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Handbook of Contemporary Paganism

EDITED BY

James R. Lewis and Murphy Pizza

BRILL

Handbook of Contemporary Paganism

Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Paganism—which consists of Wicca and Witchcraft, Druidry, Heathenry, Asatru, Goddess-worship, Ethnic Reconstructions, and many other traditions—is a movement that is still young and establishing its identity and place on the global religious landscape. The members of the movement confront a paradox of wanting to continue to grow and unify, and of also wishing to maintain its characteristic diversity of traditions, identities, and rituals. Not surprisingly, the modern Pagan movement has had a restless and schismatic formation period, most notably in the United States, but has also been the catalyst for some of the most innovative religious expressions, praxes, theologies, and communities.

In some ways, the nature of contemporary Paganism—polyvalent, syncretic, and creative—makes it difficult to formulate a satisfying and accurate definition of this religious phenomenon. The definition of Paganism submitted by Michael York* which has been promoted by the academic *Pagan Studies* series, edited by Chas Clifton and Wendy Griffin, puts emphasis on the commonalities between the various Pagan traditions. It includes sacred relationships and experiences that reach beyond monotheism and steps outside conventional institutionalized religious practices. Reliance on revelation or scriptures is de-emphasized in favor of relationships, and an immanent spirituality is also acknowledged that includes reverence for land and place, as well as reverence for the tangible living things and unseen participating spirits that inhabit it. Even this kind of overarching working definition does not fully capture the flux and ambiguity of contemporary Paganism. A nuanced understanding of this movement requires an extended treatment that explicates and describes the many facets of modern Paganism—a treatment that provides scholars and practitioners with a sense of Paganism's rich diversity, as well as its characteristic ambivalence toward formal institutionalization, rejection of homogeneity, and fluid, permeable identity.

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* Amplified in his contribution to this volume as well as in York's book, *Pagan Theology*.

Ronald Hutton traced contemporary Paganism's origins to mid-20th-century England in his historical study, *Triumph of the Moon*, where traditions like Wicca and Pagan Druidry sprouted up as offshoots of occult revivals and British identity movements from a century before. Once these movements moved across oceans—to the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand—and spread back across Europe, identifying and studying the contemporary Pagan movement became less about tracing origins and more about examining overlaps and patterns. In his historical overview of American Paganism, *Her Hidden Children*, Chas Clifton compares the origins and growth of the movement to a once-bare island, suddenly and simultaneously bursting with different life forms; no one origin can be discerned, but the abundance of diverse life creates a successfully flourishing environment where sustenance and growth is maintained for the whole island. Thus any comprehensive study of contemporary Paganism would naturally be interdisciplinary, would profile the many traditions identified as Pagan, would explore variation and creativity in theologies, rituals, and cultural transmission, and would explore dimensions within the ever-present tension between exuberant innovations and the cultivation of older traditions. It would also include explorations of religious identity politics, including issues of gender, ethnicity, and social class, which are as important a set of influences on contemporary Paganism as are magic and occult studies, fantasy and science fiction, and early anthropology.

As contemporary Paganism continues to grow and mature, new angles of inquiry are emerging, especially with regard to regional religious and cultural expressions; it is very likely that practitioners and scholars will be speaking in terms of "Pagan communities" rather than conceiving the movement as one large imagined community of interest and importance. This would be a natural outgrowth of the movement's heterogeneous nature. What is also on the horizon with regard to contemporary Paganism's shifting identity is its slow but continued forays out of the occult subculture and into mainstream dominant cultures and conventional cultural imaginations—the fight for American Wiccan veterans killed in action to have Veteran's Affairs approve the inscription of the sacred pentacle on their gravestones being one example—which includes media and literature, while finding innovative new ways to remain an edgy, marginal spiritual alternative in what Pagans perceive to be a homogenized, disenchanted dominant religious milieu.

Contemporary Pagans consider themselves both religious reconstructionists and culture changers, both spiritual innovators and guardians of tradition. These sorts of paradoxes and ambiguities are what make modern Paganism so difficult to define, yet they are also what gives the movement its vibrancy, sustainability, and growth. The close examination and study of contemporary Paganism will also create new ways to observe and examine other religions, where perhaps their own innovations, paradoxes, and inconsistencies can be more accurately documented and explained. For practicing Pagans, the long-fought-for legitimacy of their religious expressions and affiliations is solidifying. This collection presents their influences on, and the challenges to, the international religious landscape—and the issues of how to retain meaning, enchantment, and sacred relationships within a world that seems to be growing more alienated, automated, and meaningless. Likewise, as warnings of environmental crises like global warming and water shortages are now becoming more urgent, modern Pagans—whose early years found them at the forefront of environmental activist movements—present examples to the rest of the world of many different ways to be reverent toward the Earth and the life forms it contains. Like any vital, living religious culture, contemporary Paganism is a way of being, doing, and relating as well as believing; the shared Pagan values of acceptance of diversity, immanent divinity, and reverence for life on Earth are expressed by the many actions and lifeways of these many traditions and practices. It is this combination of new perspectives and new ways of being that are contemporary Paganism's contribution to local and global conflicts and crises, as well as remaining a mosaic of powerful personally transformative religious expressions.

Overview of Volume

Nevill Drury's "The Modern Magical Revival" provides both an historical overview of the magical streams feeding into contemporary Paganism and an early history of the movement. The roots of modern magical practice can be traced back to medieval Kabbalah and medieval Tarot, and to the Hermetic tradition of the Hellenistic period. Another strand of influence is constituted by two mystical fraternities, the Freemasons and Rosicrucians. These strands were initially brought together by ceremonial magicians, who were the immediate predecessors to Gerald Gardner's Wicca. Subsequently, the most significant influence on Paganism was feminism and Goddess spirituality.

One of the important pre-Gardnerian figures for contemporary Paganism was Aleister Crowley. In "The Influence of Aleister Crowley on Gerald Gardner and the Early Witchcraft Movement," Henrik Bogdan explores this connection with particular reference to sexual practices. Though Crowley's influence can be seen in certain aspects of Wiccan ritual, the sexual symbols and practices in Gardner's synthesis reflected the latter's conception of Witchcraft as a fertility religion rather than sex magic in the Crowleyian sense.

Wicca had arisen in 1950s England as a self-described fertility cult claiming direct continuity with pre-Christian religion. Such a claim was unsustainable in the New World. Instead, as Chas Clifton discusses in "Earth Day and Afterwards: American Paganism's Appropriation of 'Nature Religion,'" American Pagans were able to merge with an existing spiritual discourse described by scholars as "nature religion," appropriating the term for their own practices as a step toward the legitimization of Paganism in the nation's religious spectrum.

Robert Puckett's "Re-enchanting the World: A Weberian Analysis of Wiccan Charisma" examines a set of related issues against the backdrop of Max Weber's analysis of disenchantment, charisma and institutionalization. Contemporary Pagans reject the core views of axial age religion, and discover a re-enchanted world via charisma in its pure form—magical power. The resulting focus on individual experience contributes to modern Paganism's resistance to structured institutions. In the latter part of his chapter, Puckett also explores the issue of institutionalization within the Pagan movement.

As a decentralized movement with anarchistic tendencies, the Pagan movement has been notoriously difficult to quantify. In her "Contemporary Paganism by the Numbers," Helen A. Berger surveys her own research and the research of others, and compiles a demographic profile based on this research. Careful not to extrapolate too far beyond the data, Berger presents a convincing portrait of a growing movement. In comparison with the general population, contemporary Pagans tend to be, among other things, more liberal, more educated, and predominantly female.

In 1979, Margot Adler claimed that contemporary paganism was a religion without converts. In "'A Religion Without Converts' Revisited: Individuals, Identity and Community in Contemporary Paganism," Síân Reid examines theories of conversion to new religious movements, set against self-reported pagan experience. What emerges is the importance of the discursive quality of pagan identity—the way in which it depends

on adoption of the narrative and symbolic conventions of paganism. This is a process that Snow and Machalek refer to as 'biographical reconstruction', and Giddens refers to as 'the reflexive narrative of the self'. Reid suggests that it is this shared universe of discourse that is most significant to pagans, and that contemporary paganism therefore constitutes what Maffesoli calls a 'neotribe'—an unstable, open community defined by the participants' uncoerced agreement that they share a common sentiment that gives rise to an ethical experience and an orientation towards proper living that may not be shared by the broader social order.

One ritual in particular, "the Wild Hunt," has infused the mythical and ceremonial corpus of contemporary Paganism. In "The Wild Hunt: A Mythological Language of Magic," it is subjected to both historical/folkloric analysis and ethnographic participation-observation by Susan Greenwood. Themes of communing with the dead, soul-challenges, and personal transformation are among those subject to Greenwood's analysis, and are discussed in terms of their meaning and applicability to modern Western Pagans and Witches.

Emphasizing ritual as an art form, in "Reclamation, Appropriation and the Ecstatic Imagination In Modern Pagan Ritual" Sabina Magliocco discusses the creative use and performance of ritual in sacred context by contemporary Pagans. Noting that the purpose for most Pagans of ritual magic is to create the means for ecstatic experience, Magliocco also touches on how the artistic "bricolage" that Pagans utilize in making ritual can also result in varying forms of cultural appropriation and misappropriation, and how those issues complicate notions of religious authenticity among Pagans.

J. Lawton Winslade's "Alchemical Rhythms: Fire Circle Culture and the Pagan Festival" examines fire circle events at Pagan festivals that feature drumming and dancing throughout the night and into the morning. At these events, drumming becomes a medium and metaphor for individual and communal relationships, as participants apply an alchemical allegory to their fire circle activities. The chapter also highlights initiatory practices associated with those who tend the fire and facilitate these events, and analyzes ritualized performances. Various interpretations of elemental fire and its uses within a broader, esoteric context are presented, while interrogating critical boundaries between esotericism, performativity, and Paganism as nature religion.

In his chapter on "Pagan Theology," Michael York attempts to describe a polymorphic contemporary Pagan theology, one not based

on belief, but on experience—a "devotional humanism," that emphasizes the honoring of cycles and human relationship with the world, poetically expressed by diverse coexisting theisms, and categorically unique compared to other world religions and their theological traditions.

In examining the sources that inform both early Wicca and later Pagans, writers often mention the ancient divinities of the Mediterranean world in passing, but generally there is a 'paucity of analysis as to the ancient (Greek and Roman) origins of this multifaceted religion.' In "Drawing Down the Goddess: The Ancient {Female} Deities of Modern Paganism," Marguerite Johnson discusses the primary goddesses of the classical period and how these goddesses have be appropriated by contemporary Pagans. She also discusses the (sometimes distorting) role of Leland, Murray, and Gardner in mediating these deities to modern Paganism.

In "The Return of the Goddess: Mythology, Witchcraft and Feminist Spirituality," Carole Cusack provides a broad-ranging overview of Goddess spirituality, from the ancient Goddess religions that were supplanted by Christianity to the role of the Goddess in modern Paganism. Her essay surveys earlier scholarship that posited Goddess worship as the primordial religion of humankind, and discusses how this scholarship informed both early Wicca and Feminist Spirituality. Toward the end of her chapter, Cusack examines the Goddess in contemporary Germanic-Norse Heathenry.

Rites of initiation and other forms of selective membership are not typically associated with the egalitarian visions of feminism—and for many good reasons. In "Witches' Initiation—A feminist cultural therapeutic?," however, Jone Salomonsen discusses how a feminist version of contemporary, neopagan Witchcraft can add to the gendered field of religion and the environment as well as to feminist ritualizing in general precisely by reworking the concept and practice of initiation. The version to be considered was established in San Francisco in 1979 by Starhawk and her friends, and was soon to become known as the "Reclaiming" Witchcraft tradition.

One subset of contemporary Pagan theological relationship, animism, is presented and discussed by Graham Harvey in "Animist Paganisms." Noting the problematic history of the term's definition, Harvey discusses the growing adoption of the term as a religious identifier by Pagans, and what the critically engaged use of the term means to them, as opposed to or alongside any theistic relationships they may have.

In "Heathenry," Jenny Blain andRobert J. Wallis outline features of Heathenry as constructed or reconstructed in the UK and in North America, and address some problems facing the Heathen community today. They point to the embedding of present practices in mediaeval literature, notably the Eddas, and indicate three areas, cosmology, ritual forms including ritual drama, and magical practices relating to runes and seidr or shamanic practice, where this is evident. This introduction to Heathen practices and dilemmas points to reading material where these issues are further explored.

The increasing popularity of shamanism and indiscriminate adoption of the term 'shaman' amongst Westerners puts shamanism at risk of being devalued. In Dawne Sanson's "New/Old Spiritualities in the West: Neo-Shamans and Neo-Shamanism," Graham Harvey's notion of the need for Western neo-shamans to 'pay extra' to shamanism is explored. Michael Harner, founder of the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies* has influenced thousands of Western neo-shamans, and 'core shamanism' as developed by him is described. Some neo-shamanic practices leave neo-shamans open to critique on a number of grounds, and these are outlined along with the potential benefits of neo-shamanic healing to support individuals and communities.

There is a growing acknowledgment of the distinct character that a Pagan community's sense of place gives them. In "Australian Paganisms," Douglas Ezzy discusses the emergence and growth of contemporary Paganism in Australia, focusing on the unique adaptations that Pagans "down under" the equator make with regard to ritual and the sacred year.

Complicating the notion of authenticity in religious identity and practice, in "Celts, Druids and the Invention of Tradition," James R. Lewis analyzes the how notions about the ancient Celts and Druids have been appropriated by contemporary Paganism. Lewis is particularly interested in the legitimacy (which is a separate issue from the authenticity) of an invented tradition. Parts of this discussion are applicable to many other modern Pagan traditions as more and more culturally-identified versions emerge.

Observers and participants alike have wondered about the future of the movement as the first generation of Pagans passes on their new tradition(s) to the next generation. In "Magical Children and Meddling Elders," Murph Pizza discusses this issue in terms of her fieldwork with the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota) community. In addition to examining how contemporary Pagans have been successful

at keeping their children 'within the fold,' Pizza also analyzes the emergence and self-conscious development of the Elder role.

The teen witch fad has been fueled by media images of attractive, hip witches. In "Of Teens and Tomes: The Dynamics of Teenage Witchcraft and Teen Witch Literature," Hannah E. Johnston situates this phenomenon within the processes of feminine teenage identity formation and the appropriate of elements from popular culture. Once publishers realized that a profit could be made from this emergent market, they began publishing numerous books aimed specifically at this youthful audience. The core of Johnston's chapter examines some of these key texts.

In "Rooted in the Occult Revival: Neo-Paganism's Evolving Relationship with Popular Media," Peg Aloi attempts to trace the evolution of three phenomena: the mediated "give and take" that characterized the expression of modern pagan witchcraft within popular media narratives, beginning with the period of the late 1960s Occult Revival; the influence of fictional texts upon actual belief and practice; and, to a lesser extent, the impact of non-narrative media commentary upon the popular reception of these narrative texts.

A convergence of academic and participant understandings problematises Pagan discourses about issues of history, 'race,' ethnicity, gender and other facets of identities. In "Weaving a Tangled Web," Ann-Marie Gallagher makes clear that the overlap between particular Pagan identities and intolerant and/or malevolent tendencies in contemporary Britain renders explicit consideration of this area a matter of urgency, particularly in relation to questions of Pagan ethics.

Taking another angle on the importance of place on Pagan religious identity and notion of indigenousness and ancestry, in "'Sacred' Sites, Artefacts and Museum Collections: Pagan Engagements with Archaeology in Britain," Robert Wallis and Jenny Blain discuss the problematic concept of "cultural heritage," both from a religious Pagan perspective and an archaeological one, and where the two perspectives conflict and overlap. Examining assumptions around the meaning of a culture's "sacred sites," issues of visitor/pilgrim, mythic interpretation/scientific explanation, and site use/site excavation are among the complex knot of concepts on the table when Pagans engage in dialogue with archaeologists about the past.

Pointing out that even counter-cultural religious movements have their fringe elements, In "Wolf Age Pagans" Mattias Gardell analyzes and describes the rise of racist Asatru and other Norse-flavored Paganisms

in the context of American White-Power culture. Its rapid rise in popularity in the 1990s and their own identity construction processes shine light on assumptions made by more mainstream Pagans regarding identity and affinity with past cultures.

HISTORICAL APPROACHES

THE MODERN MAGICAL REVIVAL

Nevill Drury

The modern magical revival has been unfolding for over a century. As a spiritual movement committed to the resurgence of esoteric knowledge or *gnosis* in the West, it first began to gather momentum in the final decade of the 19th century and has since seeded itself around the world in fascinating ways, spawning divergent esoteric groups and organizations. In terms of actual historical beginnings, however, the story of the 20th century magical revival commences with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, arguably the most influential esoteric organisation in modern history. All modern occult perspectives—including Wicca, Goddess spirituality and the *Thelemic* magick of Aleister Crowley—owe a debt to the Golden Dawn for gathering together the threads of the Western esoteric tradition and initiating a transformative process that continues in the 21st century. This chapter explores the principal sources of the Western esoteric tradition that helped generate the revival of magical thought and practice in the modern era.

Established in England in 1888, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn drew on a range of ancient and medieval cosmologies and incorporated them into a body of ceremonial practices and ritual grades centred on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, an important motif within the Jewish mystical tradition which, as a unified but nevertheless complex symbol, represents the sacred 'emanations' of the Godhead.[1] In addition to the Kabbalah, which occupied a central position in the cosmology of the Golden Dawn, the organisation also drew on the Hermetic tradition

[1] The Kabbalistic Tree of Life is referred to in the Jewish mystical tradition by its Hebrew name *Otz Chiim* and represents a process of sacred emanation from the Godhead. The Tree is a composite symbol consisting of ten spheres, or *sephiroth*, through which the creation of the world—indeed, all aspects of creation—have come about. The ten sephiroth are aligned in three columns headed by the first three emanations, Kether (The Crown), Chokhmah (The Great Father/Wisdom) and Binah (The Great Mother/Understanding). Collectively the ten *sephiroth* on the Tree of Life symbolise the process by which the Infinite Light and Formlessness of the Godhead (*Ain Soph Aur*) becomes manifest in the universe. The seven emanations beneath the supernal triad of Kether, Chokhmah and Binah (ie. the remaining *sephiroth* Chesed, Geburah, Tiphareth, Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Netzach) represent the 'seven days of Creation'.

which had its roots in Neoplatonism and underwent a revival during the Renaissance. Roscrucianism, Freemasonry and the medieval Tarot were also significant elements.

The Medieval Kabbalah

According to Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), widely regarded as one of the pre-eminent authorities on the origins and symbolism of the Kabbalah, the medieval Kabbalah belongs to an emanationist cosmological tradition that has its origins in Gnosticism.[2] Indeed, Scholem

[2] See G.G. Scholem. *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York 1960: 1–3. Gnosticism focuses on the quest for *gnosis* [ancient Greek: 'spiritual knowledge']. The origins of Gnosticism remain a matter of debate, but there is broad consensus that Gnosticism as a historical movement parallels the rise of early Christianity. Some scholars, like Hans Jonas (author of *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston 1958) have seen in Gnosticism residues of pre-Christian Iranian dualism while others believe that it developed in response to the failure of Jewish apocalyptic expectations and have dated its origins to around 70 CE, coinciding with the fall of the Jerusalem Temple. Others regard Gnosticism as a response to the failure of Christian messianic expectations—where some early Christian devotees, feeling that the Messiah had not returned as soon as had been hoped, turned away from religious faith towards spiritual inner knowledge. Gnostic thought was certainly well established by the second century of the Christian era. The unearthing of a major Gnostic library near the town of Nag Hammadi in upper Egypt in 1945 provided a rich body of source material on the Gnostic philosophies. Until this time much of the existing Gnostic scholarship had been based on other surviving Gnostic commentaries written by Church Fathers like Irenaeus, Clement and Hippolytus, who were hostile to Gnostic tenets. The Nag Hammadi codices, a collection of texts written in Coptic, revealed the syncretistic nature of Gnosticism, demonstrating that as a movement Gnosticism incorporated elements from Christianity, Judaism, Neoplatonism and the Greek mystery religions as well as material from Egypt and Persia. Essentially Gnosticism was a call for transcendence, a movement seeking a return to the Spirit and a movement away from the constrictions of the material world which was regarded as a source of pervasive evil. James M. Robinson, editor of the English translation of the Nag Hammadi Library, has explained the Gnostic philosophy in the following terms: 'In principle, though not in practice, the world is good. The evil that pervades history is a blight, ultimately alien to the world as such. But increasingly for some the outlook on life darkened; the very origin of the world was attributed to a terrible fault, and evil was given status as the ultimate ruler of the world, not just a usurpation of authority. Hence the only hope seemed to reside in escape… And for some a mystical inwardness undistracted by external factors came to be the only way to attain the repose, the overview, the merger into the All which is the destiny of one's spark of the divine.' (See J.M. Robinson, Introduction to *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, Harper & Row, San Francisco 1977: 4).

In the Gnostic conception there is a clear divide between the spiritual world which is good, and the physical world which is evil, that is to say, a clear demarcation between the cosmic and the divine on the one hand, and the physical, or material, on the

has referred to the Kabbalah as a form of Jewish Gnosticism.[3] In its most fundamental sense the Kabbalah can be defined as a mystical commentary on the Pentateuch: the written Torah, or 'five books of Moses'.[4] The Hebrew word *Kabbalah* (which translates as 'that which has been received')[5] refers to an oral or secret tradition and as Scholem has observed, the *Zohar*, the central text of the medieval Kabbalah, compiled in written form by the Spaniard Moses de Leon circa 1280 CE, has spiritual links with earlier schools of Gnosticism[6] and Neoplatonism.[7] In all three there are references to the concept of sacred emanations from the Godhead, to the idea of the pre-existence of the soul and its descent into matter, and to the sacred names of God.

Although the Kabbalah did not exist in written form until the Middle Ages, it is thought that the *Sefer Yetzirah*, or *Book of Creation*, was composed in Palestine between the third and sixth centuries CE. The *Sefer Yetzirah* descibes how God created the world by means of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the 10 *sefirot*—a term that appears for the first time in Hebrew literature. The 10 *sefirot* of the Tree of Life (also spelt *sephiroth*) are a central symbolic aspect of the Kabbalah.

Another early Kabbalistic text, *Sefer ha-Bahir*, emerged in Provence—where there was a Jewish community—between 1150 and 1200. Interest in the Kabbalah subsequently spread across the Pyrenees into Catalonia and then to Castile. In *circa* 1280, the Spanish Jewish mystic Moses de Leon (1238–1305) began circulating booklets among his fellow Kabbalists. These texts were written in Aramaic, and de Leon claimed that he had transcribed them from an ancient book of wisdom

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other. The Gnostic texts portray humanity as being increasingly separated from the sustaining realm of divinity and spirit, and this in turn provides a rationale for spiritual transcendence, for in the Gnostic conception there is a vital need to liberate the 'divine spark' entombed in the physical world.

[3] Admittedly, not all scholars agree on this point. The late Ioan P. Couliano believed that Scholem overstated the connection between Kabbalah and Gnosticism (see Couliano's *The Tree of Gnosis*, HarperCollins, San Francisco 1992: 42 et seq.). However Scholem states quite emphatically that the Kabbalistic text *Bahir*—which pre-dates the *Zohar*—makes it clear that the 'thirteenth century Kabbalists became the heirs of Gnostical symbolism'. See *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken, New York 1961: 214.

[4] G.G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken, loc. cit.: 14.

[5] D.C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah*, HarperCollins, New York 1995: 1.

[6] In addition to Scholem see also M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1988: 119 for parallels between Gnosticism and the Kabbalah.

[7] G.G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1990: 363–364; 389–90.

composed in the circle of Rabbi Shim'on bar Yohai, a famous disciple of Rabbi Akiva, who lived and taught in Israel in the second century. These booklets gradually formed the text known as *Ha-Zohar ha-Qadosh*, usually referred to as the *Zohar* (*The Book of Splendour*). Although Moses de Leon may have drawn on early material received through the secret oral tradition, it is now thought that he himself was probably the author of the *Zohar*.

According to the *Zohar*, God first taught the doctrines of the Kabbalah to a select group of angels. After the creation of the Garden of Eden, these angels shared the secret teachings with the first man, Adam. They were then passed to Noah, and subsequently to Abraham, who took them to Egypt. Moses was initiated into the Kabbalah in Egypt, the land of his birth, and King David and King Solomon were also initiated. No one, however, dared write them down until Rabbi Shim'on bar Yohai.[8]

In the Kabbalah all aspects of manifested form, including the sacred archetypes or manifestations of the Godhead, are said to have their origin in *Ain Soph Aur*—also referred to as *En-Sof*[9] or *Ein-Sof*[10]—'the limitless light', a realm of being entirely beyond form and conception which 'has neither qualities nor attributes'. In Kabbalistic cosmology the subsequent emanations which emerge from this profound Mystery, and which constitute the spheres upon the Tree of Life [*Otz Chiim*], reveal different aspects of the sacred universe but are nevertheless considered as part of a divine totality. *Ain Soph Aur*, writes Scholem, 'manifests . . . to the Kabbalist under ten different aspects, which in turn comprise an endless variety of shades and gradations'.[11] These emanations nevertheless reflect the essential unity of the Godhead, and because the human form is said to have been created 'in the image of God' the spheres on the Tree of Life are also spheres within the body of Adam Kadmon, the archetypal human being.[12] In the Kabbalah the quest for mystical self-knowledge is therefore regarded essentially as a process of regaining undifferentiated One-ness with the Divine.

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[8] D.C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah*, loc. cit.: 3.

[9] See G.G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, loc. cit.: 12.

[10] See D.C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah*, loc. cit.: 40.

[11] See G.G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, loc. cit.: 209.

[12] See M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1988: 119, and also G.G. Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, Schocken, New York 1991: 43.

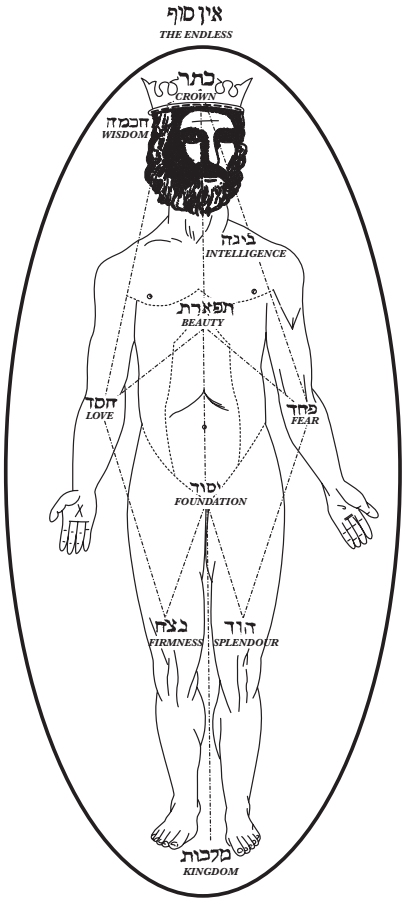

Fig. 1. Adam Kadmon, the archetypal human being. His body contains the ten *sephiroth*, or emanations from the Godhead.

According to the Kabbalah, the mystical universe is sustained by the utterance of the Holy Names of God: the ten emanations or *sephiroth* on the Tree of Life are none other than 'the creative names which God called into the world, the names which He gave to Himself'.[13] According to the *Zohar*:

> In the Beginning, when the will of the King began to take effect, he engraved signs into the divine aura. A dark flame sprang forth from the

[13] G.G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, loc. cit.: 215–16.

> innermost recess of the mystery of the Infinite, *En-Sof* [*Ain Soph Aur*] like a fog which forms out of the formless, enclosed in the ring of this aura, neither white nor black, neither red nor green, and of no colour whatever. But when this flame began to assume size and extension it produced radiant colours. For in the innermost centre of the flame a well sprang forth from which flames poured upon everything below, hidden in the mysterious secrets of *En-Sof*. The well broke through, and yet did not entirely break through, the ethereal aura which surrounded it. It was entirely unrecognisable until the impact of its breakthrough a hidden supernal point shone forth. Beyond this point nothing may be known or understood, and therefore it is called *Reshith*, that is 'Beginning', the first word of Creation.[14]

Scholem writes that the 'Primordial Point' was thought of by the majority of Kabbalists not as *Kether*, the Crown (normally considered the first emanation upon the Tree of Life) but as the Great Father, *Chokmah* or Wisdom, which is the second *sephirah*. In Kabbalistic cosmology the energy of the Great Father unites with that of *Binah*, the Great Mother (Understanding), and from her womb all archetypal forms come forth.[15] As Christian Ginsburg notes in his seminal book *The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development and Literature*, 'It is not the *En-Sof* who created the world, but this Trinity…the world was born from the union of the crowned King and Queen…who, emanated from the *En-Sof*, produced the Universe in their own image.'[16] In a symbolic sense the seven subsequent emanations beneath the trinity of *Kether*, *Chokmah* and *Binah* constitute the seven days of Creation.[17] The Tree of Life, with its ten *sephiroth* or emanations of divine consciousness, therefore encompasses a symbolic process by which the Infinite becomes tangible.[18] The ten spheres on the Tree of Life are as follows:

Kether	*The Crown*
Chokmah	*Wisdom* (The Father)
Binah	*Understanding* (The Mother)
Chesed	*Mercy*
Geburah	*Severity*, or *Strength*

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[14] Ibid.: 218–19.
[15] Ibid.
[16] C. Ginsburg, *The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development and Literature*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1956: 102.
[17] See D.C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah*, loc. cit.: 7.
[18] Ibid.: 41.

Tiphareth	*Beauty*, or *Harmony* (The Son)
Netzach	*Victory*
Hod	*Splendour*
Yesod	*The Foundation*
Malkuth	*Kingdom*, or *Earth* (The Daughter)

These emanations align themselves into three pillars, the outer two being the Pillar of Mercy headed by *Chokmah* (symbolising light and purity) and the Pillar of Severity headed by *Binah* (symbolising darkness and impurity). Beneath them lies the Garden of Eden, with its four rivers *Chesed, Geburah, Netzach* and *Hod* converging in *Tiphareth*, which is located at a central point on the Middle Pillar. The occult historian A.E. Waite—a leading member of the Golden Dawn—has suggested that the Middle Pillar can be regarded as the Perfect Pillar, for it reaches to the Crown, *Kether.*[19] The other two pillars provide a duality of opposites and represent the 'Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil'. The sixth emanation on the Tree of Life, *Tiphareth*, is associated symbolically with the divine Son and is regarded in the western esoteric tradition as the sphere of spiritual rebirth. The final emanation on the Tree of Life, *Malkuth*, 'The World', is represented symbolically by the Daughter, *Shekinah*, who in turn is a reflection of the Great Mother, *Binah.*[20]

In addition to recognising ten *sephiroth* upon the Tree of Life, the medieval Kabbalists also divided the Tree into 'four worlds' of creative manifestation. God was said to be present in each of these four worlds and each in turn was represented symbolically by a letter in the Tetragrammaton,[21] the sacred name JHVH (consisting of the four Hebrew letters *Yod, He, Vau, He*) usually translated as Jehovah, or Yahweh, meaning 'Lord'. The four worlds are as follows:

Atziluth, the Archetypal World

This level of existence is closest to the unmanifested realm of *Ain Soph Aur* and contains only one *sephirah*, Kether, which is described as 'the hidden of the hidden. It is the emergence of God's Will, His creative

[19] A.E. Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah*, University Books, New York 1960: 201.
[20] See V. Crowley, *A Woman's Kabbalah*, Thorsons, London 2000: 189 and R. Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, third edition, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1990: 116.
[21] J. Bonner, *Qabalah*, Skoob Publishing, London 1995: 23.

urge. It is the infinite, the initiation of all that can and will be. It is infinity.'[22]

Briah, the World of Creation

This world contains two *sephiroth*, Chokmah and Binah, representing the Great Father and the Great Mother and reflecting the highest expression of the sacred male and female principles. Their union gives rise to the World of Formation.[23]

Yetzirah, the World of Formation

This world contains the *sephiroth* Chesed, Geburah, Tiphareth, Netzach, Hod and Yesod. As indicated by its name, Yesod literally provides the 'foundation' for all that has preceded it in the creative process of sacred emanation from the highest realms of the Tree of Life.

Assiah, the Physical World

This world represents the final materialization of God's Will in the sphere of Malkuth on the Tree of Life and is represented by *Shekinah*, the Daughter, who is spoken of variously as 'the Bride of the Divine Son in Tiphareth', 'the Bride of Kether' and the 'Daughter of Binah'. *Shekinah* personifies the Divine Feminine on Earth.[24]

Each *sephirah* is also said to contain an entire Tree of Life. The 'Malkuth' of the first *sephirah* emanates the 'Kether' of the following *sephirah*, and so on, through the ten emanations on the Tree. Each of these ten spheres is therefore considered a mirror of the Divine. According to the Jewish mystical tradition nothing exists beyond God, and as John Ferguson has observed in relation to the spiritual quest in the Kabbalah: 'We must see God as the First Cause, and the universe as an emanation from his Will or Wisdom. The finite has no existence except in the light of the Infinite, which contracted so that the finite might be…Man is the highest point of the created world, and his soul

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[22] S.A. Fisdel, *The Practice of Kabbalah: Meditation in Judaism*, Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale, New Jersey 1996: 100.

[23] J. Bonner, *Qabalah*, loc. cit. 1995: 25.

[24] See V. Crowley, *A Woman's Kabbalah*, Thorsons, London 2000: 189 and R. Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, loc. cit.: 32.

contains animal and moral elements, but also an element of pure spirit, which in the righteous ascends to God.'[25]

The Hermetic Tradition

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Hermetica, or Hermetic tradition, gained intellectual and philosophical influence in Europe. Hermetic philosophy has its roots in Hellenism.[26] During the Renaissance, Florence became a cultural centre where esoteric and metaphysical perspectives were strongly supported and it was in the royal courts under the rule of Cosimo and Lorenzo de Medici, that the Hermetic tradition received significant endorsement. In 1460 a monk named Leonardo da Pistoia brought with him to Florence a collection of Greek manuscripts that had been discovered in Macedonia and which would later become known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, or *Hermetica*. These texts were presented to Cosimo de Medici (1389–1464), the Italian merchant prince who ruled Florence and who was also a noted collector of Greek manuscripts. In 1462 Cosimo passed the Hermetic texts to his young court scholar, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), requesting that he translate them into Latin. This work was completed in 1463 and Cosimo was able to read the translation before his death the following year.[27]

The Hermetic material was essentially a body of Greek mystical and philosophical writings that drew on Platonism, Stoicism and Neoplatonism and then subsequently emerged within a Gnostic-Egyptian context. The Hermetic texts date from the latter half of the second century CE through to the end of the third century.[28] In

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[25] J. Ferguson, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Mysticism and the Mystery Religions*, Thames & Hudson, London 1976: 99.

[26] Hermetic scholar Dan Merkur has emphasized in a recent article that Gnosticism and Hermeticism are frequently, and wrongly, confused with each other—they present completely different concepts of God. Merkur writes: 'Like the God of Stoicism, the Hermetic God was omnipresent and omniscient through the material cosmos. In Gnosticism, by contrast, God was transcendent, and the physical universe was an evil place created by an evil Demiurge. Hermetic ethics celebrated the divine within the world; Gnostic ethics were abstemious, ascetic efforts to escape from the world.' See D. Merkur, 'Stages of Ascension in Hermetic Rebirth', *Esoterica* 1 (1999): 81.

[27] Ficino's texts are now held in the Medici Library in Florence.

[28] See W. Barnstone (ed.) *The Other Bible*, Harper & Row, San Francisco 1984: 567 and the entry on Hermetic books in *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, Columbia University Press, New York 1975: 1232.

these writings the central figure, Hermes Trismegistus (Thrice Greatest Hermes) is presented as a wise spiritual teacher, a Gnostic master who is a composite of Hermes and Thoth.[29] In the Hermetic model of the universe all things were believed to have come from God and the world was therefore part of a sacred Unity. The universe itself was divided into three worlds, or emanations. The lowest sphere was the world of Nature, which in turn received divine influences from the more sanctified realms above. At the next level were the stars, spirits and 'guardians'. Higher still was the supercelestial world of *nous*, the world of angelic spirits who were thought to have a superior knowledge of reality because they were closer to the Godhead, the sacred source of Creation. According to the Hermetic perspective the transcendent act of achieving a state of Oneness with God entailed liberating oneself from the constrictions of temporal life and entering the realm of pure and divine Thought.[30]

Ficino's work on the *Corpus Hermeticum* was developed by Giovanni Pico, Count of Mirandola (1463–1494). Pico combined Ficino's Hermetic Neoplatonism with an extensive knowledge of astrology, the Kabbalah, Christianity and 'high magic' (*mageia*).[31] Like Ficino, Pico conceived of a universe that emanated from the Godhead. However Pico's conception was not simply that of the devotional mystic. According to Pico, not only could man come to know God but he could also become a type of god himself—an attitude to divinity also found among some contemporary magical practitioners:

> …he who knows himself in himself knows all things, as Zoroaster first wrote. When we are finally lighted in this knowledge, we shall in bliss be addressing the true Apollo on intimate terms…And, restored to health,

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[29] In Greek mythology, Hermes was the messenger of the gods, the protector of sacrificial animals and also god of the wind. He conducted the souls of the dead on their passage to the Underworld. In ancient Egyptian mythology, Thoth is a scribe and moon god and is best known as god of wisdom and magic. He also invented numbers and writing, and measured time. Thoth presided with his consort, Maat, in the Judgement Hall, where the hearts of the deceased were weighed against the feather of truth. Thoth recorded all judgements made in relation to the dead. The ancient Greeks identified Thoth with Hermes. See J.E. Zimmerman, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, Harper & Row, New York 1964 and P. Turner & C.R. Coulter, *Dictionary of Ancient Deities*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Pico also distinguished between 'bad' magic, which had to do with demons and devils, and 'natural' magic, which was essentially 'good' and compatible with God's freedom of will. See D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, Sutton Publishing, Stroud, UK 2000: 54–55.

> Gabriel 'the strength of God', shall abide in us, leading us through the miracles of Nature and showing us on every side the merit and the might of God.[32]

According to Pico, *mageia* or high magic, could provide humanity with access to the inner workings of Nature and the cosmos. *Mageia* could be employed 'in calling forth into the light, as if from their hiding places, the powers scattered and sown in the world by the loving-kindness of God'.[33] The role of the sacred magician, the practitioner of *mageia*, was to raise earth (matter) to the level of heaven (spirit). In the *Asclepius*, Hermes Trismegistus similarly urges his followers to become 'god-like':

> …he takes in the nature of a god as if he were himself a god…He is united to the gods because he has the divinity pertaining to gods…He takes the earth as his own, he blends himself with the elements by the speed of thought, by the sharpness of spirit he descends to the depths of the sea. Everything is accessible to him; heaven is not too high for him, for he measures it as if he were in his grasp by his ingenuity. What sight the spirit shows to him, no mist of the air can obscure; the earth is never so dense as to impede his work; the immensity of the sea's depths do not trouble his plunging view. He is at the same time everything as he is everywhere.[34]

It was primarily the high magic or *mageia* of the Hermetic tradition that attracted the founding members of the Golden Dawn because, at its most profound level, high magic (or 'theurgy') proposed an archetypal process of mythic renewal. The magical quest, as delineated within the Hermetic and Gnostic traditions, was to be 'reborn' from the limited and restricted world of material form into the realm of Spirit. This in turn became a guiding maxim within the Western esoteric tradition up until the time of the Golden Dawn. However a polarising split subsequently occurred within this tradition with the introduction of Crowley's doctrine of *Thelema*: thereafter an influential chthonic element was introduced to 20th century magical practice which led many occult devotees away from the quest for mythical renewal and towards accentuated occult individualism and/or esoteric anarchy.

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[32] Quoted in T. Churton, *The Gnostics*, loc. cit.: 113.
[33] Ibid.: 114.
[34] Ibid.: 112.

The Medieval Tarot

The earliest specific references to Tarot cards date back to 1442 and the d'Este court of Ferrara,[35] although Tarot cards may have been invented a few years earlier, originating in northern Italy between 1410 and 1425.[36] It seems likely that the earliest Tarot cards were associated with the aristocratic courts of either Ferrara or Milan; most of the Tarot decks which survive from 15th century Italy reflect the style and fashion of the nobility from that era.[37] Interest in the Tarot subsequently spread from Italy to France and Switzerland. The modern Tarot deck is descended from the Piedmontese Tarot which was widely known in northern Italy and France by the beginning of the 16th century. This pack consisted of 78 cards divided into 22 cards of the Major Arcana and 56 cards of the Minor Arcana.[38] The Major Arcana are the so-called 'court' or mythological cards, while the Minor Arcana consists of four basic suits, swords, wands, cups and pentacles, which parallel the four suits in the modern (early 20th century) Rider-Waite Tarot deck.[39]

The widespread occult belief that the Tarot cards conceal a hidden symbolic language based on esoteric themes has led to a plethora of fanciful explanations relating to the Tarot's actual origins and purpose. Even today, some enthusiasts continue to claim that the Tarot cards originated in ancient Egypt and are associated with an esoteric wisdom tradition dating back thousands of years.[40] Such a view was first pro-

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[35] R. Decker, T. Depaulis and M. Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards: the Origins of the Occult Tarot*, St Martin's Press, New York 1996: 27.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Tarot decks which reflect this cultural tendency include the Tarocchi of Mantegna deck, the Tarocchi of Venice deck, the Tarocchino of Bologna decks and the Michiate of Florence decks. See See S.R. Kaplan, *Tarot Classic*, Laffont/Grossett & Dunlap, New York 1972: 18–22.

[38] One of the earliest known Tarot decks is the 15th century Visconti-Sforza deck associated with the fourth Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza. This deck consisted of 78 cards and featured the four suits of *spade* [spades], *bastoni* [diamonds], *coppe* [hearts] and *denari* [clubs]. It also featured 22 Major Arcana cards, including *Il Matto*, The Fool. See S.R. Kaplan, *Tarot Classic*, loc. cit.: 24.

[39] The Rider-Waite deck was created by Arthur Edward Waite (1857–1942) and Pamela Colman Smith (1878–1951), both of whom were members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. For Waite's biography see R.A. Gilbert, *A.E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts*, Crucible, Wellingborough UK, 1987; for Colman Smith's biography see M.K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, Park Street Press, Rochester, Vermont 1985: 406–409.

[40] See, for example, *Ishbel's Temple of Isis Egyptian Tarot*, Llewellyn Publications, St Paul, Minnesota 1989.

posed by French theologian Antoine Court de Gébelin (1725–1784), author of *Le Monde Primitif* (nine volumes), published in Paris between 1775 and 1784. His essay on the Tarot is included in volume VIII of this work, published in 1781.[41] According to Court de Gébelin the Tarot cards had been invented by ancient Egyptian priests; their seventy-eight page book, disguised as a pack of playing cards, escaped the fire that destroyed their ancient libraries.[42]

One of Court de Gébelin's followers, a wig-maker named Jean-Baptiste Alliette (1738–1791), reversed his name to Etteilla and in 1783 published a book titled *Manière de se récréer avec le Jeu de Cartes nommées*[43] in which he claimed that the Tarot, otherwise known as *The Book of Thoth* (after the ancient Egyptian god of wisdom), had been created by seventeen Magi, 171 years after the Deluge. He further claimed that one of these Magi, Athotis, was descended from Mercury and Noah.[44] Alliette associated the Tarot with the Hermetic tradition, maintaining that it had been conceived by Hermes Trismegistus and that the text of *The Book of Thoth* had been written on leaves of gold in a temple three leagues from Memphis.[45] Alliette also emphasized the role of the Tarot in fortune-telling, creating a deck of cards and an accompanying book titled *Manière de tirer: Le Grand Etteilla où tarots Egyptiens*, specifically for the purpose of divination.[46]

While Court de Gébelin and Alliette promoted the concept of an Egyptian origin for the Tarot, the French ceremonial magician Eliphas Lévi (Alphonse-Louis Constant, 1810–1875) who believed that the Tarot cards represented a secret esoteric alphabet that had links with the ancient Jewish mystical tradition. According to Lévi, the Tarot originated with Enoch, the oldest son of Cain,[47] and provided the universal key to the Kabbalah. In one of his major works, *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* [1856],[48] Lévi proclaimed that the twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana (the mythological cards of the Tarot) could

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[41] See R. Decker, T. Depaulis and M. Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards: the Origins of the Occult Tarot*, loc. cit.: 57.

[42] Ibid.: 59–60.

[43] This translates as *A Way to Entertain Oneself with the Pack of Cards called Tarots.* It was published in Amsterdam and Paris in 1783.

[44] S.R. Kaplan, *Tarot Classic*, loc. cit.: 42.

[45] C. McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*, Rider, London 1972: 51.

[46] S.R. Kaplan, *Tarot Classic*, loc. cit.: 45.

[47] S.R. Kaplan, *Tarot Classic*, loc. cit.: 45.

[48] First published in one volume in Paris by Germer Baillière, 1856.

be directly attributed to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and therefore linked to the Tree of Life.[49]

Lévi's concept of merging the Kabbalistic Tree of Life with the Major Arcana of the Tarot was developed by the French physician Dr Gerard Encausse (1865–1916), who wrote under the name of Papus. In 1889 Papus published an influential work titled *The Tarot of the Bohemians*[50] which was illustrated with images from the Tarot of Marseilles.[51] Papus provided a text-commentary on the symbolism of each letter of the Hebrew alphabet in direct association with the Tarot cards of the Major Arcana and his Tarot card images incorporated letters of the Hebrew alphabet next to their titles, thereby reinforcing the idea that the Tarot and the Jewish mystical tradition were symbolically interconnected.[52] The concept of mapping the Major of Arcana of the Tarot as a network of symbolic pathways upon the Tree of Life was subsequently adopted by the ceremonial magicians of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn[53] and the Fraternity of the Inner Light, founded by Dion Fortune. Two other Golden Dawn members, Arthur Edward Waite (*Frater Sacramentum Regis*) and Pamela Colman Smith (*Soror Quod Tibi id Aliis*), created the well-known Rider-Waite Tarot deck (first published by Rider & Co., London, in 1910), which has remained one of the most popular Tarot decks up to the present day.

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[49] S.R. Kaplan, *Tarot Classic*, loc. cit.: 46.

[50] Translated into English by A.P. Morton and published in London, 1892. A revised edition, edited by A.E. Waite, was published in 1910.

[51] The Tarot of Marseilles is a 18th century French adaptation of earlier Italian Tarot decks. According to occult historian Fred Gettings this deck was first printed by Nicholas Conver in Paris in 1761 but appears to be based on earlier versions produced by such printers as Arnoud (1748) and Dodal, whose designs were executed in the first decade of the eighteenth century. See F. Gettings, *The Book of Tarot*, Triune, London 1973: 140.

[52] All twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana are reproduced as line drawings in *The Tarot of the Bohemians*. See second revised edition with preface by A.E. Waite, Rider & Son, London 1919.

[53] Volume 1 of *The Golden Dawn* (ed. I. Regardie, Aries Press, Chicago 1937) contains Frater S.R.M.D's (ie MacGregor Mathers') 'Notes on the Tarot'. Here Mathers writes quite explicitly: 'In the Tree of Life in the Tarot, each path forms the connecting link between two of the Sephiroth' (1937: 141) Mathers then lists all 22 cards in the Major Arcana, together with a brief summation of their symbolism. (1937: 141–143).

Rosicrucians and Freemasons

In addition to the Kabbalah, Hermetica and medieval Tarot, the Western esoteric tradition has also been strongly influenced by two mystical fraternities, the Freemasons and Rosicrucians, both of which played a key role in the late 19th and early 20th century magical revival. Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry build on mystical themes of spiritual transformation and renewal that have become an intrinsic component of modern magical perspectives.

Modern Freemasonry has 18th century origins. The Masonic Grand Lodge of England was established in London in 1717.[54] The formation of the Grand Lodge represented the beginning of what is known as 'speculative' Freemasonry, the present-day fraternal order which does not require that its members should be working stonemasons.[55] However Freemasonry as a tradition derives originally from the practices of the highly skilled stonemasons and cathedral builders who worked on large-scale constructions in Italy, France, Spain, Germany and England during the early Middle Ages.[56] As early as the 14th century these so-called Operative, or Working Masons formed lodges and recognised 'degrees' in order to maintain their professional skills and standards. An itinerant builder was required to answer veiled questions and respond to special signs and passwords in order to establish his credentials as a Master Mason. In due course an elaborate system of Masonic rituals developed, sheathed in secrecy and maintained by oaths of fidelity and fraternity. By 1723 there were approximately 30 lodges in England; the Grand Lodge of England developed rapidly into the central governing body overseeing these lodges, thereby bringing a sense of coherence and stability to British Masonry[57] By the end of the 18th century there were also Masonic lodges in most European countries.

Rosicrucianism, meanwhile, has 17th century origins. The Rosicrucian fraternity announced their existence in Germany with the release of

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[54] C. McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology and Rituals of an Esoteric Order*, Weiser, York Beach, Maine 1997: 64.

[55] W.H. Harris and J.S. Levey, (ed.) 'Freemasonry' in *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, Columbia University Press, New York 1975: 1007.

[56] J.F. Newton, *The Builders: The Story and Study of Masonry*, Allen & Unwin, London 1918: 72–73.

[57] C. McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology and Rituals of an Esoteric Order*, loc. cit.: 64.

four pamphlets in 1614–16. The first of these documents was the *Fama Fraternitatis, dess Löblichen Ordens des Rosenkreutzes* [The Declaration of the Worthy Order of the Rosy Cross] issued in Kassel in 1614[58] together with a satirical work by the Italian writer Trajano Boccalini titled *Allgemeine und General Reformation, der gantzen weiten Welt* [The Universal and General Reformation of the Whole Wide World]. In 1615 an anti-Papal document entitled the *Confessio Fraternitatis* also appeared in Kassel, published in Latin. This in turn was followed by a fourth work published in Strasbourg in the German language in 1616, titled *Die Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosenkreutz* [The Chemical Marriage of Christian Rosencreutz, (or Rosycross)]. The last of these, an allegorical rather than a polemical work, is especially important in the context of contemporary magical thought because of its alchemical themes and spiritual rebirth symbolism, and its direct later influence on the Inner Order ritual grades of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.[59]

Both the *Fama* and the *Confessio* contained brief information on the life of the mythical figure Christian Rosencreutz and the formation of his Order. The *Fama* was translated into English by the alchemist and mystic Thomas Vaughan (1622–1665) and published in 1652 under Vaughan's *nom de plume*, Eugenius Philalethes.[60] The *Fama* related that Brother C.R. has travelled extensively and received the wisdom of the East. The text also proposed that the many learned magicians, Kabbalists, physicians and philosophers in Germany should collaborate with each other because until now they have kept 'their secrets close only to themselves'.[61] The writer explains how the 'faults of the Church and the whole *Philosophia Moralis* [can] be amended'[62] and reformed through this new sacred knowledge. The writer then goes on to explain how the Rosicrucian fraternity came into existence, initially with four members and later with a much expanded following. The text also mentions that members of the Brotherhood meet annually in the House of the Holy

[58] The *Fama* had been circulating in manucript form for some time, possibly as early as 1610. See C. McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology and Rituals of an Esoteric Order*, loc. cit.: xviii.

[59] See sections of the present chapter which describe the key influences on the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

[60] See *The Fame and Confession of the Fraternity of R: C:, Commonly, of the Rosie Cross* [1652] by Eugenius Philalethes in P. Allen (ed.) *A Christian Rosenkreutz Anthology*, Rudolf Steiner Publications, Blauvelt, New York 1968: 163–190.

[61] Ibid.: 166.

[62] Ibid.: 167.

Spirit [a building called Sancti spiritus][63] and that a vault has been discovered where the original Brother Rosencreutz is buried.[64]

Many who read the Rosicrucian pamphlets sought to contact the Fraternity without success: 'The Brothers, if they existed seemed invisible and impervious to entreaties to make themselves known.'[65] This lack of public response intensified interest in the Rosicrucian mystery, especially since the pamphlets were anonymous[66] and the identity of the Brothers unknown. Christopher McIntosh, author of a recent history of the Rosicrucians, believes that the author of *Die Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosenkreutz* [The Chemical Marriage of Christian Rosencreutz] was 'almost certainly' the Tübingen-based Protestant theologian Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654), and that Andreae may possibly have authored, or co-authored, the *Fama* as well.[67] The author of the *Confessio* remains unknown.[68]

McIntosh believes that later developments within the Rosicrucian movement also placed considerable emphasis on the alchemical secrets of transmutation and knowledge of the Philosopher's Stone or the Elixir of Life.[69] Michael Maier (1568–1622), a Lutheran physician with a strong interest in Hermetica, was one of the first writers to emphasize the alchemical aspects of Rosicrucianism through such publications as *Symbola Aureae Mensae* (1617) and *Themis Aurea* (1618).[70] Maier also defended the authenticity of the Rosicrucian brotherhood, even though he claimed at the time that he was not a member.[71] Lyndy Abraham describes the Philosopher's Stone in her *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (1998) as 'the most famous of all alchemical ideas. The Stone is the arcanum of all arcana, possessing the power to perfect imperfection in all things, able to transmute base metals into pure gold and transform

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[63] Ibid.: 169.
[64] Ibid.: 173.
[65] Ibid.: 49.
[66] Except for Trajano Boccalini who had authored *Allgemeine und General Reformation, der gantzen weiten Welt.*
[67] C. McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology and Rituals of an Esoteric Order*, loc. cit.: xix.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.: 51.
[70] Both works were published by Luca Jennis in Frankfurt and stressed that the R.C. Brotherhood really existed. In *Symbola Aureae Mensae* in particular Maier referred to the 'all-wisdom of Hermes' and the sacredness of the 'Virgin', or 'Queen Chemia', concluding with a Hermetic hymn of regeneration. See F.A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1972: 84–85.
[71] Ibid.: 85.

earthly man into an illumined philosopher.'[72] The Philosopher's Stone also had a Christian dimension that Maier would have found especially relevant. Abraham writes: 'It [ie. the Stone] is the figure of light veiled in dark matter, that divine love essence which combines divine wisdom and creative power, often identified with Christ as creative Logos.'[73] The figure of Christian Rosencreutz himself embodies both Christian and alchemical ideas: he is, as the English Rosicrucian philosopher and scientist Robert Fludd observed, a symbol of spiritual renewal, 'a light, as if it were the Sun, yet winged and exceeding the Sun of our heaven, arising from the tomb…a picture of the making of the perfect man'.[74]

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was formally established in London on 12 February 1888 when its three founding figures, Samuel Liddell Mathers (1854–1918), Dr William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925) and Dr William Robert Woodman (1828–1891) signed a document headed 'Order of the G.D.' All three were members of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (SRIA)[75] and it was through this esoteric Masonic organisation that they had met each other.[76] Westcott had acquired a manuscript in cipher form which had been discovered among the papers of a deceased member of the SRIA, and he claimed to have found among the leaves of the cipher manuscript the name and address of a certain Fraulein Anna Sprengel, said to be an eminent Rosicrucian adept. On her authority, and following a lengthy correspondence, Westcott announced in Masonic and Theosophical circles that he had been instructed to found an English branch of her German occult

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[72] L. Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998: 145.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Text quoted in F. King, *Ritual Magic in England*, Spearman, London 1970: 15–16.

[75] The Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (SRIA) had been founded in England on 1 June 1867 by Robert Wentworth Little and W.J. Hughan, drawing on a system of grades employed by an Edinburgh-based group known as the Rosicrucian Society in Scotia. (See R.A. Gilbert, *A.E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts*, Crucible, Wellingborough UK 1987: 105). Other members of the SRIA included Frederick Hockley, Kenneth Mackenzie and Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton.

[76] R.A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order*, Quantum/Foulsham, Slough UK 1997: 93.

group, calling it the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.[77] The first official document defined the purpose of the Golden Dawn as a secret society dedicated to the pursuit of 'occult science'. The text began as follows:

> For the purpose of the study of Occult Science, and the further investigation of the Mysteries of Life and Death, and our Environment, permission has been granted by the Secret Chiefs of the R.C. to certain Fratres learned in the Occult Sciences, (and who are also members of the Soc.Ros.in Ang.) to work the Esoteric Order of the G.D. in the Outer; to hold meetings thereof for Study and to initiate any approved person *Male* or *Female*, who will enter into an Undertaking to maintain strict secrecy regarding all that concerns it. Belief in One God necessary. No other restrictions.[78]

Three points in this document are of particular interest. The first is the reference to 'Secret Chiefs': from the very establishment of the Order it was claimed that these mysterious personages provided the spiritual authority for the Golden Dawn and this would prove to be a point of contention in later years. The second is that the founders of the Golden Dawn had decided to admit both male and female members, thus differentiating the new organisation from mainstream Freemasonry: this is significant because, in addition to being members of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, Mathers, Westcott and Woodman were all Freemasons, and traditionally Freemasonry admitted only male members.[79] The third is that the new magical order required its members to believe in 'One God'. The inference here was that the Golden Dawn would be grounded philosophically in a monotheistic spiritual tradition. This was further clarified in the text of the new Golden Dawn 'pledge form' which specified that the preferred religion should be Christianity: 'Belief in a Supreme Being, or Beings, is indispensable. In addition,

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[77] A thoroughly researched history of the establishment of the Order is provided by Ellic. Howe in *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1972.

[78] R.A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order*, loc. cit.: 21.

[79] Traditionally women have not been admitted to the Order of Freemasons. However there have been some exceptions to this rule. Count Alessandro di Cagliostro (1743–1795) admitted women to his so-called Egyptian rite, the Duchess of Bourbon presided as grand mistress in the Grand Orient of France lodge (1775) and the Rite of Mizraim established Masonic lodges for both men and women as early as 1819. In so-called Co-Masonic orders, the rites follow orthodox Freemasonry and men and women hold corresponding ranks.

the Candidate, if not a Christian, should be at least prepared to take an interest in Christianity.'[80]

The latter document also clarified the earlier statement that the Golden Dawn was dedicated to the 'investigation of the Mysteries of Life and Death' by confirming that it was not prepared to admit candidates to the Order who were Mesmerists[81] or Spiritualists[82] 'or who habitually allow[ed] themselves to fall into a completely passive condition of Will'.[83] This, too, is a crucial point. Central to the development of the Golden Dawn as a magical organisation would be the development of the 'magical will', sometimes capitalised as Will to connote a higher spiritual purpose. The development of the magical will is itself a defining characteristic of the Western esoteric tradition.

Establishment of the Golden Dawn Temples

Westcott invited his colleague from the SRIA, Samuel Liddell Mathers, to expand the cipher material so that it could form the basis of a 'com-

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[80] Ibid.: 23. Nevertheless the form of Christianity which was adopted in the Golden Dawn, namely the spiritual rebirth symbolism of Christian Rosenkreutz, was far from the mainstream, and few orthodox Christians would have embraced the concept of assigning Christ to Tiphareth in the centre of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life alongside the many other 'god-forms' and archetypal mythic images associated by the Golden Dawn members with the different spheres on the Tree of Life.

[81] Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) was born in Germany and studied medicine at the University of Vienna. Here he embraced the then-current scientific view that a magnetic fluid permeated all aspects of life. Mesmer then came to the view that when this natural source of energy was blocked in the body, disease and ill-health would result. After graduating from the University of Vienna, Mesmer worked as a healer, first in Vienna and later in Paris, using magnets to 'correct' imbalances in the human organism. He transmitted 'healing energy' to his patients by making passes over his patients with his hands, or by using iron rods or wands that he had magnetized. Mesmer is now regarded as one of the pioneers of psychosomatic medicine and hypnotherapy. During the late-Victorian era of the Golden Dawn, the term 'Mesmerist' was used to connote a hypnotist.

[82] Spiritualism is the belief that the spirits of the dead can communicate with the living through a psychic medium. Seances are conducted to summon a particular deceased spirit and the medium then enters a state of trance. The deceased spirit subsequently 'possesses' the trance medium and either addresses the gathering directly or communicates through 'automatic' writing, painting or drawing. Spiritualism was a popular practice in late-Victorian Britain and was widely believed to provide proof of life after death.

[83] R.A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order*, loc. cit.: 23.

plete scheme of initiation'[84] and this proposal had a positive outcome. Mathers developed the five Masonic grades into a workable system suitable for the practice of ceremonial magic and as a result the Isis-Urania Temple of the Golden Dawn was established in London on 1 March 1888 with Mathers, Westcott and Dr Woodman confirmed as leaders of the Order.[85] In a relatively short time it would be followed by other branches: the Osiris Temple in Weston-super-Mare, the Horus Temple in Bradford, the Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh and the Ahathoor Temple in Paris.[86]

In due course the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn would attract a distinguished membership including such figures as the distinguished homeopath Dr Edward Berridge; the Scottish Astronomer Royal, William Peck; Arthur Edward Waite, an authority on the Kabbalah, Rosicrucianism and the Holy Grail legends; the distinguished poet William Butler Yeats, who would later win the Nobel prize; well known physician and pioneer of tropical medicine, Dr R.W. Felkin; lawyer John W. Brodie-Innes; the well-known fantasy novelists Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood; and the controversial ritual magician and adventurer Aleister Crowley. The Order also included within its membership several notable women, among them Annie Horniman, later a leading patron of Irish theatre; artist Moina Bergson, sister of the influential French philosopher Henri Bergson and future wife of Samuel Mathers;[87] Celtic revivalist Maude Gonne; actress Florence Farr; and in later years the Christian Kabbalist Violet Firth, better known as the magical novelist Dion Fortune.[88]

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[84] Quoted in E. Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1972: 12.

[85] See F. King (ed.) *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic and Alchemy*, Neville Spearman, London 1971: 21.

[86] See F. King, *Ritual Magic in England*, loc. cit.: 43 and R.A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order*, loc. cit.: 44.

[87] Samuel Mathers and Moina Bergson married in 1890.

[88] Details of the Golden Dawn membership are included in E. Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1972; I. Colquhuon, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, Neville Spearman, London 1975; R.A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order*, loc. cit., and M.K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, Park Street Press, Rochester, Vermont 1995. According to Ellic Howe (*The Magicians of the Golden Dawn* loc. cit.: 49), 170 people had been initiated into the Golden Dawn by 2 September 1893 and 315 by 1896. These figures include the membership of four Golden Dawn temples at that time: Isis-Urania in London; Osiris in Weston-super-Mare; Horus in Bradford and Amen-Ra in Edinburgh, and after 1894, Mathers' Ahathoor temple in Paris.

Ritual Degrees and the Tree of Life

As Freemasons, Westcott and Mathers were strongly attracted to the concept of ritual degrees, and the grades of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn were formulated in a manner that would align them symbolically with the *sephiroth*, or levels of mystical consciousness upon the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. Four of the five ritual grades had Latin names: Zelator (corresponding to the *sephirah* Malkuth on the Tree of Life), Theoricus (corresponding to Yesod), Practicus (corresponding to Hod) and Philosophus (corresponding to Netzach).[89] There was also

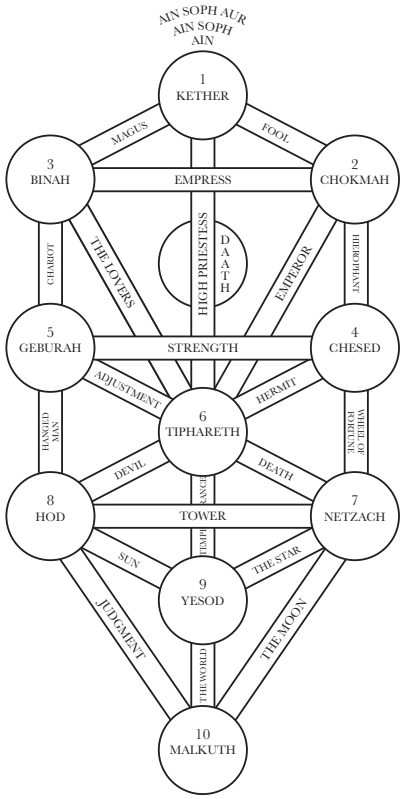

Fig. 2. The Golden Dawn version of the Tree of Life, combining the ten *sephiroth* and the interconnecting paths, represented by the Major Arcana of the Tarot.

[89] F. King, *Ritual Magic in England*, loc. cit.: 57–58.

a 'Neophyte' grade which, in a symbolic sense, was located *below* the Kabbalistic Tree of Life because at this stage the candidate who had just entered the Golden Dawn had not yet embarked on the magical exploration of the higher spheres on the Tree. Occult historian Francis King notes that immediately after admission to the grade the Neophyte was given the first 'Knowledge Lecture', a document that contained various Hermetic teachings together with instructions on the meditations the candidate was to perform as part of his psycho-spiritual training. The Neophyte was also given the rubric of the 'Qabalistic Cross and the Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram' so that he or she might copy, learn and practise it, 'thus arriving as some . . . comprehension of the way to come into contact with spiritual forces.'[90]

When Westcott, Mathers and Dr Woodman established the Isis-Urania Temple in London in 1888, they conferred upon themselves a Second Order[91] ritual grade which implied that they were the 'Secret Chiefs' incarnate: the grade 7° = 4° corresponded to the *sephirah* Chesed, the fourth emanation on the Tree of Life and the sphere symbolically associated with the Ruler of the Universe (represented cosmologically by Jehovah/Yahweh in Judaism, Zeus in ancient Greece and Jupiter in ancient Rome). As the leaders of the Isis-Urania Temple, Westcott, Mathers and Woodman interacted with incoming members by using secret magical names, for as a matter of principle Golden Dawn members could only be allowed to know the magical names of their peers and those with lower grades beneath them. Mathers was known as *Deo Duce Comite Ferro* and later *'S Rioghail Mo Dhream*, Westcott was *Non Omnis Moriar* and *Sapere Aude*, and Woodman *Magna est Veritas et Praevalebit* and *Vincit Omnia Veritas*.[92]

The three grades of the Second Order were Adeptus Minor (corresponding to Tiphareth on the Tree of Life), Adeptus Major (corresponding to Geburah) and Adeptus Exemptus (corresponding to Chesed).[93] By passing through the 5° = 6° ritual grade of Adeptus

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[90] Ibid.: 57.

[91] According to Golden Dawn historian R.A. Gilbert, the Second Order, the *Rosae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis* had existed since the earliest days of the Golden Dawn, but had worked no actual rituals. 'Members who advanced to become adepti of the Second Order did so by means of passing examinations.' See R.A. Gilbert, *A.E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts*, loc. cit.: 107.

[92] The magical names of the leading Golden Dawn members are provided in G.M. Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, Macmillan, London 1974: 314–316.

[93] F. King, *Ritual Magic in England*, loc. cit.: 56.

Minor the ceremonial magician entered what Mathers called 'the Vault of the Adepts'.[94] The candidate was bound symbolically on the 'Cross of Suffering' while also witnessing 'the resurrection of the Chief Adept, who represented Christian Rosencreutz, from a tomb within an elaborately painted, seven-sided vault'.[95]

The Spiritual Realm of the 'Secret Chiefs'

As indicated above, the fourth emanation on the Kabbalistic Tree (Chesed) lies just below the supernal triad of Kether, Chokmah and Binah. Between the supernal triad and the seven lower *sephiroth* upon the Tree is a symbolic divide associated with a transitional *sephirah* known as Daath (knowledge), which is often referred to by magical practitioners as the Abyss.[96] The Abyss symbolically distinguishes the transcendent nature of the Godhead (above) from the domain of Creation (below). In the Jewish mystical tradition symbolic forms are rarely ascribed to levels of mystical reality above the Abyss because, essentially, they lie beyond the realm of Creation. Despite the transcendental nature of the supernal triad on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, Mathers and his wife conceived of a mystical Third Order which corresponded to the exalted levels of spiritual awareness above the Abyss. They proposed the ritual grades of Magister Templi (corresponding to Binah), Magus (corresponding to Chokmah) and Ipsissimus (corresponding to Kether) and declared that the sacred domain of the Third Order was also the spiritual home of the 'Secret Chiefs' referred to in the founding charter of the Golden Dawn. Mathers spoke of 'the Great White Lodge of the Adepti',[97] but was less than forthcoming when it came to describing how contact with the Secret Chiefs could actually be achieved. Nevertheless, he did take the credit for establishing the inspirational connection that sustained the Golden Dawn:

> Prior to the establishment of the Vaults of the Adepts in Britannia (the First of the Golden Dawn in the Outer being therein actively working… it was found absolutely and imperatively necessary that there should be

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[94] Quoted in F. King, *Ritual Magic in England*, loc. cit.: 44. The 'Vault of the Adepts' was a ritual crypt representing the burial tomb of Christian Rosenkreutz.
[95] R.A. Gilbert, *A.E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts*, loc. cit.: 112.
[96] J. Bonner, *Qabalah*, Skoob Publishing, London 1995: 98–99.
[97] F. King, *Ritual Magic in England*, loc. cit.: 65.

> some eminent Member especially chosen to act as the link between the Secret Chiefs and the more external forms of the Order. It was requisite that such Member should be me, who, while having the necessary and peculiar educational basis of critical and profound occult archaeological knowledge should at the same time not only be ready and willing to devote himself in every sense to a blind and unreasoning obedience to those Secret Chiefs…[98]

However, Mathers was unable to supply his followers with any detailed information about the actual identity of the mysterious Secret Chiefs who represented the source of his magical authority:

> I do not even know their earthly names. I know them only by certain secret mottoes. I have *but very rarely* seen them in the physical body; and on such rare occasions *the rendezvous was made astrally by them* at the time and place which had been astrally appointed beforehand. For my part I believe them to be human and living upon this earth but possessing terrible superhuman powers.[99]

By claiming exclusive access to the Secret Chiefs, Mathers was acting in a way that would have a substantial impact on the future development of the Golden Dawn: he was effectively claiming privileged access to a unique source of sacred power. And Mathers would soon be able to exert his total authority over the Golden Dawn in a more literal and specific way. Dr Woodman had died in 1891 and Westcott had already begun to redirect his attention away from the Golden Dawn towards the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, which became his administrative responsibility from 1892 onwards.[100] Westcott finally resigned from the Golden Dawn in 1897 because rumours relating to his involvement in the Golden Dawn were affecting his professional career as Crown Coroner.[101] The death of Woodman and the resignation of Westcott left Mathers effectively in control of both the Inner and Outer Orders of the Golden Dawn, even though he and his wife were now based in Paris, having moved there in 1894.

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[98] Quoted in E. Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, loc. cit.: 127.

[99] Ibid.

[100] R.A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order*, loc. cit.: 79.

[101] See R. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999: 76 and R.A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order*, loc. cit.: 48.

Mathers' Autocratic Leadership and Its Consequences

At the time of his assumption of total control of the Golden Dawn, Mathers was engaged in literary research at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, where much of his time was taken up translating the French manuscript of a lengthy and important 15th century grimoire titled *The Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*.[102] Mathers was now referring to himself as MacGregor Mathers, MacGregor of Glenstrae and Count of Glenstrae to feign some sense of rank and importance.[103] Supported financially by wealthy Golden Dawn member Annie Horniman (*Soror Fortiter et Recte*),[104] a tea heiress and key senior member of the London Isis-Urania Temple, Mathers was presiding over the Ahathoor Temple in Paris while simultaneously attempting to maintain dominance over the various Golden Dawn branches across the Channel. However when Annie Horniman queried various aspects of the funding of Mathers' stay in Paris, Mathers accused her of insubordination and expelled her from the Order.[105]

Mathers' autocratic style and the expulsion of Annie Horniman from the Golden Dawn caused considerable disquiet among Order members and he caused even more consternation the following year when, in a letter to senior Order member Mrs Florence Farr Emery (*Soror Sapientia Sapienti Dono Data*) dated 16 February 1897, he charged her with 'attempting to make a schism' in the Golden Dawn and expelled her from the Order as well.[106] The expulsion of Annie Horniman and Mrs Emery from the Golden Dawn would lead to three years of internal bickering and dissension among Order members.

A crucial confrontation occurred in April 1900 when another Golden Dawn member, Aleister Crowley, who was regarded as an ally of Mathers, arrived in London from Paris, where he had been initiated

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[102] Publication of this text would later be financed by Frederick Leigh Gardner, a collector of esoterica, the grimoire being issued by John M. Watkins, London, in 1898, but it was not a commercial success in Britain. The Chicago-based De Laurence Company issued a pirated edition in the United States in 1932 and this was more successful. It reprinted in 1939 and 1948.

[103] Although only a clerk and infantryman by profession—he had been a private in the Hampshire Infantry Volunteers—Mathers believed that the Jacobite title of Count of Glen Strae had been bestowed on one of his ancestors by King James II.

[104] Annie Horniman was providing Mathers with an allowance of £420 per annum. See G.M. Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, Macmillan, London 1974: 163, fn. 10.

[105] Quoted in G.M. Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, loc. cit.: 15.

[106] Ibid.: 22.

by Mathers into the 5° = 6° degree.[107] On 17 April, Crowley (*Frater Perdurabo*) and a Golden Dawn colleague, Miss Elaine Simpson (*Soror Donorum Dei Dispensatis Fidelis*) broke into the Second Order members' meeting rooms in an effort to seize Order property, acting on Mathers' direct authority. Two days later Crowley was involved in a direct confrontation with Second Order members William Butler Yeats (*Frater Daemon est Deus Inversus*) and Edward A. Hunter (*Frater Hora Et Semper*) at the same meeting rooms. Hunter later provided a statement, describing Crowley's somewhat melodramatic performance: 'About 11:30 Crowley arrived in Highland dress, a black mask over his face, and a plaid thrown over his head and shoulders, an enormous gold or gilt cross on his breast, and a dagger by his side.'[108] Yeats and Hunter barred Crowley from access to the Order's premises and Crowley subsequently called for a constable to intervene: the constable in turn advised Crowley to 'place the matter in the hands of a lawyer'.[109]

As a direct consequence of this confrontation, at a meeting of twenty-two Second Order members of the Isis-Urania Temple on 21 April 1900, a resolution was passed expelling Mathers and Miss Simpson from the Order of the Golden Dawn and also refusing admission to Crowley, whose 5° = 6° degree initiation in Paris had not been recognised by the London Second Order members.[110] Mathers' exclusive hold on the Order of the Golden Dawn had effectively come to an end.

Golden Dawn Splinter Groups

In spite of the reaction against Mathers' autocratic rule, several members of the Golden Dawn formed splinter groups inspired by their own versions of the 'Secret Chiefs'. Mrs Florence Farr Emery headed a Golden Dawn Second Order offshoot known as the Sphere Group, that at first was said to be controlled by an Egyptian Adept and later drew on the inspirational symbolism of the Cup of the Stolistes, an

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[107] Crowley had been initiated into this degree by Mathers on 16 January 1900. See F. King, *Ritual Magic in England*, loc. cit.: 67.

[108] G.M. Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, loc. cit.: 23. See also E. Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, loc. cit.: 225.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Five members of Isis-Urania's Second Order remained loyal to Mathers. They were: Dr Edward Berridge (*Frater Resurgam*); George C. Jones (*Frater Volo Noscere*); Mrs Alice Simpson (*Soror Perseverantia et Cura Quies*); Miss Elaine Simpson (*Soror Fidelis*) and Col. Webber (*Frater Non Sine Numine*). See F. King, *Ritual Magic in England*, loc. cit.: 69.

image of the Holy Grail.[111] Much of the Sphere Group's activities were devoted to inner plane work, including astral explorations, skrying,[112] colour-meditation[113] and spirit-communication.[114] Meanwhile, Dr R.W. Felkin (*Frater Finem Respice*), together with several members of the London Isis-Urania Temple and the Edinburgh Amen-Ra Temple, founded the Order of the Stella Matutina (Morning Star) and continued to strive for contact with the Secret Chiefs even though they had broken

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[111] M.K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, loc. cit.: 257. Greer explains how the Cup Of Stolistes had been created as a sacred image based on the specific *sephiroth* from the Kabbalistic Tree of Life:

'There were twelve people in the "Sphere Working", evenly divided into six women and six men.. Every Sunday from noon to 1pm. in their own separate homes but working simultaneously, they began by creating an image of the Cup of Stolistes (Holy Grail) containing a burning heart that represented Tiphareth. The *sephiroth* of the "middle pillar" (Kether, Daath, Tiphareth, Yesod and Malkuth) were aligned in a central column, with Kether envisaged as a flame arising from the top of the Cup and Malkuth forming its base. The remaining six *sephiroth* were doubled (to form twelve) and arched toward the four directions, creating a sphere around Tiphareth. Each person took one of the twelve sphere positions, envisioning themselves not only as the corresponding *sephira* but as an entire Tree of Life within that *sephira*. They saw themselves clothed in the colour of the planet, bathed in an aura the colour of the *sephira*, and they consciously projected appropriately coloured rays of light to the nearest *sephiroth* on the central column and to the *sephiroth* above and below them.' The visualisations focused the energy initially on the Second Order meeting rooms and were then expanded in range to cover the whole of London, the entire planet and then the Universe itself. The purpose of these visualisations says Greer was to 'transmute evil into good through the actions of the greater forces on the lesser' (Ibid.: 257).

[112] Skrying, or scrying, is a form of divination in which the practitioner gazes at a shiny or polished surface to induce a trance-state in which images appear as part of a 'psychic' communication. Crystal balls, mirrors, polished metal and cups of clear liquid have all been used for the purpose of skrying. An essay titled 'Of Skrying and Travelling in the Spirit-Vision', written by Soror V.N.R. (Moina Mathers) was included in Israel Regardie's monumental work, *The Golden Dawn*, vol. 4, Aries Press, Chicago 1940: 29–42.

[113] Colour meditation is a practise whereby a practitioner visualises various colours because of their perceived healing properties. Red, orange and yellow are stimulants, whereas green, blue, indigo and violet are relaxants and each of these colours are believed to have specific healing effects. In the Golden Dawn each of the different *sephiroth* on the Tree of Life was ascribed a colour, for the purpose of visualisation and meditation. In his work on Kabbalistic meditation, *The Middle Pillar*, Israel Regardie (who was a member of the Stella Matutina) provides the following correlations between specific colours and the *sephiroth* on the Tree: Kether:white; Chokmah:grey; Binah: black; Daas [Daath]:lavender-blue; Chesed: blue; Gevurah [Geburah]: red; Tipharas [Tiphareth]: gold; Netzach:green; Hod: orange; Yesod: puce; Malkus [Malkuth]: 'mixed colours' (these are usually interpreted in the Golden Dawn system as citrine,olive, russet and black). See I. Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, Aries Press, Chicago 1945: 140. For the 'mixed colours of Malkuth' see W.E. Butler, *The Magician: His Training and Work*, Aquarian Press, London 1959: 81.

[114] M.K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, loc. cit.: 260.

their allegiance to their former leader. Felkin had named his Order the Stella Matutina because Venus (the Morning Star) was believed to be the guardian planet of the Isis-Urania Temple.[115] Prominent members of the Amoun Temple of the Stella Matutina in London included John W. Brodie-Innes (formerly a leading member of Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh, where he was known as *Frater Sub Spe*), Annie Horniman, Percy Bullock, Arthur Edward Waite and William Butler Yeats.[116] In its later years, Israel Regardie, editor of the major four-volume source-work, *The Golden Dawn*, would also join the Stella Matutina.[117]

Magical Symbolism in the Golden Dawn

As Israel Regardie notes in relation to the Neophyte grade, for the Golden Dawn magician the ultimate mythic attainment was to come forth ritually into the Light, for this was the very essence of spiritual rebirth.[118] The process of ascending the Kabbalistic Tree of Life by means of visualisation and ceremonial magic involved powerful acts of creative imagination: the magician had to feel that he or she was fully engaging with each sphere of consciousness in turn. However the mono-theistic nature of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life presented the Golden Dawn occultists with a paradox, for while they acknowledged the sacred unity of the Tree of Life in all its emanations they also believed that they had to focus their creative awareness upon a sequence of specific archetypal images if they were to 'ascend' to the Light. Their solution was to regard the Kabbalistic Tree of Life as a matrix upon which the archetypes of the great Western mythologies could be charted and interrelated as part of a sacred unity. It then became possible to cor-relate the major deities from the pantheons of ancient Egypt, Greece,

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[115] G.M. Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, loc. cit.: 28.

[116] See I. Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, loc. cit. 191–192.

[117] Israel Regardie (1907–1985), a one-time secretary to Aleister Crowley, joined the Stella Matutina in 1933, attained a ritual grade of Theoricus Adeptus Minor and then left in December 1934. Between 1937 and 1940 he published a four-volume treatise *The Golden Dawn* (Aries Press, Chicago), which included the bulk of the Golden Dawn's rituals and teachings, thereby providing an invaluable source of esoteric material that might otherwise have faded into obscurity. See www.hermeticgoldendawn.org/regardie.htm

[118] Within the Golden Dawn system of ritual grades this would not actually be achieved until the candidate had attained the Second Order 5° = 6° degree associated with Tiphareth, the sphere of 'spiritual rebirth'.

Rome and Celtic Europe in what was effectively a cumulative approach to the western mythological imagination. In due course other magical objects would also be charted symbolically upon the Tree, including various precious stones, perfumes, minerals and sacred plants—each being assigned to specific gods and goddesses in a ceremonial context. These charted mythological images were known to the Golden Dawn magicians as 'magical correspondences'.

Occult historian Ithell Colquhoun notes that S.L. Mathers and Wynn Westcott began compiling the lists of magical correspondences during the 1890s but this work would subsequently be commandeered by Aleister Crowley and published under his own name:

> A manuscript arranged in tabular form and known as *The Book of Correspondences*, the compilation of which Mathers and Wynn Westcott had together begun in the early days of their association, was circulated by them among their more promising students during the 1890s. Allan Bennett had a copy which he passed on to [Aleister] Crowley, or allowed him to copy again. Years later Crowley, while convalescing in Bournemouth, had the bright idea of adding a few columns to it. He then gave it the title of *Liber 777*, wrote an introduction and notes and, in 1909, published the whole as his own work, 'privately', under the imprint of the Walter Scott Publishing Co. Ltd., London and Felling-on-Tyne. This is the explanation of Crowley's claim to the feat of composing the whole within a week and without reference books. Certain of the columns were repeated in his *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929) and in Regardie's *The Golden Dawn.* A new impression of the original was *Liber 777 Revised*, brought out in by the Neptune Press, London in 1955…the authorship of Mathers, who had done most of the initial work, went unrecognised.[119]

The listings in *Liber 777* included references to ancient Egyptian and Roman deities as well as listings for western astrology, plants, precious stones and perfumes. The following are selected listings from Crowley's version of Mathers' and Westcott's *Book of Correspondences* published in Table 1 in *Liber 777*:[120]

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[119] I. Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, loc. cit. 104–105.

[120] See A. Crowley, *Liber 777*, in *The Qabalah of Aleister Crowley*, Weiser, New York 1973: 1–10.

Table of Correspondences

Level	*Kabbalah*	*Astrology*	*Egyptian*	*Roman*
1	Kether	Primum Mobile	Ptah, Hadith	Jupiter
2	Chokmah	Zodiac/Fixed Stars	Amoun, Thoth	Janus
3	Binah	Saturn Hecate	Isis, Nephthys	Juno, Cybele,
4	Chesed	Jupiter	Amoun	Jupiter
5	Geburah	Mars	Horus	Mars
6	Tiphareth	Sol (Sun)	Ra	Apollo
7	Netzach	Venus	Hathoor	Venus
8	Hod	Mercury	Anubis	Mercury
9	Yesod	Luna	Shu	Diana
10	Malkuth	The Elements	Seb	Ceres

The following perfumes, precious stones and plants were considered appropriate in rituals corresponding to the invoked god or goddess for each of the ten *sephiroth* and are also listings from Crowley's Table 1:[121]

Level	*Precious Stones*	*Perfumes*	*Plants*
1	Diamond	Ambergris	Almond in flower
2	Star Ruby, Turquoise	Musk	Amaranth
3	Star Sapphire, Pearl	Myrrh, Civet	Cypress, Opium Poppy
4	Amethyst, Sapphire	Cedar	Olive, Shamrock
5	Ruby	Tobacco	Oak. Nux Vomica, Nettle
6	Topaz	Olibanum	Acacia, Bay, Laurel, Vine
7	Emerald	Benzoin, Rose, Sandlewood	Rose
8	Opal	Storax	Moly, *Anhalonium lewinii*
9	Quartz	Jasmine	Mandrake, Damiana
10	Rock Crystal	Dittany of Crete	Willow, Lily, Ivy

[121] Crowley's *Liber 777* listings included several psychoactive plants: opium poppy, nux vomica, mandrake, peyote (*Anhalonium lewinii*) and damiana, a sure sign that these were his additions and not part of the original Mathers/Westcott listings. Moly is a mythical plant: it was given by Hermes to Odysseus to protect him from the magic of Circe. See C. Ratsch, *The Dictionary of Sacred and Magical Plants*, Prism Press, Dorset, 1992: 127.

Liber 777 and its precursor *The Book of Correspondences* helped codify the modern magical imagination. The listings themselves are of historic significance because they represented an early attempt to systematise archetypal images and 'mythic' levels of consciousness at a time when psychology itself was still in its infancy. *Liber 777* and *The Book of Correspondences* predate by well over a decade Carl Jung's work with the primordial images' of the unconscious mind, later referred to as the 'archetypes of the collective unconscious'.[122]

From a psychological perspective it is clear that the magicians of the Golden Dawn regarded the Tree of Life as a complex symbol representing the realm of sacred inner potentialities. To simulate the gods and goddesses through acts of magic was to *become like them*. The challenge was to identify oneself with the mythological and archetypal images of the psyche through a process of direct encounter: the act of engaging the gods, whether through ritual or by some other means like visualisation, meditation or magical trance, was essentially a process of discovering one's inner potential. As Aleister Crowley observed in *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929): '…the Gods are but names for the forces of Nature themselves'[123] and 'the true God is man. In man are all things hidden…'[124]

The magicians in the Golden Dawn had therefore to imagine that they were partaking of the nature of each of the gods in turn, embodying within themselves the very essence of the deity. Their rituals were designed to control all the circumstances which might assist them in their journey through the subconscious mind and the mythic imagination. They included all the symbols and colours of the god, the utterance of magical names of power, and the burning of incense or perfume appropriate to the deity concerned. In Golden Dawn ceremonial workings, the ritual magician imagined that he or she had become the deity whose forms were imitated in ritual. The traditional concept of the gods (or God) ruling humanity was reversed so that it was now the ritual magician who controlled the gods, uttering the sacred names

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[122] According to Jung's colleague, Dr Jolande Jacobi, Jung at first referred to 'primordial images' and later to the 'dominants of the collective unconscious'. It was 'only later that he called them archetypes'. Jacobi notes that Jung took the term 'archetype' from the *Corpus Hermeticum* and from *De Divinis nominibus* by Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite. See J. Jacobi, *The Psychology of C.G. Jung*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1942: 39.

[123] A. Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929), Castle Books, New York, n.d.: 120.

[124] Ibid.: 152–153.

that sustained the universe. As Eliphas Lévi had written in his seminal text *The Key of the Mysteries*, '…all magic is in a word, and that word pronounced Kabbalistically is stronger than all the powers of Heaven, Earth and Hell. With the name of *Yod, He, Vau, He*, one commands Nature…'[125]

In passing through the ritual grades from Malkuth to Netzach, the Outer Order members of the Golden Dawn focused their magical activities on the mythic levels associated with the lower *sephiroth* of the Tree of Life, specifically the spheres of Malkuth, Yesod, Hod and Netzach.[126] In doing so, they developed specific techniques for the expansion of spiritual awareness. These included a rich application of magical symbols and mythic imagery in their ritual adornments, ceremonial procedures and invocations, all of which were intended to focus the imagination during the performance of a given magical ritual. In one of his most important books, *The Tree of Life*, Israel Regardie describes magical ritual as 'a deliberate exhilaration of the Will and the exaltation of the Imagination, the end being the purification of the personality and the attainment of a spiritual state of consciousness, in which the ego enters into a union with either its own Higher Self or a God'.[127]

Dion Fortune and the Inner Light

Apart from Aleister Crowley, who abandoned Golden Dawn theurgy in order to practise Thelemic sex magic, one of the other notable figures to emerge from the Golden Dawn was Dion Fortune (1890–1946). Fortune's *The Mystical Qabalah* (1935) is widely regarded among esoteric practitioners as one of the best practical sourcebooks in its field. She

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[125] E. Levi, *The Key of the Mysteries*, Rider, London 1959: 174.

[126] The Kabbalistic sphere of Malkuth, for example, was associated with the earth, crops, the immediate environment and living things. Yesod was linked symbolically to the Moon and was regarded as the sphere of 'astral imagery', the dream-world and the element Water. Yesod was also the seat of the sexual instincts and corresponded to the genital area when 'mapped' upon the figure of Adam Kadmon, the archetypal human being. Hod was associated with the planet Mercury, representing intellect and rational thinking, and symbolised the orderly or structured aspects of the manifested universe. Netzach was linked to the planet Venus, and was said to complement the intellectual and orderly functions of Hod. While Hod could be considered clinical and rational, Netzach represented the arts, creativity, subjectivity and the emotions. See also the mythological listings in *Liber 777* referred to above.

[127] See I. Regardie, *The Tree of Life: A Study in Magic*, Rider, London 1932: 106.

also wrote several works of occult fiction, including *The Goat-foot God* (1936), a novel dedicated to the Great God Pan.

Dion Fortune was born Violet Mary Firth on 6 December 1890 at Bryn-y-Bia, in Llandudno, Wales. Her father, Arthur Firth, was a solicitor but for her own reasons Violet liked to emphasise a close connection with the better known Firth family of Sheffield, a leading steel-producing company, and she would later take its family motto as her own.

Although details of her early professional life are scanty it is known that she worked as a therapist in a medico-psychological clinic in East London and later studied psychoanalysis in classes held at the University of London by a Professor Flugel, who was also a member of the Society for Psychical Research.[128] Strongly influenced by the theories of Freud, Adler and Jung, Firth became a lay psychoanalyst in 1918. In Jung's thought, especially, she found correlations between the 'archetypes of the collective unconscious' and a realm of enquiry which would increasingly fascinate her: the exploration of sacred mythological images invoked by occultists during their rituals and visionary encounters.

According to Fortune's biographer, Alan Richardson, her first contact with occult perspectives seems to have come through her association with an Irish Freemason, Dr Theodore Moriarty. Firth probably met Moriarty at the clinic where she worked; he in turn was involved in giving lectures on occult theories in a private house in the village of Eversley in northern Hampshire. Dr Moriarty's interests were both Theosophical and metaphysical, encompassing such subject matter as the study of psychology and religion, the so-called 'root races' of lost Atlantis,[129] mystical and Gnostic Christianity, reincarnation, and the occult relationship between mind, matter and spirit. It is not clear whether Dr Moriarty had any personal connection with the Golden Dawn magicians—many of whom were also Freemasons. But Violet Firth had a close friend, Maiya Tranchell-Hayes (later Mrs Maiya

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[128] A. Richardson, *Priestess: The Life and Magic of Dion Fortune*, Aquarian Press, Wellingborough UK 1987: 52.

[129] The concept of 'root races' is a 19th century Theosophical teaching which states that humanity has evolved through different phases of spiritual growth and intellectual development, each of these being known as a 'root race'. The present state of humanity is said to be the fifth root race. It was preceded by the Atlantean (fourth) and Lemurian (third), both of which were engulfed in cataclysms. According to Madame H.P. Blavatsky the first root race consisted of 'Celestial Men' (see *The Secret Doctrine*, [1888] Vol. 1: 214) whereas the second root race were of a-sexual origin and were known as 'The Fathers of the "sweat-born"' (*The Secret Doctrine* [1897] Vol. 3: 125), Theosophical Publishing House, Madras, fifth edition, 1962.

Curtis-Webb), whom she had known from childhood and who was also an occult devotee, and through her she was introduced to the Golden Dawn Temple of the Alpha and Omega in 1919.[130] Based in London, this temple was a southern offshoot of the Scottish section of the Golden Dawn headed by Dr J.W. Brodie-Innes. Maiya Tranchell-Hayes became her teacher at the Alpha and Omega temple,[131] and Firth found the magical ceremonies powerful and evocative. However she also felt there was a sense of gloom in this particular group. According to Firth: 'The glory had departed…most of its original members were dead or withdrawn; it had suffered severely during the war, and was manned mainly by widows and grey-bearded ancients.'[132] A year later Firth joined a London temple headed by Mrs Moina Mathers, who was continuing the esoteric work of her husband following his untimely death from influenza in the epidemic of 1918.

In the Temple of the Alpha and Omega, Violet Firth took the magical name *Deo Non Fortuna*, 'by God and not by luck', which was also the Latin motto inscribed upon the Firth family crest. She subsequently became known in esoteric circles as Dion Fortune, a contraction of her magical name, and in 1922 formed her own meditative group. Originally established as The Christian Mystic Lodge of the Theosophical Society, it soon became known as The Fraternity of the Inner Light. For a time, following an agreement with Moina Mathers, Fortune's meditative group served as 'an Outer Court to the Golden Dawn system'[133] but when Fortune had a significant disagreement with Mrs Mathers in 1924[134]

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[130] A. Richardson, *Priestess: The Life and Magic of Dion Fortune*, loc. cit.: 111.

[131] According to Kenneth Grant, Fortune based the character of Vivian le Fay Morgan in her two novels *The Sea-Priestess* (1938) and *Moon Magic* (1956) on Maiya Tranchell-Hayes. See K. Grant, *The Magical Revival*, loc. cit.: 177. Tranchell-Hayes was a pupil of J.W. Brodie-Innes, a leading member of the Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh.

[132] Quoted in A. Richardson, *Priestess: The Life and Magic of Dion Fortune*, loc. cit.: 112.

[133] Ibid.: 117.

[134] The dispute arose over the publication of Fortune's book *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, which put forward the view that a sexual relationship between two people could be considered as an energy exchange on many levels of being, not just the physical level. While this now seems reasonably innocuous, and perhaps even obvious, Moina Mathers charged Dion Fortune with 'betraying the inner teaching of the Order'. Fortune protested that she hadn't actually received the relevant degree from Mrs Mathers' temple and she was then 'pardoned'. Nevertheless, the dispute with Moina Mathers continued. Soon afterwards, according to an account by Dion Fortune published in *The Occult Review*, Mrs Mathers suspended Dion Fortune for writing her book *Sane Occultism* and ceased all magical co-operation, turning her out 'because

she then set up a temple of her own in Bayswater. Fortune's temple was loosely affiliated with the Stella Matutina, the splinter group established by Dr R.W. Felkin and other Golden Dawn members following the rift with MacGregor Mathers.

Dion Fortune's contribution to Western esoteric thought dates from the formation of the Fraternity of the Inner Light. Here she increasingly engaged herself in the mythological dimensions of magic, venturing into what she now came to regard as the collective pagan soul of humanity, tapping into the very heart of the Ancient Mysteries. Reversing the male-dominated, solar-oriented tradition which MacGregor Mathers had established in the Golden Dawn, Fortune committed herself completely to the magical potency of the archetypal Feminine, and began exploring Goddess images in the major ancient pantheons. She was also intrigued by the symbolic and sexual polarities in magic, including those of the Black Isis.[135] Isis is best known as the great goddess of magic in ancient Egyptian mythology, as the wife of the sun-god Osiris and the mother of Horus. It was Isis who succeeded in piecing together the fragments of Osiris's body after he had been murdered by Set, and it was she who also tricked Ra into revealing his secret magical name.[136] However Fortune was apparently interested in a different aspect of Isis, a dimension that the tantric magician Kenneth Grant has called the 'primordial essence of Woman (*sakti*) in her dynamic aspect'. While Isis was a lunar goddess[137] and the Moon is traditionally considered 'passive', a receptacle or reflector of light, the Black Isis was said to destroy all that was 'inessential and obstructive to the soul's development'. This in turn led to an exploration of the magic of sexuality. According to Grant, the basis of Fortune's work at this time involved 'the bringing into manifestation of this *sakti* by the magically controlled interplay of sexual polarity embodied in the priest (the consecrated male) and the specially chosen female.' Together they enacted the immemorial Rite and this formed a vortex on the inner planes 'down which the tremen-

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certain symbols had not appeared in my aura—a perfectly unanswerable charge.' See R.A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn*, loc. cit.: 124.

[135] K. Grant, *The Magical Revival*, Muller, London 1972: 176.

[136] See P. Turner & C.R. Coulter, 'Isis' in *Dictionary of Ancient Deities*, Oxford University Press 2000: 243 and R.A. Armour, 'The Adventures of Osiris and Isis' in *Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt*, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 1986: 72–88, among many other accounts of this classic ancient Egyptian myth.

[137] Isis was identified as a lunar goddess by Plutarch. See P. Turner & C.R. Coulter, 'Isis' in *Dictionary of Ancient Deities*, Oxford University Press 2000: 243.

dous energies of Black Isis rush(ed) into manifestation'.[138] If Grant is correct, and he met Fortune during the 1940s around the same time that he knew Crowley,[139] this was clearly a type of visionary magic that ventured into new realms, encompassing the use of transcendent sexual energies and the fusion, in ritual, of male and female polarities. It seems to have involved some form of Western magical *Tantra*, and was a clear departure from the Golden Dawn, which tended to downplay the sexual dimensions of magic.[140]

While the sexual aspects of the most secret Inner Light rituals remain a matter of speculation, it is clear that Fortune's main emphasis was not so much on physical magical activities as on astral encounters with the mythic archetypes of the mind. The Fraternity of the Inner Light continued the experimental work with magical visualisation that had first been undertaken in the Golden Dawn during the 1890s, and the Inner Light magicians developed a practical approach to magical 'path-workings', visualisations involving guided imagery,[141] as a direct means of exploring the subconscious mind. An important essay titled *The Old Religion*, written by a senior member of Fortune's group, Charles R.F. Seymour,[142] confirms that the Inner Light members believed that

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[138] K. Grant, *The Magical Revival*, Muller, London 1972: 177.

[139] According to his wife Steffi, Kenneth Grant met Crowley in 1945. See Introduction in K. and S. Grant, *Zos Speaks: Encounters with Austin Osman Spare*, Fulgur, London 1998: 16. Dion Fortune died in 1946, Crowley in 1947.

[140] It has been suggested in an article in *Gnosis* magazine (No. 43, Spring 1997) that there may have been a secret sexual dimension to the rituals of the Golden Dawn, but the arguments put forward by the authors, John Michael Greer and Carl Hood, are less than convincing. It is pertinent to mention in this context that MacGregor Mathers, arguably the most influential figure in the formation of the Golden Dawn, apparently valued celibacy and virginity and never consummated his marriage to Moina Bergson (see I. Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, loc. cit.: 54). Sexual magic was more the domain of occultists like Austin Osman Spare, who was never a member of the Golden Dawn, and Aleister Crowley, who developed his interest in Thelemic sex magic after leaving the Golden Dawn in 1903.

[141] Magical 'pathworkings' were developed in the Fraternity of the Inner Light and by its more recent offshoot, Servants of the Light (SOL), and employ a guided imagery technique in which one person reads from a written text so that a subject (or subjects) may be led along 'inner meditative pathways' in order to experience archetypal visions. Pathworkings often utilise the symbolism of the Major Arcana, drawing on descriptions of the Tarot images associated with the ten *sephiroth* on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life (a symbolic connection first proposed by the 19th century occultist Eliphas Levi). Pathworkings are intended to trigger personal meditative experiences of the gods and goddesses of the various mythological pantheons.

[142] The chapter 'The Old Religion' in Basil Wilby (ed.), *The New Dimensions Red Book*, Helios, Cheltenham 1968 identified the author only as 'F.P.D.'. It is now known that 'F.P.D.' was Colonel Charles R.F. Seymour (1880–1943). See A. Richardson, *Dancers to*

inner-plane ventures of this kind could arouse 'ancient cult memories' from previous incarnations. Fortune believed that the key to understanding human life and achievement lay in understanding the nature of reincarnation,[143] and the archetype of the Great Mother, in particular, could be thought of as a symbolic embodiment of the World Memory, a concept which has a parallel in the Theosophical concept of the Akashic Records.[144] According to Fortune it was possible to access details of earlier incarnations through contact with the Great Mother, and in this way the nature of one's sacred purpose could be determined. In *The Old Religion* Seymour explains that it was this shared belief in the spiritual authenticity of 'ancient cult memories' that united the members of their esoteric group:

> Most of the members of these groups have, in the past, served at the altars of Pagan Religions and have met, face to face, the Shining Ones of the forests and the mountains, of the lakes and seas…In the course of these experiments it was discovered that if anyone of the members of a group had in the past a strong contact with a particular cult at a certain period, that individual could communicate these memories to others, and could link them with cult memories that still lie within the Earth memories of Isis as the Lady of Nature.[145]

The Rise of Wicca and Goddess Worship

Much of the current interest in Western occultism, and contemporary paganism in particular, is directly related to the rise and importance of feminism as a contemporary social movement. Contemporary witchcraft—often referred to as Wicca—and its more eclectic variant, Goddess worship, both focus on the veneration of the sacred Feminine—the Universal Goddess—in her myriad manifestations.

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the Gods: The Magical Records of Charles Seymour and Christine Hartley 1937–1939, Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, UK 1985: 90.

[143] D. Fortune, *Applied Magic*, loc. cit.: 4.

[144] The concept of the Akashic Records derives from the teachings of Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891) and the Theosophical Society (founded in New York in 1875). According to the Theosophists, the Akashic Records are an astral memory of all events, thoughts and emotions since the world began. Psychics are said to be able to receive 'impressions' from this astral realm and some Theosophical descriptions of the legendary lost continent of Atlantis are based on this psychic approach. *Akasha* is a Sanskrit word meaning 'luminous' and Akasha is one of the five Hindu elements, or Tattvas, whose symbol is the 'black egg' of Spirit.

[145] See 'F.P.D.', 'The Old Religion', in B. Wilby, *The New Dimensions Red Book*, loc. cit.: 47.

There is, however, no single spiritual pathway within contemporary paganism. Some neo-pagans are highly structured in their ceremonial practices, while others are much more spontaneous. Some emphasise lineage and authority within their respective covens, others are more egalitarian. Nevertheless, there are many shared perspectives across the broad spectrum of pagan beliefs and ritual practices, and our focus here is on core elements in modern Wicca and Goddess worship.

The term Wicca itself derives from the Old English words *wicca* (masculine) and *wicce* (feminine) meaning 'a practitioner of witchcraft' The word *wiccan*, meaning 'witches' occurs in the Laws of King Alfred (circa 890 CE)[146] and the verb *wiccian*, 'to bewitch',[147] was also used in this context. Some witches believe the words connote a wise person; Wicca is often referred to by practitioners as the 'Craft of the Wise'.[148]

Modern witchcraft is a Nature-based religion with the Great Goddess as its principal deity. In Wicca the Great Goddess can take many different forms, associated with a range of mythological pantheons: these include Artemis, Astarte, Athene, Dione, Melusine, Aphrodite, Cerridwen, Dana, Arianrhod and Isis,[149] among many others. Alternatively reference may be made in general terms to the Great Mother or Mother Nature. The high priestess, who is the ritual leader of an individual group of witchcraft practitioners, or coven, incarnates the spirit of the Goddess in a ceremonial context when her senior male partner, the high priest, 'draws down the Moon' into her body. In modern witchcraft, the high priestess is regarded as the receptacle of wisdom and intuition and is symbolised by the sacred ritual cup, whereas her consort is represented symbolically by a short ritual sword or dagger known as an '*athame*'. Witchcraft rituals associated with the so-called Third Initiation (see below) feature the act of uniting dagger and cup in a symbol of sexual union, and there is also a comparable relationship in Celtic mythology between the sacred oak tree and Mother Earth. Accordingly the high priest, or consort, is sometimes known as the Oak King, a reference to the sacred Oak of the Celts, and at other times as Cernunnos, 'The Horned One'.[150]

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[146] D. Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft, Past and Present*, revised edition, Hale, London 1984: 343.

[147] Ibid.

[148] P. Crowther, *Lid off the Cauldron: A Handbook for Witches*, Muller, London 1981: 1.

[149] The goddesses named here are all included in the so-called Witches' Charge a key element in Wiccan ritual.

[150] In modern witchcraft the Horned God personifies fertility, the Celtic counterpart of the Great God Pan, the goat-footed god, who in ancient Greece personified the

Wiccan covens vary in size although traditionally the membership number is thirteen, consisting of six men, six women and the high priestess.[151] When the group exceeds this number, some members leave to form a new coven. Following their initiation into a coven, Wiccans are given magical names which are used in a ritual context and among coven members. Wiccan ceremonies are held at specific times of the year. The coven meetings held through the year at full moon are called *esbats*: there are usually thirteen of these meetings in a calendar year. The major gatherings in the witches' calendar, the so-called Greater Sabbats, are related to the cycle of the seasons and the traditional times for sowing and harvesting crops. In the Northern Hemisphere the four Greater Sabbats are held on the following dates each year:

> Candlemas, known by the Celts as *Imbolc*: 2 February
> May Eve, or *Beltane*: 30 April
> Lammas, or *Lughnassadh*: 1 August
> Halloween, or *Samhain*: 31 October[152]

In addition, there are four minor Sabbats: the two solstices at midsummer and midwinter, and the two equinoxes in spring and autumn.[153]

In pre-Christian times, *Imbolc* was traditionally identified with the first signs of spring; *Beltane* was a fertility celebration when the sacred oak was burned, mistletoe cut, and sacrifices made to the gods, and *Lughnassadh* was related to autumn and the harvesting of crops and celebrated both the gathering in of produce and the continuing fertility of the earth. *Samhain* represented the transition from autumn to winter and was associated with bonfires to keep away the winter winds. *Samhain* was also a time when the spirits of the dead could return to earth once again to contact loved ones. Among contemporary witches, Sabbats are

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untamed forces of Nature and the universal life-force. There is no connection between the Horned God of witchcraft and the Christian horned Devil although, since the time of the witchcraft persecutions of the Middle Ages this has been a common error.

[151] D. Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft, Past and Present*, loc. cit.: 69.

[152] The equivalent dates for the Southern Hemisphere are as follows: *Candlemas/Imbolc*: 1 August; *Beltane*: 31 October; *Lammas/Lughnassadh*: 2 February; *Halloween/Samhain*: 30 April.

[153] In the Southern Hemisphere, midsummer solstice occurs on 21 December and midwinter solstice on 21 June. Spring equinox is on 21 September and Autumn equinox on 21 March.

a time for fellowship, ceremonial and initiation, and ritual performances are followed by feasting, drinking and merriment.[154]

Wiccan ceremonies take place in a magic circle which can either be inscribed upon the floor of a special room set aside in a suburban house and designated as the 'temple', or marked on the earth in a suitable meeting place: for example, in a grove of trees or on the top of a sacred hill. The earth is swept with a ritual broomstick for purification and the four elements are ascribed to the four directions: Earth in the north, Air in the East, Fire in the south and Water in the west. The ritual altar is traditionally placed in the north. Beings known as the 'Lords of the Watchtowers'[155] are believed to govern the four quarters and are invoked in rituals for blessings and protection.

Within the circle and present on the altar are a bowl of water, a dish of salt, candles, a symbolic scourge (representing will and determination), a cord to bind candidates in initiation, and consecrated symbols of the elements: a pentacle or disc (Earth/feminine); a cup (Water/feminine); a censer (Fire/masculine) and a wand (Air/masculine). The high priestess has her personal *athame*, or ritual dagger, and the sword of the high priest rests on the ground before the altar.

Contemporary Wicca recognises three initiations. The first confers witch-status upon the neophyte, the second promotes a first-degree witch to the position of high priestess or high priest, and the third celebrates the bonding of the high priestess and high priest in the Great Rite, which involves either real or symbolic sexual union and is perceived as a 'mystical marriage'. There is also usual practice in Wicca that a man must be initiated by a woman and a woman by a man, although a parent may initiate a child of the same sex.[156] Most covens do not admit anyone under the age of twenty-one.[157]

Wiccans recognise the three-fold aspect of the Great Goddess in her role as Maid (youth, enchantment), Mother (maturity, fulfilment),

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[154] See J. and S. Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, Hale, London 1981.

[155] The Lords of the Watchtowers are the Wiccan equivalent of the four archangels, Raphael, Michael, Gabriel and Uriel who are invoked as protectors in the Golden Dawn banishing ritual of the Lesser Pentagram.

[156] During his own initiation, in the New Forest in September 1939, Gerald Gardner, one of the principal figures in the modern witchcraft revival, was told by his initiators 'The law has always been that power must be passed from man to woman or from woman to man, the only exception being when a mother initiates her daughter or a father his son, because they are part of themselves.' See G. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* Rider, London 1954: 78.

[157] See D. Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft, Past and Present*, loc. cit.: 203.

and Crone (old age, wisdom). This symbolic personification of the three phases of womanhood is represented, for example, by the Celtic triad Brigid-Dana-Morrigan, the Greek goddess in her three aspects Persephone-Demeter-Hecate, or by the three Furies, Alecto (goddess of beginnings)-Tisiphone (goddess of continuation)-Megaera (goddess of death and rebirth). The universal presence and three-fold nature of the Great Goddess is particularly emphasised by feminist Wicca groups in their development of 'women's mysteries'. As American neopagan Zsuzsanna Budapest writes in her *Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*: 'Images abound of the Mother Goddess, Female Principle of the Universe and source of all life… the Goddess of Ten Thousand Names.'[158]

In Wicca, magic is usually classified as 'black' or 'white', a distinction related to personal intent. Black magic is pursued in order to cause harm to another person through injury, illness or misfortune and may also be practised in order to enhance personal power as a consequence. By definition, white magic is practised with a positive intent, seeks a beneficial outcome, and is often associated with rites of healing, with eliminating evil or disease, or with the expansion of spiritual awareness.

The so-called Wiccan Rede, or code of ethics, specifically prohibits Wiccans from causing harm. The Rede is a statement of principle that all Wiccans are asked to adhere to: *Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfil: An it harm none, do what ye will.*[159] The Pagan Federation in London has expanded upon the Wiccan Rede, issuing a statement that all neopagans are asked to accept as a basic philosophy of life:

> Love for and Kinship with Nature: *rather than the more customary attitude of aggression and domination over Nature; reverence for the life force and the ever-renewing cycles of life and death.*

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[158] Z. Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*, Wingbow Press, Los Angeles, California 1989: 277–278.

[159] This is the version given by Patricia Crowther, high priestess of the Sheffield Coven, in *Lid off the Cauldron*, loc. cit.: 6. The *Wiccan Rede* is regarded by some as a reformulation of Aleister Crowley's magical dictum: 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.' Crowley influenced Gardner in developing modern witchcraft practices and Crowley's dictum may have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the *Wiccan Rede*. However the crucial element of 'harm none' was missing from Crowley's statement of magical purpose. Graham Harvey notes that in the *Wiccan Rede* the word 'will' means 'your true self'. He also mentions that although the word *an* is Anglo-Saxon for 'if', some Wiccans interpret it as a shortened form of 'and'. See G. Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism*, Hurst, London 1997: 38.

> The Pagan Ethic: *'Do what thou wilt, but harm none.' This is a positive morality, not a list of thou-shalt-nots. Each individual is responsible for discovering his or her own true nature and developing it fully, in harmony with the outer world.*
>
> The Concept of Goddess and God *as expressions of the Divine reality; an active participation in the cosmic dance of Goddess and God, female and male, rather than the suppression of either the female or the male principle.*[160]

Gerald Gardner and the 20th Century British Witchcraft Revival

Although the roots of modern witchcraft date from the 1930s (see below), the British Witchcraft Act [1604], which prohibited the practice of witchcraft, was not finally repealed in the United Kingdom until 1951. Prior to this date, books advocating the practice of witchcraft were legally restricted from publication in that country. One of the principal figures associated with the revival of British witchcraft, Gerald Brosseau Gardner (1884–1964), published a semi-autobiographical title, *High Magic's Aid*, in 1949 under the nom de plume *Scire*[161] but was legally required to portray it as a work of fiction. Gardner's first non-fiction title on Wicca, *Witchcraft Today*, was published in London in 1954, followed by *The Meaning of Witchcraft* in 1959.[162]

Gardner was born at Blundellsands, a few miles north of Liverpool. Gardner was of Scottish descent and came from a wealthy family: his father was a partner in the family firm Joseph Gardner and Sons, founded in 1748, one of the largest hardwood importers in the world.[163] Gardner received his share of the family inheritance when his father died in 1935 and was financially independent from this time onwards.

For many years Gardner lived in the East, in such countries as Ceylon, Borneo and Malaya.[164] In 1936 he returned to England with his wife Donna and began planning his retirement. Interested in exotic folk-traditions, Gardner joined the Folk-Lore Society in March 1939 and

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[160] Quoted from *The Pagan Federation Information Pack*, second edition, London 1992: 14.

[161] *Scire* ('to know') was Gerald Gardner's magical name in the Ordo Templi Orientis. Gardner joined the O.T.O. after meeting Aleister Crowley in Hastings in 1946.

[162] These three titles were published by Michael Houghton (London: 1949), Rider & Co (London: 1954) and Aquarian Press (London: 1959) respectively.

[163] P. Heselton, *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*, Capall Bann Publishing, Milverton, Somerset UK 2000: 12.

[164] Gardner was interested in the history of Malayan civilisation and had written a book titled *Keris and Other Malay Weapons*, a pioneering study of the history and folklore of local armaments, published in Singapore in 1936.

became interested in witchcraft around this time.[165] When returning to England Gardner had brought with him a large and valuable collection of swords and daggers.[166] Fearing that this collection could easily be destroyed during war evacuation plans then current in London, Gardner and his wife decided to move to the country, purchasing a large brick house in Highcliffe, near the New Forest in Hampshire. Shortly after moving to Highcliffe, Gardner made contact with a group of local occultists that included Mrs Mabel Besant-Scott, daughter of the well known Theosophist Dr Annie Besant.[167] Known as the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship (founded in 1920 by George Sullivan, otherwise known as Brother Aureolis),[168] its members held theatrical performances at the Rosicrucian Theatre in nearby Christchurch. Some members of the Crotona Fellowship, specifically various members of the Mason family,[169] claimed to be members of an existing hereditary witchcraft coven and it was through contact with this fringe group within the Crotona Fellowship that Gardner was subsequently introduced to witchcraft.

Gardner's Initiation

According to Jack Bracelin's biography of Gardner, *Gerald Gardner: Witch*,[170] a few days after the outbreak of World War Two in September

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[165] P. Heselton, *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*, loc. cit.: 26.

[166] Patricia Crowther writes in *Lid off the Cauldron* (loc. cit.: 28) that Gardner's collection of daggers and swords came 'from all parts of the world'.

[167] Dr Annie Besant (1847–1933) became president of the Thesophical Society in 1891. She was involved in a number of social movements, including the Fabian Society, the Indian Home Rule League and the Boy Scouts. Together with Charles Leadbeater, she also sponsored the spiritual cause of Jiddu Krishnamurti, establishing the Order of the Star in the East to promote him as a 'world teacher', a role he later rejected. Dr Besant was a leader in the Co-Masonry movement and also founded the Order of the Temple of the Rose Cross in 1912. The rituals of this Order may have influenced those of the Crotona Fellowship.

[168] P. Heselton, *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*, loc. cit.: 56, 58.

[169] Ibid.: 114.

[170] The text *Gerald Gardner: Witch* by J.L. Bracelin, published by Octagon Press, London 1960, is now believed to have been written by the well known scholar of Sufi mysticism, Idries Shah (1924–1996), who met Gardner in the mid-1950s and got to know him well (See R. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, Oxford University Press, 199: 205, 445 fn.1, and P. Heselton, *Wiccan Roots*, loc. cit.: 8–9.). Shah apparently did not want to put his name to the Gardner biography so Jack Bracelin, another friend of Gardner's, agreed that his name could

1939[171] Gardner was taken to a 'big house' owned by a wealthy lady known as 'Old Dorothy' and was initiated there.[172] Bracelin's account of the initiation reads as follows:

> Gardner felt delighted that he was to be let into their secret. Thus it was that, a few days after the war had started, he was taken to a big house in the neighbourhood. This belonged to 'Old Dorothy'—a lady of note in the district, 'county' and very well-to-do. She invariably wore a pearl necklace, worth some £5000 at the time.
>
> It was in this house that he was initiated into witchcraft…he was stripped naked and brought into a place 'properly prepared' to undergo his initiation…It was halfway through when the word Wica [sic] was first mentioned…[173]

Additional details are also provided in Gardner's book *Witchcraft Today* (1954):

> I soon found myself in the circle and took the usual oaths of secrecy which bound me not to reveal any secrets of the cult.[174]…I was half-initiated before the word 'Wica' which they used hit me like a thunderbolt, and I knew where I was, and that the Old Religion still existed. And so I found myself in the Circle, and there took the usual oath of secrecy, which bound me not to reveal certain things.[175]

Bracelin's biography records how Gardner felt after the ceremony was over. Gardner is reported to have said: 'It was, I think, the most wonderful night of my life. In true witch fashion we had a dance afterwards and kept it up until dawn.'[176]

Gardner accepted the view of his initiators that the hereditary witches of the New Forest region were a surviving remnant of an organised pagan religion that had existed and operated in England until the

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be substituted instead. It is of interest that Octagon Press is an imprint best known for its Sufi publications.

[171] The Sheffield-based witch, Patricia Crowther, a friend of Gardner's, has suggested that if Gardner was initiated on a night of the new moon (the first after the beginning of World War Two on 3 September 1939) he would have been initiated on 13 September 1939. See P. Heselton, *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*, loc. cit.: 178.

[172] J.L. Bracelin, *Gerald Gardner: Witch*, loc. cit.: 165. It has recently been established by Philip Heselton (see *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*, loc. cit.) that Gardner was initiated by Edith Woodford-Grimes (also known as Dafo), who was a member of the Crotona Fellowship.

[173] Ibid.

[174] G. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, Rider, London 1954: 19.

[175] Ibid.

[176] J.L. Bracelin, *Gerald Gardner: Witch*, loc. cit.: 166.

seventeenth century, a view expressed by Dr Margaret Murray (1862–1963) in her controversial book *The Witch-cult in Western Europe* (1921).[177] Murray specialized in near-Eastern archaeology and had undertaken excavations in Egypt, Petra and southern Palestine. She believed that, as a broad-based fertility religion, the roots of pagan medieval witchcraft could be dated back to Paleolithic times. In a later book, *The God of the Witches* (1933),[178] Murray focused specifically on the figure of the Horned God whom she believed to be the oldest male deity known to humanity. Murray maintained that the origins of the Horned God could be traced back to the Old Stone Age and that his pagan worship had extended across Europe to the Near East up until the seventeenth century.[179] According to Murray, the Horned God provided a prototype for the Christian Devil; his principal form in north-western Europe was the Gallic deity Cernunnos.[180] Gardner would have been familiar with Dr Murray's writings through his membership of the London Folk-Lore Society and probably met her there in person.[181] She later provided an introduction for Gardner's *Witchcraft Today* (1954).

Gardner moved back to London in late 1944 or early 1945 and spent the following ten years consolidating his views on witchcraft and how it should be practised. According to Philip Heselton, author of a recent history of Wicca, the years from 1944 to 1954 'were an important period in Gardner's life, in the development of his ideas and in the development of what is now known as "Wicca" or "Gardnerian Witchcraft" '.[182] One of Gardner's formative influences was the ceremonial magician Aleister Crowley, who was now well-known as an advocate of *Thelemic* sex magic. Crowley had retired to a boarding-house named Netherwood on the Ridge in Hastings.[183]

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[177] M.A. Murray, *The Witch-cult in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1921.

[178] M.A. Murray, *The God of the Witches*, Sampson Low, London 1931; second edition Oxford University Press, 1970.

[179] See R. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, loc. cit.: 196.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Dr Murray was also a member of the Folk-Lore Society. Philip Heselton believes that Gardner may have met her in late 1938 or early 1939 and discussed her theories of the origins of pagan witchcraft. See P. Heselton, *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*, loc. cit.: 27.

[182] Ibid.: 273.

[183] Crowley had lived in Hastings since January 1945. See J. Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life and Magick of Aleister Crowley*, Macdonald, London 1971, Mayflower reprint 1973: 450.

Gardner first visited Crowley in Hastings with his friend and fellow witch, Arnold Crowther, in 1946.[184] Crowther (1909–1974) had met Crowley during his wartime travels and it was he who arranged for the two occultists to meet. The encounter is significant because it has been suggested that Crowley may have composed a set of witchcraft rites for Gardner known as the *Book of Shadows*.[185] Gardner maintained that the rituals in his *Book of Shadows* had been passed to him by members his coven but it is clear that Gardner also borrowed heavily from Crowley's writings, especially *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929).[186] The respected Wicca historian Aidan Kelly maintains that Gardner 'borrowed wholesale from Crowley'.[187]

Doreen Valiente, who was initiated into Gardner's coven in 1953 and later became his high priestess, felt that some of the Crowleyian material which Gardner had incorporated into Wiccan practice was either too 'modern', or inappropriate. Much of this material would be written out of the ceremonial procedures between 1954 and 1957, as Gardner and Valiente worked together developing the rituals which would form the basis of the so-called 'Gardnerian tradition' in contemporary witchcraft.[188] Making specific reference to the contributions by Crowley, Valiente confirmed in 1989 that she had to rewrite Gardner's *Book of Shadows*, 'cutting out the Crowleyanity as much as I could'.[189] Nevertheless Gardner and Crowley apparently had several meetings during the intervening months before Crowley died in December 1947. As a result of these meetings, during which the two men discussed their respective magical paths, Gardner became a member of Crowley's sex-magic order, the Ordo Templi Orientis; Crowley is known to have charged Gardner £300 for dues and fees.[190] This theoretically authorised Gardner to establish a charter of the O.T.O. although he never

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[184] Arnold Crowther's widow, Patricia Crowther, gives this date in her book *Lid off the Cauldron* (Muller, London 1981: 26) although Lawrence Sutin maintains that it was May 1947 'according to Crowley's diary'. See L. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley*, St Martin's Press, New York 2000: 409.

[185] L. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley*, loc. cit.: 409.

[186] Ibid.: 410.

[187] A. Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic (vol. 1): A History of Modern Witchcraft 1939–1964*, Llewellyn, St Paul, Minnesota 1991: 174.

[188] J. and S. Farrar, *The Witches' Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft*, Hale, London 1984: 3.

[189] D. Valiente, *The Rebirth of Magic*, loc. cit.: 61.

[190] L. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley*, loc. cit.: 409.

did so.[191] Gardner's magical name in the O.T.O. was *Scire* (meaning 'to know').[192]

It is likely that in addition to the ritual input from Crowley and subsequent modifications by Valiente, several aspects of what is now referred to as 'Gardnerian witchcraft' were probably Gardner's own invention. Aidan Kelly believes that Gardner may have introduced the 'duotheistic' idea of the God and Goddess into modern witchcraft and that he initially proposed that the Horned God and the Goddess should be considered equals in Wiccan rituals, even though the Goddess has since become dominant.[193] Another innovation that may have originated with Gardner himself was the modern tendency for witches to work naked, or 'sky-clad', in their rituals.[194] Gardner was an enthusiastic naturist and, as Valiente has noted, he had 'a deep-rooted belief in the value of going naked when circumstances favoured it'. For him, according to Valiente, 'communal nakedness, sunshine and fresh air were natural and beneficial, both physically and psychologically.'[195] However, it is also possible that Gardner may have derived the concept of ritual nudity from the book *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches*, written by American folklorist Charles G. Leland and published in 1889. Leland first learned about Aradia from a hereditary Etruscan witch called Maddalena, while he was visiting Italy. Aradia was the daughter of the Roman Moon goddess Diana and Leland's text includes details of Diana's role as Queen of the Witches. *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches* mentions that devotees of Diana were instructed to be naked in their rituals as a sign of personal freedom.[196]

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[191] Ibid.

[192] I. Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn*, loc. cit.: 207.

[193] See A. Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, loc. cit.: 179–84 and L. Hume, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1997: 28.

[194] Noted contemporary exponents of witchcraft Janet and (the late) Stewart Farrar write in *The Witches' Way* [1984]: 'Ritual nudity is a general practice in Gardnerian and Alexandrian witchcraft and is to be found among other Wiccan paths as well.' See J. and S. Farrar, *The Witches' Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft*, Hale, London 1984: 193.

[195] D. Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft*, loc. cit.: 156.

[196] The pertinent text from *Aradia* reads:

Sarete liberi dalla schiavitu!
E cosi diverrete tutti liberi!
Pero uomini e donne
Sarete tutti nudi, per fino.

(Ye shall be free from slavery!
And thus shall ye all become free!

While Gardner's approach to ritual nudity appears well-intentioned, according to occult historian Francis King other, less appealing, sexual tendencies also found their way into Gardner's witchcraft practices. According to King, 'Gardner was a sado-masochist with both a taste for flagellation and marked voyeuristic tendencies. Heavy scourging was therefore incorporated into most of his rituals[197] and what Gardner called the "Great Rite" was sexual intercourse between the High Priest and the High Priestess while surrounded by the rest of the coven.'[198]

In 1951 Gardner moved to Castletown on the Isle of Man, where a Museum of Magic and Witchcraft had already been established in a 400-year-old farmhouse by an occult enthusiast, Cecil Williamson.[199] Gardner bought the museum from Williamson, became the 'resident witch', and added his own collection of ritual tools and artefacts. Gardner's Museum of Magic and Witchcraft attracted considerable media attention, as did the publication of Gardner's later books.[200] The release of *Witchcraft Today* in 1954 placed Gardner in the media spotlight and the ensuing publicity led to the rise of new covens across England.

In 1964 Gardner met Raymond Buckland (1934–), a London-born Englishman of gypsy descent[201] who had moved to America two years earlier. Prior to meeting each other Buckland had developed a 'mail and telephone relationship' with Gardner while he was living on the Isle of Man and Buckland subsequently became Gardner's spokesperson in the United States, responding to American correspondents on Gardner's behalf. In 1964, Gardner's high priestess, Monique Wilson

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Therefore, men and women,
Ye too shall be naked.)

Quoted in J. and S. Farrar, *The Witches' Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft*, loc. cit.: 194.

[197] Francis King probably overemphasised this particular point. Doreen Valiente is reported as having advised Janet and Stewart Farrar that when the scourge is used in ritual practice, 'no pain should be either inflicted or expected; it is always used gently.' Quoted in J. and S. Farrar, *The Witches' Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft*, loc. cit.: 194.

[198] F. King, *Ritual Magic in England*, Spearman, London 1970: 180.

[199] See R.E. Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, Facts on File, New York and Oxford, 1989: 134.

[200] Gardner's quest for publicity angered members of his former coven. According to Michael Howard '…It has…been said that Gardner's decision to"go public", even in fictional form, upset the Elders of his parent coven and he left them.' See M. Howard 'Gerald Gardner: the Man, the Myth & the Magick' Part 2, *The Cauldron* , Beltane/Midsummer 1997: 19.

[201] See R.E. Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, loc. cit.: 40.

(Lady Olwen) initiated Buckland into the Craft in Perth, Scotland. It was Buckland who subsequently introduced Gardnerian witchcraft to the United States.[202]

Gardnerian witchcraft is now the dominant form of international Wicca with covens operating in a range of English-speaking countries, including Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. In 1992, Aidan Kelly estimated that there were between 2000–4000 active Wiccan covens in the United States[203] while data from 1994 suggests that at that time Australian covens would number in the low hundreds.[204] Gardner himself did not live long enough to experience the international impact of the witchcraft movement he had helped create and, based on his own published opinions regarding the future of witchcraft, would probably have been surprised by the ongoing contemporary interest in Wicca.[205] Gardner died at sea on 12 February 1964, returning to England from a trip to Lebanon, and was buried the following day in Tunis.[206] Considered within a historical context,

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[202] See R.E. Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, loc. cit.: 134. Occult historian Aidan Kelly notes that Buckland, with his wife Rosemary acting as High Priestess, subsequently founded a coven of Gardnerian witchcraft in Bayside, Long Island. 'Almost all the "official' Gardnerians in America,' writes Kelly, 'are descendants of that coven.' See Aidan A. Kelly, 'An Update on Neopagan Witchcraft in America' in J.R. Lewis and J.G. Melton (ed.) *Perspectives on the New Age*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York 1992: 137. More recently it has been suggested by Mike Howard, editor of *The Cauldron* in the United Kingdom, that Gardnerian Wicca may have been introduced to the United States via two separate and independent routes: via Buckland and his wife on the East Coast and via a Gardnerian practitioner named Queen Morrigan on the West Coast. Morrigan allegedly settled in Stockton, California in 1960–62 and established what is now known as Central Valley Wicca. See M. Howard, 'Gerald Gardner: The Man, the Myth and the Magick', parts 1–4, *The Cauldron*, 1997.

[203] Aidan A. Kelly, 'An Update on Neopagan Witchcraft in America' in J.R. Lewis and J.G. Melton (ed.) *Perspectives on the New Age*, loc. cit.: 141.

[204] The Pan Pacific Pagan Alliance, which has regional councils in every state of Australia had a subscription membership of 150 in January 1994, each subscription covering several people. If a single membership extended to an individual coven, the national total would have been between 100–200 covens in 1994. See L. Hume, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1997: 244–45.

[205] Gardner was doubtful whether Wicca would survive in the long term. In *Witchcraft Today* [1954] he wrote: 'I think we must say goodbye to the witch. The cult is doomed, I am afraid, partly because of modern conditions, housing shortage, the smallness of modern families, and chiefly by education. The modern child is not interested…and so the coven dies out or consists of old and dying people.' Cited in R. Graves, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*: 559 and quoted in S. Farrar, *What Witches Do*, revised edition, Phoenix Publishing, Custer, Washington 1983: 7.

[206] In his will, Gardner bequeathed the Isle of Man museum to his High Priestess,

Gardner's major contribution to the 20th century magical revival was in working with Doreen Valiente to create a series of magical practices that would help define the nature of contemporary Wicca, both in Britain and internationally.

Esbats and Sabbats

In their ceremonies Wiccans honour both the lunar and the solar cycles of Nature. Esbats are monthly meetings of the coven held at the time of full moon. Because there are thirteen months in the lunar calendar, there are usually thirteen esbats each year. The solar cycle in Wicca is marked by the eight sabbats mentioned earlier (referred to collectively as the Wheel of the Year; these are the solstices, equinoxes and the four points between).[207] Wiccan high priestess Margot Adler believes that these Wiccan festivals 'renew a sense of living communion with natural cycles, with the changes of the season and the land'.[208]

Each of the esbats has its own name which in turn is linked symbolically to the time of the year in which it occurs.[209] Wiccans believe that

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Monique Wilson, and she in turn ran it with her husband for a short time, before selling it to the Ripley organisation.

[207] See Diagram of the Wheel of the Year, with accompanying dates for both Northern and Southern hemispheres.

[208] Quoted in J.R. Lewis (ed.), *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York 1996: 61–62.

[209] The first esbat occurs in October just before the festival of Samhain (All Hallows' Eve, or Halloween) and is known as *Blood Moon*. It is traditionally associated with the slaughter of animals for food prior to the onset of winter and is therefore represented by the colour red. *Snow Moon* rises in November and is associated with the first falls of snow. *Oak Moon* is the full moon in December. It is linked to the colour black and also to the oak, sacred symbol of the Dark Lord aspect of Cernunnos, since it is his wood which is burnt at Yule. *Ice Moon*, represented by the colour purple, rises in January, followed by *Storm Moon* in February, a time when the ice and sleet may turn to rain. This full moon is linked to the element Water, and to the colour blue. March brings the *Chaste Moon*, the return of Spring from the depths of winter, and is represented by the colour white. In April, *Seed Moon* is a time when the seeds in the earth bring forth new life, and this esbat is represented by the colour green. *Hare Moon* rises in May and is dedicated both to the Goddess and to fertility. Its colour is pink, symbolic of love. June brings the *Dyad Moon* and, as Gwydion O'Hare notes, this name alludes to 'the visible presence of the God and Goddess reflected in the bright sun and green fields'. The associated colour is orange, 'the colour of the summer sun'. The *Mead Moon* rises in July and is a time for dancing and revelry. Traditionally this is the time when honey mead was made for the ensuing harvest celebrations and accordingly its symbolic colour is yellow. August brings the *Wort Moon*, a reference to the dark green

esbats are marked by a sense of heightened psychic awareness resulting from the lunar energy of full moon; according to the leading British witch Alex Sanders (1916–88) it is during the esbat that 'the Goddess has her greatest power'.[210] For this reason Wiccans often perform specific magical workings at this time, followed by feasting and drinking. The word 'esbat' itself is thought to derive from the Old French word *s'esbattre*, meaning 'to frolic and amuse oneself'.[211]

Esbats are sometimes referred to as 'lesser' Wiccan celebrations. As Doreen Valiente has noted, 'the esbat is a smaller and less solemn occasion than the sabbat'.[212] The Sabbats, on the other hand, are celebrations which link contemporary Wicca directly with festivals honoured by the Celts and Druids, although as religious scholar James W. Baker has observed, some aspects of the 'Wheel of the Year' are not Celtic in origin and are part of an 'invented tradition'.[213]

As noted above, the four so-called Greater Sabbats are those of Candlemas (2 February), May Eve (30 April), Lammas (1 August) and Halloween (31 October): the traditional Druidic names for these celebrations are Imbolc (or Oimelc), Beltane (or Beltain), Lughnassadh and Samhain respectively.[214] The Lesser Sabbats are those marked by the midsummer and midwinter solstices and the equinoxes in spring and autumn. Considered as a whole, the Wheel of the Year represents not only the cycle of the seasons but more specifically the cycle of Nature's fertility. This is also reflected in the major Wiccan initiations, which

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abundance of harvest time. September is the month of the *Barley Moon*. This is the season when grain is harvested: brown is the symbolic colour for this esbat. Finally, *Wine Moon* is the esbat which arises as a consequence of the difference between the solar and lunar calendars. Unlike the twelve-month cycle of the solar calendar there are usually thirteen full moons in any given year, and this esbat is the thirteenth in the cycle. It honours the sacrament of wine and its symbolic colour is burgundy red. *Wine Moon* precedes *Blood Moon*, and so the lunar cycle continues. See G. O'Hara, *Pagan Ways*, loc. cit.: 64–67.

[210] A. Sanders, *The Alex Sanders Lectures*, Magickal Childe Publishing, New York 1984: 57.

[211] See D. Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft*, loc. cit.: 108.

[212] Ibid.

[213] James W. Baker, in his essay 'White Witches: Historic Fact and Romantic Fantasy' points out that the Wiccan 'Wheel of the Year' is by no means purely Celtic. The major Sabbats, Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane and Lughnassadh were Celtic festivals, but Yule was an Anglo-Saxon celebration. Midsummer did not feature in Celtic celebrations and the vernal equinox was not considered important either. For this reason Baker refers to the eight-fold cycle of the Wheel of the Year as a modern invention, an 'invented tradition'. See J.R. Lewis (ed.), *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, loc. cit.: 178, 187.

[214] See G. Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, loc. cit.: 3–12.

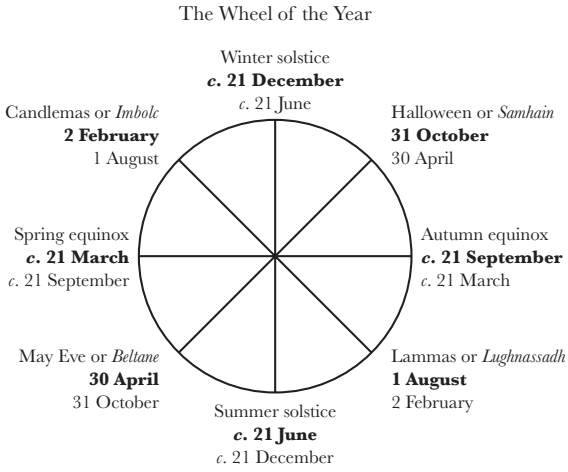

Fig. 3. The symbolic associations of the Greater Sabbats are as follows, commencing with Halloween, or Samhain, the traditional beginning of the pagan year.

culminate in the sacred marriage of the God and Goddess, whose union, according to Wiccan belief, brings forth new life.

Halloween/Samhain: This is a celebration to honour the dead.[215] As the dying sun passes into the nether world, Samhain is said to be the time of the year when the thin veil between the everyday world and the afterlife is most transparent, allowing Wiccans to communicate more readily with the spirits of the departed. In mythic terms, Samhain is the season during which the dying God sleeps in the underworld awaiting rebirth. At the same time the seed of new life gestates within the womb of the Great Mother, who in this cycle is regarded as the Queen of Darkness. The Farrars write that Samhain 'was on the one hand a time of propitiation, divination and communion with the dead, and on the other, an uninhibited feast of eating, drinking and the defiant affirmation of life and fertility in the very face of the closing dark'.[216]

Candlemas/Imbolc: Imbolc has been described as 'the quickening of the year, the first stirrings of Spring within the womb of Mother Earth'.[217]

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[215] Ibid.: 6.
[216] J. and S. Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, loc. cit.: 122.
[217] Ibid.: 61.

The Irish name *Imbolc* means 'lactation' and this Sabbat is related to the beginning of the lambing season which commences at this time.[218] Imbolc is very much a fertility celebration.The focus is on light and new life,'the strengthening spark of light beginning to pierce the gloom of Winter'.[219] For this reason Imbolc is sometimes referred to by Wiccans as the Feast of Lights.[220] In mythic terms Imbolc is associated with the youthful Goddess,[221] or Virgin.

May Eve/Beltane (*Beltain*): Beltane marks the beginning of Summer and is also a fertility celebration. The name of this Sabbat may derive from the Celtic deity Bel or Balor, god of light and fire: in ancient times 'bel-fires' were lit on the hilltops to celebrate the return of life and fertility to the world.[222] Wiccans often celebrate Beltane by dancing the Maypole, offering garlands of May blossom to their partners, and celebrating the love and passion between men and women.[223] Beltane is also a popular time for 'handfastings', or Wiccan weddings. In mythic terms, Beltane honours the mating of the Sun God with the fertile Earth Goddess.

Lammas/Lughnassadh: The Old English word *hlaf-maesse*, from which the Anglo-Saxon celebration of Lammas derives its name, means 'loaf feast'.[224] Lammas is the time of year when the first corn is harvested. Known to the Druids as *Lughnassadh*, this Sabbat marks the season of Autumn and was traditionally a celebration to Lugh, the Celtic sun god. *Lughnassadh* is associated with the waning power of the sun but is also regarded by Wiccans as a suitable time to reflect upon the fruits of the earth. Wiccans gather at Lammas to celebrate the gifts of abundance that have come forth from the womb of the Goddess. *Lughnassadh* represents fulfilment: the act of reaping 'all that has been sown'.[225]

While Wicca is primarily regarded as a religion of the Goddess, the mythic cycle of the Greater Sabbats provides clear evidence that the role of the Sun God is also significant. The Celts acknowledged that just as the Goddess waxed and waned through her lunar cycles as Maiden,

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[218] G. Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, loc. cit.: 8.
[219] J. and S. Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, loc. cit.: 61.
[220] Ibid.
[221] G. Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, loc. cit.: 8.
[222] J. and S. Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, loc. cit.: 82.
[223] G. Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, loc. cit.: 10.
[224] Ibid.: 12.
[225] L. Hume, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, loc. cit.: 123.

Mother and Crone, so too did the Sun God pass through cycles of death and rebirth. In Wicca the God of fertility has two personas, representing the God of the Waxing Year and the God of the Waning Year.[226] The Oak King represents the initial phase of expansion and growth and is associated with the time of year when the days grow longer. The Holly King represents withdrawal and rest, and is associated with the time when the days grow shorter.[227] Janet and Stuart Farrar note that the Oak King and Holly King 'are the light and dark twins, each the other's "other self"…They compete eternally for the for the favour of the Great Mother; and each, at the peak of his half-yearly reign, is sacrificially mated with her, dies in her embrace and is resurrected to complete his reign.'[228]

The Three Initiations of Wicca

Esbats and Sabbats are collective celebrations which involve the entire Wiccan coven. However, the three Wiccan initiations, or degrees, relate primarily to the spiritual development of the individual. Wiccan initiations are essentially rites of passage intended to bring about a transformation of consciousness in the person involved. Anthropologist Lynne Hume writes that, with regard to Wicca: 'The intention of initiation is to allow the candidate to enter a new dimension of reality; to die to as her previous self and be reborn as her witch self. It is not so much an acquisition of knowledge but rather the experience of the process that is crucial.[229]…The process of initiation relies primarily upon the will of the person to make the journey towards the Mystery.'[230]

The First Initiation

Covens often request that candidates for this initiation should fast for several days before the ceremony. Candidates may also be advised to spend time meditating on Nature. Immediately before the first initiation takes place, the candidate is asked to bathe and is then brought naked

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[226] J. and S. Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, loc. cit.: 24.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid.
[229] L. Hume, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, loc. cit.: 131.
[230] Ibid.: 134.

('sky-clad') and blindfolded to the sacred circle: usually the candidate's hands are bound with ritual cords.[231] The state of nakedness represents a casting aside of the old persona.

While the new initiate-to-be waits outside the circle, the Great Goddess and Horned God are invoked into the high priestess and high priest for the duration of the rite. At the outer rim of the circle the candidate is challenged at the point of a sword, an act intended to heighten the candidate's sense of vulnerability and exposure. However once the new candidate has been accepted within the circle, he or she is welcomed by the initiator, who kneels and bestows kisses upon the new candidate:

> *Blessed Be thy feet that have brought thee in these ways*
> *Blessed Be thy knees that shall kneel at the sacred altar*
> *Blessed Be thy phallus/womb without which we would not be*
> *Blessed Be thy breasts formed in beauty and in strength*
> *Blessed Be thy lips that shall utter the sacred names.*[232]

Wiccan high priestess Vivianne Crowley notes that in this ritual process 'the body is honoured and reverenced': the essential message of the First Initiation is one of acceptance.[233]

First degree witches are introduced during the ritual to the practical tools of witchcraft. They are also shown how to cast a magical circle and how to call the watchtowers of the four elements from North, East, South and West. Following their initiation, they will also be expected to develop an increasing familiarity with the principles and philosophy of witchcraft.[234] Initiates usually take a new magical name and will be known by this name among other coven members.

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[231] According to the Farrars, the binding is done with three red cords—one nine feet long, the other pair four-and-half feet long: 'The wrists are tied together behind the back with the middle of the long cord, and the two ends are brought forward over the shoulders and tied in front of the neck, the ends left hanging to form a cable-tow by which the Postulant can be led. One short cord is tied round the right ankle, the other above the left knee—each with the the ends tucked in so that they will not trip [the Postulant] up.' See J. and S. Farrar, *The Witches' Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft*, loc. cit.: 16.

[232] Quoted in V. Crowley, 'Wicca as Modern-Day Mystery Religion' in G. Harvey and C. Hardman (ed.), *Pagan Pathways*, Thorsons, London 2000: 88.

[233] Ibid.

[234] L. Hume, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, loc. cit.: 132.

The Second Initiation

In passing through the Second Initiation, Wiccans attain the rank of high priestess or high priest. Some Wiccan covens require three years of ritual work before they grant the second degree to one of their members.[235] In the second degree a stronger connection is made between the initiator and the initiated, and candidates will need to find an opposite sex partner with whom they can work compatibly in partnership.[236] Vivianne Crowley has described the Second Initiation in Wicca as a journey into the depths of the unconscious mind.[237]

An important feature of the second degree rite includes a mystery play called the *Legend of the Goddess*, in which the initiate and other coven members enact the descent of the Goddess into the Underworld. In the *Legend* the Goddess goes forth into the underworld to seek an answer to the question: *Why dost thou causeth all things that I love and take delight in to fade and die?*[238] Here the Goddess encounters the God in his role as the Dark Lord of Death.[239] Within the coven, male and female participants are expected to respond differently to the *Legend of the Goddess* because issues related to the 'polar opposites' of the psyche[240] are likely to arise. According to Crowley, for a man to find his true self he must encounter the divine feminine.[241] For a woman the process involves overcoming passivity: 'She is challenged to go forth and to seek experience.'[242] Crowley also notes that whereas the First Initiation involved confronting vulnerability and exposure,[243] the aim of the Second Initiation is 'the transformation of the inner world'.[244] At the end of the *Legend of the Goddess*, writes Crowley, 'the seeker is given a new message: that from

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[235] Ibid.: 133.

[236] Single-gender Wiccan groups develop their own rules and responses in relation to this issue.

[237] V. Crowley, 'Wicca as Modern-Day Mystery Religion 'in G. Harvey and C. Hardman (ed.), *Pagan Pathways*, Thorsons, London 2000: 89.

[238] Ibid.: 90.

[239] Ibid.

[240] Vivienne Crowley describes the impact of the *Legend of the Goddess* on male and female initiates as 'a meeting with their contra-sexual side. For a woman, this is a meeting with her Animus and for a man a meeting with his Anima.' See V. Crowley, *Wicca: the Old Religion in the New Millennium*, Thorsons, London 1996: 205.

[241] Ibid. For a man this the archetypal feminine dimension of the male unconscious mind, epitomised as an aspect of the Goddess. See V. Crowley, *Wicca: the Old Religion in the New Millennium*, Thorsons, London 1996: 205.

[242] Ibid.: 89.

[243] V. Crowley, *Wicca: the Old Religion in the New Millennium*, loc. cit.: 108.

[244] Ibid.: 200.

the dark world of the unconscious and the Land of Death may come rebirth'.[245] Janet and Stewart Farrar have transcribed this section of the ritual text as follows:

> …there are three great events in the life of man: Love, Death and Resurrection in the new body; and Magic controls them all. For to fulfil love you must return again at the same time and place as the loved one, and you must remember and love them again. But to be reborn you must die and be ready for a new body; and to die you must be born; and without love you may not be born…[246]

The *Legend* closes with the God and Goddess instructing each other in these mysteries: 'She teaches him the mystery of the sacred cup which is the cauldron of rebirth, and in return he gives her the necklace which is the circle of rebirth.'[247] The rite concludes with the initiator announcing to the four quarters that the initiate has been consecrated as a high priest or high priestess.[248]

The Third Initiation

The third degree in Wicca is referred to as the Great Rite and is bestowed upon two individuals who are already a couple, that is to say, 'husband and wife or established lovers'.[249] The Great Rite is perceived by Wiccans as a sacred marriage: the ritual union of the Goddess and the God. From a mystical perspective the ritual itself also points towards transcendence for, in the sacred marriage between Goddess and God, the duality of sexual polarity referred to in the Second Initiation ceases altogether: 'The Goddess and the God are united as One.'[250] During the first part of the ritual the Goddess and the God are invoked into the high priestess and high priest by their initiators.[251] However in the second part of the ritual they interact as incarnate deities themselves: '…they themselves have the Divine forces invoked into them so that

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[245] V. Crowley, 'Wicca as Modern-Day Mystery Religion' in G. Harvey and C. Hardman (ed.), *Pagan Pathways*, loc. cit.: 91.

[246] J. and S. Farrar, *The Witches' Way*, loc. cit.: 30.

[247] V. Crowley, 'Wicca as Modern-Day Mystery Religion' in G. Harvey and C. Hardman (ed.), *Pagan Pathways*, loc. cit.: 91.

[248] V. Crowley, *Wicca: the Old Religion in the New Millennium*, loc. cit.: 205.

[249] J. and S. Farrar, *The Witches' Way*, loc. cit.: 32.

[250] V. Crowley, *Wicca: the Old Religion in the New Millennium*, loc. cit.: 235.

[251] Those conducting the first part of the Third Initiation as initiators must themselves be Third Degree witches. See J. and S. Farrar, *The Witches' Way*, loc. cit.: 31.

the Sacred Marriage may be performed between the Goddess and the God.'[252]

Wiccans undertaking the Third Initiation do not necessarily consummate their ritual union physically. When the union is enacted symbolically—for example, by ritually plunging the athame into the chalice—it is said to be performed *in token.*[253] However, when two partners taking the role of God and Goddess wish to physically enact their sacred sexual union, the high priest offers the third degree to his partner *in token*, and the high priestess returns it to him *in true*.[254] The final part of the Great Rite, involving either the real or symbolic act of sexual union, is performed in private after other coven members have left the circle.[255]

The Great Sabbats and the three initiations of Wicca focus on concepts of fertility, the cycles of the seasons and the sacred union of the Goddess and the God. Through their celebrations Wiccan practitioners emphasize a process of renewal which in turn is reflected psychologically and spiritually within their own inner being. As Lynne Hume observes:

> In spite of its seemingly theatrical mode, its tools and paraphernalia, ritual is only a means to an end. Ritual is the *outer form* whose purpose is to act as catalyst to the *inner process*…Neither ritual nor magic are intended to convert the sceptical or astound the novice, but are used as tools to transform the individual.[256]

Feminism and Goddess Spirituality

In the United States the late-1960s psychedelic counterculture, associated especially with the Bay Area around San Francisco,[257] fuelled a fascination with diverse wisdom traditions and various forms of 'alternative

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[252] V. Crowley, *Wicca: the Old Religion in the New Millennium*, loc. cit.: 227–228.

[253] J. and S. Farrar, *The Witches' Way*, loc. cit.: 32.

[254] That is to say, the sexual act takes place physically, not symbolically. See V. Crowley, *Wicca: the Old Religion in the New Millennium*, loc. cit.: 227.

[255] J. and S. Farrar, *The Witches' Way*, loc. cit.: 37.

[256] L. Hume, *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, loc. cit.: 143.

[257] The Californian psychedelic counterculture was at its peak between November 1965 and January 1967. For coverage of this colourful period see G. Anthony, *The Summer of Love*, Celestial Arts, Millbrae, California 1980; J. Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*, Atlantic Monthly Press, New York 1987, and T. Leary, *Flashbacks: An Autobiography*, Tarcher, Los Angeles 1983.

spirituality' and esoteric teachings from around the world.[258] The psychedelic revolution itself was short-lived[259] but in its aftermath, during the early 1970s, the eclectic fusion of Eastern mysticism, Western esoterica, indigenous spirituality, metaphysics and popular self-help psychology, gave rise in turn to what is now known as the New Age movement.[260] This was a socio-religious movement with identifiable characteristics,[261] and its international influence is still felt today.

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[258] This period saw strong popular interest in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which first appeared in the W.Y. Evans-Wentz edition (Oxford University Press, New York 1960) and then provided the basis for a psychedelic experiential manual (T. Leary, R. Metzner and R. Alpert, *The Psychedelic Experience*, University Books, New York 1964) which became a bestseller in counterculture circles , enjoying seven reprints between 1964 and 1971.The American counterculture also embraced a wide range of other Eastern wisdom traditions including Zen Buddhism, Taoism, Tai Chi and Tantric yoga. However it was also a period of renewed interest in magic, the Tarot and the Kabbalah, and many occult classics by such authors as A.E. Waite, Lewis Spence, Eliphas Lévi, E.A. Wallis Budge and Aleister Crowley were reprinted at this time as well. Following the release of Mircea Eliade's classic work, *Shamanism* (Princeton University Press, 1964), interest in this subject area was further heightened by the release in 1968 of the first of Carlos Castaneda's many books: *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (University of California Press, Berkeley) and this in turn stimulated a developing interest in Native American culture and indigenous spirituality generally. For an overview of the spiritual and metaphysical undercurrents operating in the American counterculture see T. Roszak, *Unfinished Animal: The Aquarian Frontier and the Evolution of Consciousness*, Harper & Row, New York 1975.

[259] Much of the psychedelic counterculture in San Francisco had begun to disperse by 1968. See G. Anthony, *The Summer of Love*, loc. cit.: 175, and N. Drury, *The New Age: The History of a Movement*, Thames & Hudson, New York 2004: 95.

[260] The history of American counterculture spirituality and the rise of the New Age movement are described in such publications as R.S. Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey 1994; W.J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York 1998, P. Heelas, *The New Age Movement*, Blackwell, Oxford 1996 and N. Drury, *The New Age: The History of a Movement*, loc. cit.

[261] Robert S. Ellwood, a scholar specialising in alternative and minority religions, believes that four different explanatory models can be advanced to account for the rise of new spiritual movements in the United States during the 1960s. In the first of these models 'the dominant paradigm moves from mainline to nonconformist religion in various forms', the civil rights and anti-war movements being followed by the 'occult/ mystical counterculture'. A second model focuses on what Ellwood calls 'the quest for relevance', while a third explanatory framework contrasts the rediscovery of natural religion with the 'revealed' nature of established religions like Christianity: 'Natural religion believes that [the divine] presence may be tapped by a normal quickening of spiritual sensitivity, which can be aided by various techniques or insights but does not require extraordinary grace. Faith in nature and nature's God may affirm hidden ("occult") natural forces that go beyond reason as ordinarily understood, including trust in psychic energies and powers of mind that seem almost magical.' Ellwood's fourth model focuses on the quest for freedom: many symbols of religious hierarchy were abandoned by mmbers of the 1960s counterculture. All of these models contribute to an

Within the context of this burgeoning 'alternative spirituality', variations on imported Gardnerian witchcraft began to emerge in the United States during the 1970s. In particular, the blending of feminism and modern witchcraft gave rise to a more broad-based spiritual movement known as Goddess worship or Goddess spirituality.[262] As theologian Mary Farrell Bednarowski has noted, this was a movement that rejected traditional Christianity and Judaism, seeking 'truth in the depths of the female psyche and [finding] its energy in the worship of the "the goddess".'[263] According to Bednarowski the primary task of feminist spirituality involved 'the resacralization of the cosmos and the reimaging of the sacred.' Resacralization in turn required the 'reinfusion of the sacred into the universe' and for this to occur there had to be a 'redefining of the very nature of the sacred'.... It could not be 'contained solely within the transcendent being of the God of the Bible.'[264]

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understanding of the rise of feminist witchcraft as a post-counterculture phenomenon in the 1970s. See R.S. Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening*, loc. cit.: 331–334.

[262] American feminist Goddess worshippers quickly focused on 'sisterhood', on close bonds between women, and for some devotees this has involved taking the Goddess tradition beyond the male domain altogether. As Judy Davis and Juanita Weaver expressed it in the mid-1970s: 'Feminist spirituality has taken form in Sisterhood—in our solidarity based on a vision of personal freedom, self-definition, and in our struggle together for social and political change. The contemporary women's movement has created space for women to begin to perceive reality with a clarity that seeks to encompass many complexities. This perception has been trivialized by male dominated cultures that present the world in primarily rational terms... [Feminist spirituality involves] the rejoining of woman to woman.' See Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (ed.), *Womanspirit Rising*: *A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Harper and Row, San Francisco 1979: 272.

[263] M.F. Bednarowski, 'Women in Occult America' in H. Kerr and C.L. Crow (ed.), *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago 1983: 188.

[264] See M.F. Bednarowski, 'The New Age Movement and Feminist Spirituality: Overlapping Conversations at the End of the Century' in J.R. Lewis and J.G. Melton (ed.) *Perspectives on the New Age*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York 1992: 169. Feminist writer Carol P. Christ goes even further, arguing that the resacralization of the earth is part of the process of individual transformation: 'When the earth is the body of the Goddess, the radical implications of the image are more fully realized. The female body and the earth, which have been devalued and dominated together, are resacralized. Our understanding of divine power is transformed as it is clearly recognized as present within the finite and changing world. The image of earth as the body of the Goddess can inspire us to repair the damage that has been done to the earth, to women, and to other beings in dominator cultures.' See C.P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*, Routledge, New York 1997: 91.

In her book *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (1979) Naomi Goldenberg proposed that feminist witchcraft could create a 'powerful new religion' focused on the worship of the Goddess and that this new religion would encourage feminist witches to reject 'a civilization in which males in high places imitate a male god in heaven'.[265] Influential thinker Mary Daly similarly claimed that the new feminist witchcraft was an appropriate alternative to a model of the universe in which a male God ruled the cosmos and thereby controlled social institutions to the detriment of women:

> The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting.[266]

Jewish writer Judith Plaskow, co-editor of the feminist anthology *Womanspirit Rising* (1979), was equally emphatic, raising issues of male-dominance articulated by many women involved with the rise of Goddess spirituality at the time:

> The Bible was written by men. The myths from which the Bible borrowed and which it used and transformed were written by men. The liturgy was written by men. Jewish philosophy is the work of men. Modern Jewish theology is the work of men… The problems we as women face in relation to our tradition are deep and complex, involving almost every aspect of tradition. Where then are we going to find the new words, our words, which need to be spoken?[267]

In the United States, Goddess worship expanded the structure of Gardnerian coven-based witchcraft, adopting rituals that were broader in scope, more diverse, and less bound by the traditional Wiccan concept of a three-fold initiation. Although some Goddess-worshippers continued to refer to themselves as witches, others abandoned the term altogether, preferring to regard their neopagan practice as a universal feminist religion, drawing on mythologies from many different ancient cultures.[268]

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[265] N. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the end of Traditional Religions*, Beacon Press, Boston 1979: 90.

[266] M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, Beacon Press, Boston 1973: 13.

[267] See J. Plaskow, 'Women's Liberation and the Liberation of God' in R.S. Gottlieb (ed.) *A New Creation: America's Contemporary Spiritual Voices*, Crossroad, New York 1990: 230–232.

[268] In her influential book *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*, Z. Budapest refers to

As the Goddess spirituality movement developed in the United States during the 1970s it would come to include such influential figures as Merlin Stone, Carol P. Christ, Margot Adler, Marija Gimbutas, Judith Plaskow, Naomi Goldenberg, Mary Daly and the Christian feminist theologians Rosemary Radford Ruether and Carter Heyward.[269] However the pioneering figures in the rise of Goddess spirituality and 'feminist witchcraft' were unquestionably Zsuzsanna Budapest and Starhawk who, between them, would redefine the very nature of feminist neopaganism in the United States.

Zsuzsanna Budapest (otherwise known as Z., or 'Zee', Budapest) was born in Hungary in 1940, the daughter of a psychic medium. Budapest's mother, Masika Szilagyi, who claimed shamanic ancestry, composed poems and invocations while in trance and was also a sculptress of note, often featuring pagan and goddess themes in her motifs.[270] At the age of nineteen, Z. Budapest left Vienna, where she had been studying languages, and travelled to Illinois in order to study German literature at the University of Chicago. Later she worked in theatre in New York, exploring techniques of improvisation, before moving to Los Angeles in 1970. Soon after arriving in Los Angeles, Budapest opened an occult shop, the Feminist Wicca, on Lincoln Boulevarde in Santa Monica. The store served as a 'matriarchal spiritual centre', dispensing candles, oil, incense, herbs, jewellery, Tarot cards and other occult paraphernalia. It also developed as a meeting place for women wishing to perform rituals together. Soon there were groups of neopagan women meeting for ceremonies on the equinoxes and solstices and, in Budapest's words, 'feminist spirituality had been born again'.[271]

In a lengthy interview with journalist Cheri Lesh, published in 1975, Budapest expressed her belief that Wicca was not an inverted form of Christianity but represented the remnants of a much older, matriarchal system of worship that recognised the feminine as the creative force in

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the Mother Goddess as the 'Female Principle of the Universe and source of all life'. She is the 'Goddess of the Ten Thousand Names'. (loc. cit.: 1989: 277–278.)

[269] These American advocates of broad-based Goddess spirituality also had notable counterparts in the UK and Ireland, among them Caitlin Matthews, Olivia Durdin-Robertson, Vivienne Crowley, Asphodel P. Long, and Elizabeth Brooke.

[270] See Z. Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*, loc. cit.: 308.

[271] Personal communication to the author, Berkeley, California, December 1984, during filming of the television documentary *The Occult Experience* (Cinetel Productions for Channel Ten, Sydney, released in the United States on Sony Home Video).

Nature.[272] Budapest spoke of the bloody transition from a matriarchal society to a patriarchal form, in which roaming bands of warriors ravaged the great Queendoms of Anatolia, Sumer and Thrace and fragmented the 'Great Goddess' into a number of minor deities. This led to a much diminished status for the goddesses, who then had confined and restricted roles as a consequence. In Greek mythology, Aphrodite became simply a goddess of love and sexuality, while Artemis represented hunting, and Athena wisdom. Hera, Amphitrite and Persephone, meanwhile, became adjuncts to Zeus, Poseidon and Hades. According to Budapest, this transition was a major cultural disaster:

> Mythology is the mother of religions, and grandmother of history. Mythology is human-made, by the artists, storytellers and entertainers of the times. In short, culture-makers are the soldiers of history, more effective than guns and bombers. Revolutions are really won on the cultural battlefields… Women understand this very well, since we became aware of how women's culture had been ripped off by the ruling class. This resulted in a stunted self-image of women which resulted in insecurities, internalizing the cultural expectations of us created by male culture-makers. Most of the women in the world still suffer from this spiritual poverty.[273]

In order to eliminate any male influence, Budapest's practice of Dianic witchcraft has excluded men altogether. According to Budapest, women's mysteries must be kept pure and strong, and men have no place in them:

> We have *women's* circles. You don't put men in women's circles—they wouldn't be women's circles any more. Our Goddess is Life, and women should be free to worship from their ovaries.[274]

Budapest's most influential publication, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (1989) includes a 'Self-Blessing Ritual' which she describes as a way of 'exorcising that patriarchal "policeman", cleansing the deep mind, and filling it with positive images of the strength and beauty of women. This is what the Goddess symbolizes—the Divine within women and

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[272] C. Lesh, 'Goddess Worship: the Subversive Religion', *Twelve Together*, Los Angeles, May 1975.

[273] Ibid.

[274] Personal communication to the author, Berkeley, California, December 1984, during filming of the television documentary *The Occult Experience*, loc. cit.

all that is Female in the universe.'[275] Budapest favours an equal mix of lesbian and heterosexual women in her circles to 'balance the polarities' in her rituals.[276] Her emphasis on women's mysteries allows the different phases of womanhood to be honoured in their own right and group ceremonies are performed for each of these phases of life.[277]

It was through the Feminist Wicca[278] that Budapest first made contact with Miriam Simos, best known as the acclaimed neopagan author Starhawk, a Jewish woman who had rejected Judaism, Buddhism and other 'male-dominated' religious traditions.[279] Budapest became one of Starhawk's teachers although Starhawk claims that her spiritual knowledge also derives from dream and trance experiences.[280] Starhawk formed her first coven, Compost, from a group of men and women who attended a class in Witchcraft that she taught in the Bay Area Center for Alternative Education, and she was later confirmed as high priestess of this coven.[281] Starhawk became a founding member of Reclaiming, a feminist network of women and men working in the Goddess tradition to unify spirituality and politics through progressive

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[275] Z. Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*, loc. cit.: 112.

[276] Personal communication to the author, Berkeley, California, December 1984, during filming of the television documentary *The Occult Experience*, loc. cit.

[277] Ibid.

[278] According to Z. Budapest, Simos was driving past the Feminist Wicca on Lincoln Boulevarde and came in to look. Budapest was staffing on that particular day and invited Simos to attend a forthcoming Spring Equinox Festival. Their friendship and mutual advocacy of Goddess spirituality developed from this point onwards. See Z. Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*, loc. cit.: xiv.

[279] Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, revised edition, HarperCollins, San Francisco 1999: 33, 51. Starhawk's response to male-dominated traditions would appear to be characteristic of the rise of feminist witchcraft in the United States since the late 1970s. Theologian Mary Farrell Bednarowski believes the rise of feminist spirituality was a response to the 'alienation from the cosmos' associated with male-dominated religions: 'According to New Age thinkers and feminists, Judaism and Christianity espouse a deity who is male, transcendent and "other". This is a static deity, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, static, unchanging in his perfection. This God has created the world but does not inhabit it, for the creation, along with humankind, is fallen. At the centre of creation, at the centre of human existence, there is brokenness rather than wholeness, sin and estrangement rather than creativity. To be saved means salvation from the world, from the body…The result is alienation from the rest of the cosmos as well as estrangement from the divine.' See M.F. Bednarowski, 'The New Age Movement and Feminist Spirituality: Overlapping Conversations at the End of the Century' in J.R. Lewis and J.G. Melton (ed.) *Perspectives on the New Age*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York 1992: 168–169.

[280] R.E. Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, loc. cit.: 327.

[281] Ibid.

activism,[282] and during the mid-1980s she also served on the teaching faculty of theologian Matthew Fox's postgraduate Institute at Holy Names College in Oakland, exploring the common ground between neopaganism and Fox's renegade Roman Catholic-based Creation-centred spirituality.[283]

Since the late 1970s Starhawk has published several highly influential books, including *The Spiral Dance*, *Dreaming the Dark* and *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying*, all widely regarded as key works in the revival of Goddess worship and neopaganism. During an interview with Toronto-based writer Alexander Blair-Ewart in the mid-1990s, Starhawk explained that her Goddess perspective involved a process of re-sacralizing the world:

> What's important about witchcraft and about the pagan movement is, essentially, that it's not so much a way of seeing reality, as it's a different way of valuing the reality around us. We say that what is sacred, in the sense of what we are most committed to, what determines all our other values, is this living Earth, this world, the life systems of the earth, the cycles of birth and growth and death and regeneration; the air, the fire, the water, the land…[284]

In her writings Starhawk also refers specifically to the nurturing and revitalising power of the Goddess-energy:

> The symbolism of the Goddess has taken on an electrifying power for modern women. The rediscovery of the ancient matrifocal civilizations has given us a deep sense of pride in woman's ability to create and sustain culture. It has exposed the falsehoods of patriarchal history, and given us models of female strength and authority. The Goddess—ancient and primeval; the first of deities; patroness of the Stone Age hunt and of the first sowers of seeds; under whose guidance the herds were tamed, the healing herbs first discovered; in whose image the first works of art were created; for whom the standing stones were raised; who was the

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[282] Starhawk remains strongly committed to political activism. Her recent publication, *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*, New Society Publishers, Victoria, Canada 2002, explores the relationship between magical ritual and progressive activism.

[283] Following his association with Starhawk, Matthew Fox came to believe that there was a connection between the Nature-spirituality in Wicca and the sense of wholeness-in-Christ expressed in his own Creation Spirituality. However he was heavily criticised by the Roman Catholic authorities for this perception, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict) referring to Fox's book *Original Blessing* as 'dangerous and deviant'. See T. Peters, *The Cosmic Self*, HarperCollins, San Francisco 1991: 126–127.

[284] See A. Blair-Ewart, *Mindfire:Dialogues in the Other Future*, Somerville House, Toronto 1995: 128.

> inspiration of song and poetry—is recognized once again in today's world. She is the bridge, on which we can cross the chasms within ourselves, which were created by our social conditioning, and reconnect with our lost potentials. She is the ship, on which we sail the waters of the deep self, exploring the uncharted seas within. She is the door, through which we pass to the future. She is the cauldron, in which we who have been wrenched apart simmer until we again become whole. She is the vaginal passage, through which we are reborn…[285]

Starhawk's seminal work *The Spiral Dance* and Z. Budapest's *Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* have influenced the rise of American Goddess spirituality in the same way that Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente's writings helped to establish the foundations of British Wicca. According to Starhawk, the sacred presence of the Goddess remains at the very heart of all forms of feminist witchcraft: 'The Goddess is around us and within us. She is immanent and transcendent… the Goddess represents the divine embodied in Nature, in human beings, in the flesh.'[286] Starhawk also maintains that the encounter with the Goddess should be based on personal experience, and not on religious doctrine or belief:

> In the Craft, we do not *believe* in the Goddess—we connect with Her; through the moon, the stars, the ocean, the earth, through trees, animals, through other human beings, through ourselves. She is here. She is within us all. She is the full circle: earth, air, fire, water and essence—body, mind, spirit, emotions, change.[287]

Starhawk's concept of deity is essentially monotheistic for she regards the Goddess as the source of all life, the ground of all being:

> The Goddess is first of all earth, the dark, nurturing mother who brings forth all life. She is the power of fertility and generation; the womb, and also the receptive tomb, the power of death. All proceeds from Her, all returns to Her.[288]

Feminist writer Carol P. Christ offers a similarly all-encompassing view of the Goddess:

> The earth is the body of the Goddess. All beings are interdependent in the web of life. Nature is intelligent, alive and aware. As part of nature, human beings are relational, embodied, and interdependent… The

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[285] Starhawk, 'The Goddess' in Roger S. Gottlieb (ed.) *A New Creation: America's Contemporary Spiritual Voices*, Crossroad, New York 1990: 213.
[286] Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, Beacon Press, Boston 1982: 8–9.
[287] Starhawk, 'The Goddess', loc. cit.: 213–214.
[288] Ibid.: 214.

> symbols and rituals of Goddess religion bring these values to consciousness and help us build communities in which we can create a more just, peaceful, and harmonious world.[289]

However, as Margot Adler has noted in *Drawing Down the Moon* (1981), many neopagans regard themselves as polytheists or pantheists, rather than monotheists, and there is no general agreement on the nature of sacred reality.[290] Adler also notes that some Wiccans distinguish between the Goddess of the moon, earth and sea, and the God of the woods, hunt and animal realm, in what amounts to a type of 'duotheism'.[291] British Wiccan writer Vivianne Crowley seeks to resolve this issue in a different way when she says: 'All Gods are different aspects of the one God and all Goddesses are different aspects of the one Goddess… ultimately these two are reconciled in the one divine essence.'[292]

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[289] C.P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*, Routledge, New York 1997: xv.

[290] M. Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, loc. cit.: 24–25.

[291] Ibid.: 35.

[292] Quoted in D.D. Carpenter, 'Emergent Nature Spirituality' in J.R. Lewis (ed.), *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York 1996: 57.

THE INFLUENCE OF ALEISTER CROWLEY ON GERALD GARDNER AND THE EARLY WITCHCRAFT MOVEMENT*

Henrik Bogdan

Magic, Sex and Contemporary Paganism

Although magic is an intrinsic part of contemporary paganism there is no consensus as to how magic is believed to function, or how it is to be defined.[1] The absence of a definition of magic that all pagans can agree upon is, on the one hand, reflective of the multifaceted nature of paganism: the term paganism as an *-ism*, implying a coherent system of beliefs and practices, is misleading since paganism is not a coherent and unified movement. On the contrary, paganism is characterised by a wide diversity that not only includes major currents such as Witchcraft, neo-shamanism, Heathenism, Asatru, Druidry, Goddess Spirituality, etc., but these currents in their turn show rich variety in beliefs, practices and organisational structures.[2] The modern witchcraft movement, for instance, consists of Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Celtic, Dianic, and Faery Wicca, to name but a few of the more well-known variants. On the other hand, the lack of an agreed upon definition of magic is symptomatic of wider trends in western spirituality that, somewhat simplistically, can be described as the ongoing struggle between disenchanted and re-enchanted worldviews. Are the gods and goddesses invoked in magical rituals actual objective entities, or are they symbols of different aspects of man's unconscious? This basic question lies at the root of emic definitions of magic, but to some pagans this is not a particularly relevant question since the only thing that matters is that the magic "works" for them. In this they reiterate what the occultist[3] Aleister Crowley wrote

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[1] For a discussion of magic in paganism, see Joanne Pearson, *Wicca and the Christian Heritage: Ritual, Sex and Magic* (2007), 94–111; Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (2007) 29–30; Graham Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism* (1997) 87–106; Graham Harvey, *What Do Pagans Believe?* (2007) 44–53.

[2] Graham Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism* (1997).

[3] Occultism, which for our present purpose can be described as a secularised form

in a short tract called "Liber O vel Manus et Sagittae", first published in his magnum opus *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929):

> In this book it is spoken of the Sephiroth and the Paths, of Spirits and Conjurations; of Gods, Spheres, Planes, and many other things which may or may not exist.
>
> It is immaterial whether these exist or not. By doing certain things certain results follow; students are most earnestly warned against attributing objective reality or philosophic validity to any of them.[4]

It is, however, not only Crowley's focus on the results of magic that is being echoed in contemporary paganism, but as has been pointed out by numerous scholars one of the most common definitions of magic to be found in the modern witchcraft movement derives from Crowley.[5] In discussing definitions of magic in paganism in *What Do Pagans Believe?* Graham Harvey states:

> Two definitions of magic are current among Pagans: some say that magic is the art of causing change according to the will, others that magic is the art of changing consciousness according to will. The first asserts that magic can change the world; it can heal a sick relative or make someone fall in love. The second suggest that magic can change one's self at the deep level of one's consciousness.[6]

It is usually acknowledged that while the first definition derives from Crowley, the second is supposed to have been formulated by the occultist Dion Fortune (pseudo. of Violet Mary Firth, 1890–1946). Crowley's well-known definition of magic (or *Magick* as he chose to spell it) appeared in print for the first time in *Magick in Theory and Practice*:

> **Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will.** (Illustration: It is my Will to inform the World of certain facts within my knowledge. I therefore take "magical weapons", pen, ink, and paper; I write "incantations—these sentences—in the "magical language" i.e. that which is understood by the people I wish to instruct; I call forth "spirits", such as printers, publishers, booksellers, and

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of Western esotericism, is characterised, among other things, by a heavy focus on the experiential aspect of religion; that is, teachings and dogmas often come second to the performance of rituals and various forms of meditation. For a discussion on how occultism (as a form of secularised esotericism) differs from traditional, or Renaissance, esotericism, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff "The Study of Western Esotericism" (2004), 497–499.

[4] Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929), 375.

[5] E.g. Graham Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism* (1997), 88.

[6] Graham Harvey, *What Do Pagans Believe?* (2007), 45.

> so forth, and constrain them to convey my message to those people. The composition and distribution of this book is thus an act of **Magick** by which I cause change to take place in conformity with my Will).[7]

Based on this definition a notion of Crowley's magic has developed that appears to maintain that Crowley understood magic solely as something which manifested outside the mind of the magician.This notion is, however, not entirely correct. In fact, to Crowley magic was just as much an inner process that led from an unenlightened state of being, to enlightenment. This process included profound psychological experiences or altered states of consciousness (the two most important ones called the "Knowledge of and Conversation with the Holy Guardian Angel", and the "Crossing of the Abyss"), which were codified in the initiatory system of his order the Silver Star, the A∴A∴ (founded in 1907).

As will be discussed below, Crowley often connected the willpower with human sexuality which was seen as a powerful stimulus of the will. Crowley developed a particular form of sexual magic in which sex was used to energise or charge the will of the practitioner, and this form of magic would later become an important influence upon the early witchcraft movement as developed by Gerald Gardner in the 1950s.

Crowley's high regard for the power of sex was not something unusual, and the fascination with sex can in fact be seen as an intrinsic part of modern and late modern Western culture. As Michel Foucault (1926–1984) has observed in his monumental study *The History of Sexuality* (1976) sex has been exploited as *the* secret of Western culture: a secret, however, which everybody is in on. Foucault questioned the notion that sexuality had been repressed by Victorian society and argued that sexuality, in its various forms, in fact was subject to thorough exploration. It was in particular sexual practices which fell outside the norms of traditional heterosexuality, such as sodomy, that received a detailed attention in the Victorian era. Although the published accounts of "perverse" and "promiscuous" sexual practices did not condone the practices, the practices came to be understood not as mere sexual acts but as expressions of human sexuality as such.[8]

The nature of human sexuality was not only discussed in academic or literary circles, but also became an increasingly important topic in

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[7] Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929), xvii.
[8] Michel Foucault, *Sexualitetens Historia, Band I* (2002), 43–70.

Western esoteric currents during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The esoteric approach to sexuality often stood in sharp contrast to traditional Christian notions regarding sexuality, such as original sin, and instead emphasised the positive aspects of sexuality. Authors such as Richard Payne Knight (1751–1824) and Sir William Jones (1746–1794) argued that pre-Christian religions from various parts of the world centred on the worship of the generative powers and the cult of the sun. Just as the sun was the source of life in the macrocosm, so the phallus was the source of life in the microcosm. Phallicism and the worship of the sun were thus seen as the original form of religion and it was furthermore believed that traces of this universal religion could be found in all cultures and religions.[9] As Joscelyn Godwin has shown in *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (1994) these ideas became popular at the end of the nineteenth century and were promulgated by various occult and theosophical groups. The esoteric understanding of the nature of human sexuality was not, however, restricted to speculations about pre-Christian religion, but also influenced the theory and practice of sexual magic in occult and neo-Rosicrucian groups such as *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor* which based its sexual magic on the teachings of Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875). Randolph's teachings would later find their way into the sexual magic of Ordo Templi Orientis, which afterwards were codified by Aleister Crowley (1875–1947). At the end of the 1960s and early 1970s there was a revival in the interest of Aleister Crowley, particularly in the countercultural movement, and at this time sexual magic became identified with Eastern Tantric practices.

The late 1960s with its focus on "sex, drugs, and rock'n roll" among the spiritual seekers of the Flower Power generation proved to be an important period for new religious movements that experimented with sex.[10] It was common at this time to come across the notion that sex is something natural and positive, and that instead of separating religion from sex one should try to unite them. Indeed, sex was often seen as a means to religious ends, something which is evident in the

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[9] For a detailed discussion of the worship of the generative powers and the cult of the sun, see Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (1994), 1–48.

[10] Susan J. Palmer has demonstrated that new religious movements can be divided into three groups according to their religious views of sex identity: sex Complement, sex Polarity, and sex Unity Groups. Susan J. Palmer, *Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers* (1994).

literature of Neo-Tantra (to use a popular neologism), which remains as an important part of the new religious landscape in the West.[11] It is common to come across the idea within this form of spirituality that our sexuality has been repressed by the Christian churches, and that the repression of sexuality is harmful to the individual. The use of sex in religious rituals is thus not only seen as a liberating component, but also as a way of healing the perceived psychological wounds caused by the repressive forms of Christianity. Sex is no longer seen as something sinful or evil, but instead as something natural or even divine. In that respect the positive attitude towards sex in both secular and religious spheres of Western society coincide, and given the assumed sexual nature of Neo-Tantra it comes as no surprise that this form of spirituality has become popular in the West.

Aleister Crowley and the Sexual Magic of the O.T.O.

Crowley first came into contact with sexual magic in a systematic way through his involvement with the *Ordo Templi Orientis*, or the *Order of Oriental Templars*. The O.T.O. was an irregular form of Freemasonry which admitted both men and women. It was founded by a former member of the Theosophical Society, Theodor Reuss (1855–1923) some time between 1906 and 1912, on the basis of a masonic charter issued by John Yarker (1833–1913) in 1902.[12] Both Reuss and Yarker were active in the world of so-called "fringe masonry" which included various forms of unorthodox and irregular high degree Freemasonry.[13] The object of founding the O.T.O. seems to have been the creation of an Academia Masonica, in which a number of different masonic Rites were collected into one system. Probably modelled upon the Swedish Rite of Freemasonry the degree system of the O.T.O. consisted of ten degrees, of which the tenth degree was an administrative degree.[14]

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[11] Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra* (2003), 1–43.

[12] The early history of the O.T.O. remains problematic. See Marco Pasi "Ordo Templi Orientis" (2005). According to Pasi the O.T.O. was founded only in 1912. This view is also expressed in A.P. Eberhardt's *Von den Winkellogen Deutschlands* (1914), 99–101.

[13] See Ellic Howe "Fringe Masonry in England, 1870–85" (1972); Ellic Howe and Helmut Möller "Theodor Reuss: Irregular Freemasonry in Germany, 1900–23" (1978).

[14] The apparent connection between the Swedish System and the O.T.O. has been noted by Martin P. Starr in *The Unknown God* (2003), 20, note 5.

According to Reuss the central Key or secret of Freemasonry was sexual magic but for one reason or another knowledge of this secret had been lost to most masonic organisations. This secret was kept closely hidden from the public in the early years of the O.T.O. and thus the aims of the Order were described in somewhat more traditional masonic and theosophical terms in the first Constitution of the Order supposedly published in 1906:

> Article II. Section II.
> The principal purpose of the O.T.O. is to teach Brotherhood and to make it a living power in the life of humanity.
>
> Article II. Section III.
> The subsidiary aims of the O.T.O. are: (a) to spread the knowledge of Hermetic Science, and to initiate its members in the Secret Doctrines of Hermetic Science; (b) to establish and administer schools, lodges, etc., where Hermetic Science is taught; (c) to build, establish, found, manage and administer Homes, Colonies, Settlements, etc., wherein initiated members may live according to the tenets of the O.T.O.[15]

Six years later, however, Reuss stated the true nature of the Order in a bolder fashion in the so-called "jubilee edition" of the Order's magazine the *Oriflamme*:

> Our Order possess the KEY which opens up all Masonic and Hermetic secrets, namely, the teaching of sexual magic, and this teaching explains, without exception, all the secrets of Nature, all the symbolism of Freemasonry and all systems of religion.[16]

Reuss had heard about Crowley in 1910 in connection with a much-publicized trial. Crowley was printing the secret rituals of an occultist initiatory society called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in his bi-annual publication, *The Equinox*, and he had announced that the March 1910 issue would include the Second, or Inner, Order rituals. S. Liddell Mathers (1854–1918), the then head of the Golden Dawn, tried to restrain the publication by suing Crowley, to no avail. According to Crowley's autobiography he received letters from all over Europe as

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[15] Theodor Reuss and Aleister Crowley *O.T.O. Rituals and Sex Magick* (1999), 66. It appears that this document was not published in 1906 as stated, but rather in 1912.

[16] Quoted in Francis King, *Ritual Magic in England* (1970), 119. The original quote in German is as follows: "Unser Orden besitzt den **Schlüssel**, der alle maurer∴ und hermetischen Geheimnisse erschließt, es ist die Lehre von der Sexual-Magie, und diese Lehre erklärt **restlos** alle Rätsel der Natur, alle freimaurerische Symbolik, und alle Religions-Systeme." *Jubilæums-Ausgabe Der Oriflamme* (1912), 21.

a result of this trial, and many honorary degrees from a number of esoteric organizations. One of the people who contacted Crowley was Reuss, who called on him in London and conferred upon him the VII° of the O.T.O. Crowley was apparently not overly impressed with Reuss, and thought little of this degree.[17] However, a few years later Reuss reappeared at Crowley's door and accused him of exposing the secrets of the Order in one of his published books, *The Book of Lies* (1913). Crowley denied that he had done so, with the argument that he was not informed of the secrets which he was supposed to have revealed. After pointing out the passages in the *The Book of Lies* for Crowley, Reuss then promptly elevated Crowley to IX° and thereby swore him to secrecy regarding the central secret of the O.T.O.

According to Crowley, the techniques of sexual magic as revealed by Reuss were in a very crude form, and Reuss had limited experience of actually practicing sexual magic. Nevertheless, after being initiated into the sexual mysteries of the O.T.O. Crowley set out to explore sexual magic applying what he considered to be a scientific method. To a certain extent, the application of a "scientific method" (such as keeping a detailed record of all the experiments) can be explained in the light of what Foucault called "Scientia sexualis", that is, the use of science as a legitimating factor in dealing with human sexuality.[18] Furthermore, the scientific approach to sexuality mirrors the Western attempt to understand the nature of human sexuality, and thereby to control it. On the other hand, the application of science on religion reflects the positivist attitudes at the time, in which the natural sciences had superseded religion as the way to knowledge. To Crowley, this was expressed by the motto of his journal *The Equinox* (1909–1913), "The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion". In 1914 Crowley made the following statement concerning sexual magic his diary *Rex De Arte Regia*:

> This Art was communicated to me in June [1912] by the O.H.O. [Outer Head of the Order] It was practised by me in a desultory way until [1 January 1914] when I made the Experiments recorded elsewhere of the Art derived from and parallel to this. The Knowledge thus gained enabled me to make further research with more acumen and directness, so that I was able definitely to assert that I had produced certain results at will. For example, my bronchitis, which had been most intractable was

[17] Aleister Crowley, *Confessions* (1989), 628–629.
[18] Michel Foucault, *Sexualitetens historia* (2002), 71–89.

> cured in a single day. I obtained money when needed. I obtained 'sex-force and sex-attraction' so strongly that for months after I was never at loss. Better than all, I was able to excite my art-creative power and my magical intuition so that much of the very great work done by me all this summer may be considered due entirely to this Art.[19]

From that year on, Crowley experimented with sexual magic and his diaries, both published and un-published, show that he kept a careful record of all "operations", stating the object; partner(s); quality of the "elixir"; and the apparent results.[20] In the early 1920s Crowley assumed the office as the worldwide chief of the O.T.O., or Outer Head of the Order as the office was officially known. The use of sex in magical and religious rituals fitted well with the principles of Thelema, a new religious movement of which Crowley was the prophet. In 1904 Crowley had "channelled" a text known as *The Book of the Law*, which he later technically labelled *Liber AL vel Legis*. According to Crowley, this text proved to be the foundation of a new religion and it identified Crowley as its prophet, The Beast 666. Thelemic doctrines were incorporated in the revised rituals of the O.T.O. that Crowley wrote at the request of Reuss during his stay in the United States during the First World War.

What, then, did the sexual magic that Crowley used actually consist of? The sexual magic of the O.T.O. was initially confined to the Eighth and Ninth degrees. In the Eight degree, Perfect Pontiff of the Illuminati, the initiate was instructed in the practice of auto-sexual magic, or masturbation. In the Ninth degree, Initiate of the Sanctuary of the Gnosis, the initiate was taught a particular form of magic which involved sexual intercourse. In addition to this, Crowley quickly developed a new form of sexual magic which involved anal sex in a newly created Eleventh Degree. A number of authors have stated that this degree was a homosexual degree, but a close reading of Crowley's diaries reveal that he performed this particular form of sexual magic with both men and women. In Crowley's sexual magic the mere use of sex was not enough in itself. The sexual energy was used to charge, as it were, mental images created by the magician. To a certain extent, this form of magic is similar to the so-called talismanic magic taught

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[19] Aleister Crowley, *The Magical Record of the Beast 666* (1993), 3.

[20] Records of Crowley's experiments with sexual magic can be found in *The Magical Record of the Beast 666* (1993), *The Magical Diaries of Aleister Crowley* (1979), and in shorter works such as "The Paris Working" (1998).

by the Golden Dawn which aimed at charging or empowering magical talismans.[21]

During the operation, as Crowley called his acts of sexual magic, the performer had to concentrate his will on a particular object, such as inspiration to write poetry, and to create mental images that would stimulate the ecstatic nature of the ritual. Crowley would, for instance, imagine showers of gold pouring over him at the moment of orgasm in rituals whose aim was to raise money. Moreover, the mental state of the practitioner had to be "energised" or charged with an ecstatic feeling or energy which Crowley apparently connected to sexual energy.[22] It seems as if Crowley sought to transcend the limits of normal rational consciousness in these forms of rituals and to reach into layers of the consciousness which are normally inaccessible. In discussing sexual magic in his diary, Crowley noted:

> Union of the conscious mind, made stable moreover, with the subconscious, is evidently necessary to any Operation in which the Result is to be formulated beforehand.[23]

The union of the conscious mind with the subconscious appears to have been a central aspect of Crowley's spiritual system as he evidently identified the subconscious with the so-called Holy Guardian Angel.[24] One significant characteristic of the O.T.O. version of sexual magic is the sacramental consumption of the so-called Elixir (in the Ninth degree the elixir consists of a mixture of male and female sexual fluids, gathered from the vagina). The Elixir could also be used to anoint objects such as talismans, thereby empowering them with the force that was released at the moment of orgasm. Crowley's systematic experimentation

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[21] The use of sex in magical rituals was, however, not allowed in the Golden Dawn.

[22] See Aleister Crowley "Energized Enthusiasm" (1913) for more information on this particular state of mind.

[23] Aleister Crowley, *The Magical Record of the Beast 666* (1993), 150.

[24] When an Australian disciple to Crowley, Frank Bennett (1868–1930) visited Crowley at the Abbey of Thelema in Cefalu, Sicily in 1921, he suddenly became "enlightened" by something that Crowley had told him: "And just what was the shattering information that Crowley had imparted? In essence, he had explained that initiation was simply a process of bringing the subconscious to the fore. The subconscious, Crowley said, was to all intents and purposes the Holy Guardian Angel with whom the aspirant wished to communicate, in order to establish his or her 'True Will.' To establish this communication, aspirants had only to open themselves up to the demands and desires of their subconscious, and act in harmony with them." Keith Richmond *Progradior & The Beast* (2004), 174.

with sexual magic resulted in a few short secret documents entitled *De Arte Magica* (1914), *Agape vel Liber C vel Azoth* (1914) and *Emblems and Mode of Use* (1944). It is interesting to note that after Crowley had been initiated into the secrets of sexual magic two significant changes took place: first, Crowley practically stopped performing complex forms of ceremonial magic in favour of the much simpler sexual magic, and, second, all his subsequent recorded acts of sex are limited to the performance of sexual magic. Crowley's sexual liberation can thus be seen as a new form of regulation, which prevented him from performing sex for mere pleasure. In choosing partners for his sexual magic Crowley appears to have had an open mind, to put it mildly. The partners were thus not only limited to his numerous mistresses and lovers, but also to his disciples, casual acquaintances, total strangers and a fair amount of prostitutes. A typical entry in his diaries detailing his sexual magic could look like the following example from June 16, 1914:

> 16 June 12.21 a.m. [1914] A hot night after a heavy thunderstorm. Lamplight.
> 'Lilian' a short plump young nigger whore.
> Object: Poetic inspiration. I was utterly tired out and could hardly perform the Operation, especially as the cucurbit [i.e. the vagina] was worthless, and I wanted either or both of two others [i.e. whores] very badly.
> The Elixir, however, was extremely good in quality, concentrated, aromatic, and sweet. The will was concentrated but not enthused.
> Result: A complete failure so far as actual poetry is concerned; but I got certain poetic ideas.[25]

To what extent, then, does the sexual magic of the O.T.O. derive from Eastern Tantric practices? The answer to this question needs to be searched for in two different places. First, the possibility of Tantric influences on pre-Crowley O.T.O.; and second, knowledge of Tantric practices on part of Crowley himself. In respect of the first, it must be stated that the available evidence is far too limited to draw any conclusive conclusions. Reuss asserted that he had not created the O.T.O. on his own, but that he had been assisted in this project by the Austrian Freemason Karl Kellner (1850–1905) and the German theosophist Franz Hartmann (1838–1912). It is Kellner in particular who has been credited as the source of sexual magic of the Order, and his knowledge of yoga—and some would claim Tantra—allegedly stems

[25] Aleister Crowley, *The Magical Record of the Beast 666* (1993), 28.

from his meeting with two Indian gurus, Bheema Sena Pratapa and Mahatma Agamya Paramahamsa, and the Arab Hadji Soliman ben Aïsa.[26] The problem with this theory is that, firstly, it is highly unlikely that Kellner had anything to do with the formation of the O.T.O. since the Order was founded after his death, and secondly, the surviving texts written by him show no familiarity with sexual magic or Tantra.[27] In a similar manner, the surviving evidence simply does not confirm the notion that Reuss had any deeper knowledge of Tantric practices. It is an undeniable fact, though, that Reuss did connect the sexual magic of the O.T.O. with Hindu yogic practices as the following passage from the Jubilee edition of *Der Oriflamme* (1912) shows:

> At the end of the previous article, it was explained that the key to opening up the secret, underlying all masonic symbols, is the doctrine of Sexual Magic.
>
> [...]
>
> We say in our Manifesto that we supply the duly prepared Brother with the practical means to gain even in this terrestial life proofs of his immortality.
>
> Well, one of these means is a certain Yoga exercise.
>
> Brother Dr. Kellner states in hus publication on Yoga: Yoga is a very old doctrine, kept secret for a long time, and anyway little known, which gives its disciples, through certain exercises, the ability to evoke in himself at will the phenomena of artificicial somnambulism.
>
> Depending upon the kind of technique used for the attainment of Yoga, one distinguishes different kind of Yoga, and in this context the nerve centres (Nadis) and the 10 dirrent kinds of breath (Vayus) play an important role.
>
> The old Indian physiological names for the 10 Vayus are Prana (in the heart), Apana (in the area of the anus), Samâna (in the area of the navel), Udâna (in the throat), Vyâna (in the whole body), Napa (in the

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[26] Mahatma Agamya Paramahamsa, author of *Śri Brahma Dhàràa* "Shower from the Highest." (London, 1905), was one of the first Indian propagators of advaita-vedanta in the West. He visited Europe on a number occasions, and met with Aleister Crowley, among others. The meeting is recorded in Crowley's diary for 1906–07. There is a humorous account of Paramahamsa published in *The Equinox* Vol I, No. IV, "Half-Hours with Famous Mahatmas" (1910), pp. 284–290, written by J.F.C. Fuller under the pseudonym Sam Hardy. Bheema Sena Pratapa was a less known guru from Lahore who visited Europe at the turn of the century. Hadji Soliman ben Aïsa, "the invulnerable fakir", was described in the press as both an Arab and an East Indian fakir. He travelled around Europe in the mid-1890s and performed at the Panoptikum in Berlin, among other places. Allegedly, Hadji Soliman ben Aïsa belonged to the secret dervish Order of Saadi, founded by Saadeddin Dschebari in 1335.

[27] Marco Pasi "Ordo Templi Orientis" (2005), 899.

> reproductive organ), Kurma (opens the eyelids), Krikara (causes sneezing), Devadatta (causes yawning), Dhananjaya (penetrates the outer coarse body).
>
> Now, sexual magic deals with the Vayus Napa (in the reproductive organ), specified in the sixth place.[28]

References to yoga does not, however, amount to Tantric origins of the sexual magic of the O.T.O. In a short article entitled "Mystic Anatomy" published the following year in the *Oriflamme*, Reuss goes into even greater detail in explaining the Eastern theory behind the sexual magic of the O.T.O., and in the text we find a rare direct reference to Tantra in relation to O.T.O.: "The Sympathicus is played on by the Tantrikas, the writings of Sakti, or worship of female energy". The Eastern references notwithstanding, sources of Reuss's sexual magic point in another direction, namely The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. This order had been founded in the early 1880s and had branches in the United States, England, France and Sweden. The Order was governed by Peter Davidson (1837–1915) and Thomas Henry Burgoyne (c. 1855–c. 1895) with Max Theon (Louis M. Bimstein c. 1848–1927) as Grand Master. The most conspicuous aspect of the teachings of H.B. of L. (as the Order was known) was a particular form of sexual magic, based on the teachings of Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875).[29] These teachings found their way via the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light into the O.T.O.[30]

It has been claimed that Crowley had firsthand knowledge of Tantra, or *vamacharya*, from the time of his travels in Asia, particularly from his visit to Ceylon in 1901.[31] It seems highly unlikely, though, that Crowley's

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[28] *Jubilæums-Ausgabe Der Oriflamme* (1912), 21–22. I am indebted to Jan A.M. Snoek for help with the translation.

[29] For the sexual magic of Randolph, see in particular P.B. Randolph, *Sexual Magic* (1988); "The Ansairetic Mystery" (1997); "The Mysteries of Eulis" (1997).

[30] On the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor and the teachings of Randolph, see John Patrick Deveney "Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor" (2005), "Paschal Beverly Randolph" (2005), *Paschal Beverly Randolph* (1997); Godwin, Chanel & Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor* (1995); P.B. Randolph, *Sexual Magic* (1988). The influence of The Hermetic Brotherhood of Light upon the O.T.O. is stated openly in the official journal of the O.T.O. in which it is claimed that Karl Kellner came in contact with the organisation on his travels in Europe, America, and the Near East, *Jubilæums-Ausgabe Der Oriflamme* (1912), 15.

[31] Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt* (2000), 141. For a discussion on Crowley's relation to Tantra, see Hugh B. Urban, "Unleashing the Beast: Aleister Crowley, Tantra and Sex Magic in Late Victorian England" (2003); Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra* (2003), 215–223; and Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis* (2006), 109–139.

knowledge went beyond a mere superficial theoretical knowledge of the subject as there is nothing in his diaries from this period to suggest that he had been initiated into a Tantric group. It should be remembered, furthermore, that little had been published on Tantra at this point in any Western language, and that Crowley's knowledge of Pali and Sanskrit was very limited. It is furthermore quite surprising that Crowley does not appear to have been familiar with the works of Sir John Woodroffe (1865–1936), whose books were the single most important sources of Tantra in the West during the first half of the twentieth century. By his own account, Crowley had studied Tantra through the works of authors such as Patanjali and Swami Vivekananda[32] (1863–1902):

> I also studied all the varieties of Asiatic philosophy, especially with regard to the practical question of spiritual development, the Sufi doctrines, the *Upanishads*, the *Sankhya, Veda* and *Vedanta*, the *Bhagarad-Gita* [sic] and *Purana*, *The Dhammapada*, and many other classics, together with numerous writings on the Tantra and Yoga of such men as Patanjali, Vivekananda, etc. etc. Not a few of these teachings are as yet wholly unknown to scholars. I made the scope of my studies as comprehensive as possible omitting no school of thought however unimportant or repugnant.[33]

Even though Crowley recommended the use of yoga to his disciples and readers in books such as *Book Four, Part I* (1911) and *Eight Lectures on Yoga* (1939), he all but gave up the practice of yoga himself after he had immersed himself in various yogic practices around 1901 under the guidance of Shri Parananda, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851–1930), Solicitor-General of Ceylon.[34] In a letter to his former disciple Gerald J. Yorke (1901–1983) written in 1945 Crowley explains his attitude towards yoga:

> I cannot agree that Asana and Pranayama are exclusively Hatha Yoga studies. The point surely lies in the motive. I have never wanted anything but spiritual enlightenment; and, if power, then only the power to confer a similar enlightenment on mankind at large.
>
> I think you are wrong about my history. I did practically no Yoga of any kind after my return from my first journey to India. I attempted to

[32] On Vivekananda's ambivalent attitude towards Tantra, see Hugh Urban, *Tantra* (2003), 161–163.

[33] Aleister Crowley, *Magick Without Tears* (1991), 231–232.

[34] Aleister Crowley, *Confessions* (1989), 235–236.

> resume practices at Boleskine and elsewhere, and could not force myself to do them. The Samadhi is a sort of bye-product of the operation of Abramelin.[35]

It comes as no surprise that Crowley's general attitude towards Tantra was positive, and he even identified Tantra as a primitive stage (in characteristic fashion of evolutionism which dominated history of religions during Crowley's formative period) of what he called the White tradition[36] (to which his system belonged).

> Paradoxical as it may sound the Tantrics are in reality the most advanced of the Hindus. Their theory is, in its philosophical ultimatum, a primitive stage of the White tradition, for the essence of the Tantric cults is that by the performance of certain rites of Magick, one does not only escape disaster, but obtains positive benediction. The Tantric is not obsessed by the will-to-die. It is a difficult business, no doubt, to get any fun out of existence; but at least it is not impossible. In other words, he implicitly denies the fundamental proposition that existence is sorrow, and he formulates the essential postulate of the White School of Magick, that means exist by which the universal sorrow (apparent indeed to all ordinary observation) may be unmasked, even as at the initiatory rite of Isis in the ancient says of Khem.[37]

To a certain extent the metaphysics of Tantra appeared congenial to Crowley's own religious system, Thelema, and he identified a few passages of *The Book of the Law* as referring to the arousal of the *kundalini*.[38] Towards the end of the Second World War Crowley was contacted by a certain David Curwen who subsequently became an initiate of the Ninth degree of the O.T.O. Curwen had supposedly been initiated into a Tantric group in Ceylon, and he claimed that he had a South Indian guru that had given him an English translation of, and Comment on, a Tantric text. In the summer of 1945 Curwen lent Crowley a copy of this document, and in the correspondence that ensued between them Crowley denied that he had been initiated into the Kaula Circle (something which Curwen's guru had claimed).[39] In a letter to Yorke

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[35] Crowley to Yorke, November 7, 1945.

[36] In *Magick Without Tears* (1991), 64–90, Crowley differentiates between three schools of magick: the Yellow, Black, and White.

[37] Aleister Crowley, *Magick Without Tears* (1991), 74–75.

[38] See in particular the so-called Old Comment to verses AL I: 57, AL II: 22, and AL II: 26 in Aleister Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries on the Book of the Law* (1974).

[39] Kenneth Grant, *Beyond the Mauve Zone* (1999), 101–102.

from this period Crowley discusses the content of the document that he had obtained from Curwen:

> Thanks for yours. I do not know who wrote the typescript [a translation and commentary on Ananda Lahari, G.J.Y.] but the style of typing is very familiar to me, and I think it is a Babu of some sort, as you yourself apparently do. I could give you a whole lot of information, but not by writing, the subjects which these MSS treat [the Bhairavi Diksha, G.J.Y.] being unsuitable for that medium. The MS was lent me by Mr. David Curwen, but I am not at all sure whether he will be pleased at me having disclosed his name. He is a very curious person. I quite agree with you about the inherent difficulties in the Manuscript. One of the troubles is that, as you know, the Hindus have got an Anatomy of their own. That, too, you seem to have noticed. It is true that from what he writes it would appear that he is making everything depend almost exclusively upon the physical or physiological basis; but when you go into that with him you find there is a whole lot of additional stuff about mantras and various magical methods, including secret medicines and the like. In a letter I got from him a day or two ago Curwen talks about their sending him certain Salts from India and speaks of a great deal of magical work having been done in India. It is all very puzzling.
>
> Naturally I got in contact with this subject quite a lot while I was in India, and on the whole I was repelled, though I had no moral scruples on the subject. I came to the conclusion that the whole thing was not worth while. They do a sort of Cat and Mouse game with you: they give you the great secret, and then you find there is something left out, and you dig up this and go for a long while in a rather annoyed condition, and then you find there is yet another snag. And so on apparently for ever. In any case it did not square with my ideas of initiation. I never wanted to do Hatha Yoga. "See ye forget the Kingdom of God" etc. [NB—overtyped from 'ye' through 'of' and variant not legible—WB] I am interested and a little surprised at the extent of your knowledge of all these subjects. You must have put in a great deal of hard work.[40]

According to Yorke the typescript given to Crowley was a translation and commentary on *Ananda Lahari*, "The Wave of Joy". This text is attributed to Sankaracharya,[41] and it is a hymn of praise addressed to Parvati, the consort of Shiva, which includes metaphysical speculations.

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[40] Crowley to Yorke, October 20, 1945.

[41] Sankaracharya, or Śankara, born in the eight century, is considered to be one of the most important Hindu philosophers. He is generally seen as the founder of Advaita Vedanta and is, furthermore, considered to be one of the most orthodox thinkers in Hindu literature. Śankara is thus a somewhat strange choice to attribute a Tantric text to.

Furthermore, Yorke also connects the manuscript to *Bhairavi Diksha*, initiation into Tantric erotico-mystical practices involving a female horde collectively known as the Yoginis.[42] According to Kenneth Grant (b. 1924), another disciple and one-time secretary of Aleister Crowley, the fact that Curwen knew more about these matters piqued Crowley.[43] Be that as it may, it should by now be fairly obvious that Crowley's sexual magic owed little to Eastern Tantric practices, even though he undoubtedly saw the similarities between the two systems.

As mentioned above, Reuss's main source to O.T.O.'s sexual magic was probably the writings of Paschal Beverly Randolph and The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, and it is this tradition that lies at the heart of Crowley's sexual magic. It is significant that we find no references to Tantric practices in the secret instructions that Crowley wrote for the members of the highest degrees of the O.T.O.: *De Arte Magica, Agape vel Liber C vel Azoth*, and *Emblems and Mode of Use*, nor in the secret instructions he wrote for the seventh and eight degrees: *De Natura Deorum* and *De Nuptiis Secretis Deorum cum Hominibus*.[44] The symbols used by Crowley in these secret texts derive almost exclusively from Western esoteric traditions, most notably alchemy. The one notable exception to this being part XVI of *De Arte Magica*, entitled "Of certain Hindu theories". In this section Crowley discusses the belief that *Prana* (force) resides in the *Bindu* (semen), and the differences between mystical and magical use of the semen. The mystic withholds the semen which is reabsorbed through the tissues of the body, whereas the magician produces an elixir which then is consumed.[45] The influence from The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor on the sexual magic of Crowley is evident in his secret instructions on the subject, as pointed out by Martin P. Starr.[46] In *Agape vel Liber C vel Azoth* Crowley states "Yet of all these powers I name but seven, the glories of Eulis; the stars upon the foreheads of the Brothers of Hermetic Light."[47] *Eulis!* is the title of an important book published by Randolph in 1874 which contains

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[42] For an excellent discussion of this type of Tantra, see David Gordon White's *Kiss of the Yogini* (2003).

[43] Kenneth Grant, *Remembering Aleister Crowley* (1991), 49.

[44] In the instruction for the eighth degree Crowley recommends the following Hindu books: *Shiva Sanhita, Hathayoga Pradipika, Kama Sutra, Ananga Ranga*. King, Francis (ed.) *The Secret Rituals of the O.T.O.* (1973), 202.

[45] Aleister Crowley, *De Arte Magica* (1974), xvi.

[46] Martin P. Starr, *The Unknown God* (2003), 25 n.

[47] King, Francis (ed.), *The Secret Rituals of the O.T.O.* (1973), 215.

references to sexual magic,[48] and the Brothers of Hermetic Light is probably a direct reference to The Hermetic Brotherhood of Light, mentioned above. It needs to be underscored that sexual magic was not something that Crowley openly propagated, but something which he reserved for his closest disciples. Throughout his published writings, however, there are innumerable more or less veiled references to sexual magic, such as in his so-called Gnostic Mass, *Ecclesiae Gnosticae Catholicae Canon Missae*.

From Magic to Witchcraft: Gerald Gardner

One person who picked up these veiled references to sexual magic was the founder of the modern witchcraft movement Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964). Gardner met Crowley for the first time on May 1, 1947, at a boarding house called Netherwood, in Hastings, through their mutual acquaintance Arnold Crowther (1909–1974).[49] Gardner paid Crowley three more visits on his own within a month, and it appears that it was during one of these visits that Gardner affiliated with the O.T.O.—first as a Minerval (lowest degree of the O.T.O.) and later as a Prince of Jerusalem (a degree between the fourth and fifth degrees).[50] The reason that Gardner was given the degree of Prince of Jerusalem is probably because of the fact that he was a Royal Arch Mason, a degree which according to O.T.O. corresponds to the Fourth degree in the O.T.O. system (masons could affiliate with the O.T.O. by paying affiliation charges for the corresponding degree they had in Freemasonry).[51] According to Gardner's biography he was initiated into co-masonry (a form of masonry that admits men and women on an equal basis) when he was working in Ceylon, c. 1905 in the lodge

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[48] Only the second edition from 1874 survives. The date of the first edition is unknown. John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph* (1997), 479.

[49] For a discussion on the relationship between Gardner and Crowley, see Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon* (1999), 216–223; Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (2007), 148–153; Morgan Davis, *From Man to Witch* (n.d.), 14–24.

[50] For a description of the degree system of O.T.O., see Aleister Crowley "Liber CXCIV: An Initimation with reference to the Constitution of the Order" (1919), 239–246.

[51] For a table of correspondence between the O.T.O. system and Freemasonry (with the affiliation charges from c. 1913), see Crowley & Bathurst "Manifesto of the M∴M∴M∴" [Mysteria Mystica Maxima, the name of the British Section of the O.T.O.] (1999), 85.

the Sphinx, 113, I.C. in Colombo.[52] Gardner was furthermore given a charter to open a Camp of the O.T.O. in London for the Minerval degree, but the camp never appears to have become active. There was some confusion about Gardner's status within the Order after Crowley's death on December 1, 1947, and it was even believed by some members that Gardner was the European head of the Order.[53] Gardner, however, seems to have lost his interest in the O.T.O. at an early stage and instead focused on constructing his own magical system. The last (and only!) published reference to his membership in the O.T.O. was on the title page of his novel *High Magic's Aid* (1947) which included his O.T.O. motto Scire (misspelled Scrire), and a confusing reference to his degree in the order.[54]

The history of Gardner and his witchcraft movement has been meticulously dealt with elsewhere so I will limit my discussion to the use of sex in Gardner's system.[55] During the late 1940s and early 1950s Gardner constructed a pagan new religious movement which worshiped the male and female principles in nature in the form of the Goddess and the Horned God. Gardner believed that these two natural forces were also present in each human being and that through rituals these forces could be celebrated and experienced. The movement was organised in so-called covens and the initiatory structure was divided into three degrees, which the members passed through by undergoing rites of initiation which to a certain extent were based on the Craft degrees of Freemasonry.[56] In the third degree, moreover, there occurred a sexual union between the initiator and the candidate. This sexual union, called the Great Rite, symbolised the union of the male and female principles and constituted the central part of the Third Degree initiation. It appears, however, that ritualised sex during Gardner's time was often performed in a symbolical manner only.

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[52] J.L. Bracelin, *Gerald Gardner: Witch* [1960] (1999), 32.

[53] Morgan Davis, *From Man to Witch: Gerald Gardner 1946–1949*, 19–23.

[54] On the title page it is stated that Gardner had the 4 = 7 degree in the O.T.O., but 4 = 7 is in fact a degree in Crowley's other magical organisation, the A.∴A.∴ (founded in 1907), the Philosophus Grade. The initiatory system of the A.∴A.∴ was based on the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn which Crowley had joined in 1898, and left two years later. There is, however, nothing to suggest that Gardner was ever a member of the A.∴A.∴.

[55] For the history of the modern witchcraft movement, see Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon* (1999), and for its history in the US Chas S. *Clifton Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (2006).

[56] Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (2007) 153–167.

To what extent was Gardner influenced by Crowley when he decided to include ritualised sex in the Third Degree of the witchcraft rituals? It is obvious that both men shared the idea that sex could be seen as a sacred act, but it is questionable whether Gardner shared Crowley's conviction that sex should be used in a willed act of magic, or indeed if Gardner ever had access to the secrets of the Sanctuary of the Gnosis of the O.T.O. As a Fourth degree member of the O.T.O. Gardner was not formally entitled to knowledge of the supreme secrets of the O.T.O., but that does not necessarily mean that Crowley did not entrust him with documents of instruction in sexual magic. It is known that Crowley did not put too much emphasis on degrees towards the end of his life. However, a textual analysis of Gardner's different versions of the witchcraft rituals of initiation shows that all the borrowings from Crowley are taken from published sources—most notably *The Book of the Law* and *Ecclesiae Gnosticae Catholicae Canon Missae*.[57] Significantly enough, there are no references to, or quotations from, the instructional papers in sexual magic that Crowley wrote, such as *De Arte Magica, Agape vel Liber C vel Azoth* and *Emblems and Mode of Use*. As already mentioned, the sexual magic of the O.T.O. was initially confined to the Eighth and Ninth degrees. In the Eighth degree, Perfect Pontiff of the Illuminati, the initiate was instructed in the practice of auto-sexual magic, or masturbation. In the Ninth degree, Initiate of the Sanctuary of the Gnosis, the initiate was taught a particular form of magic that involved sexual intercourse. Crowley would later include an Eleventh degree concerned with anal intercourse. In Gardner's witchcraft rituals there are, however, no references to masturbation or anal intercourse, and, as Doreen Valiente (1922–1999) has observed, Gardner did not include the sacramental consumption of the Elixir.[58] If anything, it appears that Gardner's use of ritualised sex in the Third Degree had a different purpose and had more to do with his attempt to re-create a fertility cult, rather than the performing of an act of sexual magic in Crowley's sense. In discussing the Stone Age origins of witchcraft (Gardner claimed witchcraft to be an unbroken tradition which had survived in secrecy from the Stone Age to modern times) Gardner

[57] See Aidan Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic* (1991); Roger Dearnaley, *The Influence of Aleister Crowley upon "Ye Bok of ye Art Magical"* (n.d.); Henrik Bogdan *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (2007) 153–168.

[58] Doreen Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* (1987), 147.

explicitly stated the purpose of contacting the Great Mother and the Horned God:

> The purpose of contacting the gods was to keep contact with the forces of life, and these were identical with the forces of magic and fertility.[59]

The third degree of Gardner's witchcraft movement differs on a number of points from the two previous degrees, but for our present purpose we will limit the discussion to the inclusion of the Great Rite that consists of a sexual union of the candidate and the initiator during the ritual.[60] The candidate, if female, assumes the role of the Priestess, or, if male, that of the Priest.

Following the customary opening, the Priestess seats herself on the altar, or if the altar is too small, on a throne. She sits in the characteristic position of Osiris with wrists crossed in front of her chest, holding the athame in her right hand, and the scourge in her left. The Priest kneels before her in the same manner as the Priest kneels before the Priestess in Crowley's Gnostic Mass, i.e. with his arms along her thighs and head bowed to her knees. After a short period of adoration, the Priest rises and brings the filled chalice, which he hands to the Priestess, and then resumes his kneeling position. She lowers the point of the athame into the wine,[61] and says: "As the athame is [to] the male, so is the cup [to] the female; and conjoined, they bring blessedness."[62] She kisses the Priest, drinks from the chalice, and with a kiss passes the chalice to him. The Priest drinks, and gives the chalice to a female member of the coven with a kiss, who drinks, and then passes it on to a male member with a kiss. This is repeated until all members have partaken of the chalice. This part of the ritual clearly inspired by Crowley's Gnostic Mass.[63]

The Priest offers a paten with cakes, and the Priestess touches each cake with the moistened tip of her athame, as the Priest says: *O Queen most secret, bless this food unto our bodies, bestowing health, wealth, strength, joy*

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[59] Gerald Gardner, *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959), 44.

[60] For a discussion about the published versions of the Gardnerian rituals of initiation, see Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (2007) 153–155.

[61] Cf. the sixth degree of O.T.O., Illustrious Knight Templar of the Order of Kadosh/Dame Companion of the Order of the Holy Grail. Theodor Reuss and Aleister Crowley *O.T.O. Rituals and Sex Magick* (1999), 255.

[62] Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way* (1986), 35.

[63] Crowley's Gnostic Mass, called "Liber XV; O.T.O. Ecclesiae Gnosticae Catholicae Canon Missae", written in 1913 in Moscow, was published three times during Crowley's lifetime: 1918, 1919, and 1929/30.

and peace, and that fulfilment of Will, and Love under Will, which is perpetual happiness.[64] The Priestess, Priest and members of the coven each take a cake in the same manner as the chalice. The Priest then adores the Priestess by kissing her knees, folding his arms along her thighs and bowing down his head. The Priest and Priestess then proceed to purify each other by scourging. The Priest is the first to receive the strokes, then the Priestess, and then finally the Priest receives yet another round of strokes.[65] After the scourging session, the Priest says, "Now I must reveal a great mystery" and gives the Priestess the five-fold kiss. The Priestess lies down in the centre of the circle, on the altar or a couch, face upwards. She is positioned so as to have her vagina in the centre of the circle, the symbolic point within the circle. The Priest kneels by her side, facing north across her body, and says:

> *Assist me to erect the ancient altar, at which in days past all worshipped,/The Great Altar of all things;/For in old times, Woman was the altar./Thus was the altar made and placed;/And the sacred point was the point within the centre of the circle./As we have of old been taught that the point within the centre is the origin of all things,/Therefore should we adore it.* [kiss]*/Therefore whom we adore we also invoke, by the power of the Lifted Lance* (he touches his own phallus and continues:)*/O Circle of Stars* [kiss]*/Whereof our father is but the younger brother* [kiss]*/Marvel beyond imagination, soul of infinite space,/Before whom time is bewildered and understanding dark,/Not unto thee may we attain unless thine image be love.* [kiss]*/Therefore by seed and root, by stem and bud, by leaf and flower and fruit,/Do we invoke thee,/O Queen of Space, O dew of light,/Continuous one of the heavens* [kiss]*,/Let it be ever thus, that men speak not of thee as one, but as none;/And let them not speak of thee at all, since thou art continuous./For thou art the point within the circle* [kiss] *which we adore* [kiss]*,/The fount of life without which we would not be* [kiss]*,/And in this way are erected the Holy Twin Pillars, B. and J.* (He kisses her left breast, and then her right breast.)*/In beauty and in strength were they erected,/To the wonder and glory of all men.*[66]

At this stage all the members of the coven leave the circle if the Great Rite is performed "in reality".[67] (The ritual does not state how the

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[64] Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way* (1986), 35.

[65] Gardner does not state how many strokes are supposed to be given at this part, but the Farrars assume that Gardner had intended the traditional 3, 7, 9, 21 at each round. Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way* (1986), 304 (note 8 to page 36).

[66] Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way* (1986), 36–37.

[67] According to the Farrars the Great Rite is applied in practice to the third degree in the following manner: "There are only two active participants in the Rite; the rest of the coven merely support it by their silent presence, whether for the whole of a symbolic Rite or for the first part of an 'actual' one. These two may be either the man (already third degree) initiating the woman; or the woman (again, already third degree)

Great Rite is supposed to be enacted in a symbolic form, but seems likely that it would include the use of the athame and the chalice.) The Priest continues:

> *O Secret of Secrets,/That art hidden in the being of all lives,/Not thee do we adore,/For that which adoreth is also thou./Thou art That, and That am I.* [kiss]*/I am the flame that burns in the heart of every man,/And in the core of every star./I am life, and the giver of life./Yet therefore is the knowledge of me the knowledge of death./I am alone, the Lord within ourselves,/Whose name is Mystery of Mysteries.*[68]

As in the two previous degrees, the Priest kisses the Priestess in the particular pattern of the Sigil of the degree—which in the Third degree is the upright triangle above the upright pentagram. It is given in the following manner: "above the pubic hair, on the right foot, on the left knee, on the right knee, on the left foot, and above the pubic hair again; then on the lips, the left breast, the right breast and finally the lips again."[69] The Priest lays his body over the Priestess's and says:

> *Make open the path of intelligence between us;/For these truly are the Five Points of Fellowship—/Foot to foot,/Knee to knee,/Lance to Grail,*[70]*/Breast to breast,/Lips to lips./By the great and holy name Cernunnos;/In the name of Aradia;/Encourage our hearts,/Let the light crystallize itself in our blood,/Fulfilling of us resurrection./For there is no part of us that is not part of the Gods.*[71]

The Priest then rises, while the Priestess remains laying down, and goes to each of the cardinal points and proclaims: "Ye Lords of the Watchtowers of the East [South, West, North]; the thrice consecrated High Priestess greets you and thanks you."[72] The Great Rite can thus be described a fertility rite in which the two participants symbolise the male and female principle in nature, and the intercourse the union between these two principles.

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initiating the man; or the man and woman may both be second degree, taking their third degree initiation together under the supervision of the High Priestess and/or High Priest." Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way* (1986), 33.

[68] Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way* (1986), 37.

[69] Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way* (1986), 37.

[70] The Farrars state that the Text B version says Genitals to Genitals, but they find that "somewhat clinical in the poetic context of the rest, and prefer Text C's Lance-and-Grail metaphor." They further state that this is the "obviously intended moment of union" if the Great Rite is "actual". Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way* (1986), 305.

[71] Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way* (1986), 38.

[72] Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way* (1986), 38.

As in the case with Crowley, Gardner was very careful to conceal the ritual use of sex from the public, even though he alluded to it in his novel *High Magic's Aid*, published two years after Crowley's death in 1949. In this novel Gardner described the first two witchcraft rituals of initiation; the Third Degree ritual that included the ritualised use of sex was only hinted at.[73]

Concluding Remarks

The Eastern references in connection with the sexual magic of the O.T.O. made in the Jubilee edition of the *Oriflamme* should not be interpreted as a *real* Tanric or Eastern origin of the sexual magic of the Order. Instead, the references should be interpreted in the occultist context which at this time was characterised by a fascination and admiration for the East. Eastern religious traditions, and in particular Hinduism, was widely held in occultist circles to be the oldest still existing religious tradition and the source of a perennial wisdom to be found in the West. The most influential occultist movement at the turn of the last century, the Theosophical Society founded in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Henry Olcott (1832–1907), epitomized the occultist interest in Hinduism and Buddhism. The Theosophy of Blavatsky was to a large extent a Western interpretation of Hinduism and Buddhism, and it was through Theosophy that many Westerners first came in contact with Eastern religious thought. Blavatsky's understanding of Hinduism was, however, heavily coloured by the prevailing Orientalist discourse at the time. While the Theosophical Orientalism was not of an antagonistic kind and stressed the supremacy of European culture, it was part of a second type of Orientalist discourse that Richard King has described as "generally affirmative, enthusiastic and suggestive of Indian superiority in certain key areas".[74] This positive type of Orientalism did not only influence Theosophy, but also other forms of "fin de siècle" and later types of occultism, including the Traditionalist movement with names such as René Guénon (1886–1951), Julius Evola (1896/8–1974), Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), and Frithjof Schoun (1907–1998) at the forefront.[75] The positive Orientalist approach

[73] Gerald Gardner, *High Magic's Aid* (1949), 290–303.
[74] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion* (2003), 116.
[75] Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (2004).

expressed by Reuss in the Oriflamme can be explained by his earlier involvement with Theosophy. By his own account, Reuss had not only personally known Blavatsky, but had also held high office in the German branch of the Theosophical Society.[76]

In a similar manner Crowley's emphasis on the Western nature of O.T.O.'s sexual magic—as opposed to the Eastern emphasis expressed by Reuss in the Oriflamme—can be explained not only by his aversion towards Theosophy, but more importantly through his background in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Golden Dawn was actually created in part as a response to the Eastern emphasis of the Theosophical Society: the Golden Dawn was founded in 1888, a year after Blavatsky had settled in London. The importance placed on the Western tradition in the Golden Dawn coloured the young Crowley who joined the Order in 1898, and although he would continue to publish on different aspects of Eastern religious traditions throughout his life, Crowley saw magic as an essentially Western tradition while Eastern traditions were regarded as expressions of mysticism.[77] It is therefore understandable that Crowley's secret instructions in sexual magic would be devoid of Tantric allusions, and instead be exclusively Western in character. The same is true for Gerald Gardner who claimed that the Witchcraft movement was a Western pre-Christian religion which had survived in secrecy to modern times, and as a result the Gardnerian rituals of initiation (including the Great Rite found in the Third Degree) are purely Western in character.

While there is a strong antinomian trait in Tantra that challenges mainstream Hindu religion and social conventions, the question needs to be addressed to what extent (if any) Western sexual magic is antinomian in character—in what way it challenges the morals of Western society? As stated at the outset of this chapter, Foucault has shown that sexuality in Victorian and late-Victorian society was not suppressed, but on the contrary was the object of fascination and detailed exploration. At the same time, the notion that man (and woman) is sexually repressed, and that we need to break free from this repression has not only been present in Victorian society, but is also to be found in modern and late-modern Western society. The *idea* that we are sexually repressed

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[76] Ellic Howe and Helmut Möller "Theodor Reuss: Irregular Freemasonry in Germany, 1900–23" (1979), 30.

[77] According to Crowley, Magick and Mysticism were the two ways of attainment. See Aleister Crowley *Book 4, Part 1* (1911), and *Book 4, Part 2* (1912).

(even if we in fact are not repressed) has been a powerful discourse in many new religious movements. Freedom from sexual repression has, furthermore, often been interpreted as part of the individual's religious emancipation. It is therefore quite understandable why to Crowley and Gardner the idea of the individual's freedom was often synonymous with sexual liberty. The morals and ethics of Western society and Christianity were regarded as restraints and restrictions imposed upon the individual, and in order to progress spiritually one had to break free from bonds of the "old" values. Often enough, the most explicit way of breaking free was to adopt a new antinomian sexual morality, which in the case of Crowley was based on *The Book of the Law*. The supreme secrets of the O.T.O. in the form of sexual magic, and the Third Degree initiation ritual of Gardner's witchcraft movement, can thus be interpreted as a way to challenge the morals of Western society and a means to break free from them. The fact that the sexual morals of the West are not as repressive as might be believed does not diminish the occultist *belief* that man needs to break free from the sexual morals of the West in order to progress on a spiritual level.

The identification of the individual's freedom with sexual liberty is, however, not unique to the teachings of Crowley and his followers. On the contrary, sexual liberty is an important feature in many new religious movements—esoteric or not. The intolerance of the press and society at large, however, caused many new religious movements until the 1960s and 1970s to keep silent about their sexual morals, or to veil them in symbolic language. This was also true for Crowley and Gardner and it needs to be emphasized that sexual magic was not something which they openly propagated but rather something which they reserved for their closest disciples.

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EARTH DAY AND AFTERWARDS: AMERICAN PAGANISM'S APPROPRIATION OF 'NATURE RELIGION'

Chas S. Clifton

The creation of a new American Paganism in the 1950s and 1960s had its roots in a European literary paganism, in the arrival of new Pagan texts, primarily from Britain, in a longstanding American metaphysical tradition but also, equally importantly, in the American tradition of seeing nature as a source of sacred value (Albanese, 1990, 2007). This root, while connected to the transnational Romantic movement, had developed in the young United States a somewhat nationalistic core that enabled new American Pagans of the mid-twentieth century to feel connected to something older and deeper than themselves. Thus, as American Paganism—particularly Wicca, its largest and most robust segment[1]—developed a new identity as "nature religion," it was able to connect to a pre-existing American spiritual current. While it is difficult to say precisely when this connection was made, it appears frequently in Pagan writing shortly after 1970, the year of the first Earth Day celebration.

Given their self-proclaimed magic-working components, Pagan religious traditions are often placed first in the "metaphysical" group. As a religious nation, America has a long-standing, although often academically marginalized, metaphysical tradition, dating back to the seventeenth-century immigrants from Western Europe who settled the Eastern Seaboard. The historian of religion Catherine Albanese, writing in *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, chastises scholars for ignoring the metaphysical tradition, declaring, "This book is suspicious about the fringe status of what [Jon] Butler termed occultism and is suspicious as well about the defeat of the 'occult' player in the American religious drama." Instead, she describes a lively metaphysical religion increasing particularly in the nineteenth century (Albanese, 2007,

[1] I follow the lead of Aidan Kelly here in using "Wicca" broadly to cover any contemporary Pagan religion that honors a god and goddess, meets within a ritual circle, invokes the elemental spirits of the four quarters, and claims to work magic by any definition (Kelly, 1991, p. 177).

pp. 2–4). Broadly, this metaphysical religion embraces a collection of ideas such as these:

- Privileging the "mind" (as opposed to the "heart" in evangelical Christianity), thus including clairvoyance, intuition, and other psychic abilities.
- Retaining the ancient hermetic doctrine of "as above, so below" and a view of the cosmos as pervaded by spiritual energy. "To put this another way, metaphysical practice is about what may be called magic, and magic…lies at the heart of American metaphysics." Hence metaphysical religion imagines that the trained, magical will can effect change in the practitioner's world.
- A radical pluralism that embraces horizontal, ephemeral, and egalitarian patterns of organization—networks—rather than top-down hierarchies.
- A therapeutic orientation towards earthly healing and comfort rather than salvation from sin and a secure place in an afterlife (Albanese, 2007, pp. 13–15).

To these I would add an openness to female religious leadership, which would also be a signature of Wiccan structure, but which had already been apparent in such movements as Spiritualism, Theosophy, Christian Science, and New Thought. In Britain, women entered ceremonial-magic groups such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn for the first time in history; indeed, earlier magical manuals such as *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* has insisted that only virgins could practice theurgy, and even they were not suitable because of "their love of talk." But it was the Golden Dawn that could "claim responsibility for opening up the world of practical magic to the female sex" (Butler, 2004, p. 228). The importance of women in the Golden Dawn would impress such transitional figures to modern Paganism as the English ceremonial magician and novelist Dion Fortune, whose novels in turn played a part in creating the seedbed in which Wicca sprouted (Clifton, 1988). Given the cultural commonplace of treating human culture as "male" in opposition to the "female" that is non-human nature, we may see a link between that trait and the eventual adoption of the term "nature religion" by Wiccans in particular.

In addition to its metaphysical lineage, American Paganism has literary roots. These roots have been chiefly described in European contexts, but literary "paganism" did reach those Americans who read

such works as the poetry of Swinburne or Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* with its evocative chapter "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn," where the Greek god Pan serves to personify not only nature but also an "eternal," if literary, English countryside (Grahame, 2004). The literary paganism of the Victorian and Edwardian periods fluctuated between two poles. One was an evocation of imperial Rome, for in this era comparisons between imperial Rome and imperial Britain were commonplace. The aesthetic "decadents," such as the artist Aubrey Beardsley and the writer Oscar Wilde, went so far as to praise the emperor Nero for his persecution of the Christians, while the critic Walter Pater favorable invoked the imperial Roman world in his 1885 novel *Marius the Epicurean*. Meanwhile, writers such as Grahame saw in ancient Greece a "rustic Arcadian perfection," a golden age "which was, in antithesis to the turmoil and mechanization of the modern world, simple and homely" (Hallett, 2006).

This anti-modern literary paganism would be compatible with some forms of "nature religion" as the latter developed in America in the mid-twentieth century. But the American "nature religion" has its own tradition and its own literature. It began with the European encounter with the seemingly untouched Atlantic coast of North America. (Not until the twentieth century did scientific ecologists begin to understand to what an extent that region had been shaped by human intervention, primarily through the use of fire.) In the early days of the American republic, it had become a rhetorical commonplace to contrast corrupt Europe's "towers in which feudal oppression has fortified itself' with 'deep forests which the eye of God has alone pervaded,' to give an example from the work of Washington Irving (1783–1859) (Nash, 1973, p. 74). This "republican nature religion," as Albanese dubs it, had one foot in the pervasive Deism of the nation's founding elite (Albanese, 1990, p. 67). Allied to a an expansionist policy of extending American territory to counter land claims by Britain, France, and Spain, it also entered the national consciousness as evidence of a divine blessing on the republic and its inhabitants, who were thus blessed with forests, minerals, rivers for navigation, and prairies for livestock-raising.

This deistic nature religion of the new republic also absorbed a strong Romantic influence, under which rugged peaks, storm-buffeted coasts, and deep gorges were reframed as not merely troublesome to travelers but also "sublime" and "picturesque." Figures of past centuries—the Druid, the Wild Man of the forests, and not least, the witch—begin to appear in literature as the embodiment of such virtues. There crossover

can be seen in American revolutionary Thomas Paine's contention that Freemasonry carried on the (conjectured) solar religion of the Druids (Albanese, 2007, p. 129). Philip Freneau, an American poet of the late eighteenth century, in a 1781 work titled "The Philosopher of the Forest," declares that the tall trees of New York's Hudson Valley make him feel "half Druid" and impel him to adore them (Albanese, 1990, p. 61). As to the Romantic conception of the witch, it springs from the French anti-clerical historian Jules Michelet (1798–1874), eager to replace Christianity with a new faith based on motherhood and a mother goddess such as Isis. In various writings of the 1840s and 1850s, Michelet broached the idea of Pagan religion surviving centuries of persecution, preserving an ancient wisdom and the spirit of liberty. As summarized by Ronald Hutton, "That wisdom was gained from a close knowledge of, and relationship with, the natural world and the life-force, and Michelet believed that women were especially suited to such knowledge and therefore had provided the priestesses of the witch religion" (Hutton, 1999, p. 139). Michelet's ideas would enter later American Paganism through two channels: via Margaret Murray to Gerald Gardner in Britain, and through the American writer Charles G. Leland, who would himself introduce purported evidence of a surviving Italian Paganism at the close of the nineteenth century in two books, *Etruscan Roman Remains* (Leland, 1999) and *Aradia: or the Gospel of the Witches* (Leland, 1998).

A mark of Romantic nature religion was its de-emphasis of transcendent deity with instead a pantheistic or panentheistic emphasis on the powers of the natural world to affect human consciousness. In a widely reprinted essay first published in 1849, Ralph Waldo Emerson claims,

> In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child.... Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perpetual festival is dressed.... There Is feel that nothing can befall me in life.... the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God (Emerson, 1996).

Even a more theistic writer such as the naturalist John Muir (1838–1914), who provided much of the intellectual impetus for the foundation of the American national park system, would argue that "Nature's object in making animals and plants might possibly be first the happiness of each one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one (Muir, 1996).

What America lacked, however, was the possibility of a fictive connection with an ancient Pagan past.[2] Whereas in Europe, the rising study of geology in the nineteenth century produced a false analogy in the study of folklore—that the "unchanging" life of the countryside retained "fossilized" remains from a pre-Christian past—there were no peasants in the nineteenth-century United States. Virtually all the Romantic elements of today's American Paganism, including the valorization of sexuality and femininity found in Michelet, would be imported from Europe. In that sense, American Paganism grew along much the same lines as its British cousin, combining Renaissance Hermetic high magic, whose survival is amply documented by Albanese (Albanese, 2007) with "low" or folk magic, where the variety of European beliefs and practices was in many cases reinforced by interaction with Native American "doctors," "jugglers," or "medicine men/women." In the United States, however, a form of nature religion gained a quasi-civil status. American Wiccans, in particular, were unable to claim that they were practicing the ancient pre-Christian religion of their ancestors in this land.[3] Yet could instead claim the label of "nature religion" or "earth religion" and thus connect with a pre-existent current in American spirituality, a charge that I date to about 1970—not coincidentally, the first annual observance of Earth Day.

In Albanese's writings, "nature religion" is her scholar's label for a group of seemingly unconnected topics—natural food, natural healing, the idea of outdoor recreation as spiritually restorative, and more. It was "a contemporary social construction of past and present American religion" (Albanese, 1990, p. 8). But to the American Pagans, nature religion was both a euphemism for more such two-edged words as "witchcraft" and "witch," which were and are harder to reclaim from their negative definitions, but also a genuine self-definition for a religion that refuses to separate the divine from the created world but sees the gods both as manifesting in and symbolized by the activities of the natural world: the hawk's swoop, the ocean's tide, the seed's sprouting, or the planets' motions. Wicca as imported from England was largely

[2] A possible analogous exception, of course, was Joseph Smith's *Book of Mormon*, which created tales of ocean-crossing Hebrews and various North American cultures, cities, and wars, all totally unsupported by the archaeological record.

[3] Followers of Reconstructionist Pagan religions seem generally less likely to identify theirs as "nature religion" than are Wiccans. On the other hand, they are sometimes more preoccupied with issues of reconciling ancestral European deities to North America.

a mystery cult with a focus on fertility, be it bodily or metaphorical. Gerald Gardner and its other founders presented it as the surviving Old Religion from an older England where the fertility of humans, animals, and crops was closely monitored in every household (Gardner, 1973). In America, by contrast, Pagans' use of the term nature religion served to outbid Christianity and other scriptural traditions. Anticipating Albanese's coining of her scholarly definition, the Pagan self-description as followers of nature religion placed Pagans squarely into one current of American spirituality. Like the American Indians, often stereotypically described as "nature's children" or as "worshiping nature," Pagans claim a special position as spokespeople for the Earth, and their environmental consciousness and activism does slightly exceed that of the public as a whole (Oboler, 2004). To take Pagan Witchcraft and re-label it as beneficent nature religion was one of the most audacious maneuvers of religious rhetoric that the twentieth century witnessed.

Nature as Cosmos, Paradisiacal Earth, and the Body

In practice, contemporary Pagan nature religion has three loci: the cosmos, the planet, and the body (Clifton, 2006). Briefly, "cosmic" nature religion serves to describe practices that seek harmony with the cosmos and its movements. Its practical applications might include astrology; its liturgical calendar is solar and/or lunar—the solstices, equinoxes, cross-quarter days, and days marking the phases of the moon. Planet-centered or "Gaian"[4] nature religion seeks to bring the practitioner into harmony with the Earth, seen as a unified divine being of whom humans form part of the nervous system. Gaian nature is also constructed by practitioners when they "go into nature" for the large-scale camping festivals that have marked American Paganism since the 1980s.

Finally, Paganism values embodied experience over detached spirituality. As it arose in 1950s Britain, Wicca included a self-description as "fertility cult" and its priests and priestesses could "carry" deities, performing rituals of trance possession. In addition, Wiccans were taught to view sexual acts as the unions of divine forces. Through ritual,

[4] From *Gaia*, the Greek word for Earth, and popularized by Pagan theologian Tim Zell slightly before James Lovelock used it metaphorically to denote the combination of the planet's ecological systems.

practitioners' bodies became repositories of episodic memory (Whitehouse, 2000), holding physical memories of firelight, anointing with ritual oil, drumming, mask-wearing, and other experiences. These practices were amplified and extended in America, where they blended with existing valuing of natural healing, natural foods, and so forth. The embodied nature of contemporary Paganism cannot be overstated, for it is in the body and its performances in specific places and times that "cosmic nature religion" and "Gaian nature religion" are united.

The founders of the New Reformed Order of the Golden Dawn, a seminal West Coast Wiccan group founded in the mid-1960s, left the city on festivals days seeking a paradisiacal nature:

> We were eclectic. We took the best of what was at hand. My friend Maudie once said to me, "What I like about our religion is, it's so *pretty*." And so it is. What lovelier than a graceful chalice, a keen blade, a shining star, a limb of green wood, all set off with fruits and flowers of the season? And what is deity but the calling forth, the manifestation of the aspiration of humankind and its acme, the highest love, the deepest passion, the most beautiful creation? All this we strove to weave into our working. (Thunen, n.d.)

One of the founding members, Fritz Muntean, spoke to the persistence of European stereotypes when he recalled, "At this point we thought of ourselves (at least nominally) as 'Druids,' never witches. [cf. Freneau's poetic Hudson Valley Druidism] It wasn't until quite late in the 60s that we became aware of [Gerald] Gardner's claims, and the W word [witch] started to be bandied about" (Muntean, 2007). The group's members were more in tune with cosmic nature—their first celebrations were for the winter solstices—than with planetary or "ecological" nature:

> There was a strong element of needing to get out of the city. Not so much into "nature." We had trunks of stuff to hang in trees: *tankas* [Tibetan religious pictures], mirrors, gongs, beads—to entertain us and to remind us our inner processes. Not just "being in nature," but a romantic being away from the city—more paradisiacal (Muntean, 2006).

The inner processes, of course, were spotlighted and examined through the lens of entheogenic drugs: peyote could still be purchased by mail order during the early 1960s, and LSD use was not yet criminalized. The Romantic influence of self-exploration and literary Druidry was strong. Yet within a very short time, the study of inner nature and the attunement to the rhythms of cosmic nature and astronomical cycles would be joined by a conception of Wicca, in particular, as nature

religion or to use a popular alternative, Earth religion (Clifton, 2006, pp. 37–70).

That change can be illustrated by an anecdote from the East Coast, where journalist Susan Roberts, author of a paperback survey of the growing Pagan movement, *Witches U.S.A.* She had been meeting with various solo Witches and members of small groups, and as chance would have it, was trying to hail a taxi in Manhattan on April 22, 1970, together with one of her informants, a man named Joe Luckach.

> Neither of us had remembered that this was [the first] Earth Day in New York City and that several main traffic arteries had been closed to automobile traffic in order to observe the event.
>
> Now, no one loves the earth and the purity of air more than a witch. But when it finally dawned on us that the traffic was worse than usual and that this official observance of Earth Day was to blame, Joe began to grumble about how stupid he thought it was to deliberately block already choked streets for any purpose, now matter how laudable.
>
> "Then, how would you observe Earth Day, witch?" I asked.
>
> "Well, I don't know. I haven't thought about it. Through witchcraft, I guess" (Roberts, 1971, p. 78).

What Roberts seems to accept as a given is the statement that "no one loves the earth…more than a witch." A shift in thinking had occurred, not orchestrated but spontaneously in tune with the times. At about the same moment, the occultist Louis T. Culling, not himself Wiccan, noted

> The Wicca work and worship in tune with Nature's own cycles, for all of the Wiccan festivals and religious days are marked either by the Lunar Cycles (the Full Moon Esbats) or the Solar Cycle (the Solstices, Equinoxes, and mid-quarters). Since man, no matter what is claimed by the technologists, is part of Nature and has his foundations with Nature, living and worshiping in accordance with the Solar Lunar Rhythms might be said to nourish his very soul (Culling, 1972, p. 31).

Culling's publisher, Carl Weschcke, head of Llewellyn Publications and himself Wiccan, added in an epilogue, "Witchcraft, no longer confused with the nonsense of wretched old women muttering vague curses, but again seen as the 'teachings of the Wicca—the wise ones,[5] brings us a new message of Nature Worship and Spiritual Ecology" (Culling, 1972, p. 43). In fact, if one were to seek the person who facilitated the

[5] The derivation of "Wicca" from an Old English word meaning wise is favored by some Wiccans although unsupported etymologically.

shift from allegedly ancient quasi-fertility cult of English Wicca to the American Wicca that knew itself as nature religion, that person might well be Weschcke. Although he did not orchestrate the shift, he certainly promoted it. As a publisher moving aggressively into the Pagan book market in the early 1970s and maintaining a dominant position today, at least in terms of the number of titles published, he and his staff were well-positioned to determine what the new American Paganism would look like. Thanks to the Gnosticon series of occult and parapsychological expositions that Llewellyn sponsored in Minneapolis, the news media were already naming the Twin Cities as "headquarters for followers of the occult" ("First Annual Festival Receives International Attention", 1972). Among the earliest participants was the Pagan visionary Tim Zell (now known as Oberon Zell), whose Pagan wedding to his wife Morning Glory was held during one of the early 1970s Gnosticons (formally the Gnostic Aquarian Festival of Psychological, Qabalistic, and Spiritual Science). Zell's writing in *Green Egg*, one of a handful of small Pagan journals of the time, would do much to foreground Gaian and embodied forms of nature religion.

Wicca's seizure of the position of the most "environmental" religion was well-timed. Environmentalism was trendy: President Richard Nixon had remarked to a Sierra Club leader at a bill-signing in 1970 that "All politics is a fad. Your fad is going right now. Get what you can, and here is what I can get you" (Flippen, 2003).

Wicca and other forms of new American Paganism stepped right through the door that Earth Day had opened for them—or perhaps more accurately, the door whose opening the first Earth Day merely marked. Through its heritage of European high magic, Wicca already drew on Cosmic Nature Now it had come to a land where "natural" and "nature" were considered by many people to be positive terms. tradition, thus adding the legitimacy of their new religious movements.

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SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES

RE-ENCHANTING THE WORLD: A WEBERIAN ANALYSIS OF WICCAN CHARISMA

Robert Puckett

The rise of Wicca is largely a reaction to the modern disenchantment of the world. Sabina Magliocco (2004: 120) argues that Wicca is a form of creative resistance against the dominant ontology of the Enlightenment, which marginalizes imagination and ecstasy. The sociologist Max Weber (borrowing from Friedrich Schiller) described this phenomenon as *Entzauberung der Welt*, literally, the de-magification of the world, which he regarded as the immediate result of the rise of Protestant ascetic rationalism, modern science, and modern capitalism. Weber's most forceful statement of this idea was in his 1918 address at Munich University entitled "Science as a Vocation." Speaking of the "meaning of science," Weber said:

> It means principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means (Weber 1968: 228).

The ascension of the "formal rationality" of science, which legitimates a "means-end rational calculation by reference back to universally applied rules, laws, or regulations" (Kalberg 1980: 1158), obviates the need for the common-sense "practical rationality," which "judges worldly activity in relation to the individual's purely pragmatic and egoistic interests" (ibid.: 1151), and ideological "substantive rationality," which "directly orders action into patterns . . . in relation to a past, present, or potential . . . entire clusters of values" (ibid.: 1155). The basis of this formal rationality lies partly in the philosophical "theoretical rationality," which "involves a conscious mastery of reality through the construction of increasingly precise abstract concepts" (ibid.: 1152). Science's universally applied laws are derived from the testing of these abstract concepts against the empirical reality of the natural world. Weber argues that it the dominance of this formal rationality which

has led to the conclusion that everything is calculation, and that the world is disenchanted.

In his description of disenchantment, Weber adopts Plato's allegory of the cave from Book VII of the *Republic*, but argues that its meaning has been inverted. Instead of the philosopher being freed from the fetters of the cave to see the sunny truth of science, Weber contends that science itself has become so divorced from its subject that it has become shadow puppetry:

> Well, who today views science in such a manner? Today youth feels rather the reverse: the intellectual constructions of science constitute an unreal realm of artificial abstractions, with which their bony hands seek to grasp the blood-and-the-sap of true life without ever catching up with it. But here in life, in what for Plato was the play of shadows on the walls of the cave, genuine reality is pulsating; and the rest are derivatives of life, lifeless ghosts, and nothing else (Weber 1968: 299–300).

In this instance, Weber conflates the theoretical rationality of Platonic idealism and the formal rationality of modern science, which was a descendent of Aristotelian naturalism. His argument that science has become divorced from its natural objects in the sensual realm, would, in a traditional interpretation of Plato, be a positive step. But for Weber, the freedom promised by both the theoretical rationality of the Axial revolution and its child, the formal rationality of Enlightenment science, in fact became enslaving.

In his classic work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber described the logical conclusion of this process by using the famous metaphor of the *stahlhartes Gehäuse* (Iron Cage) to describe this disenchanted modern world's secular materialism:

> In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the "saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment." But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage (Weber 1958: 181).

The rationalized bureaucracies of social order that care only for material things were for Weber the inevitable consequence of the "Spirit of Capitalism" born from Puritan asceticism. The formal rationality of the economic order, with its efficient mechanisms of production, had become a model for the whole of culture, making human beings into cogs in a machine, stripping from them the significance of life. Weber described this end result as:

> mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved" (ibid.: 182).[1]

It is the illusion of progress that maintains this system of slavery. Those chained to the wall of the cave truly believe in the reality of the shadows, but never know the true light of the sun.

Though Weber only outlined the final steps of disenchantment in *The Protestant Ethic* and its consequences in "Science as a Vocation," he argued that this intellectual bondage was not simply the product of the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the result of a process of increasing rationalization "which has continued to exist in Occidental culture for millennia" (Weber 1968: 298). He asserted that the beginnings of this process were rooted in the elimination of "all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin" by the Hebrew prophetic and Hellenistic scientific traditions (Weber 1958: 105). The process of rationalization by which this disenchantment occurred was a major theme throughout all of Weber's works, and was especially prominent in *Religionssoziologie* (*The Sociology of Religion*), which was published as Chapter VI of his *magnum opus, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (*Economy and Society*). Weber's primary argument is that the processes of formal and theoretical rationalization occur within the sphere of religion due to the increasing transcendence of the divine and the purely ethical justification that is left in its wake. As a result, all forms of salvation ultimately become rationalized.

The starting point for all of Weber's roads to salvation is ecstasy, "the distinctive subjective condition that notably represents or mediates charisma," which Weber defines as:

> a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader…It is very often though of as resting on magical powers (Weber 1968: 48).

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[1] Stephen Kalberg has translated this as "mechanized ossification" rather than Parsons' "petrification." This translation more adequately conveys the metaphor of the death which Weber uses to describe the disenchanted world of the Iron Cage (Weber 2001: 124).

For Weber, charisma is a form of authority, wielded alike by magicians, shamans, gurus, prophets, demagogues, and saviors. Weber's analysis of charisma is primarily based on its quality as a this-worldly mode of authority. He says that on the basis of charisma that "the individual concerned is treated as a leader." This treatment is based upon recognition of the leader's divine gift, which inspires loyalty and obedience from followers, granting the leader legitimacy. Indeed, it is the *duty* of the chosen followers to recognize and therefore legitimate the authority of the charismatic individual. Though this devotion may be upheld by an absolute trust, the charismatic leader can lose this trust if his powers or gifts fail him. This legitimacy rests, then, not solely within the charismatic leader, but within the relationship created between leader and follower(s). Weber argues that this recognition is freely given, arising out of "the conception that it is the duty of those who have been called to a charismatic mission to recognize its quality and act accordingly" (ibid.: 49). Here we find obscured an important point: that it is not simply the charismatic personality to which the follower feels a duty, but to the charismatic *mission.* If charisma is recognized for what it truly is: a divine gift, then the true follower sees past the recipient and to the giver. True recognition entails an understanding of what the giver wishes the recipient to do with the gift. True followers feel the calling just as strongly as the leader, though they may have differing interpretations of the mission (Jesus and Judas, for example). Nonetheless, the charismatic leader's gift grants him/her with a claim to primacy of its interpretation.

What is the nature of the charismatic mission? According to Weber, due to its otherworldly character, charisma always exhibits an antinomian quality, resisting this-wordly conventions and the especially the processes of formal rationalization. The "mission" thus represents a "revolutionary force" (ibid.: 52) wherever it is found. Weber continues:

> Charisma may involve a subjective or internal reorientation born out of suffering, conflicts, or enthusiasm. It may then result in a radical alteration of the central system of attitudes and directions of action with a completely new orientation of all attitudes toward the different problems and structures of the "world" (ibid.: 53–54).

Thus charisma is always associated with freedom from the strictures of external bonds. Gerth and Mills go so far as to say that the concept of charisma serves Weber as "a metaphysical vehicle of man's freedom in history" (Weber 1946: 72). Prophetic charisma, which characterizes all

of the soteriological traditions, is in fact born out of just such a reorientation. To these traditions, the charismatic mission is an articulation of the tension between the transcendent and mundane through the gift of prophecy.[2] The psychological and social conflict between empirical reality and the system of meaning derived through prophetic revelation leads to the fulfillment of the mission in the attempt to alleviate or eliminate this tension by means of a revolutionary transformation of this-worldly order to conform to the otherworldly model, i.e., salvation.

However, prior to all other forms of charisma and their attendant authority structures is this charisma in its pure form as magical power. Pure charisma is the force behind magic, and is tied to a worldview of immanence and enchantment. The divine is manifested through the material, not separated from it. The magician is the person who cultivates this charisma through ecstasy, and thus has it permanently available for his disposal (Weber 1963: 3). Others must resort to drugs, music, dance, and/or sexuality to attain this state. When this is done in a communal form, it is orgiastic. The goal of this activity is self-deification, which Weber describes as "the incarnation within man of a supernatural being" (ibid.: 158), the ultimate form of worldly enchantment.

Charisma contains a sense of potentiality for change—it is flexible, not rigid. Charisma overtly challenges the formal rationalization of the bureaucratic authority structures of modernity, which are the latest manifestation of the disenchantment of the world. Because the modern era has defined itself largely in opposition to the irrational magical thinking of both pre-modern and non-Western cultures, Randall Styers points out that magic "has proved an important medium with which to contest the hegemonic social structures and norms of modernity" (Styers 2004: 20). Weber continues:

> Charismatic authority is thus specifically outside the realm of everyday routine and the profane sphere. In this respect, it is sharply opposed both to rational, and particularly bureaucratic authority, and to traditional authority, whether in its patriarchal, patrimonial, or any other form. Both rational and traditional authority are specifically forms of every-day routine control of action; while the charismatic type is the direct antithesis of this (Weber 1968: 51).

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[2] Weber makes the distinction between ethical and exemplary prophecy, the former being characterized by the Zoroastrian and Abrahamic traditions, the latter by the Dharmic traditions (Weber 1963: 55).

The Routinization of Charisma

Weber argues that this pure, magical charisma cannot survive over a long period of time. "In its pure form, charismatic authority may be said to exist only in the process of originating. It cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both" (ibid.: 54). Because of its transitory nature, charismatic authority undergoes the process of routinization, thus losing its tension with routine structures. The paradox of charisma is that it must change to survive, but in changing, it loses its essential liminal quality.

Routinization occurs as a result of the ideal and material interests of the followers in the continuation of the community and communal relationships after the initial phase of the charismatic mission is complete or disrupted. It is the process by which the successor(s) appropriate political and economic controls and regulate future recruitment into the organization. Weber highlights the most explicit example of this in the problem of succession—after the death or disappearance of the charismatic leader, how does one determine who is qualified to lead the movement and to carry on the mission? Weber lists six possible solutions: 1) by virtue of their personal qualities; 2) by divination; 3) by appointment or designation of the charismatic leader; 4) by appointment or designation of the administrative staff; 5) by heredity; and 6) by ritual transmission of the office (ibid.: 55–57). Along with the question of succession go a whole host of other administrative decisions that result in the creation of a fiscal organization and the development of offices and institutional structures to administer the organization. Although these may be in service to the charismatic mission, their organization inevitably adheres to traditional or rational principles, for these best serve the ideal and material interests of the administrative staff.

Charisma and Routinization in Wicca

Helen Berger, following James Beckford's discussion of late modern religion, concluded that because of the fluidity of organizational membership, the lack of a uniform dogma, and its skepticism towards authority and organizational hierarchy, the Weberian model of routinization does not seem to be applicable to Wicca.[3] While these factors are all

[3] Instead, Berger adopts a model of homogenization formulated by DiMaggio and

sound reasons for this conclusion, I hypothesize that the cause for the breakdown of the routinization model in this case goes even deeper. Wiccans, unlike the followers of soteriological religions, do not depend upon the charisma of a prophetic breakthrough to assert their tension with this-worldly order in favor of an otherworldly order. Instead, Wicca explicitly denies soteriology and eschatology—it does not enable the individual to ultimately transcend the world of nature or be liberated from the perceived evils or sufferings of this world, nor does it look forward to an apocalyptic reshaping of the world (York 2003: 157–160). On the contrary, Wicca represents a critique of the worldviews that have engendered the need for soteriological and eschatological hopes. Although this has in the West typically manifested as a rejection of Judaism, Christianity, and secular materialism, this philosophical critique is much more far-reaching, because it denies the ontological foundations of almost all contemporary religiosity and non-religiosity.

Wiccans believe in a fundamentally different vision of spirituality and religion, rejecting not just an explicitly Christian view of the world and history, but all worldviews characterized by Karl Jaspers as part of the Axial Age (Jaspers 1953: 1). That is, Wicca denies the "basic tension between the transcendent and mundane orders" (Eisenstadt 1982: 294) that manifested itself from 800–200 BCE in the crucial stage of development of many major religio-philosophical complexes, including Judaism in Israel, the philosophical movements of Greece, Zoroastrianism in Persia, Vedantic Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism in India, and Confucianism and Daoism in China. The effects of the Axial Age continued in the formation of both Christianity and Islam, whose missionary zeal quickly spread the Axial revolution to all parts of the globe.

Powell (1983). The mechanisms for such homogenization are coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism:

> Organizations experience coercive isomorphism by responding to pressure from other organizations on which they depend, or to government regulations. Mimetic isomorphism develops because of the organization's uncertainty of its technologies, goals, or solutions. Organizations, therefore, follow the lead of others that appear to be successful. The third mechanism, normative isomorphism, is the result of professionalization, which through the educational process, professional organizations, and networks helps to create and spread similarities among organizations (Berger 1999: 50).

The ontological tension between the transcendental and mundane orders "poses the question of the ways in which the chasm . . . can be bridged. This gives rise to the problem of salvation" (ibid.: 297). Wicca, by contrast, does not exhibit this problem. It is explicitly non-soteriological, searching not for a way to bridge such a chasm, but for epistemologies by which to demonstrate that this gap is fallacious. In other words, the charisma of the Wiccan movement is built into the very denial of such a tension, without denying a distinction between the two realms. Wiccans attempt a constructive synthesis of otherworldly and this-worldly orders which, they assert, does not depend upon any single individual or organization. Instead, Wicca rests on the fundamental philosophical critique of the Axial tension and all heretofore proposed resolutions of that tension.

Thus Wicca differs from the Axial traditions in that its charisma operates according to Weber's magical interpretation of "pure" charisma, not as the prophetic type of charisma he describes in *The Sociology of Religion*. That is, even though Wicca exhibits some of the characteristics of routinization from its very beginnings (hierarchical leadership structure, degrees of initiation, etc.), these were not formed out of an attempt to institutionalize a previously charismatic movement in order to secure the political or economic advantages of an administrative staff. On the contrary, the insistence on small decentralized coven organization (Gardner 1954: 114–115) and the injunction against accepting money for the Craft (Gardner 1959: 24–25) prevented this sort of institutionalization from being able to occur on a large scale. This charisma is therefore not manifested through authority structures resulting from the tension or its resolution, but through the magical power that belies the tension. Magic provides the means and the end of the charismatic mission: to re-enchant the world.

Dance, Sing, Feast, Make Music and Love: Magical Ritual as Embodied Epistemology

According to Weber, "the distinctive subjective condition that notably represents or mediates charisma," is ecstasy. In the Wiccan context, this ecstasy manifests itself not in the inspired words of a prophet, but in the context of magical rituals which are specifically designed to bring about the ecstatic state.

These rituals may be part of the individual magician's secret lore, but in Wicca, they typically replicate the collective ecstatic practices Weber refers to as "orgiastic." A qualifier is in order: "orgy" in this context does not necessarily solely imply licentious revelry, though this may be a component. The Greek ὄργιον was a secret rite among many Mystery traditions, but especially associated with Dionysos, the god most associated with the ecstatic state (Herodotus: 2.81). The word is cognate with ἔργον, meaning work, and in a religious context, service or sacrifice. This is significant because Wiccans often refer to the performance of magic as "doing work" or "working for" the stated goal. Great effort is involved in attaining the ecstatic state which is necessary for magic. Gerald Gardner says:

> One must always remember what magic is and how it works. It is not a case of pressing a button or on turning a tap. It is work, and often hard work. For most things it would be easier to produce the results by ordinary methods of working in the usual mundane way; and it is, above all, not a way to make money. But there are just certain things which cannot be obtained by ordinary methods, and then it works…As the witch told the psychical research man: "To do magic you must work yourself into a frenzy; the more intense you feel, the more chance of success." You simply can't get the required number of people to do it just for fun, or if it's likely to come off naturally; the chance are then usually 80–90 per cent against (Gardner 1959: 104–105).

Wiccans believe that through this "work" they can raise energy from their bodies to be directed towards their magical goals. The raising of this energy is tied to the shifting into an ecstatic state of consciousness. In Wiccan covens, group "workings" are directed by the High Priestess and/or the High Priest into a "cone of power," visualized as a cone of energy encompassing the circumference of the circle, tapering to a point high above the center of the circle. Each witch contributes his/her energy to the cone, and as it grows in intensity, the consciousness of the participants becomes more ecstatic. When this ecstatic state finally reaches a peak, the ritual leader gives a signal and the energy is released and the cone is "sent" towards its goal (ideally, the coven eventually attains such a level of attunement to the magical energy that the signal of the leader is no longer necessary).

According to many Wiccans, the process of raising energy causes a feedback loop that feeds this ecstatic state—the more energy raised, the more altered the consciousness, and the more altered the consciousness, the easier it becomes to raise energy. Hence, working magic in

groups is thought to be more effective, as the feedback of the ecstatic energy is multiplied.

This state of ecstasy can be achieved through a variety of techniques, as is attested in shamanic cultures throughout the world. Achieving a state of *collective* ecstasy, however, requires a slightly narrower range of options in order to time the working correctly. The most common of these techniques are encompassed by the line in the Charge of the Goddess that enjoins witches to "dance, sing, feast, make music and love, all in my praise." By doing so, the Goddess continues, the results are simultaneously "ecstasy in the spirit" and "joy on earth." But these are not simply the results, but the methods of magic as well.

These methods represent the attempt to form epistemologies by which to demonstrate the fallacy of the separation of the otherworldly and this-worldly realms. These techniques are able to perform this function precisely because they mediate this gap through their embodied nature: they are tied to the body in this world, while allowing ecstatic access to otherworldly power, energy, or charisma. Through embodied ritual praxis, magic allows its practitioners to participate in the immanence of the divine in this world. These techniques, by seemingly working through the body and bypassing the rational mind, subvert the formal rationalization process that has led to disenchantment.

The primary techniques that Wiccans use to raise energy and work magic are through a combination of dancing, chanting, singing, and/or drumming. These sorts of auditory and kinesthetic rhythmic activities are typical of those that are used to induce trance or altered states of consciousness cross-culturally (Locke and Kelly 1985: 30). Margaret Murray notes this in her preface to Gardner's *Witchcraft Today*:

> The ritual dance, whether performed as an act of worship or as the expression of a prayer, is characterized by its rhythmic action…All the movements are rhythmic, and the accompaniment is a chant or performed by percussion instruments by which the rhythm is strongly marked. The rhythmic movements, the rhythmic sounds, and the sympathy of numbers all engaged in the same actions, induce a feeling of exhilaration, which can increase to a form of intoxication. This stage is often regarded by the worshippers as a special divine favour (Gardner 1954: 12).

Murray thus links the phenomenon of the "divine favour" or otherworldly charisma to the ecstatic state reached through the rhythmic performance. This seems to occur (at least partly) through the mechanism of "auditory driving," first proposed by Andrew Neher in 1961 (Neher 1961: 449–451 and 1962: 151–160). In Neher's limited study,

the brainwaves of all ten of his subjects entrained to match tempos of 3 Hz, 4 Hz (theta range), 6 Hz, and 8 Hz (alpha range) beats when exposed to them for a duration of only 40 seconds. Gilbert Rouget faults Neher for not being able to reproduce the dramatic effects of trance in a ritual setting, but this was well beyond Neher's limited goal within a small laboratory study of a relatively miniscule duration (Rouget 1985).

However, Rouget rightly points out that the link between music and trance is not causal or deterministic. There are a number of individual and cultural factors that influence the physiological and experiential dimensions of trance. Primary among these factors are attention and intention. Of course not everyone listening to a piece of music or drumming is going to fall into a trance. These sorts of shifts in consciousness are in the majority of cases, conscious acts.[4] The more attention that is paid to a stimulus, the more that stimulus will affect the consciousness of the observer. This can be witnessed in a mild form in the light trances we engage in every day when we are engrossed in an activity and lose our awareness of the outside world.

Wiccans teach that the success of magic is dependent upon intention, and train initiates in a number of methods of focusing their attention on the "work" at hand. The first among these is the technique of "grounding and centering," that is, clearing the mind and rooting oneself in the here and now. The second step in focusing the attention is in creating the sacred space. The sacred space of the magic circle is considered by Wiccans to be a place "between the worlds," on the boundary between the ordinary mundane space and the space of the divine. Here the ritual participants may communicate with both this-worldly and otherworldly realms. The sacred space of the magic circle serves practical as well as symbolic purposes—it serves a protective function—keeping out negative energies, as well as containing the magical energies raised within it. The "casting" of the circle thus further focuses the attention of the participants upon their goal. Through repetition, the steps involved in forming the circle themselves become visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and olfactory "triggers" that focus the attention of Wiccans and help to put them into trance states. Finally, during the raising of energy, Wiccans are trained to focus their attention on the stated goal of the magical working. For a healing spell, for instance, they would visualize the target as healthy and pain-free. They would hold that image firmly in their

[4] Exceptions might include photosensitive epileptics, for instance.

minds as they chanted, danced, and drummed to raise the energy into the cone of power, which would then be directed towards the visualized goal. These techniques for focusing the attention therefore enable the achievement of the ecstatic trance.

The embodied nature of these techniques—their engagement of the breath, the voice, and the hands—further focus attention away from the mundane concerns of the mind, and create a feedback loop that can send the participant further into trance. Music alone affects both brain and body:

> All the studies that locate the reception of music in special areas of the frontal lobe ignore the massive reentrant links that trigger neuronal activity in many specialized brain areas and down our spinal cord. Not only do we hear in our right and left frontal cortexes, we hear with our skin…Listening to music activates many areas of the brain/body (Becker 1994: 45–46).

It is worth remembering that the word "enchant" comes from the French "chanter"—to sing. To enchant is to cast a spell with sound, specifically with song. Music can bring one under the sway of the magical—through sound the world is literally re-enchanted.

When dancing is added to the mix, and the body is engaged in movement to the auditory input, the cortical rhythms are more forcefully driven. Reclaiming Witch M. Macha Nightmare, says "dancing is real important. It always 'sends' me [into trance]…it gets me out of my head, away from 'talking self'" (quoted in Magliocco 2004: 171). Ecstatic dance eventually produces what Eugene D'Aquili describes as "an intensely pleasurable, ineffable experience" (D'Aquili 1985: 22).

Once achieved, the energy of this collective ecstasy, envisioned and shaped by Wiccans into a "cone of power," is directed towards the goal of the spell. The energy raised is both otherworldly and this-worldly in nature: it is raised through physical means, from the bodies of the participants, but the energy itself is supersensual and *a priori*, like Mauss and Hubert's *mana* (Mauss and Hubert 1972: 144–146). The gods and other spirits are asked for their assistance, and the magical rite takes place in the circle which is "between the worlds." However, as noted above, these goals towards which energy are directed are most often this-worldly in nature: healing, prosperity, fertility, etc.

A Religion of Priests: The Democratization of Charisma

Because the whole coven participates in magical techniques of collective ecstasy, Wiccan charisma is not limited to a leader or leaders, but rather democratized, so that it never has a chance to become "routinized." As noted earlier, this democratization does not always show itself in structural terms—many Wiccan groups still maintain hierarchical degree systems, and specified ritual leaders. But the practice of Wicca is participatory, not spectatory. Even though the High Priest and High Priestess may be active in "speaking" roles, the performance of the rite depends upon the active ritual and magical participation of all present. Each participant is supposed to contribute his/her magical "energy" into the casting of the circle, the summoning of the elements, the invocation of the gods, and any magical "workings" that are performed.

Furthermore, most Wiccan traditions uphold the idea that Wicca is a "religion of clergy," that is, every initiate is a priest/ess for him/herself. This seems to be based upon a radical version of Protestant philosophy of the "priesthood of the believers" in which everyone has their own "direct line" to divinity. But it also reflects the nature of the initiatory mystery tradition that forms the original basis and core of Wicca: the initiate is ordained, given the titles of priest/ess and witch. There is no laity in the Church of magic, as Durkheim recognized:

> But what is especially important is that when these societies of magic are formed, they do not include all the adherents to magic, but only the magicians; the laymen, if they may be so called, that is to say, those for whose profit the rites are celebrated, in fine, those who represent the worshippers in the regular cults, are excluded (Durkheim 1915: 60–61).

So even though a distinction is made in this structural authority, it is in the actual practice of magic that charisma is located, and it is through that structural authority that the magical charisma is passed on from generation to generation without the need for prophetic revivals. This is a modification of Weber's concept of *amtcharisma*, the charisma of office. But there is not a single officeholder who embodies the charismatic mission, for all initiates are invested with this authority.

Possible Routes to Routinization in Wicca

Nonetheless, these systems of structural authority can and have become the sources of contestation regarding the traditionalization and

rationalization of Wicca. The coven structure which Gardner promoted was small and hierarchical: the coven (with a theoretical maximum of 13 members) was run by a High Priestess, who was assisted by a High Priest. While every member of the coven was involved in the ritual, the primary responsibilities lay with the High Priestess and High Priest. Therefore these particular offices have the potential to become loci of structural authority which may undermine the democratization of the magical charisma and lead to the routinization of the charisma towards personal agendas rather than the charismatic mission. This particular phenomenon, characterized by the gradual evolution of authority from influence and charisma, is labeled "High Priest(ess) syndrome" by practitioners.[5] "High Priest(ess) syndrome" demonstrates the fragile nature of Wiccan charisma, but because this is recognized as the pathological exception rather than the rule, provides evidence that the "normal" state of such charisma is democratic, magical, and non-routinized.

Another such locus of conflict lies in the struggle between the modern concept of the individual and the premodern value placed on the collective. This manifests itself in a number of different ways within Wicca, and is directly related to the process of routinization. Because Wicca individually invests its charisma in every initiate, and this charisma is invested and reinforced through the magical work of the coven, there are inevitably power struggles within individual covens, traditions, and larger organizations, which have been dubbed "Witch Wars."

Because of such leadership struggles and differences over practice, other "denominations" of Wicca soon emerged after Gardner. Alex Sanders began his own "Alexandrian" tradition in the 1960s. Raymond Buckland brought Wicca to the United States in 1963, and after he split from Gardner, he formed his own branch of Wicca known as Seax, or Saxon Wicca. Other traditions of Wicca continue to spring up across North America and Europe.

Eclecticism: The Protestantization of Wicca

Many of these new groups attempted to improve upon the Gardnerian model by becoming more eclectic, both in their rituals as well as in organizational structure. The term "eclectic coven" which is defined

[5] Susan Greenwood provides a great example of this behavior in the story of "Sarah" and her coven, (2000: 138–144).

in opposition to the "traditional coven" (i.e., Gardnerian, Alexandrian, and others), indicates that the group performs new and different rituals in each circle. Many of the feminist Wiccan groups, in attempt to do away with outmoded "patriarchal" hierarchy, adopted a rotating leadership model, whereby the ritual would be led by a different member each month. This model was promoted by Starhawk in *The Spiral Dance* (1989: 51–52), and soon became popular within mainstream (dual-gender) eclectic Wiccan groups as well.

These movements collectively represent a Reformation of traditional Wicca, and an attempt to become free from its perceived routinization. The common complaints about traditional Wicca: that it is secretive, hierarchical, and exclusionary, and that rituals are performed by rote, arise out of legitimate concerns that the charisma of the movement is susceptible to becoming institutionalized in the structural authority rather than being funneled towards the charismatic mission, echo the concerns of Luther about the sixteenth-century Church. Therefore eclecticism attempts to dislocate the charisma of Wicca from a specific office or ritual (through which the charisma is magically passed) and instead diversify the charisma by means of creativity and heterogeneity.

However, the organizational solutions to these issues, like the Reformation churches, have their own set of challenges. First, many eclectic covens retain the offices of High Priestess and High Priest, even if ritual leadership rotates within the group. In others, experimentation with rotating leadership fails due to apathy, and the same people end up essentially filling the roles of High Priestess and High Priest by default. Because of these factors, or due to others (lack of time, energy, creativity), these ritual leaders begin to resort to what Berger refers to as "mimetic isomorphism," the appropriation of information (i.e., ritual and liturgical components) from other successful organizations or published material that results in decreased spontaneity and creativity.

Eclectic Wicca is characterized by a creative approach to ritual and liturgy that does not necessarily require that its practitioners be "believers in the same god or observers of the same cult" (Durkheim 1915: 60). For instance, one Sabbat the coven may invoke the Celtic deities Cerridwen and Herne for a Samhain ritual, and the next Sabbat, the Egyptian Isis and Horus for a Yule ritual. Many eclectic covens encourage members to choose their own patron/matron deities to "work with" on an individual basis. If the coven works on a rotating leadership model, the members will most often invoke their own patron/matron deities when it is their turn to perform the Sabbat or esbat. Of course,

this can be justified through the theologies of hypostatic duotheism, henotheistic polytheism, or even Gaian pantheism. But because these interpretations are not anchored in a particular cultic practice (other than the barest outlines that characterize "Wiccan" ritual), investigation of these questions can slip into speculative metaphysics or a quasi-scientific experimentation. The lack of a cohesive membership, as defined by initiation into the tradition, and the lack of a body of traditional magical and liturgical material excusive to those initiates, undermines the social cohesion that allows Wicca to create a moral community that is, *contra* Durkheim, a Church of magic. Although there are no reliable statistics on retention within Wicca (as there are no reliable statistics on membership in general, cf., Cowan 2005: 84–87; 194–196), anecdotal evidence suggest that this is one reason that some practitioners abandon Wicca, or at least coven membership.

Solitary Wiccan Practitioners

It was the revolution instigated by the publication of Scott Cunningham's *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* in 1988 that changed Wicca into a much more self-oriented movement. Unlike previous manuals on Wicca which made it possible for individuals to practice Wicca alone (e.g., Starhawk 1979, Buckland 1986), Cunningham's work was explicitly written for an audience who wished to practice Wicca without the guidance of a coven, and even to "self-initiate." Due to the success of Cunningham's work, hundreds of similar manuals have been published, mostly by Llewellyn Publications in St. Paul Minnesota (who also published Cunningham). Many Wiccans who could not find covens, or those who left covens after being dissatisfied, used these manuals to become solitary Wiccan practitioners.

This solitary phenomenon can be partly understood as a backlash against "High Priest(ess) Syndrome" and "Witch Wars," but is primarily the result of the explosive growth of the movement and its incapacity to deal with the number of seekers due to its lack of institutionalization. Although solitary practice of Wicca is the logical result of this Reformation, solitaries cannot claim to be part of the Church of magic: "The magician has no need of uniting himself to his fellows to practice his art" (Durkheim 1915: 60). Nonetheless, the majority of those who identify as Wiccans are solitary practitioners, and the trend appears to be growing. *The Pagan Census* found that 50.9% of those surveyed

practiced as solitaries, 9.2% practiced with a spiritual partner, and 32.2% practiced with a group (Berger, Leach, and Shaffer 2003: 129). A 2005 poll by the Covenant of the Goddess of over 6500 Wiccans and Neopagans found that 62% of Pagans and Wiccans surveyed practiced as solitaries, and an additional 12% practiced with the "community." Only 26% reported practicing with a coven.[6]

Commodification

Although the solitary trend seems to point in a non-routinizing direction, it also is indicative of the pressures towards greater homogenization. The popularization and commercialization of Wicca have come under increasing scrutiny, as hundreds of manuals like Cunningham's have flooded the shelves of both occult and mainstream bookstores in the past 15 years. Berger has argued that these publications, as well as the sharing of materials through the internet, Wiccan festivals, and larger organizations, have led to standardization and the loss of creativity (Berger 1999: 100–122). Eclectic solitary practice makes one more susceptible to the influence of mimetic isomorphism, specifically embodied in a commodification of spiritual practice. Unlike the so-called "Cafeteria Catholic," however, the eclectic solitary Wiccan does not choose from among a predetermined set of options, but rather shops for the ingredients of her spiritual practice herself: she is a "supermarket Wiccan." Furthermore, she is constantly refining her "recipes" and "menus" to suit her own tastes. It is a "do it yourself" approach to religiosity. This is in fact an inverted version of Durkheim and Weber's prototypical magician. For them, a magician is not engaged in a religious practice, but rather an economic one: peddling her spells and potions to clients in exchange for material wealth. The eclectic solitary Wiccan, however, is typically the consumer, not the vendor.

As this ethic of commodified spirituality has developed (and it is by no means limited to Wiccans), an entire industry (led by Llewellyn, among others) has sought to supply it with material goods as well.

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[6] *http://www.cog.org/05poll/poll_results.html.* Helen Berger, one of the co-authors of *The Pagan Census*, attributes the differences in these statistics to two factors: 1) the COG poll was conducted solely online, where solitaries are more likely to be active, and 2) that the number of solitaries has likely increased in the decade between the time of the Pagan Census (data gathered from 1993–1995) and the 2005 COG poll (personal communication).

Looking at the Azure Green catalog,[7] for instance, one finds an assortment of books, tools, statues, jewelry, crystal balls, candles, incense, oils, stones, herbs, robes, tarot cards, and even bumper stickers. Every major city has a handful of brick-and-mortar stores which sell these sorts of supplies. On a visit to any Pagan festival, you will walk past rows of vendor tents selling similar wares. Douglas Ezzy refers to this phenomenon as commodified Witchcraft, which he defines as "a set of products inscribed with beliefs and practices broadly consistent with the religion of Witchcraft, but for which the dominant institutional goal is profit" (Ezzy 2001: 34).

This raises puzzling questions about Wiccan relations to materiality. On one hand, this is a result of a relation to materiality that is different than the disenchanted world. In the Wiccan worldview, these objects are (at least potentially) enchanted: imbued with spiritual power, meaning, and use. But because they are being bought and sold within the consumerist paradigm of mainstream culture in which one's material goods define one's identity, their very existence derives from disenchantment. While the retailers of such merchandise are almost always fellow Wiccans or Neopagans, the manufacturers may or may not be, and thus may not ascribe any value to these objects other than their profit potential. So are Wiccans re-enchanting disenchanted commodities by using them in sacred ways, or are Wiccans feeding the disenchanted culture by the commodification of supposedly sacred objects?

Styers also points out the ways in which the magical worldview undermines the economic authority that depends on a rationalized, disenchanted view of the material world. Weber argues that in the modern world material goods have gained "an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history" (Weber 1958: 181), but in the capitalistic authority of the post-Calvin society, the material derives its meaning not from any inherent value, worth, or sacredness, nor even from its signification of a spiritually elevated status, but from its potential for service to the profit motive—its ability to create more wealth. Although a side-effect of wealth creation may be the improvement of human quality of life, this is not the explicit goal. Thus material values are caught in a self-validating feedback loop with no external value referent.

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[7] A mail order and online Pagan supply store based in Middlefield, MA.

Because magic is able to invest material objects with an external value referent of otherworldly power and hence meaning (e.g., amulets, talismans, ritual tools, etc.), the meanings of these objects serve as a contrast to the assigned meanings of the commodified objects of the hegemonic capitalist discourse.

> In its brazen display of the machinations through which objects are invested with meaning, it [magic] stands as an overt threat to the mystifications of the commodity form. At the core of magic we find the prospect of other possible relations to materiality, relations that threaten both to expose the fetishism of the commodity and to disrupt its hegemony (Styers 2004: 215).

In addition, the magical worldview of an interconnected natural world that stands in homologous relation to otherworldly values affirms the inherent value of the material beyond its service to the economic system, thus further undermining the default commodification of the material.

In an enchanted economy, material objects should fulfill the needs (either material or non-material) of the user. In the disenchanted economy typified by consumerism, however, material goods are not designed and marketed to satisfy needs, but to "stimulate desire, but to never fully satisfy that desire" (Ezzy 2001: 38). The example that Ezzy gives for this, however, is not of goods being marketed to Wiccans, as mentioned above, but of a book of love spells being sold via the internet (and then causing the buyer to also have to purchase the spell ingredients). This is a commodification of the magical practice of Witchcraft itself, much like Durkheim and Weber's fee-for-service magicians (albeit in a new and improved do-it-yourself format). This is an important distinction, however. No longer is magic something performed only by the professional under secretive and mysterious conditions (as Mauss and Hubert contend), but is something that anyone can learn to do, albeit for a price. Because magic is perceived as a way to fulfill all desires, its commodification can potentially open a pathway to a perpetual cycle of desire stimulation and consumption. This is exactly the sort of charge leveled against the New Age by many Wiccans—that it is a collection of business models rather than a religious practice. And this is the primary motivation behind the injunction against taking money for teaching Wicca. Commodification of goods or services is acceptable—commodification of knowledge trivializes and hence routinizes the magical charisma of Wicca.

Arguments Against and For Full-Time Wiccan Clergy

Another potential "route to routinization" comes in the form Berger refers to as "normative isomorphism": the professionalization of roles and offices which "through the educational process, professional organizations, and networks helps to create and spread similarities among organizations" (Berger 1999: 50). In a religious context, this means the development of a professional clerical class. There has been a debate for sometime within the Wiccan community as to whether or not full-time paid clergy would be desirable. Currently High Priestesses and High Priests (in both traditional and eclectic groups) are unpaid and typically employed in other professions. As noted above, the traditional Wiccan view is that money and religion should not mix: taking money for the teaching of Wicca or the practice of magic is highly frowned upon. Of course, many practitioners charge for "services" such as Tarot readings, but the suggestion of paid clergy has been very controversial. If everyone is his/her own Priest/ess, then the need for a paid clergy is obviated.

Other arguments against the idea of full-time Wiccan clergy fall into two categories: first, that this would create a divide between clergy and laity that does not currently exist, and that the clergy would exercise undue authority over their congregation, and second, that this would lead to a loss of the intimacy and spontaneity of Wicca, i.e., that Wicca would become congregational and thereby routinized.

Others argue that professional clergy would be beneficial to Wicca. Some point to ancient Pagan traditions as models in which there were temple-complexes presided over by priests and priestesses. These individuals performed rituals and met the spiritual needs of their communities, and for this they were duly compensated. In addition to the historical argument, some argue that a paid clergy would give Wicca an official recognition it currently lacks. Barrette argues that professional clergy would lend:

> greater credibility with "mainstream" organizations and make it much harder for them to dismiss us as "inconsequential" or "not a real religion" in the future. As things stand now, Pagans face unfair discrimination in areas where a professional clergy would make all the difference in the world (Barrette 1997).

A paid clergy would give Wicca credibility within larger institutions by providing an authoritative voice for what is necessarily a polyvocal movement.

The primary argument given for a professional clergy concerns the need for clergy to have certain qualifications and skills which the current unpaid clergy do not possess due to the lack of adequate training and the part-time nature of the job. Wiccans are traditionally considered to be clergy after they are initiated, which typically occurs after a training process that lasts approximately a year. Many traditions divide the training into three degrees: the first is granted upon initiation, the second after additional training, and a third after even more training. At the third degree, one is given the title High Priest/ess and is granted the right to form their own group, if they so desire. The training process typically consists of instruction and theology and ritual, although some groups additionally include training in areas such as counseling and group dynamics.

This process, however, does not typically confer ordination in the legal sense. Other Pagan groups such as the Church of All Worlds (CAW) and the Druidic Ar nDraiocht Fein (ADF, also known as A Druid Fellowship) have their own training systems which end in a legal ordination. Both of these paths concentrate focus on "Support Services" as well as ritual and theology.

Wiccans may be able to obtain legal credentials through the Universal Life Church, which offers free (and even online) ordination to anyone who agrees with their statement of belief. In addition, the Covenant of the Goddess (a nationwide Wiccan umbrella organization) extends an option for legal ordination for the recognized High Priestesses and High Priests of their member groups. Although some Wiccans have gained legal ordination through such groups, very few have gone through the rigorous process of a seminary education. Although they may be very well versed in theology and ritual, they may not have the pastoral skills to deal with group dynamics, counseling, crisis management, conflict resolution, etc. Inanna Arthen, a Wiccan who graduated from Harvard Divinity School, says many Wiccans:

> demand the kinds of social support other churches have had traditionally…Who among us is trained to deal with someone who's suicidal, or dying of AIDS in a hospice? With someone who is desperate? (Jennifer 1995).

The need for such skills was not as apparent in the past when covens were few and far between. However, because of the explosive growth of Wicca, these issues have become more prevalent and more complex. This situation was so apparent that in 1998, a Wiccan High Priestess

named Amber K published *Covencraft*, a 500-page manual for Wiccan Priests and Priestesses (not just for coven leaders, she says emphatically) detailing the minutiae of running a coven. The book includes chapters such as Group Dynamics; Communications, Cooperation, and Conflict; Pastoral Counseling; and Education and Training (Amber K. 1998).

The Pagan Census demonstrates the divide in the Pagan and Wiccan communities over issues of full-time clergy and payment for the teaching of Wicca. 50.8% of the general Neopagan population agreed that full-time clergy should be supported by their community, while only 25.4% disagreed, and 23.9% had no opinion or no response. 51.9% of the Wiccan population agreed, 27.2% disagreed, and 20.9% had no opinion or no response (Berger, Leach, and Shaffer 2003: 175). However, when the question was phrased in a different way, the split was closer. In response to the statement "A Witch should not accept money for teaching the Craft," 42.5% of the general Neopagan population agreed, and 41.7% disagreed. The split among Wiccans was wider, with 39.7% agreeing and 47.7% disagreeing. Regardless of these opinions, Berger, Leach, and Shaffer believe that because of the mode of transmission, the amorphous structure, and the unwillingness of practitioners to make large donations, the creation of a paid clergy in the traditional congregational sense is highly unlikely (ibid.: 170).

In fact, a professional class of those trained with such skills is now making its way to the forefront of the movement, trying to gain legitimacy for themselves and for their religion. Some Wiccans, such as Inanna Arthen, are attending mainstream seminaries such as Harvard Divinity School. Pagan seminaries are also appearing, such as the Cherry Hill Seminary in Vermont, which offers ordination through the Communitarian Church. Cherry Hill, however, makes a firm distinction between the roles of priest/ess and minister:

> In Paganism, every person is her or his own priest/ess to her or his own gods within her or his particular tradition. The role of priest/ess is taught in covens, circles, groves or through the direct inspiration of the gods, and no institution or governing body should attempt to intervene in that process. We perceive that there is a distinct difference between priest/ess and minister. CHS defines "minister" as a priest/ess who also is called to the specialized public service of a wider community. Therefore, the focus of CHS is to teach those specialized skills and knowledge necessary for serving in positions of community leadership: as a pastoral counselor, a chaplain, in public relations, as social services liaison, as a minister for public rites of passage, in interfaith work and in any other roles in which s/he will interact with governmental agencies and the non-Pagan community (*http://cherryhillseminary.org/faq.html*).

Cherry Hill's assumption is that all ministers are priest/esses, but not all priest/esses are ministers. This, like Luther's idea of the priesthood of all believers, affirms the idea of the individual's unique connection to the divine, but also recognizes that the role of clergy can (and should) extend beyond this vertical relationship and into the horizontal realm of human relations. Cherry Hill affirms that it can teach the latter skills, while leaving the former to individual covens or traditions. In doing so, it manages to avoid sectarianism and is able to cater to the widest possible audience. In addition, by focusing on the development of ministerial skills that are not in direct confrontation with the predominant Axial worldview (although non-Axial worldviews underlie them), Cherry Hill makes itself more credible to accrediting agencies and potential employers of its graduates.

However, in attempting to maintain this legitimacy, is the practical effect divorcing the role of priest/ess from that of minister? That is, how is the traditional pastoral role of priest/ess integrated with the rational demands of the minister? Weber sees the origin of pastoral care in the magician's role as oracle or diviner:

> Pastoral care . . . has its source in the oracle and in consultations with the diviner or necromancer. The diviner is consulted when sickness or other blows of fate have led to the suspicion that some magical transgression is responsible, making it necessary to ascertain the means by which the aggrieved spirit, demon, or god may be pacified (Weber 1963: 75).

Though most Wiccan priestesses probably wouldn't frame the question in terms of pacifying aggrieved spirits, the means of helping fellow coveners or others who seek them out with life crises may be similar: divining the nature of and solution to the problem by magical means, such as tarot cards, astrology, runes, etc. In some cases the solution may be rational and practical, such as a mediation between two conflicting parties; in others, the solution may be magical, such as a ritual to let go of past grievances and conflicts. Hence, modern Wiccan pastoral care walks a middle path between the fully charismatic magical approach and a fully rationalized ministerial approach. Seminaries like Cherry Hill attempt to give ministerial skills to supplement the charismatic magical and priestly skills that they assume their students already possess. It is then up to the minister to balance these two approaches in their own ministry.

CUUPS

Berger assumes that if Wiccan ministry is to become institutionalized, it will do so through umbrella organizations like the Covenant of the Goddess or Circle Sanctuary. Because it is rooted in the larger institution of the Unitarian Universalist Church, some believe that The Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS) provides an opportunity, a means, and/or a model for the routinization of Wicca and Paganism, specifically the professionalization of a Wiccan or Pagan ministry. CUUPS' Statement of Purpose states:

> The Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans, Inc. exists for the purposes of promoting the practice and understanding of Pagan and Earth-centered spirituality within the Unitarian Universalist Association, enabling networking among Pagan-identified Unitarian Universalists, providing for the outreach of Unitarian Universalism to the broader Pagan community, providing educational materials on Paganism and Earth-centered spirituality for Unitarian Universalist congregations and for the general public, promoting interfaith dialogue, encouraging the development of theological and liturgical materials based on Pagan and Earth-centered religious and spiritual perspectives, encouraging greater use of music, dance, visual arts, poetry, story, and creative ritual in Unitarian Universalist worship and celebration, providing a place or places for gathering and for worship, and fostering healing relationships with the Earth and all of the Earth's children. The purposes of CUUPS include providing support for Pagan identified UU religious professionals and ministerial students (CUUPS Corporate Bylaws Section 3.1).

These goals point towards an institutionalization of what has until now been a movement that in many ways has resisted formalization. Other Wiccan and Pagan umbrella organizations such as the Covenant of the Goddess share the goals of networking, education, interfaith dialogue, and providing places of worship. However, the routinization of Wicca and Paganism within CUUPS occurs in a very particular way: it attempts to incorporate Wicca and Paganism within the institutional structure of the UUA. Nonetheless, CUUPS is an Independent Affiliate of the UUA, and Section 16.2 of the Bylaws states that "Loss of affiliation with the UUA shall not necessarily entail the dissolution of the corporation."

Unlike Wicca, the UUA does have a doctrinal statement of "Principles and Purposes" which defines both the principles and sources of their faith. This statement was adopted by the 1984 and 1985 General Assemblies. While CUUPS does not have a separate doctrinal statement

equivalent to the UUA's "Principles and Purposes," two statements of this document are presented throughout CUUPS literature as defining its own doctrine. The first is the seventh Principle/Purpose of the UUA, which affirms and promotes: "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." The second is the Sixth Source of the UU tradition: "spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature." While the first statement pre-dates the creation of CUUPS, it was CUUPS itself that pressed for the adoption of the Sixth Source at the UU General Assembly in 1995. Nonetheless, both of these statements form the basis for the interpretation of Pagan doctrines within CUUPS.

In "providing support for Pagan identified UU religious professionals and ministerial students," CUUPS promotes the professionalization of a specifically UU Pagan clergy. This normative isomorphism may have the broadest effect upon the homogenization and routinization of Wiccan and Paganism within CUUPS. No other Wiccan umbrella group shares this goal, and this directly ties CUUPS to the larger UUA.

This tie is not only organizational, but also theological in nature, for we are discussing the training and career of theological professionals—UU Pagan clergy. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the ways in which CUUPS members understand the intersection of the doctrines of Wicca and the UUA, for this is the basis on which this normative isomorphism must operate.

To become a minister in the UUA, one has to undergo rigorous training. The UUA website outlines the process:

The basic requirements for UU ministry are:

1. Career assessment program at a career center approved by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee
2. Candidacy status granted by a Regional Sub-Committees on Candidacy
3. Sponsorship by a UU Congregation
4. Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent
5. Approved internship
6. Basic unit of Clinical Pastoral Education
7. Completion of the Reading List
8. Interview with the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (*www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ministerialcredentialing/16219.shtml*).

This rigorous process, is, however, due to an emphasis on quality within the UUA that is not present within many Wiccan or Pagan traditions. The UUA requires candidates for ministry to exhibit competence in many academic and professional areas, such as Pastoral Care and Counseling, Leadership and Organization, and Administration and Management (*www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ministerialcredentialing/16191.shtml*). UUA-trained Wiccan or Pagan ministers would certainly be able to give support to those in need.

While the UUA ordination program certainly addresses the concerns of the advocates of a full-time paid Wiccan clergy, the UUA itself does not offer the type of position that would be attractive to most Wiccans who are attempting to become ordained. Most Wiccan priests and priestesses do not want to devote the enormous amount of time, effort, and money necessary for the UU ministry requirements, nor do they want to have a congregation made up of mostly non-Wiccans.

Therefore, even if CUUPS were to provide support for those who wish to become Wiccan or Pagan clergy, it is unlikely that many would choose this path. If CUUPS were to change its status as an independent affiliate of the UUA and try to organize its own congregations, then this could be a possibility. However, as things now stand, CUUPS' support of Wiccan or Pagan clergy does not seem to be a significant force for the routinization of Wiccan ministry.

Military Chaplaincy

Don Larsen was removed from the Army chaplain corps after he announced his conversion to Wicca and his intention to seek endorsement from the Sacred Well Congregation, a Wiccan group based in Texas. Larsen was caught in a classic Catch-22 when his former endorser, the Pentecostal Chaplaincy of the Full Gospel Churches, revoked their endorsement before the transfer could be made. The Sacred Well Congregation was not yet an official endorser, because they lacked a viable candidate. Thus Larsen was removed from the chaplain corps and sent home from Iraq (Cooperman 2007).

This tale can be interpreted as an example of institutional hostility towards Wicca in the military, but it also raises questions about the process of routinization of Wicca and Paganism more broadly through its encounters with institutions of power such as the military.

Berger largely dismisses coercive isomorphism in her studies of civilian Wiccans, but in the military, the pressures of government regulations are undeniable. The specific pressure of coercive isomorphism in the case of chaplaincy is towards a normative isomorphism: a professionalization of a pastoral position in a religion which declares that everyone is his or her own priest/ess, and which has historically repudiated the concept of paid clergy.

The coercive isomorphism of the military does not allow for chaplains to make these sorts of compromises and decisions in many cases. The qualifications for military chaplaincy assume that the chaplain comes from a religious background which "functions primarily to perform religious ministries to a non-military lay constituency" (DoD Directive 1304.28 Section E2.1.10), and that the chaplain will be able to fulfill that function for the unit to which s/he is assigned. This is important for the religiously pluralistic military, for the large majority of soldiers come from backgrounds as laypersons in congregational religious settings. The chaplain must be able to minister to their needs, regardless of their religious affiliation, or his/her own. She or he is only responsible for sacerdotal duties to those of his/her faith. Thus military uniformity is ultimately in service to the cause of pluralism and diversity.

However, this translates in practice not only to a requirement that the chaplain-designate be trained for the performance of such ministerial duties, but also that the religious organization that sponsors the chaplain (the Ecclesiastical Endorsing Authority) be organized on a congregational model, with ministers serving a lay constituency. Although the standards for lay leaders (Designated Faith Group Leaders) are less stringent, certification or approval by a recognized (congregational) religious organization is still required. Because most Wiccan organizations today do not fit these requirements, there is a lack of qualified organizations to sponsor even qualified chaplain or lay leader candidates. Sacred Well Congregation (which was created by military Wiccans for the purpose of ministering to military Wiccans) represents the exception, not the rule. Wiccans may either assume the normative structure, as has Sacred Well (possibly working to change from within), or they may challenge it overtly, which will be a much more difficult struggle, but better bring to light the cultural assumptions about what a "religion" is.

There has been an outpouring of support for the idea of a Pagan chaplain in the military (as witnessed in the Pagan Religious Rights Rally at Lafayette Square Park on July 4, 2007) on grounds of religious

freedom and fairness. Certainly this would be a great step forward in the public recognition and legitimation of Wicca as a religion, both within and outside of the military. However, this comes at a price: normative isomorphism, the professionalization of a ministerial (though not a priestly) class, and the institutionalization of religious organizations modeled on a congregational model in order to satisfy the coercive demands of the State.

By moulding itself into the predominant congregational religious models in order to achive greater legitimacy, does the professionalization of a pastoral class necessarily mean an institutionalization of a priesthood, or can these two functions operate separately, as represented in Cherry Hill's philosophy? Military chaplaincy offers an interesting test case for what a socially integrated congregational Wicca could look like.

Will the professionalization of Wiccan ministry lead to a normative isomorphism? As Weber notes, pastoral care is the greatest source of authority for the priesthood, but this is most developed in the Axial "ethical" religions (Weber 1963: 75–76). Is this a significant force for the routinization of Paganism's democratized, magical charisma? Right now, the ministerial movement is too small within Wicca to tell if there will be a large scale impact. Cherry Hill's program may serve as a model for other seminaries,[8] but the test is going to be the success of its graduates. If these ministers (or military chaplains or CUUPS affiliated ministers) become influential leaders within the Wiccan and larger Neopagan movement, then the professionalization of Wiccan ministry may become more widely accepted.

However, if paid full-time ministers ever became a reality within Wicca, they would most likely would operate outside of (and alongside) existing coven structures, and act primarily as a resource for solitary practitioners, because this is where there appears to be a real need. Mayla, a Wiccan priestess (and CUUPS member) in southeastern Massachusetts said: "If you are not in a coven/group of some sort you have no elder type person to go to. If there were clergy, people would have a place to go for answers, guidance, or information" (personal

[8] Though it is not a seminary, the Pagan Leadership Skills Conference is similarly dedicated to education about topics such as "publicity and promotion, group facilitation, conflict resolution, accounting, pastoral care and board development." (*www.paganleadership.org/*)

communication Nov. 30, 2000 with e-mail follow-up, December 13, 2000). Her High Priest, Niko, echoed this sentiment: "Not everyone wants or needs to be in a coven but there are sometimes when you need to speak to someone of the (altar) cloth" (e-mail communication, December 13, 2000).

Would the professionalization of a ministerial class necessarily mean an institutionalization of a Wiccan priesthood? This seems more unlikely. This would require a distinction to be drawn between Wiccan clergy and laity that would be philosophically different than the distinction between ministers and non-ministers. It would change the nature of religion from an individually-oriented magical mystery tradition into a congregational religion. It would require a massive-scale organization of a largely unstructured movement, undermining both the coven and solitary structures present in contemporary Wicca. It would require economic resources to be devoted to the maintenance of such a priesthood. And most of all, it would be perceived as undermining the individual's autonomy as her own spiritual authority and placing an intermediary between her and the gods. This could weaken the experiential ecstatic and magical aspect of the religion, and routinize its charisma into the institutional bureaucracy. Don Larsen himself said, "We don't need more Calvinist rationalizing. We need mystery. We need horizons. We need journeys" (Cooperman 2007). In the Wiccan practice of magic, the rationalistic Calvinist distinction between this-worldly activity and otherworldly activity is deliberately and intentionally broken down.

Wicca operates within a world which was fundamentally created by the Axial vision. It does not reject other breakthroughs of the Axial Age, such as reflexivity, reason, or the notion of history (Jaspers 1953: 2–5). It thus stands in a particularly unique locus within modernity, accepting some fundamental principles, while rejecting others. As it grows and ages, it must negotiate the same challenges of modernity as all other religious movements, questions of doctrine, practice, structure, institutionalization, etc. Some aspects of the religion will undoubtedly become routinized. Other forms of routinization will be rejected. However, as long as the movement remains world-affirming and enables the individual to experience the magical charisma for themselves, enchantment will follow. The achievement of the ecstatic state belies this fundamental Axial ontology, and in doing so, acts as an epistemology that allows Wiccans to view the world as enchanted. As Magliocco says:

> The re-sacralization of the everyday world—the magical worldview, in other words, provides a context in which extraordinary experiences become part of the ordinary world, a world full of meaning and enchantment (Magliocco 2004: 181).

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CONTEMPORARY PAGANISM BY THE NUMBERS

Helen A. Berger

There are a growing number of ethnographic studies of Neopaganism (see for example; Berger 1999, Bado-Fralick 2005, Hume 1997, Luhrmann 1989, Magliocco 2004, Pike 2001, Salomonsen 2002) but only a few that are quantitative and those that do exist are concentrated in North America (Berger et al. 2003, Orion 1995, Jorgensen and Russell 1999, Adler 1986, CoG 2005, Reed 2001). None of these studies is based on random samples, nor with a population as dispersed and at times secretive as Neopagans is it possible to have a random sample. Nonetheless, these studies even with their flaws provide us with important information about the demographics, distribution, and some aspects of the belief and practices of Neopagans. Internationally, census data exist that provides a sense of the extent of Paganism in different nations. Religious affiliation is not included in the United States census but the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) produced by The City University of New York (CUNY) provides similar data for the United States. This essay explores what the numbers tell us about Neopagans as well as the limits of these studies.

How Many Pagans Are There?

In 1992 Aidan Kelly estimated that there were 300,000 Neopagans in the United States. His estimate is based on an extrapolation from festival attendance and subscriptions to Neopagan journals, and by using the number of covens in San Francisco as a template for the nation, estimating that there were about ten people per coven. There are some problems with Kelly's process of estimation. Possibly the most egregious is his extrapolation from the number of covens per capita in San Francisco to the nation as a whole, as California has a higher percentage of Neopagans than most of the country (Berger 1999, Covenant of the Goddess 2005). Furthermore, the estimate of ten people per coven may be high—many covens have fewer than that and only a minority have more. This latter point is somewhat mitigated by the fact that he does not count solitary practitioners. Although imperfect, Kelly does

offer a method of estimating the contemporary Pagan population using a number of different criteria.

During this same period CUNY, in its National Survey of Religious Identification Survey (NSRI), based on phone interviews with 133,723 people gathered by random dialing of phone numbers throughout the United States found that there were 8,000 Wiccans in the United States. They reported no other form of contemporary Paganism. The large discrepancy between Kelly's estimate and the NSRI findings may in part be explained by some contemporary Pagans not feeling comfortable stating their religious affiliation, and therefore lying, others who combine their Pagan practices with more traditional religions reporting only the latter, and the fact that in relatively small samples, such as that in the first CUNY religious affiliation survey, small populations can be missed or under-represented. Nonetheless, it does suggest that Kelly probably over-estimated the number of Neopagans in the United States.

The difference in estimates between Kelly's method and CUNY's random sample highlights the problem of trying to determine the number of contemporary Pagans in the United States and worldwide. Contemporary Pagans' and researchers' sense of the population is normally higher than that presented in census data and surveys. The researchers' sense of the extent of the population may be influenced by their being in the midst of a vibrant community that they mistakenly believe is larger than it is, but it also influenced by more objective criteria, such as the number of books sold on Pagan subjects. For example, Jone Salomonsen (2002) notes that *The Spiral Dance* (Starhawk 1979) has sold over 300,000 copies. A Barnes and Nobles executive estimates that there are ten million individuals who buy books on Pagan topics (Lewis 2002). Although not all of these individuals are Pagans—some are merely interested in the topic, students assigned a book in a course, dabblers who have not and may not commit to the religion, researchers of Paganism who are not practitioners—it still suggests a larger population than reported in censuses and surveys.

James R. Lewis (2007) relying on the census data from Canada, The United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, all of which record religious affiliation at least in some years, as well as reviewing the data from both the NSRI and ARIS, argues that there has been a spectacular increase in the numbers of Pagans since the 1990s. He notes an increase in Canada from the 1991 census which reported 5,530 Pagans to 21,085 in the 2001 Census, The United Kingdom census reported 42,336 Pagans in 2001 but had not included the question of

religious affiliation previously in their census. The percentages of those who report being Pagans in both the UK and Canadian censuses are approximately equal (0.075% for Canadians and 0.081% for the UK). Between 1991 and 2001 New Zealand noted an increase from 318 to 5,862, resulting in 2001 in 0.157% of the population claiming to be Pagans in the Census. The 1991 Australian census did not contain relevant information. Lewis, therefore, compares the number of Pagans listed in the 1996 Australian census with the 2001 Australian census, finding that there was an increase from the 9,498 reported in 1996 to 23,460 in 2001 with 0.125% of the Australian population reporting being Pagans. Lewis reports that the CUNY study indicates a change from 8,000 to 307,000 Pagans. He includes a caveat with these figures because in 1991 CUNY only recorded Wiccans while in 2001 they had three categories of contemporary Pagans—Wiccans, Druids, and Pagans—but he notes the increase was still spectacular, as in 2001 there 134,000 Wiccans reported in the CUNY study. In 2001 0.145% of the population in the United States stated that they are Pagan.

In addition to the surveys and censuses Lewis reviews Pagan magazine subscriptions, numbers of new accounts on Witchvox, the largest Pagan Internet site, and booksellers' statistics on number of individuals purchasing Pagan related literature. All these, he notes, indicate an increase in numbers of Pagans. Lewis attributes this increase to two factors: the growth and increased availability of the Internet and the increase in interest in the religion among adolescents spurred in part by the media and by the availability of the Internet. Christian Smith with Melinda Denton (2005) in their survey of religious affiliation and belief among US teenagers between the ages of thirteen and seventeen found that only 0.3 percent report being Pagan, which is approximately 60,660 people. We would expect more if eighteen and nineteen year old were included. As with other survey data this number may be low as some young people may have kept their affiliation secret or still be attending church with their parents. As with adults the sheer number of books geared to the young that are being sold and the number of those active on sites, such as Witchvox, suggest that the numbers are higher than reported in Smith and Denton's survey. Nonetheless, consistent with Lewis's prediction the percentage of teenagers who state they are Pagans as reported by Smith with Denton is more than twice as high as that reported for adults in the ARIS study.

In addition to new converts, particularly among the young, there is a growth of a second and in some instance third generation of practitioners,

at least in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.[1] Many of those who converted in the 1960s and 70s were ambivalent about raising their children as Pagans, feeling that everyone, including their children, should find their own path (Berger 1999). The online 2005 survey by Covenant of the Goddess (CoG) indicates that only 27 percent of those who have children claim to be raising their children in their spiritual path. Nonetheless, research suggests that many of the second generation do consider themselves Pagans, although preliminary research also indicates that second generation Pagans regret that their parents did not more actively provide them with training (Wildman-Hanlon forthcoming).

Douglas Cowan (2005) cautions against the view that contemporary Paganism is the fastest growing religion in the United States and possibly the world, noting that the increased numbers reported in censuses and surveys may not indicate an increase in conversion but a combination of greater acceptability of the religion resulting in more Pagans coming out of the broom closet to census takers and researchers and the coming of age of some of those who joined as teenagers who can now self report instead of being included in their parents' responses. Cowan warns in particular against counting the number of websites on Paganism as an indication of the number of Pagans in either one country or the world. Many of these sites are defunct and when search engines such as Google or Yahoo count number of sites, they not only include those that are defunct but also count some more than once, resulting in very inflated numbers. Nonetheless, Cowan notes that the movement is clearly growing. His concern is that it might not be growing at quite as high a rate as is being suggested by others.

There are currently some indicators that the rate of growth of contemporary Paganism is slowing. As Lewis notes the number of new accounts being opened on Witchvox has declined. In an article on Witchvox Phyllis Curott, a well-known Pagan author laments the decrease of book sales of Pagan oriented books. She attributed some of this decline to people relying more on the Internet for their information, but there is reason to believe that the rate of growth particularly among adolescents may have reached a peak. Although the Harry

[1] Douglas Ezzy, an Australian scholar of contemporary Paganism has told me that there is not a significant second generation of Pagans in Australia at this time. He thinks it may be because the religion came later to Australia.

Potter series is still popular and the last installment has just come out, some of the more popular television shows that have witch characters are no longer being produced.

What does all this mean for both the number of contemporary Pagans worldwide and for the religion's growth rate? There is good reason to believe that contemporary Paganism has grown, particularly in the past decade. The growth rate appears to be substantial. There are clearly more contemporary Pagans today than in the 1970s. The rate of growth, however, may now be leveling off or at least slowing down. All religions have attrition and contemporary Paganism is no exception. Because of the decentralized nature of the religion it is impossible to determine what the attrition rate among Neopagans is. At this point, the attrition rate appears to be more than compensated for by both new conversions and children raised by Pagan parents who continue in the religion. It will be interesting to see what the next set of census data provides in terms of growth rates.

Who Joins?

The quantitative research on Contemporary Paganism in North America consistently shows that Pagans tend to be well-educated, middle class, and disproportionately female. There have been a number of studies that have looked at the demographics of contemporary Pagans in North America. Margot Adler (1985), Loretta Orion (1995) and Danny Jorgensen and Scott Russell (1999) all distributed surveys at festivals in the United States. Adler distributed 450 surveys at four festivals and had 195 completed and returned. Orion never discloses how many surveys she distributed but received back 189 responses. Jogensen and Scott distributed over 2,000 and received approximately a third, 634, back. I conducted a survey, entitled the Pagan Census with Andras Corbin Arthen of Earthspirit Community, a large Neopagan umbrella group. Initially Arthen had hoped to do an actual census of all contemporary Pagans in the US, but that proved impossible. Ours was the largest survey completed, with over two thousand returned. It was also the survey that was most widely distributed. Although some of our survey forms were distributed at festivals this was not the main venue for distribution. Most of the large Neopagan groups and organizations cooperated with us by distributing our survey to their members. This was done either in mailings or by publishing the survey in newsletters

and journals. Some individuals, unbeknownst to us put the survey on the Internet and people duplicated and distributed the survey among Neopagans they knew. This resulted in our receiving more surveys than we initially sent out. Some of the results of this survey were subsequently published in *Voices from the Pagan Census* (Berger et al. 2003). Covenant of the Goddess did an online survey in 2005 of North Americans but did not specify the number of responses they received. Sian Reid (2001) did a small survey of Canadians and a more recent one, which she reports on in this volume. As I did not have access to the data from her more recent study when writing this chapter I rely on the older survey completed by Reid in the discussion below.

None of these surveys is random, nor with a population as dispersed and unorganized as Pagans could they be. Nonetheless, they help to provide a portrait of the Neopagan community that qualitative studies alone could not provide. Jorgensen and Russell's study, CoG's poll, the Pagan Census and Reid's survey all include ages of participants. All found that there are more adult practitioners than adolescents or people in their early twenties. As Jorgensen and Russell excluded teens from completing their survey, their data would be skewed toward adults. The Pagan Census did not exclude the young but was distributed between 1993 and 1995, which is at the beginning of the time period in which teenagers joined in large numbers. Although one would expect that there would be more teenagers who are Witches today, most of the members are older, as a large cohort joined the religion in the 1960s and 70s and are now middle aged and the numbers of people above the age of twenty-three is higher in the general population than those between the ages of thirteen and twenty-three. In the CoG Poll, 15 percent state they are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, with 6 percent younger than eighteen and only 3 percent over the age of sixty. The vast majority 76 percent were between the ages of 26–58.

All the studies found that there are more women than men. In the Pagan Census 64.8 percent of our sample are women and 33.9 percent men (1.3 percent did not answer this question). Jorgensen and Russell discovered a smaller disparity in the numbers of women and men having found 56.8 percent of their sample are women and 42.3 percent are men. This difference may have to do with place of distribution of the surveys. In our study we found that men are more likely than women to state that they had attended a festival in the previous year and more likely to attend multiple festivals than women. As Jorgensen and Russell distributed their survey at festivals their data would be

skewed toward a higher percentage of men. Seventy-five percent of Reid's sample is female. As she notes this is higher percentage of women than was reported among Pagans in the 2001 Canadian census, which indicted the 54.1 percent of Pagans are women and 45.9 percent are men. In trying to reconcile the difference between her findings and the Canadian government's she suggests that neither sample may have gotten a complete picture of the religion. The Canadian census may have under-represented all women's groups and her sample included too many of these groups. CoG's survey, which did not distinguish between Canadian and US Citizens, found that 74 percent of their sample were women, 25 percent men and 1 percent self describe as other. The New Zealand Census found that 62.8 percent of Pagans are women, the rest being men.

Although there is variation in the percentage of women and men among surveys of Pagans in the United States and between Reid's survey and the Canadian Census, it seems clear that there are more women than men in the religion. Comparing and contrasting the surveys it seems reasonable to estimate that about one-third of the Pagan population are men and two-thirds women. This may vary internationally. Although both young men and women have joined Paganism in the last fifteen years, the religion has been growing more among young women than men, in part because the media portrayal of Witches has been mostly of young women (Berger and Ezzy 2007). Furthermore, women tend to participate at a higher rate in most religions and with the inclusion of Goddess worship within Paganism it is not surprising that the rate is somewhat higher.

In both the Pagan Census and in Orion's study it was found that the majority of contemporary US Pagans live in urban or suburban areas. Orion found that 80 percent of her sample lived in metropolitan areas. We found about half of our respondents live in greater metropolitan areas. Our study suggests that the distribution of Pagans follows settlement patterns of most Americans, most of whom live in greater metropolitan areas. Our study did find that 16.6 percent live in rural or secluded areas and another 13.5 percent live in small towns. This suggests that Paganism is not shunned by those who live close to nature, which has been suggested by critics of the religion. Our study also found that Pagans are distributed throughout the United States, with the largest percentage on the west coast. Reed found that most Canadian Pagans live in live in urban or suburban areas and that British Columbia has the highest number of participants. The CoG study to

the contrary suggested the Ontario has the largest number of Pagans in Canada. Not surprisingly the CoG survey identified California as having the highest number of Pagans; it was also the state with the highest number of Pagans in the Pagan Census.

The largest percentage of respondents to the Pagan Census are students (16 percent). Of those who are no longer students the most common occupation is in computers (10 percent). This was a similar finding to those of Adler and Jorgensen and Russell. Orion, to the contrary found most Neopagans in the healing or helping professions. As her sample was one of the smaller, it seems to be probable that it is less accurate. Why the link between people working in computers and Paganism? Those in Adler's sample suggested several reasons for this link, from "that is where the jobs are" to Paganism helping to balance the linear thinking of computer work. Eric Davis (1995) has suggested that there is a link between magic and computers, as both require imaging an alternative realm. Cyberspace he suggests can be viewed as between the worlds. Although the surveys are pretty consistent in finding that work in the computer field is the most common form of employment among Pagans, most Pagans are not working in this field as they tend to span the occupational categories.

All the research indicates that Neopagans have a higher level of education than the typical American. In the Pagan Census we found that 64.5 percent of Pagans have a college degree or more and another 25.4 percent have some college education. Only 7.2 percent of contemporary Pagan claim to have a high school degree or less. This can be compared with the general American public in which 51 percent have no more than a high school diploma. Although educational attainment varies regionally in the United States, this is not the case for Neopagans who maintain a high educational level regardless of region in which they reside. Jorgensen and Russell and Reed similarly found that Pagans were more educated than others in North America. Jorgensen and Russells's sample has a higher percentage of students than ours, over half their sample are students. They note that very few (3 percent) work in occult occupations. Pagans tend to earn around the median income in the United States. Their earnings are somewhat lower than expected given their high educational level. This in part is explained by the large number of students in the populations as well as the large proportion of women, who have a lower average income than men both within the general population and among Pagans (Berger et al. 2003).

In the Pagan Census we found that 41 percent of our respondents are parents. The CoG study found that 51 percent of their sample are parents. As there is a ten year gap between our sample and CoGs the increase would indicate that more contemporary Pagans have become parents in the time between surveys. It is also possible that by limiting their survey to online responses they had a higher proportion of individuals who are parents.

Jorgensen and Russell found that 38.3 percent stated they had been raised Protestant, 27.2 percent Catholic, 5 percent Jewish, 20.8 percent were raised something else and 9.7 percent did not answer this question. They note that this suggested that a smaller percentage of Protestant and a larger percentage of Jews and "others" become Neopagans than would be expected from their numbers in the general population. Adler who did not list any as not answering the question, found a higher percentage of Protestants. In her sample 42.7 percent were raised Protestant, 25.8 percent Catholic, 6.2 percent Jewish, 10.1 percent were raised in non-religious homes and 15.2 percent were other. In both studies there appears to be a high percentage of individuals who claimed they were raised as something else or other, with no indication of what the other religions are. Both samples show a higher percentage of Jews among converts to Paganism than in the general American society. Neither of the studies controlled for educational level or urbanism. Historically American Jews tend to live in urban areas and to have higher than average educational attainment. If these two things were controlled for, would the percentages still appear disproportional? It is nonetheless interesting to note that individuals from the culturally dominant religion—Protestantism—have a lower rate of participation in Neopaganism. None of the studies provide an explanation for the lower than expected participation of Protestants. One possible explanation is that many sects of Protestantism eschew ritual resulting in their adult children finding religions like Paganism, with its emphasis on ritual, more alien and hence less appealing. It is also possible that as members of the majority religion they are less likely than those who come from a minority religion to join a culturally marginal religion.

Demographics of Pagans suggest that they are on the whole well-educated middle class individuals. They are mainstream participants in a non-mainstream religion. There are more women than men in the religion. If, as has been suggested by Lewis, the growth in the religion is in part fueled by the influx of teenagers into the religion (stimulated

in part by *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) then we would expect that this disproportion will continue for at least another generation. But as more second and third generation Pagans continue in the religion, the proportions should become closer to that of other religions.

Politics and Paganism

In the original edition of *Drawing Down the Moon* (1979) Margot Adler contended that although there were regional differences that on the whole contemporary Pagans were not political in the traditional sense, of voting, writing letters to elected officials, and protesting, but that most were political in the sense of participating in alternative life styles, this is what Anthony Giddens (1991) refers to as life style politics—questioning gender roles, recycling, buying organic products. In the second edition of *Drawing Down the Moon* (1986) Adler notes that in response to the growth of the Religious Right American contemporary Pagans have become more traditionally political.

The extent of political activity among Pagans is debated among scholars of Paganism. Andy Letcher (2000) has argued that contemporary Paganism is a nature religion in name only as participants are not active in environmentalism. Graham Harvey (1997) and Regina Oboler (2004) have, to the contrary, argued that Neopagans are environmentally active. Cynthia Eller (2000) contends that Goddess spirituality in general discourages political activity resulting in women participating in rituals to the Goddess instead of fighting for women's rights. Others have suggested that Goddess spirituality encourages political activity (Finely 1991, Starhawk 1979).

In part how politically active one determines contemporary Pagans are, is dependent on the comparative group used. Neopaganism is not a political but a spiritual or religious movement, and therefore, one would expect Neopagans to be less active than members of Greenpeace or N.O.W. However, if one compares Neopagans to average citizens, at least in the United States, they appear to be more politically active. In *Voices from the Pagan Census* (Berger et al. 2003) we found that Pagans tend to be as active as Unitarian Universalists and more active than most other Americans.

In order to compare Neopagans with other Americans the Pagan Census included questions from the General Social Science Survey

(GSS). Some of these questions concerned political opinions and activities. In her study of contemporary Pagans Adler concluded that although contemporary Pagans are often believed to be liberals, she met individuals across the political spectrum. We also found variation among Neopagans on all issues including politics. However, on the whole our study found that Neopagans are liberal and more politically active than the typical American. Very few Neopagans are conservative. For example, only 6.6 percent of Pagans state they are registered Republicans, while 42.9 percent are registered Democrats (Berger et al. 2003). GSS questions on government spending incorporated into the Pagan Census indicated that Pagans were more likely than other Americans to believe the government was not currently spending enough money on mass transit, parks and recreation, and crime. The strongest difference between contemporary Pagans and the general American public is on the issue of environmentalism. Ninety-two percent of Pagans believe that the government is spending too little on environmental issues as compare to 55.7 percent of the general American public (Berger et al. 2003: 67).

When asked about issues of gender equity, we again found that, on the whole, contemporary Pagans were more supportive than the general American population of issues of gender equity, particularly in terms of employment and pay. Not surprisingly women are more supportive of these issues than men are. However, on the issue of abortion rights Pagans appear divided, with 58.6 percent supporting legalized abortion and 40.1 percent opposing it, and 1.2 percent not answering this question. Men were slightly more likely to support legalized abortion than women (60.0 percent of men and 57.6 percent of women). Sexual identity issues, like environmentalism, are an area in which Neopagans show a great distinction from the general American public. Most Americans (67.2 percent) state that they are opposed to gays having the right to marry. To the contrary 89.2 percent of Neopagans support gay marriage and this support is greater among women Neo-Pagans 92.2 percent of whom support gay marriage.

Neopagans are not just more liberal but more politically active than other Americans. Neopagans vote at a higher rate than the average American. 70.9 percent claim that they had voted in the last national election, 58.8 percent in the last state election and 87.6 percent note that they are registered to vote. In their study of Canadians and US citizens CoG found that 94 percent were registered to vote. The difference between CoG's and the Pagan Census's findings on political

registration may be because they included Canadians in their sample or the result of their survey being completely online. People with higher educational levels and higher income are more likely to have access and use the Internet. On the whole, as noted in the last section, Neopagans are well educated and middle class, a group that is noted for higher than average rates of voting. Neopagans, unlike the religious right, do not vote as a block and their numbers are insufficient to sway an election. However, Neopagans' interest in the environment and gay and women's rights are at least among those concerns that Neopagans bring with them to the voting booth.

Only 4 percent of American Neopagans who answered the Pagan Census were found to have ever held an elected office, and only 8.2 percent state that they were ever active in a political campaign, but almost half say that they had participated in a march or rally. Only about 20 percent of Americans claim that they have participated in a rally or march. Neopagans have a higher rate of participation in this political activity than Unitarian Universalists (UUs), who are noted for their participation in liberal causes. Thirty percent of UUs state that they participate in rallies or marches (UUA 1992). Neopagans are more likely to write letters to elected officials than UUs are.[2] UUs did vote at a higher rate than Neopagans, with 86 percent saying they had voted in the last election. Neopagans appear to have about the same level of political activity as UUs, with each exceeding the other group in same areas of political activity but both showing political involvement higher than the national average. Unitarian Universalist Pagans have the highest levels of political activity among Contemporary Pagans (Berger et al. 2003: 110).

Given the much higher political activity of Neopagans compared to the typical American, why are they frequently viewed as apolitical, particularly when UUs who have about the same level of political activity are viewed as more active? In my first book *A Community of Witches* (1999) I too concluded that Neopagans were involved in life politics but not in what Giddens (1991) termed emanicipatory politics,

[2] Following the GSS we asked three separate questions inquiring if our respondents had written letters to their federal, state, or local officials respectively. Looking just at the response to the question about federal officials we found that 49.1 percent of Pagans said they had written a letter. The question asked by the Unitarian Universalist Association was about either writing a letter or visiting an elected official. It was a broader question. Nonetheless, a smaller percentage, 37 percent, stated that they had done either of these activities.

that is, involvement in direct political activity. But, the results of the Pagan Census present a different picture—of a group of people who are politically active. In part this may be because in the Pagan Census the comparison was between the general American public which is on the whole not politically active and Neopagans. But I think it is more that that. When one attends UU churches it is common to see sign-up lists for social action activities, some of which are political in nature. Political activities are mentioned from the pulpit. To the degree that Neopagans participate in politics it is as individuals and not as members of the Pagan community. I have attended gatherings in which people discuss an upcoming gay rights march or an environmental demonstration, but very few groups make it a central part of their spiritual or religious practice. For example, in the Circle of Light coven[3] that I studied one of the women was active as an escort for women going to a family planning clinic for abortions—walking them past right to life protesters. She often spoke of this work as important to her, she was supported by others in the coven, but it did not become part of the coven work, nor did others join her in this activity. Furthermore, most Neopagans are solitary practitioners (Berger et al. 2003, CoG 2005) and may only have sporadic contact with other Neopagans and that may be on the Internet.

To what degree does Paganism foster increased political activity? Or is it merely that Paganism has drawn so many of its participants from a social economic group that is more likely to be politically active? No quantitative study provides answers to this question. But, it is reasonable to presume that the socio-economic background of most Neopagans contributes to their level of political activity. Furthermore, those concerned with gender issues, gay rights, and environmentalism may be more likely to become Pagans. Oboler's (2000) study of a small group of American Neopagans suggests this is the case for environmentalism. In our study of teenage Witches in the United States, England and Australia (Berger and Ezzy 2007) we found that those who became Witches were often already environmentally oriented and interested in gender issues, including those of sexual identity. They found the female divine, the celebration of nature, the acceptance of gay and lesbian identity within Paganism appealing. But, they were also influenced by the rituals and their interactions with others in the community—even

[3] This is a pseudonym.

if that was only on the Internet or through reading books resulting in their becoming more environmentally concerned, gender aware, and supportive of gay rights.

Unlike the Religious Right which has combined political and spiritual life, Contemporary Pagans do not. Nonetheless, the data suggests that Pagans are politically active and involved. The rituals and community do not require political activity, nor are all Pagans politically active, nor all in agreement in political perspective. But, there is a tendency for them to be liberal. The community, which is dispersed—mostly formed around books, gatherings, journals, and Internet sites—helps to fosters concern about the environment and gender and sexual identity issues. These concerns do appear to translate into encouraging political activity, but not requiring it.

Spiritual Practices

Neopagans pride themselves on being in control of their own spirituality. On discussions groups it is common to hear people bemoan the notion that all Pagans are Wiccans or that all forms of practice are an offshoot of Wicca. Nonetheless, all the quantitative data in North America suggests that Wicca is the largest tradition within Neopaganism. The CoG poll finds that 37 percent of their sample considered themselves Wiccan, 35 percent Pagan, 18 percent Witches, 3 percent Heathen and 7 percent other. Jorgensen and Russell in their study find 46.7 percent of their respondents state that they are Wiccan, 5.4 percent are Shamanic, 2 percent ceremonial magicians, 1.2 percent Druids, 34.8 percent Gaian, 34.8% responded to more than one of their categories or listed a spiritual practice not on their form with 7 percent not answering this question. In the Pagan Census we provided respondents with twenty-one alternative designations the last being "other." We asked that people state which was their primary form of practice, but some people listed more than one as primary. Unlike Jorgensen and Russell who did not register the categories of individuals who picked more than one we decided to include all those who stated that each category was their primary one, even if they had checked more than one. This has resulted in our percentages being greater than 100 percent. In *Voices from the Pagan Census*, we chose six different spiritual paths to discuss in greater detail and only included the percentages for those. Listed below are all the designations and the percentage of respondents who

considered it to be at least one of their primary paths in declining order of participation.

Wiccan	63.8%
Pagan	53.6%
Goddess Spirituality	44.5%
Neo-Pagan	24.5%
Magic-Worker	22.9%
Spiritual, but dislike labels	21.4%
Shaman	17.3%
Other	14.9%
Witch (non-Wiccan)	12.4%
New Age	9.8%
Druid	9.4%
Unitarian Universalist Pagan	9.2%
Ceremonial Magician	7.9%
Agnostic	4.8%
Christian	4.7%
Buddhist	4.4%
Jewish	3.5%
Odinist	3.3%
Thelemite	2.4%
Atheist	1.8%
Satanist	1.2%

In the Pagan Census we found that just over half (50.9 percent) of contemporary Pagans practice alone. Jorgensen and Russell to the contrary found that more of their sample practiced in a group; 47.7 percent practice in groups, 45.9 percent alone and 6.2 percent did not answer this question. The difference between our findings and Jorgensen and Russell's is small and can be accounted for by the fact that their survey was distributed at festivals. We found that fewer solitaries attend festivals than those who work in groups. The categories are of course fluid, with some individuals being trained in a group then choosing to work alone for a period of time only to eventually join another group. It is further complicated by some individuals self defining as solitaries while, nonetheless, joining others regularly for rituals. For example, in West Chester, Pennsylvania a group existed until a few years ago of solitary practitioners. One of the founders of the group who I met with shortly before the group dissolved responded to my question of how one could be both a member of a group who joined together for rituals and remain a solitary practitioner, by insisting that, although they came together to discuss spiritual practices and to perform rituals

including sabbats and esabats, each person remained a solitary because they were neither a training group, nor a group of people trained in the same spiritual path. Each person brought into the circle her or his own spiritual practices and shared it with others, but did not suggest that this was the right or only way in which to practice. A similar definition of being a solitary appeared in Douglas Ezzy and my research on teenage Witches. Although most claimed to be solitary practitioners they at times participated in groups, such as school or university Wiccan or Pagan clubs (Berger and Ezzy 2007). Nonetheless, the growth of solitary practitioners is very real and probably increasing as more individuals learn about the religion through the Internet or books and may never meet others except in cyberspace. This is supported by the CoG poll, which was completed later than either Jorgensen and Russell's survey or the Pagan Census, and found that 62 percent of their respondents practice as solitaries, 26 percent in covens and another 12 percent in what they refer to as community. The increased percentage of solitaries may in part be a reflection of CoG's data being collected completely online, but I think it also supports what ethnographic research is suggesting—the growth of solitary practitioners.

Conclusion

Quantitative research other than that found in censuses has been focused exclusively on North America. This research paints a picture of a group of individuals who are largely middle class, well-educated, disproportionately female, many of whom are parents. They tend to be politically active, although that activity is not normally directed by or necessarily seen as part of their spirituality. Most would self-define as Wiccans or Pagans—other spiritual paths are clearly a minority within Neopaganism—and most are solitary practitioners. All the quantitative research is imperfect as none has been based on a random sample. Nonetheless they provide valuable information about contemporary Paganism. More of this type of research needs to be completed outside of North America, including in non-English speaking nations to enable us to compare and contrast Paganism internationally.

Some international data is available through censuses. These are important data. Although census data too have been criticized for excluding some groups, such as the homeless, they provide a wealth of information not otherwise available. Lewis (2007) analysis of the census

data internationally among English-speaking nations indicates a large growth rate in the religion. Some of this growth can be accounted for by more individuals coming out of the broom closet to census takers as the religion becomes more known and more accepted, but not all or even most of it. The religion has clearly been growing during the last fifteen years. This growth has been fueled by the Internet and by the relatively positive portrayal of Witches in the media. There are some indicators that this growth rate is slowing, including a decline in the sale of books and the opening of new accounts on Witchvox. The growth of the Internet as well as how-to-books on Witchcraft and Paganism has also resulted in the growth of solitary practitioners, who at this point make up the majority of Pagans—at least in North America. The religion is changing as it grows. It is important to have more quantitative studies, particularly outside of North America to chronicle these changes as contemporary Paganism moves from being a young religion to a middle aged one.

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"A RELIGION WITHOUT CONVERTS" REVISITED: INDIVIDUALS, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY IN CONTEMPORARY PAGANISM

Síân Reid

Margot Adler's influential book, *Drawing Down the Moon* (1979) contains a chapter titled "A Religion without Converts." In it, she relates her own spiritual journey towards paganism, and elaborates those of others she has met and interviewed. Superficially, Adler's assertion that people do not convert to contemporary paganism is problematic because it is clear that most people do not begin their lives as pagans and even fewer had done so in the seventies than might be the case today.[1]

The original empirical research presented here is derived from a survey of Canadian pagans I conducted in 1995 (n = 187) and semi-structured interviews done with 10 percent of that survey sample (n = 18) in 1998. The survey was open to those residing in Canada, who were over the age of 18, and who would self-identify as practitioners of paganism, neopaganism or witchcraft, under any of the many labels or descriptions by which these are named. The main distribution vehicle was the now-defunct Canadian pagan magazine, *Hecate's Loom.* Questionnaires were also distributed through the auspices of personal contacts and through public pagan groups. While this method produced a convenience sample, obviously unsuitable for complex statistical manipulations, it has proven adequate to yield preliminary insights.

Adler's rejection of the language of religious conversion remains prevalent in the pagan community, even 30 years later. Having had a sense of this before I began, I studiously avoided the use of the word 'conversion' throughout the surveys and interviews unless I was specifically questioned about the academic context of my research. 'Conversion' is a loaded and pejorative term among contemporary pagans and not one they use to describe their own experiences. This rejection is based upon a particular understanding both of conversion and of other religions more generally.

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[1] Among my survey respondents, only three indicated that they had been raised in pagan families.

Conceptualizing 'Conversion'

Eugene Gallagher (1994) takes issue with Adler's assertions about conversion and contemporary paganism. He examines Adler's material and notes "…how strongly Adler's accounts of those who have made the journey into neo-Paganism resemble the tales of converts from other religious traditions" (1994: 851). Gallagher suggests that Adler's rejection of the term 'conversion' to describe the process through which individuals come to identify themselves as contemporary pagan practitioners is fundamentally rooted in a construction of conversion that presupposes a passive self. This idea that 'conversion' is essentially something that happens 'to' someone, that is orchestrated from outside and involves both elements of threat and duress (you will burn in hell as an unbeliever) and that involves an individual having to renounce certain beliefs or aspects of their pre-conversion self in order to conform to a worldview and moral order determined independently of them, is pervasive among contemporary pagans. In interviews, individuals specifically chose to highlight aspects of conjunction and continuity between paganism and their previously existing identities and beliefs, and to emphasize the freely chosen and self-reflexive nature of their path.

> The philosophy, in general, was what I believed anyways. The Craft gave me a way to talk about what I already believed. Sure, not all of it was familiar…there was a learning curve as I picked up elemental correspondences and sabbats and mythology and all the rest of the things that go into the Craft way of talking about the universe, but none of it seemed really alien, it just wasn't stuff I might have come up with on my own. (Carrie)

> …when I came to paganism…there is a sense of coming home, there is a sense of actually being able to place a name onto a way of thinking and a way of looking at the world that you've had, that I've had for, a number of years, and just didn't realize that there was a way of describing it…(Don)

> …I don't have the experience of having *joined* Craft.… I don't have the sense of being converted…convinced, maybe, but not converted. I've had beliefs affirmed, challenged, but certainly not imposed on me. (Francine)

> I wonder if that sense of having been that way all along is why most Wiccans don't like the term 'conversion'…because they haven't changed anything…? (Andrea)

Gallagher notes that there are models of conversion that presuppose an active self; he cites William James (1903) and Stark and Bainbridge.

Interestingly, he does not cite James Richardson, who has probably done the most elaborated body of work on an alternative model of conversion that constructs the convert as an active agent.

Richardson argues that the approach to conversion as something that 'happens to' an individual is the legacy of Christian conversion discourse, which treats the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus as the prototype for all conversion. He considers this the 'old paradigm' for conversion research. He and Brock Kilbourne state,

> The Pauline experience and similar passivist conversions are usually described by the following characteristics: 1) sudden and dramatic, 2) irrational or magical in nature; 3) involving a powerful, external, and impersonal force, 4) usually a single event, 5) the negation of the old self and the affirmation of the new self, 6) change from one static state to another static state, 7) typically occurs during adolescence and is a 'good thing' and 8) behaviour change usually follows belief change (1988: 1–2).

They contrast this with the 'new paradigm' of the activist conversion, the prototype for which is the 'seeker'.

> Rather than being pushed around by powerful, unseen, and uncontrollable forces, the seeker is an active agent. The seeker is generally characterized by the following: 1) volition, 2) autonomy, 3) search for meaning and purpose, 4) multiple conversions or conversion careers, 5) rational interpretation of experiences, 6) gradual and continuous conversion(s), 7) negotiation between the individual and the potential membership group, and 8) belief change that follows behavior change, as the individual learns the role of being a new convert (1988: 2).

This latter description of conversion incorporates many more of the elements featured in contemporary pagan accounts of their involvement in their chosen spiritual expression.

Another feature of this approach to conversion that makes it more suitable to elaborate the idea of contemporary pagan 'conversion' is its focus on the individual, rather than the group, as its unit of analysis. These theorists do not approach conversion from the perspective of recruitment to a group, but instead from the standpoint of the individual searching for meaning who utilizes the group as a resource (Straus 1979: 158). They extend the notion of religious conversion beyond its formulation as a process model by Lofland and Stark (1965), which ended at recruitment, and look at conversion as an ongoing phenomenon, recognizing that recruits do not always stay in the groups in which they become involved, and that any theory of religious conversion must be able to account for those who leave and where they

go. However, even this approach to conversion makes affiliation with a group of like-minded others more central to the identity of the convert than would seem to be the case with contemporary pagans, who tend to retain their self-identification as participants even when they are not actively involved with a group, or even with specific ritual or spellwork practices independent of a group.

One of my interview participants described his 'lack of involvement' in pagan practices in the past few years in terms of not wanting to spend a lot of time doing structured study and meditation, writing rituals, or teaching others. He noted that because he was not really 'putting in the effort required to keep things going', he had left the coven with which he had been working because it would have placed an unfair burden on them were he to remain. I asked him if he felt 'any less pagan' now than he had when he was more active. He answered, "Not in the slightest. On the other hand, I mean, I'm sure there's a lot of people out there who think of themselves as Christian that basically get to church only for weddings and funerals…" (Michael). Another participant commented that, since having children, she was no longer working in a group and that really, at the moment, she didn't consider herself to be 'working' pagan as much as simply 'being' pagan. When asked what she meant by that, she said, "That I'm living in accordance with my view of the universe and my values and my understanding of life…but I'm not doing sabbats or esbats or spellwork, because that's not where my life is at right now." When asked where her life was, she invoked a central contemporary pagan metaphor to help elaborate the way in which her family life, in the sense of having small children, had shifted her understanding of her priorities.

> But my outlook hasn't changed…just my observances. I go back to the wheel of the year again. Spring is for beginnings, summer is for hectic work in the fields and growth, fall is for taking stock and reaping the rewards, winter is for rest and introspection. Well, this just ain't winter! [laughing] So now I'll do the busy, active summer thing and raise my family…someday the wheel will turn and I'll have time for the other stuff again. It's not going anywhere…(Carrie)

Both Carrie and Michael retain strong religious identifications, although neither is currently actively engaged in most of the distinctive practices of contemporary pagans.

Lorne Dawson (1990) takes an interesting approach to the theoretical elaboration of 'active' conversions. He stresses the relationship between

rational, or self-reflexive actions, and the principle of activity stressed by such researchers as Richardson.

Dawson equates rationality with reflexivity (153). He takes fully rational human action as an ideal limiting case, and proposes that conversions may be considered more or less active according to their degree of departure from that ideal case (1990: 147). Using a variation of role theory, he suggests that attitudinal (as opposed to behavioral) converts can be distinguished by a high degree of 'role-person merger', and that a conversion should be considered 'active' if that merger has proceeded reflexively (155). 'Role-person merger' is described as "…the fusion of one's subjective sense of self with the expectations of a particular role" (144). Following Ralph Turner (1978) he lists four propositions for assessing if role-person merger has taken place.

1. the failure of role compartmentalization;
2. resistance to abandoning a role despite available, advantageous and viable alternatives;
3. the thorough acquisition of attitudes and beliefs appropriate to the role;
4. the tumultuous character of the process of learning and adopting such a role as compared with roles which are merely situational resources. (Turner 1978: 3–4 in Dawson 1990: 155)

'Role-person merger' is one way to account for contemporary pagans' tendency to cast themselves as always having been pagan, even before they had encountered explicit articulations of it. Said one,

> All my life I have been involved, I just didn't know it consciously until around 1988, when I finally found the name and more of a manifestation, and I said 'ah! that's what it is!'…(Martha)

The individual's sense of their own identity has become so enmeshed with their idea of themselves as a pagan practitioner that the two can no longer be distinguished retrospectively, thus producing the kind of biographical reconstruction discussed in Snow and Phillips (1980) and Snow and Machalek (1983). However, Dawson's attempt to relate these role-theory insights specifically to conversion and the 'convert role' is problematic in a contemporary pagan setting, where there is no 'convert role' separate from a 'participant role'. The strength of Dawson's discussion, at least with regards to contemporary paganism, rests in the way in which it takes into account the individual's reflexive definition of themselves. The centrality of reflexivity, characterized

as self-knowledge or personal development, is apparent in almost all pagan 'instructional' material aimed at beginners (Cunningham 1989; Crowley 1989; Starhawk 1979).

However, it is in David Snow and Richard Machalek's schema (1983) that one finds a characterization of the 'convert' that is clearly applicable to contemporary pagans. Snow and Machalek, unlike many conversion researchers, do not address the process or causes of conversion in their study. Instead, they take as their starting point the continued inability of conversion researchers to distinguish between converts and non-converts. They reject the mere behaviour of switching religious groups as a reliable indicator of conversion, and are suspicious of convert's self reports of their status. They suggest that the 'change' that all researchers agree must be present in order for a conversion to have taken place is located in the 'universe of discourse' of the convert (1983: 265). Therefore, converts should display properties in their talk and reasoning that are absent from the talk and reasoning of the non-convert. Based on an analysis of their conversations with members of the Nicherin Shoshu Buddhist organization (NSA), Snow and Machalek propose four 'rhetorical indicators' as formal properties which will act to distinguish the convert as a social type distinct from other social types. These are: biographical reconstruction, adoption of a master attribution scheme, suspension of analogical reasoning, and embracement of a master role (1983: 266).

Biographical reconstruction involves the editing and reinterpretation of one's biographical narrative to reflect the norms and interpretive categories offered by the new religious worldview. For example, someone who came into paganism in their twenties recounting a story about an incident that happened as a child that made her feel 'close to the Goddess, even though she did not know it at the time' is engaging in biographical reconstruction, applying categories to a past experience which would not have been available to describe that experience at the time, but which reinforce and legitimize the current worldview. Several participants volunteered stories of this type during their interviews.

'Adoption of a master attribution scheme', for Snow and Machalek, has to do with the way in which subjects make causal inferences. They write,

> . . . one causal scheme or vocabulary of motives informs all causal attributions. A single locus of causality is simultaneously sharpened and generalized. Feelings, behaviour and events that were previously inexplicable or accounted for by reference to a number of causal schemes are now interpreted from the standpoint of one pervasive scheme. (1983: 270)

While my own research was not structured to analyze participants' tendencies in making causal attributions, there is certainly a vocabulary of metaphor that arises out of their spiritual convictions that participants use to explain and make sense of the broader context of their lives.

> …you feel differently about it [the things you do everyday]. Like when you're cleaning the house, and can feel like you're purifying and cleansing, and getting rid of all the negative, old stuff, and bringing in new stuff, and I think that it definitely does put a different slant on day to day activities. (Jennifer)

> I find it [paganism] is also helpful in explaining, um, things to my children. You know, my daughter asked me why is it summer, and we talk about the natural cycles of the earth. And she really likes the idea of a God and a Goddess, and even she, at four and a half, can see the natural cycles of the planet…(Karen)

> The Craft embodies the image of the wheel of the year…that spring will happen over and over again…and there's something reassuring about that…but it also means that things that you have to do over and over again, like cooking and cleaning and laundry, can have some value in the wider scheme of things. (Carrie)

'Suspension of analogic reasoning', which Snow and Machalek take to be assigning a central primacy to one's own world view that excludes the ability to recognize that other beliefs and practices may perform the same functions equally well, is not evident in my interviews. Perhaps because of the syncretic and personal nature contemporary paganism, as well as the ideology of tolerance for the beliefs and practices of others that it makes explicit, interview participants did not make 'fundamentalist' statements about believing they were in possession of 'the one true way'. Several participants commented that the way they had chosen for themselves was the best way for them, but acknowledged that others could find other ways equally fulfilling and satisfying. One described it this way, "I think that all religions are different from each other, and at the same time, they're all the same, because it's people, always people. Right? People make religions." She went on to say later, "I think that people can [get a sense of community, friendship and satisfying spiritual experiences from other religions] I don't think that I could have" (Bronwen). Another noted,

> …the Craft tries to make the world meaningful. It tries to give you a framework through which you can understand your life. All religions try to do that. Choosing a religion is a matter of finding a philosophy and a practice and a symbol set that works for you…that resonates. I don't think

> that the Craft is any different from Buddhism or Hinduism or Judaism or anything else if you look at it that way. (Carrie)

When asked if she could have gotten the same sorts of benefits she perceived she had derived from her paganism from another religion, she responded,

> Well, I looked at other religions, really I did, and nothing seemed to fit for me. Maybe if I'd kept looking, I would have found something.... So for me, no, I don't think so...but that doesn't mean I don't think that other people can't find their...I don't know...their...whatever...that way. (Carrie)

This suggests that participants maintain a reflexive sense of relativism about their own religious identity that would not support the suspension of analogic reasoning.

Snow and Machalek's final criterion, the embracement of a master role, would seem to have a great deal in common with Dawson's notion of a role-person merger. What they add to Dawson's conceptualization is that all other 'roles' that the 'convert' enacts are subordinate in their mind to that of their religious identity. Their other identities are interpreted through their identity of 'religious practitioner'. The way in which interview participants tend to discuss their understandings of the 'everyday' aspects of their lives as being informed by their religious outlook supports the supposition that their religious identification may be functioning as a master role.

Clifford Staples and Armand Mauss (1987) undertake to test and modify Snow and Machalek's assertions, taking as their subjects a group of Christian evangelicals. These researchers reconceptualize the value of examining the narrative style of 'converts':

> ...we think also that a focus on the language and rhetoric of converts is a useful direction to pursue, not so much because it allows us indirect access to consciousness, but rather because it is through language that individuals transform themselves. That is, we take what is referred to as a 'functionalist' approach to language...Thus, where Snow and Machalek view particular kinds of language and rhetoric as observable indicators of some underlying change in consciousness, we view particular kinds of language and rhetoric as methods used by subjects to achieve self-transformation (137–38).

Unlike Snow and Machalek, Staples and Mauss examine the conversations of two groups of evangelicals, one group which self-identified as converts, and one that did not. Because Snow and Machalek examined

a recently imported movement, it was reasonable for them to assume that those who were deeply involved were not so involved because of a lifelong association with the movement. What Staples and Mauss report, as a result of their analysis, is that three of the Snow and Machalek indicators of conversion do not distinguish between religious conversion and religious commitment. The only indicator found consistently in their convert group, while being absent in their non-convert group, was biographical reconstruction. Staples and Mauss assert, therefore, that it is the process of biographical reconstruction that characterizes the religiously converted and not the religiously committed. Their logic appears to be that it is only the convert group that needs to transform their identities through reinterpreting their biographies. Staples and Mauss' findings are important simply because they underline the presence of a characteristic that is shared between contemporary pagans and converts to other types of religions, even though contemporary pagans reject the idea of 'conversion' and the label of 'convert.'

Becoming Involved in Contemporary Paganism

Much of the literature examining conversion to new religious movements emphasizes the importance of personal contact with members in facilitating the decision to 'convert' (Lofland and Stark 1965; Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1987; Dawson 1998; Snow and Phillips 1980; Gartrell and Shannon 1985). Religious products presented by those with whom one has already established a history of positive exchanges, one perspective elaborates, are likely to be viewed as more credible and therefore less risky than religious products that come without such an endorsement (Iannaccone 1995). Also, the evaluation of a belief or practice by one's significant others, those with whom one conducts important exchanges, is likely to have an effect on the cost of adopting those beliefs or practices (Sherkat 1997; Gartrell and Shannon 1985). In addition, if one adopts the standpoint that religious conversion is a form of secondary socialization (Long and Hadden 1983; Kilbourne and Richardson 1988; Thumma 1991), observance of and interaction with others will be instrumental in guiding the individual to an understanding of the norms and conventions of the group, broadly defined. Because there are very few contemporary pagan practitioners relative to the population in general, survey respondents were asked about several aspects of their level of contact with other practitioners, both initially

an on an ongoing basis, to gauge the ways in which these dynamics might apply in a contemporary pagan context.

Survey respondents were asked how they first came to be aware of contemporary paganism.[2] The majority of their responses centered on other people or books. Family members, friends and acquaintances were cited as the first source of awareness about paganism in 28.8 percent of responses; books were cited in 30.2 percent of responses. 'Friends and books', listed as a single, not easily divisible item, was given in another 5.5 percent of responses. Interestingly, 15 people said that they could not remember how they first became aware of paganism, or had just somehow always known about it.

When asked to rate on a four-point scale how important each of books and other people were in first getting them involved in contemporary paganism, the perceived importance of books becomes particularly clear.[3] While 62.4 percent of respondents indicated that books were 'very important' in getting them involved, only 38.7 percent said that other people had been 'very important' in getting them involved. The centrality of books is also apparent when respondents were asked to list how they first became involved in paganism, as opposed to merely aware of it. Responses involving bookswere given by 45 percent of respondents.[4] This points to a feature of contemporary paganism that differentiates it in practice from many more mainstream religions; despite the fact that it bills itself as being 'not book based', inasmuch as it does not have a central authoritative text, practitioners often rely more heavily on books than they can on unmediated interaction with other people to provide them with information about paganism, ideas about practice, and the norms of pagan life. The material encountered in books, and more recently, on web sites, often provides the bricks out of which participants construct their idea of contemporary paganism, and their identities as pagan practitioners.

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[2] In 32 cases, more than one response was given. Both responses were coded. The percentages that follow are therefore those of the total number of responses given.

[3] My research was conducted before the internet became ubiquitous. More recently, Douglas Cowan (2005) suggests that internet sites have joined books as important textual reference points and sources for contemporary pagans.

[4] Coded in several different categories: read books; read books and started alone; started alone then read books; read books and then found people; found people and then read books.

Despite the number of practitioners who flagged reading as the beginning of their involvement, others did highlight interactions with people, and some presented the two in ways that defied separation into a 'priority in time' or 'priority of importance' order. Fifteen percent of people indicated that they considered themselves to have become involved in paganism through direct interaction with other practitioners (talked with other pagans; began studies with a practitioner; interviewed practitioners; sought out an existing group). Another 12.3 percent said they had either 'read books and then found people' or 'found people and then read books'. Some 17.7 percent considered the beginning of their involvement to have been marked by their attendance at a ritual, which also would have involved interaction with other practitioners.

However, survey respondents did not necessarily perceive working with other people as centrally important to maintaining either their involvement in or commitment to, their paganism. Although 18.9 percent of respondents said working with people was 'very important' in maintaining their involvement, 17.8 percent said it was 'not at all important'. Only 5.4 percent of respondents said that working with other people was 'very important' in maintaining their commitment to paganism, while 45.7 percent said it was 'not at all' important. This suggests that participants see their ongoing identification as pagan as something that resides within themselves, and is not a function of their membership in a group.

Identity and Community

Anthony Giddens defines the 'narrative of the self' as "the story or stories by means of which self-identity is reflexively understood, both by the individual concerned and by others" (1991: 244). He relates this to the 'reflexive project of the self', which is "the process whereby self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives" (1991: 243). Individuals, in a late modern context, transform both their understanding of themselves and the understandings of them available to others through their self-conscious narrative construction of their own identity. Reflexivity is more than simply a synonym for 'deliberate' or 'self-conscious' although both of those concepts are also subsumed within it. Reflexivity involves an acknowledgement of the tentativeness and fragility of the narratives we construct, the requirement to engage with others whose constructions are different than our own and the

constant revision and refinement of our own narratives through these interactions. It is a process through which contradictions are continually confronted and no absolute certainty is possible. Individuals, in this environment, must negotiate a level of existential and ontological comfort for themselves while simultaneously acknowledging that their own existential constructions cannot easily be generalized.

Contemporary paganism is, first and foremost to its practitioners, a fluid, transformational narrative. Situated in the context of the modern construction of the reflexive individual, contemporary paganism provides a symbolic language that can be appropriated and manipulated to effect meaningful transformation in both self and surroundings through individual interpretive agency. The change that participants highlight as being the most significant result of their involvement in contemporary paganism is not the content of their beliefs, values or personalities, but instead is one of interpretive context, of how these things come to be understood and expressed. Paganism provides individuals with a framework within which it is possible to reinterpret and re-evaluate themselves and their relationship to their subjectively experienced worlds. This worldview includes the convictions that the sacred is immanent in nature and in all living things, that all elements of the universe are holistically connected and imbued with energy, that there are both material and non-material realms of being and that events are meaningful and non-random.

The location of one's expression of these principles within the framework provided by contemporary pagan language and symbolism is what is meant by having a 'pagan identity', which then centrally informs participants' constructions of themselves, often offering them a sense of integration and belonging that they identify as having been absent in their lives up to that point. It does not negate previous unpleasant experiences; it provides an interpretive mechanism through which these experiences can be transformed into narrative elements that will help to support an individual's positive self-evaluation. Contemporary paganism acts as an identity-enhancing religious choice by allowing participants to perceive as positive those elements of their biography and personality that they had previously evaluated negatively.

Contemporary paganism allows people to retain a sense of continuity with their 'previous' self, while enabling them to enhance their self-worth and positive self-evaluation. It provides participants with a more satisfactory sense of "ontological security" (Giddens 1991: 47–56) than the interpretive context out of which they had previously operated. What

Snow and Machalek (1983) refer to as biographical reconstruction, and Giddens would characterize as the reflexive narrative of the self, is the chief mechanism used by pagan practitioners in order to effect their personal transformation. Techniques, such as magical practice, are tools that support this mechanism. Tanya Luhrmann comments, "It is as if magicians learn a new language in which to talk about their world, and gain a new set of possibilities for organizing it" (1989: 245). The narrative reconstruction of the self is seen as a wholly legitimate process of allowing one to grow into becoming the person one actually wants to be rather than as a form of misrepresentation of the person one is at the moment. While 'biographical reconstruction' is not a term that would be used by participants, other terms such as 'reclaiming' and 're-shaping' describe the same process.

Interview participants did not describe their involvement in paganism as precipitating a fundamental shift in states. Their narratives are organized around their sense of an unfolding understanding of themselves and their search for a spiritual context in which they felt they belonged. When asked to rate how closely the statement "I always knew I had a religion; I never knew it had a name" came to describing their feelings when they first encountered contemporary paganism, 58 percent of respondents said it was very close; 24 percent said it was somewhat close; 13 percent said it was not really close, and only 5 percent said it was not at all close.

When interviewed, many participants emphasized two things about becoming involved in paganism; the first was a sense that what they had always believed had been validated and given a name and a vocabulary, and the second was that their paganism had allowed them to move from a space in which they did not feel as though they belonged, to a space in which they felt they did. This space could be a social space, an intellectual space, an emotional space, or an ontological space, and often was some or all of these simultaneously.

> …it's sort of made sense and order out of my universe, because um, Craft is based on the natural cycles of our planet, it's given me a place where I feel like I fit, which I didn't grow up with.…it's also given me a, not just fitting in with the natural cycles of nature, but it's also given me a community where I feel more accepted. (Karen)

> [Without paganism] I wouldn't be nearly as actualized. I would have this unnamed, longing, thing going on, and I would always feel that I was a freak and I was alone and nobody else ever had this stuff, and…you know, it's a lot more difficult when you're all by yourself? Because just

> about everything in the society around you tells you that you're a freak and you're weird, and you've got to be real careful talking about any of this with anybody… (Martha)

> So I was fourteen the first time I was in a Craft ritual and… Oh, I hate sounding like a cliché! [changes voice] 'It felt like coming home.' How many thousand times have you read that? It had a huge resonance for me. I was always liminal. I had been liminal damn near since I was born.… And so… I found a community that I could interact with. A community that was working very hard at showing me that, from the spiritual point of view, I belonged, I was important, I was more than just a cog in a large wheel, that my needs were important… (Judith)

> …I'm not sure that the Craft brought me any beliefs or any behaviours that I didn't have before, but instead of them being almost a private perversion, it's something I can live as part of a community, where, uh, I don't have to justify the fact that I believe in, and want to act in certain ways. (Francine)

The pagan context that participants chose to adopt performed an integrative function, allowing them to meaningfully place themselves in an ontological context.

Participants describe a process of progressive 'becoming', a personal evolution and refinement of their understanding of their own spirituality through the examination of other modes of religious life. Many of them engaged in what James Richardson (1982) would characterize as 'spiritual seekership' as part of a 'conversion career' before settling into a pagan identity. The extent to which they experienced the other worldviews they explored as illuminating or deficient with reference to their own biographies helped participants to clarify their spiritual and philosophical priorities. They do not describe themselves as having 'become' pagan as much as they emphasize that they found expressed in paganism the essence of what they already understood and believed about themselves and their worlds.[5]

[5] It is not possible to tell, simply by examining participant narratives, to what extent the priority in time given to existing adherence to the principles of contemporary paganism would be observably the case to an outsider, and to what extent the acquisition and utilization of this narrative element is socialized by the norms of the group. It is, without doubt, discursively ubiquitous. To study the ongoing reflexive formation of participants' pagan narratives would require a series of observations of them from a point just before their involvement to a point sometime after; it cannot be captured in the context of retrospective reporting.

Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge use the concept of 'stakes in conformity in order to develop a series of propositions regarding the costs of deviance. They define 'stakes in conformity' as consisting of attachments, investments, involvements, and beliefs (1987: 190). Implicit in Stark and Bainbridge's construction is that 'conformity' means conformity to the dominant cultural ideology, unless otherwise stated.[6] One way of understanding the appeal of contemporary paganism is to suggest that the individuals to whom it appeals do not have the same level of investment in the dominant elements employed in constructing a conventional biographical narrative, possibly because they do not find that assembling a narrative within that framework results in a positive self-evaluation.

This process can be seen especially clearly in the way in which one interview subject, Carrie, frames her biographical narrative. Carrie describes herself as having had very poor social skills as a teenager, and as being prone to experiencing people as 'loud'.

> I was really sensitive to how other people were feeling and it all sort of pressed in on me all the time. If I were to give a visual metaphor, it was like walking through a laser light show 24 hours a day. I just didn't want to be around a lot of other people. I just couldn't cope. I thought I was going crazy…I really did. I thought if I talked to anyone about what was going on, they'd lock me up and throw away the key. I was really frightened.

She describes how finding paganism helped.

> Well, for one thing, it told me I wasn't crazy. It told me that people's feelings did radiate a kind of energy, and that there were ways you could tune in on this. Most Craft books tell you how to develop your intuition and your psychic sense…I did it backwards…I used the techniques to help me turn it off. The Craft provided me a framework where I wasn't crazy, I just wasn't in control, and it also provided me with a way to DO something about it…(Carrie)

She asserts that paganism enabled her to exchange a negative evaluation of herself as 'crazy', an evaluation that she felt powerless to address or to change, for the more neutral evaluation 'out of control' through the adoption of a pagan worldview and vocabulary. In addition,

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[6] In the case of a member of a religious community, for example, the individual's stakes in conformity with the norms of the 'outside' world can be low, while their stakes in conformity to the expectations of their community are high.

framing herself as 'out of control' gave her back a sense of personal agency because the designation implicitly contains the idea that being 'in control' is possible. Carrie used the magical training techniques taught in paganism to build and reinforce her own sense of stability and competence.

Stark and Bainbridge make the following propositions about self-evaluation:[7]

P134 Every person seeks a positive self-evaluation.
P135 Persons desire a positive evaluation of the rewards they possess, including the explanations and the power-giving resources they possess.
P136 Explanations that imply positive evaluations of a person and the rewards the person possesses are themselves rewards, while explanations that imply negative evaluations are costs. (1987: 196)

In Stark and Bainbridge's terms, the gain in positive self-evaluation associated with the adoption of a contemporary pagan narrative, as well as the sense of reinforcement for that positive evaluation by the amorphous contemporary pagan community to which one can perceive one belongs, must be sufficient to offset the stigma and disapproval one may potentially encounter from others for long-term affiliation to occur. The desire to protect this gain would then result in high stakes in conformity to the discursive expectations believed to be associated with, in this case, contemporary paganism.

This investment in the symbolic capital of 'countercultural spirituality' is the focus of Jon Bloch's analysis of contemporary pagans and New Agers. After examining the ways in which symbolic codes and ideology are explicitly and implicitly graven in the discourse of 'countercultural spiritualists', he observes,

> Even when discussing limitations of their ideology, selves, or the countercultural spiritual community, the persons I interviewed spoke in ways that served to promote alternative spirituality and diminish competing claims from mainstream society.… While speaking about their personal experiences and beliefs, it would seem that interviewees very much framed their narratives around their identities as countercultural spiritualists, and were at least implicitly and often explicitly critical of the dominant, mainstream viewpoint in comparison. Even when referring to mundane

[7] Stark and Bainbridge define 'self-evaluation' as: "that person's determination of how valuable a reward he constitutes as an exchange partner" (1987: 138).

> experiences, mainstream knowledge claims, or more legitimized mainstream religions, the alternative spiritual viewpoint dominated, whereby competing information claims were viewed as relatively positive or negative by countercultural spiritual standards. (1998: 116)

The centrality of the symbolic and ideological content associated with contemporary pagan religious identity to participants' narratives and explanations was also evident in the interviews conducted for this project, as both Dawson (1990) and Snow and Machalek (1983) would lead one to expect in the case of individuals who have chosen their religious identity rather than simply accepting the one into which they may have originally been socialized.

What Giddens discusses as the 'reflexive self' is produced by the dynamic inherent in the modern condition. The existential sureties once provided by traditional authority are replaced by a reliance on rational knowledge. This knowledge, however, is made relative by the pervasive doubt that is an intrinsic part of the modern order. Truth claims become working hypotheses, subject to revision as different claims are made. This dynamic also tends to separate questions of ultimate meaning and truth from those of day-to-day activity. It is in the context of facing this fundamental divorce of the existential from the activity of existing that the logic of contemporary paganism exerts an appeal for some. Contemporary pagan spirituality is based on a personal, individual, non-prescriptive relationship with an immanent and pervasive sacrality. It explicitly accepts that spirituality is reflexive and constructed within an individual's personal narrative, rather than presenting itself as something that exists 'outside' the practitioner as a 'code' or a set of beliefs. It is congruent with the dominant cultural logic of pluralism, because by accepting the premise that spirituality is constructed by the individual's relationship to the sacred, it also accepts that it can have no universal fixed and true form. Despite its obvious differences from mainstream culture and mainstream religion, contemporary paganism exemplifies some of the pervasive cultural directions of late modernity, not only in where it locates its construction of religious belief and identity, but also in how it reconfigures the notions of community and belonging.

Bloch discusses the relationship between the centrality of the autonomous individual and the desire for community among 'countercultural spiritualists' as a form of ideological strain. He examines the ways in which his interview participants address that strain when they discuss themselves and their beliefs. He notes that the responses to his question

'have you ever met anyone else who shares your beliefs' were particularly telling.

> In effect, each person stated that he/she would never meet anyone who absolutely believed the same way, because each person was unique; however, there was a community of persons who reflected a certain common ground or overlap of belief. And this community was viewed as providing a means for sharing with others who fundamentally were fellow travelers despite superficial differences of belief. (1998: 40)

Bloch locates the foundation of countercultural spiritual community in a sense of shared values and shared symbolic communications codes, in Giddens' terms, a common way of composing and structuring narrative. Contemporary pagan community is created neither by participation in an organizing structure, nor by geographical proximity and face to face interaction, as is the case with most modern and pre-modern forms of community. Contemporary pagan community is immediate in terms of representing to the individual a source of belonging, but it is often abstract in the sense of being founded on a sense of commonality with an Other who is not present, and is only presumed to exist. The fact that the presence of physical others who share a religious identity with the participant was not seen as important by most of my survey respondents to maintaining either their involvement with, or their commitment to, their paganism points to the operation of a more diffuse, abstract notion of community within contemporary paganism.

Michel Maffesoli provides a model of community that potentially resolves the ideological strain identified by Bloch by suggesting that authentic sociality must transcend the isolated and self-contained territory of the autonomous individual. "[W]hereas individualist logic is founded on a separate and self-contained identity, the person (persona) can only find fulfillment in his relations with others" (1996: 10). Maffesoli postulates that the rationalized 'social' of the modern period is coming to be replaced by an empathetic 'sociality' as we progress further into the postmodern condition (1996: 11). Contemporary pagans constitute an 'emotional community' or neotribe, in Maffesoli's terms, because despite the variations in the specific practices and beliefs of groups and individuals, there are aesthetic, moral and emotional continuities between them that are perceived by participants as distinguishing them from other communities. This collective sensibility, which is articulated through the adoption of similar forms of narrative and symbolic expression, has the capacity to shore up the sense of ontological security that

is produced by being able to place oneself in a relationship of similarity to others. It is the recognition, finally, of the potentially shared elements of the individual's perception of the spiritual landscape that produces the relief and sense of 'having come home' that so many participants report feeling even when the only depictions of contemporary paganism they had encountered at that point were literary ones. As Maffesoli explains,

> [I]t may be said that the aesthetics of sentiment are in no way characterized by an individual or 'interior' experience, but on the contrary, by something essentially open to others, to the Other. This overture connotes the space, the locale, the proxemics of the common destiny. (1996: 14–15)

As long as individuals labour under the impression that their beliefs are aberrant, held uniquely, they perceive themselves as separated from others and alienated from their surroundings. This is evident from the frequent descriptions participants give of themselves before they encountered contemporary paganism as being 'outsiders', 'liminal' or 'not belonging'. One participant commented, "…I think that, that feeling out of place, that sense of anomie, is probably talked about more in paganism than anywhere else" (John). Bloch also noted this narrative element among his interview subjects, indicating that some described themselves as having been 'born different' (1998: 30–31).

The adoption of the wholly elective identification of 'contemporary pagan' is not so much an expression of individualism, but of the desire, arising from value-rational rather than instrumental-rational premises, to construct oneself in relation to like others. Involvement in contemporary paganism can therefore be seen as a creative attempt to dissolve some of the boundaries separating self from other, and the 'human' from the 'natural'. The collective sentiment evinced by contemporary pagans revolves around the 're-enchantment' of both the natural world and of social relationships. This is accomplished by situating them all within a web of related, comprehensive symbolic narratives. This has the effect of allowing value-rational orientations to prevail in areas previously governed by purposive-rational logics, and creating a situation in which 'the earth' can exist as a silent, but present participant in moral discussion. Because ethical orientations are not taken to be pre-given in a contemporary pagan context, but are produced as part of a reflexive process, this re-enchantment does not necessarily result in a loss of rationality, as Weber suggests (1946: 350–1).

The contemporary pagan community, in general, also exemplifies other characteristics Maffesoli ascribes to neotribes. Neotribes are unstable, open communities defined by the participants' uncoerced agreement that they share a common sentiment which gives rise to an certain ethical experience, an orientation towards proper living that may not be shared with the broader social order. This is an accurate description of the amorphous, decentralized, unregulated nature of the broad contemporary pagan community, out of which smaller groups characterized by closer proximal relationships coalesce and dissolve, leaving the collective sentiment, which is not dependent upon any particular individual or group of individuals, intact. It also suggests that the decentralization that has been characteristic of contemporary paganism is a fundamental part of its vitality and its ability to provide people with a sense of identity not dependent on the organizing structures of power in society. Finally, it suggests that the traditional language of conversion is rejected by pagans because of its absolute linearity, its implication that there is both a starting place and an ending place, when what pagans perceive is a continuous unfolding of narrative potentials.

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MAGIC AND RITUAL

THE WILD HUNT: A MYTHOLOGICAL LANGUAGE OF MAGIC*

Susan Greenwood

> *Metamorphoses, cavalcades, ecstasies, followed by the egress of the soul in the shape of an animal—these are different paths to a single goal. Between animals and souls, animals and the dead, animals and the beyond, there exists a profound connection.* Carlo Ginzburg (1992: 263).

The discussion developed in this chapter will show how the mythological corpus of the 'Wild Hunt', a generic name given to numerous folk myths associated with 'soul-ravening' chases, often led by a god, goddess, or mythological figure accompanied by a cavalcade of souls of the dead, opens awareness with the cyclical process of nature through magical consciousness, an expanded sensory awareness. The mythology of the Wild Hunt, as a language of magical consciousness, creates a framework to experience what Carlo Ginzburg, in the quote above, calls the 'profound connection' between animals, souls, the dead, and the beyond; it primarily concerns an initiation into the wild, untamed forces of nature in its dark and chthonic aspects. This mythology comprises what Ginzburg has termed a Eurasian substratum of shamanic beliefs (1992) and forms a significant component of contemporary practitioners' ideas about otherworldly spiritual realms. For those engaging with the Wild Hunt the aim is not only participation with animals, souls, and the dead, but also with the ritualized cycle of life and death. This experience runs counter to anthropologist Maurice Bloch's (1992) universalistic and dualistic assertion that there is an underlying theme to all ritual that negates biological life processes in favour of a transcendent realm of spirit.

Soul-Ravening Chases

The night flight is an ancient theme in folk beliefs and it involves an ecstatic journey made by the living into the realm of the dead.

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According to Carlo Ginzburg, in Europe from the eleventh century onwards apparitions of furious armies were frequently referred to in references in Latin literary texts. A 'throng of the dead' consisting of anyone from soldiers killed in battle to unbaptized children were led by various mythological characters on a journey to the beyond (1992: 136). One such leader was Gwyn ap Nudd. In Celtic folklore Gwyn ap Nudd is a wild huntsman who rides a demon horse and hunts in waste places at night with a pack of white-bodied and red-eared 'dogs of hell'. Cheering on his hellhounds in a fearful chase, he hunts souls. A British god of battle, the otherworld and the dead, Gwyn ap Nudd is a psychopomp who conducts the slain into Hades and then rules over them. He knows when and where all the great warriors fell, for he gathered their souls upon the field of battle, and now rules over them in Hades, or upon some 'misty mountain-top' (Squire 1912: 255). Later semi-Christianised stories place Gwyn ap Nudd over a brood of devils in the Celtic otherworld of Annwyn, lest they should destroy the present race. In Arthurian romances he was king of the underworld and had a duty to control imprisoned devils and prevent them from destroying humans (Briggs 1976: 212–213).

There are many leaders of the Wild Hunt in folklore.[1] In Teutonic mythology it is Woden (Odin or Wotan) who leads the hunt accompanied by fearsome ghostly dogs:[2]

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[1] Le Grand Veneur hunted with dogs in the forests of Fontainebleau in France; Hackelberg sold himself to the Devil for permission to hunt until doomsday in Germany; and in Britain King Arthur served as goblin huntsman. The same mythology is said to prevail among all Aryan peoples with little difference in detail. The souls of the dying, acording to Wirt Sikes, we carried away by the howling winds or the dogs of Hermes. Hermes conducted the souls of the dead to the world below and was, at times, interchangeable with his dog. This relates to the early Aryan conception of seeing the wind as a howling dog or wolf which speeds over the house tops causing the inmates to tremble with fear lest their souls should follow them ([1880] 1973: 144).

[2] The spirit of this folklore has been captured recently by the poet Martin Newell in a poem about 'Black Shuck', a ghostly black hound of Odin. The story of Black Shuck apparently originates with the Vikings who brought the tale with them when they invaded East Anglia—as they 'sprang from their long ships and stormed ashore in the mist, they brought with them the legend of their ghostly dog'. Black Shuk has remained part and parcel of the local folklore of the region. 'Padding the quiet roads at night', he is described as having a shaggy black coat and eyes as big as saucers that glow like red-hot coals. He must be treated with respect because a sighting of him is thought to mean that you, or somebody who you know, will shortly die. You might meet Black Shuck at a crossroads, on a bridge, ford, or in a lonely country lane. He is said to haunt the boundary lines of ancient parishes, and is often encountered on

> Mortals can hear the hunt thundering across the sky, and dogs will often begin to howl at the noise of the ghost hounds, but to see the procession is to invite death or disaster, perhaps even to be caught up with it and swept away (Jones 1996: 455).

In some accounts Woden is accompanied by beautiful spirit maidens called Valkyries or Waekyrges who, mounted on white steeds, took heroes slain on the battlefield to Valhalla, the battlefield reserved for the worthiest. The Valkyries are portrayed as ravens or wolves in some accounts (Jones 1995: 444; Farrar & Farrar 1991: 145). Herne the hunter,[3] a descendant of Woden,[4] is also said to lead a Faery pack across the hills of Britain (Matthews 1993: 47) and is identified with Hermes (Graves 1981: 151). The leader of this ghastly rout was sometimes

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marshlands, fens and misty low-lying coastal ground. A verse from Newall's poem captures Black Shuk's association with death:

> Then Shuck will run behind me
> And I may not look back
> But press on into darkness as I must
> As others have before me
> And others yet to come
> Who flower once, before they turn to dust
> (1999: 8)

[3] The first reference to Herne comes from Shakespeare in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Act IV, scene 4:

> There is an old tale goes, that Herne the hunter,
> Sometime a keeper here in Windsor forest,
> Doth all the winter-time, at still midnight,
> Walk round about an oak, with great ragg'd horns—
> And there he blasts the tree, and takes the cattle,
> And makes the milch-kine yield blood, and shakes a chain
> In a most hideous and dreadful manner…
> You have heard of such a spirit, and well you know
> The superstitious idle-headed eld
> Received, and did deliver to our age,
> This tale of Herne the hunter for a truth.
> (Quoted in Matthews, 1993: 47).

Matthews indicates that Shakespeare drew upon an older 17th century story associated with an oak tree in Windsor Great Park, called 'Herne's Oak', which was supposed to 'commemorate regular sightings of a mysterious and terrifying huntsman and his ghostly hounds' (1993: 48).

[4] Odin was gradually replaced by the Devil and in time later local and national heroes supplanted the Devil. In many places a ghostly coach and four superseded the huntsman's pack. Francis Drake, seated in a black coach and lashing a team of headless horses into a wild gallop' accompanied by hideous howls of Yeth Hounds or Wish Hounds which scream on the wind and hunt down the souls of unbaptised babies across Dartmoor (Readers Digest 1973).

female; in northern Germany she was the wife of Wotan, sometimes it was Holda, Holle, or Holt, 'the friendly one', goddess of marriage and fecundity; in the south she was called Perchta, Berhta, or Berta, 'the bright one'. During the Middle-Ages there were female ecstatic cults of night-flying goddesses, whose followers believed they were riding out with Diana, Herodias, or Holda, accompanied by a train of souls of the dead. Hecate, or Hekate, a goddess originally worshipped in Asia Minor and later in ancient Greece (Ronan 1992: 5), was a leader of the 'famous witch ride' of the Middle Ages (Smith 1992: 61). Hecate, an underworld goddess originally associated with crossroads, 'flies about by night on the wind' accompanied by a 'host of Hekate', the restless souls of the dead (Rohde 1992: 67–69). These beliefs about night-flying goddesses were distorted and re-elaborated by the Inquistion to create the stereotype of the diabolical witches' sabbath (Ginzburg 1992).

Many modern witches have incorporated this folk-lore into their present-day rites. According to Doreen Valiente, a well-known witch and one time high priestess to Gerald Gardner, the founder of modern witchcraft, Herne, the leader of the Hunt (also known as the Horned God, the Oak King, and the Greenwood Lord) carries off the souls of the dead into the underworld and leads the Hounds out on the chase at Candlemas. Gwyn ap Nudd and the Wild Hunt are also called upon to prowl beyond the witchcraft circle as a 'protective element keeping all that has no right to enter the circle away' (Valiente 1990: 59, 154). Valiente, who lived in Sussex, England, notes how on Ditchling Beacon, the highest point on the Sussex Downs, an ancient earthwork is haunted by a 'phantom hunt, known locally as the Witch Hounds'. She says that 'listeners hear the cry of hounds, the hoofbeats of galloping horses, and the call of the hunting horn, but nothing is seen' (1962: 55).

I now turn to see how a group of contemporary pagans in Norfolk used the Wild Hunt mythology as a means of confronting the dark of nature as a process of initiation.

A Wild Hunt Challenge in Norfolk

East Anglia has a reputation among some for being a strange and magical place. The magical realms of eastern England are said to be the land of handywomen, horse-whisperers, wizards and witches, cunning men and wise women (Pennick 1995). The Essex witch trials have been well documented by Alan Macfarlane (1970) and the infamous

self-styled 'witch hunter general' Matthew Hopkins hailed from and worked in this area too (Deacon 1976). In the King's Lynn Tuesday Market a diamond shape brick keystone above a first floor window allegedly marks the spot where, in 1590, the heart of Margaret Read, the last witch burnt in Norfolk, exploded. Another story, current to the beginning of the previous century, claimed that it rolled down a lake leading from the market place and plunged into a river[5] (Porter 1974: 137–138). According to folklorist Jennifer Westwood, there is a well-recorded history of magical activities of witches and their familiars, but less on the cunning folk—the wise men and women who practiced 'un-spelling' or 'un-bewitching'. However, some cunning folk, such as Cunning Murrill who apparently dressed up for the part wearing 'terrifying goggles', attained some notoriety. Westwood notes that it was a common belief in Norfolk that the toad and all creeping things were in the service of evil. In 1879, Eckling Green was fined a shilling for assaulting a woman who had charmed him by using a toad, and in East Dereham, as recently as after the Second World War, a man was brought to court for assaulting a woman whom he had accused of being a witch.[6] East Anglia today is said to have become a particular target for devil worship with its many abandoned churches regularly being found daubed with pentagrams and other magical symbols.[7] For such a dispersed and largely rural area of the country, Norfolk also has quite a number of practitioners of contemporary Paganism and I met a number of them at a pub moot (the meeting was advertised in the Pagan magazine *Pagan Dawn*) organized by one couple.

Richard and Louise, who are both in their early forties, run a small post-office called Wizard's End in a small Norfolk village. Wizard's End is like any other post-office apart from the fact that it has a large wizard painted on the outside wall,[8] and that it sells magical paraphernalia—

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[5] Enid Porter. *The Folklore of East Anglia*.

[6] At a Norwich day seminar on the *Ritual Protection of House, Farm and Church from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*. Wensum Lodge, 17 October 1998.

[7] *The Guardian*, 24 November 1998.

[8] For a time, in the autumn of 1998, it was also distinctive for its blue post box that was located in the wall beside the wizard painting. The post-office authorities objected and painted the box red. According to Richard, it was so badly painted that he had to re-paint it and the only colour he had was blue! An official from the post-office was sent to warn Richard and Louise that they were contravening post-office regulations. When Richard told the official that there was no mention of colour in the regulations, the official allegedly got extremely annoyed and threatened to prosecute. The post box has now been carefully painted by the post-office in its original red colour.

such as incense, essential oils, candles, wands, wizard figurines and Pagan journals—alongside stamps, postal orders and regular national newspapers. Richard also makes special Wizard's End skin cream from a blend of essential oils and herbs in a natural base using 'age old knowledge'. Louise casts horoscopes. At the moot in the back room of the pub Richard told about how he had been struck by lightening. He had walked outside the post office whilst looking up at a storm and a lightening bolt had struck him. At this point in the conversation Richard pointed to the top of his head and showed us a small round bald patch, the place where the bolt had hit him. Thinking that he had died and gone on to the next world, he tried to phone some of his friends to check whether he could communicate with the living; they were all out, and he said he did not know whether he was alive or dead. This had awakened his interest in religion and magic, and both he and Louise had attended a Pagan Federation course on witchcraft in a nearby village. However, they felt that the person running the course did not know anything and was 'on the lookout to initiate young women'. Then Louise had had a communication from a hereditary witch in the north of England via citizen band radio, and subsequently Richard and Louise took up a training given by these hereditary witches, who had passed on their tradition fearing that it was dying out through lack of family interest. Communicating with the witches by taped recordings, the first time they had met their trainers was at their joint initiation. Richard said how they had been worried about meeting the witches but had nevertheless undergone an initiation; this had included being tied up naked while a sword was pointed at them as they were introduced to the circle watchtowers.

After the death of one of their initiators and unresolved differences with the other, Richard and Louise decided to go their own way. They explained that hereditary witchcraft originated with the Iron Age tribes, of which the Iceni was the most local one in Norfolk, and that they had their own ways of doing things. They followed the Celtic 'Herne Path', which was apparently similar to the Romany way of life, but also different. They described it as an eclectic path that incorporated many ideas and practices of different times. Richard said that it involved a cosmic fight between good and evil—Herne, the force of good, seeks out and battles with the forces of darkness (which inhabit vulnerable bodies or those close to death). They follow a Wiccan ritual pattern but are also involved with nature, and they spoke about getting to know trees and trying to understand the energies of woods etc. They

frequently compared themselves to another group of Norfolk Pagans who allegedly always conducted their rituals indoors. According to Richard, were so scared that something powerful might arrive that they conducted their rituals in a church hall 'just in case'. Richard added that 'they [the other Pagan group] go out and hug trees, we go out and the trees hug us—we know what the outside is'.

Richard and Louise invited those interested to an open event that involved getting to know the spirits of a wood near Norwich through a Wild Hunt Challenge; it was to be held on the 31 October at Samhain (Halloween), when it is said that the veil between this world and the otherworld is thin. They spoke about previous experiences with the spirits of another wood near Norwich in which they had conducted similar challenges in previous years. The aim of the challenge was to gain mastery over an area of Gwyn ap Nudd's hunting ground. The plan was to walk the wood route during daylight to learn the way, and then repeat it at night in a timed challenge. If completed successfully, the challenged person earned the right of the cooperation of the spirit beings of the area, and to cut a staff from the wood.

Richard, who said that he had been researching the folklore of the Wild Hunt on the Internet, explained to me that the challenge was a 'guided mediation' where the challenger tried to interact with the elementals of the wood to open up other ways of being and to learn how to use the senses:

> We are used by Herne and the hunt to find things on this plane. It's like a territorial army exercise—learning to use them, to work with them, and them learning to trust us. It's a challenge.
> Normal people don't go into the wood at night. You take on the ambiance of the wood and learn. You come back charged. You survived! You learn. You hear different things, your senses go on overdrive and your ears are the size of elephants' ears. Last time I heard fairy bells. I strained to hear them and then I saw other people straining to hear…It was a lovely sound. Then there were fire flies…

Richard informed me that the Challenge was by invitation only and that people had to do it for the right reasons. In a previous year, one group had participated for excitement rather than spiritual intent and when Richard had refused to let them join in the following year, they had gone around Norwich dressed up as vampires instead. Richard said that he and Louise had cycled around the route in the wood and that the wood had a positive energy. He did not know how long it would take to walk at night. On previous Challenges he used to time

the pace by how long it took their old lurcher dog to walk, but she had died. They were going to walk it the following night with a group of people. Then they were going to walk it for two more nights before the big challenge at Samhain.

At the next Pagan moot the conversation was mainly focused on a discussion of the Wild Hunt. Five people had walked the course the previous afternoon. It was agreed that the wood was friendly and wanted to communicate with us. Richard and Louise spoke about issuing the Challenge to the wood. We decided to walk the route in the dark on the Friday Samhain eve. People recounted what had happened in previous years in a different wood, but nearly all of the conversation was on the forthcoming Challenge as people aired their fears and their fantasies about what might happen. This was part of a process of building up the tension and excitement. There was an air of anticipation, of shared purpose, spiritual quest, an expedition into the unknown. When we ventured into the wood what would we find? What would find us? Would we come back? Richard and Louise handed out the following Challenge information:

The Wild Hunt
Samhain 1998

This is a competition betwixt the shaman, and the elements of the Fairy Folk who hunt with Gwyn Ab Nudd [sic].

This is called the Ultimate Sport of the Magician or Sorceress (all sons of Herne and Maids of Moira were thus qualified).

The Magician wishes to gain mastery over an area of Gwyn Ab Nudd's sporting and hunting grounds if, …the shaman is triumphant, the Elemental Kings must yield mastery of the territory to the Magician for his lifetime.

If …the land succeeds in preventing the magician/sorceress from finishing, and the said applicant survives the chase, then he should repay the land according to the terms set out before the challenge begins.

The area has been carefully chosen and an offering will be laid out before the hunting date, bread, fruit etc. The terms of the challenge will be issued aloud i.e. boundaries, time, forfeit or prize.

Dark clothing is to be worn in salutation to the time of the season. Kindle a fire at the starting point, dedicate it to Gwyn Ab Nudd thus:-

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Place the posy into the flames and as it burns this releases the dark spirit of the Hunt in its smoke. Be off and hasten about your business, from here on you are alone, use your wits.

Turning around or looking over your shoulder will be viewed as surrender! The Challenge is betwixt you and the Hunt, both you and they will know if you succeed!

> Should you win, you may expect full co-operation of non-physical being within that area for your lifetime.
>
> Losing is evident if the circuit is not completed in the specified time, or any other surrender, a precious offering is given to appease the triumphant Hunt, such as honeycomb, wine, etc.
>
> Some have lost their lives or have actually joined the Wild Hunt instead of being chased by it, but, please think of this as a great honour.

On the reverse side was a map of the route sitting between these words:

> Failure exists only when
> Success is measured by
> The words of a Non-God!
>
> But remember this, you are only following in the footprints where we your Elders have trodden before.

The emphasis was on competition, sport and mastery—a contest between the Magician/shaman and the land with its Elemental Kings or nature spirits. This was a Challenge shaped by the mythology and folklore associated with Gwn ap Nudd, and it also showed the influence of computer language, 'Be off and hasten about your business, from here on you are alone, use your wits'. The reference to the ancestors 'following in the footprints' of the Elders stressed the continuity between the land, past generations and the present. The implicit danger in this quest—the possibility of joining the Wild Hunt and not returning—added to the *frisson*, the excitement of an initiation encounter.

Walking the Wood

Three of us who were considering undertaking the Challenge—Mary, a shamanic practitioner, artist and musician, Sophie, a hereditary witch and an artist, and me—decided to walk the wood route in the daylight to see what it was like. We called in to Wizard's End on route to see Richard and Louise. Richard had announced that he had had two messages: one was from ordinary reality, and the other from the otherworld. The first was that Andy had checked with the warden from the wood that permission had been given for us to be there. The other message was from the otherworld: Gwyn ap Nudd had communicated, via the ouija board, saying that we would each be met with challenges according to our ability.

Driving to the wood, the clouds gathered over the wide Norfolk horizon momentarily dispersing the sunshine. There appeared to be

an ominous dark cloud over the wood as we approached and a flock of rooks flew overhead. However, on arrival at the car park the clouds disappeared and the atmosphere appeared to become more benign. We walked leisurely around the wood and, as instructed by Richard and Louise and I gathered material to put in a magical bag or 'posy'. I collected oak leaves, mushrooms, holly leaves, soil from a molehill, acorns, silver birch bark, and twigs to put in my posy. Mary had already collected hers on the first walk, and Sophie had decided that she did not need to do the Challenge (as she claimed to be a hereditary witch). We followed the special Challenge map that Richard and Louise had given us; it showed a route on which significant places had been marked. It started at 'Wild Hunt car park' went in a straight direction along the perimeter of the wood before a left hand turn to 'Thor's Furnace' (a charcoal burning oven). The path from Thor's Furnace led between piles of felled pines into the dark interior of the wood. To the right was a 'Circle of Power', a small circle of tree stumps, and a bit further on was the 'Magical Tree'. This silver birch had had honeysuckle growing around its trunk in its formative growing years leaving it with an unusual twisted shape. After the Magical Tree, the path led towards the right and came eventually to a 'Log Seat' to one side of a low-hanging branch. From here on the route in the wood was difficult to follow—there was no clear path and many twists and turns which were cut through scrub and woodland which looked the same (this was to prove to be a real test in navigational skills). It came as a great relief to eventually find 'Woden's Standing Stone' (a tall narrow slate sculpture which appeared to be invisible if approached from the wrong angle). Another area of criss-crossing paths eventually led out onto a wider track—with muddy swampy areas—which eventually completed the circuit leading back to Wild Hunt car park.

On the Friday Mary and I drove to Wizard's End and Richard and Louise took us to the wood in their car. Richard wore a red jester's hat with many bells. On this occasion the mood was light-hearted although not much was said, and it was in stark contrast to the serious event that loomed the following night. When we arrived at the wood the others were waiting in two cars in the car park. Mike, in his early 20s, was unemployed but interviewed people who had had UFO sightings for the Norfolk UFO Society. Colin was about the same age as Mike but was very quiet and not very talkative. Janet and Malcolm were in their mid 50s. Janet said that she and Malcolm had known Richard and Louise for about six years and that Janet looked after the cards in

the post office shop at Wizard's End. They had initially got to know Richard and Louise because they had asked them for help with difficult neighbours who were interfering in their life. Richard and Louise had done a spell to try and get them to move. The spell had not worked in the sense that the neighbours had moved, but they were much quieter afterwards.

We walked around the circuit in the wood in the moonlight together. Some people collected things for their poppets. When we reached the Magical Tree everyone stopped to admire it. I decided to walk ahead to see if I could find my way by myself. Janet and Malcolm followed some distance behind. There were two difficult turns—right after the low branch and left at the first fork and right at the second. When I was sure that I knew where I was going, I slowed down and waited for Janet and Malcolm to catch up, and we started talking. They said that they had been in the wood since 3.30pm and had done a practice run in the light and were now doing it in the dark. They had tried the previous Sunday with their grandchildren but had gone in completely the wrong direction. As we walked we chatted about the route and how we would remember where to go the following night. When we arrived back in the car park we had to wait for the others to arrive. When everyone had come back we agreed to meet at 8.30 the next evening.

Richard and Louise gave Mary and I a lift back to Wizard's End. After showing us their rescued Tawny owls (Odin, Phantom and Min), who were kept in an aviary in the back garden, they invited us in for tea in the back part of the post office. The sitting room was finished in pine and had a Scandinavian feel to it. The large fireplace was decorated with pistols, a mace and an enormous sword. There were Egyptian pictures on another wall, pictures of owls and lots of wizard figurines (like the ones for sale in the post office shop). On one windowsill overlooking the garden was a model of Wizard's End post office. In one corner of the room was an enormous globe. An open plan pine staircase led upstairs. Louise showed us a copy of the women's magazine *Chat*, drawing our attention to a Halloween special on spells for curing cellulite, how to get pregnant, how to deal with a hostile mother-in-law etc. We laughed at the way the article had been written, and the contrast between this popular interpretation of magic that drew on rather superficial stereotypes of witchcraft, and our forthcoming Challenge—which seemed like a confrontation between life and death—seemed stark. Richard played some music by *The Enid*, a New Age Pagan band.

Confrontation with the Wild Hunt

On Samhain morning Mary and I made our posies. We bound the leaves, bark and fungi etc into newspaper and then wrapped them up in Hessian and stitched it with turquoise thread into a parcel. As the day drew on and darkness descended our anticipation and anxiety about the forthcoming Challenge increased. We spoke about 'the wild' and what it meant to us. Mary saw the wild as neutral. She said that when it sees destruction—ecological or whatever—the wild hunt comes in and sweeps it all clean. It is earth energy—tornadoes, flood and earthquakes. It is a wild energy—of rain and storm—the wild comes in as an uncontainable force. I said that I saw the wild as all that was repressed by society; it was the potentiality of humanness; it was like walking off the path into the wood, where the path represents the social and the wood the unrepressed part of the self. Mary said that she had experienced elementals in the wood. She picked up one of her many drums and tried to channel the elemental by drumming:

> The first thing is that it wants reassurance that I'm not taking the piss. It wants me to ask questions.
> What is it and where does it come from?
> It won't answer.
> It's not communicable that way. It's an energy that moves around in woods. It was in holly, but not a holly thing. It moves around. It is the eyes of the wood checking us out to see who we were.
> It wants a honey sandwich (laughter). I'm going to take a selection of sandwiches with me!
> It's not the wind blowing through the holly. I did some gazing at it—it's a presence—I saw it but not as I see you. It's like a sense of being slightly sparkly inside the bush and when I see something like that I get shivers up and down my spine. It didn't feel bad or good—neutral—and it feels as though it's sussing us out—the eyes of the wood, but won't say more than that. It wasn't very convinced that we were taking it seriously.
> I don't see fairies—I get the feeling first then change in shape or lights etc. It was definitely in the bush. It wasn't hiding but drawing attention to itself. I've sent a power animal round the wood and she says it's ok.

I said that I was not worried so much by what was in the wood but confronting my imagination about what might be lurking—my own fear of being in the wood. I was allowing myself to opt out of the Challenge until the last moment to see how I felt about walking in the wood alone at night. I knew that my active imagination would see rapists and other monsters at the slightest noise from the undergrowth;

supposing I met some one on the path? Mary said that what starts off as a psychological battle could shift a person into another place where a different type of communication was possible. She said that that had been her experience of a shamanic 'sitting out' vision quest where she had faced her biggest fear and had managed to walk through it to see 'images of beauty'.

As darkness fell it started raining lightly, no moon was visible. How would we see in the wood? Fears about being lost in the wood were voiced by both of us, we decided to go and buy a torch each 'just in case'. We arrived at the wood at 8.15 after a drive in near silence as a light drizzle played on the car windscreen. Andy was standing outside Colin's car, Mike, Colin and his girlfriend had taken the opportunity to practice the route. We chatted as we waited for everyone to arrive and Andy told me that he'd been involved in all sorts of magical practices from Druidry to Gardnerian Wicca. He was now more concerned with 'putting theory into practice' and was studying an environment management course. The course was small compared to other courses at the college, and he thought that this might be because many people were not interested in the environment. He said that he thought that Pagans were not very interested in acting on their ideas about nature.

As we were talking, Richard and Louise arrived with their barbeque that they set up in the car park. They proceeded to light a fire so that the posies could be burnt to release our spiritual connections to the wood. In the meantime the others came back. Everyone was very talkative and quite animated. Richard said that he would go first and then it had to be female, male, female etc., (reflecting the Wiccan notion of sexual polarity). Mary said that she wanted to go after me because I'd go quickly (because of my fear), so I said I'd go after Richard. The others decided between themselves the 'running order'. Richard read out the dedication to Gwyn ap Nudd and placed his posy in the fire to burn, thus releasing his spirit connection to the wood, and he took off. Some time later it was my turn, and after placing my poppet in the flames, I walked down the first track, rather relieved that at last it was happening. As I was walking away from the others, I felt resolute that I was going to do the Challenge, quietly determined to face my own fears about walking in the wood at night. I tried to blank my mind to my fears—was that shadow someone or something sitting down watching me, or was it a local axe man? I visualised myself strong and with a blue light protecting me. This feeling of strength and determination became stronger as I entered the deeper, darker part of the wood there

was no turning back. There was very little light, but it was possible to make out the path and the shapes and outlines of the trees. The rain was falling softly and there was a wet, misty feel to the woods—dark but gently inviting. The ground was very wet underfoot and boggy in places. I found my way easily and between the Log Seat and Woden's Standing Stone I imagined I saw a shadowy figure. I had a moment of panic—was I going to let my biggest fear overtake me? Was I going to panic? I decided to carry on and decided that I was going to enjoy the experience. I felt relatively confident of the route and I thought I would just enjoy the darkness and the wood and let myself be aware of the energies and sounds. I felt the wood and its energies through a misty, glistening darkness—it was a wonderful experience.

When I eventually arrived back in the car park some people were still in the process of setting off on their challenge. As I walked into the circle around the fire faces looked expectantly for my report on my experiences. As more came back so the discussion and comparison of experiences grew. Richard said he felt a dark presence following him, which he thought was a large black dog. Darren, a friend of Colin and Mike, who had arrived late and was wearing a black army-style balaclava, saw a medieval knight sitting on a horse behind him to his right. He spoke to Richard about it afterwards and offered to take Richard back to the spot where he had seen it. Richard said that this was no good as it had been Darren's experience and that the knight would have vanished. Richard advised Darren to look at the armour in a history book to find out what the knight was. Richard spoke of the last Challenge and how, in a different wood, he had seen some Vikings. He had reached out to touch them but they had backed off, making his hand and arm glow golden.

In the meantime, Mike had got lost and found himself in brambles, but had eventually found the 'Wild Hunt car park'. He talked to me about his pet subject of UFOs and seemed quite disappointed that he had not seen one on this occasion. He spoke about how he went out UFO hunting in the night with a group of friends. They had gone to a local beach and mediated on calling down UFOs. A large cube had materialized with four bright lights and a cigar-shape in the middle. This had convinced his friend who had been skeptical. Mary came back saying that she had been fine until the last section when she had heard a dog barking and also she thought that she might have been followed. Richard said that the previous year the Wild Hunt had left a dog with a challenger to look after for a year as a learning experi-

ence. Mary said that she had been overtaken by a figure and she was not sure who or what it was (it later transpired to be Mike who had got lost). Janet and Malcolm were quiet about their experiences, but spoke about hearing noises and seeing lights. In the meantime Andy had got thoroughly lost. There was a discussion about whether he had been taken by the Wild Hunt. Richard was just on the point of going to look for him when Andy stumbled through the undergrowth. He had not encountered horses or dogs, but had gone in totally the wrong direction and seen a badger's set and a deer instead. When everyone got back we made our way up to the Circle of Power close to Thor's Furnace. Mary drummed and sang while everyone sat on tree stumps. We walked to the Magical Tree and then all present agreed that the energy in the wood had changed—it was no longer welcoming, it was time to go.

Initiation into the Process of Nature

Maurice Bloch, in a study of the Merina of Madagascar (1986) (which he later developed into a universalistic theory of ritual (1992)) maintains that transcendent spirit must conquer nature as biological life processes. According to Bloch, Merina circumcision ritual demonstrates that blessing is the true transcendental source of eternal life through descent and this is established by the denial of nature as represented by women, fertility, and sexuality. However, this is only suitable for the ancestors not the living. Nature, as the biological facts of life, cannot be expelled but it has to be controlled, and this is done by a violent re-assertion of ancestral spirits. This assures obedience to the past, the dead and senior generations; it makes certain that the ancestors are not forgotten and that their authority is established via a complicated symbolism that tries to overcome that which cannot ultimately be conquered. Bloch sees the ritual as an attempt to establish a source of fertility 'free from nature, women and biology and based entirely on descent blessing and authority'; however this cannot be done because of the inevitable reliance, in this world at least, of the living on natural fertility. As a result the symbolism 'seems to be forever chasing it own tail, recovering what it has thrown out and celebrating what it has denigrated' (1986: 103). Bloch's assertions have been challenged as ahistorical and dualistic (Morris 1997: 85) and they demonstrate not so much an indigenous understanding but rather a neoplatonist interpretation.

In the case of practitioners of nature spiritualities, the aim is to re-establish a contact with the process of nature. There are neoplatonic aspects within the broad category of nature religion, as discussed in Chapter 8, but they tend to focus around anthropocentric and monotheistic tendencies within a wider and more holistic worldview. The majority of practitioners of nature religion see the world in holistic terms where everything is interconnected, but people living in modern Western societies are separated from the natural world, they are no longer directly dependent upon it for day-to-day survival, therefore a relationship with nature has to be created. The Wild Hunt Challenge was an initiative aimed at creating such relationship by opening up a different sort of understanding of (with) nature—it was an initiation into the process of life and death; entry into the wood was a type of initiation into magical consciousness through the mythology of the Wild Hunt: to be hunted, to be taken by the hunt, is to face the dark chthonic realms of the otherworld. It is difficult for this to happen within the confines of a witchcraft ritual circle marked out inside someone's living room with all the furniture pushed out of the way. It has to happen out 'in nature'. The wild wood is the ideal place—it is dark, the realm of elemental spirits, a space apart, and according to Richard, 'normal people don't go into the wood at night'. One has to turn from the everyday world—'the normal'—to put oneself into a position to 'be taken' by the train of the ghostly dead. In a manner of speaking, it was an exposure, not only to 'see' in a different way by an opening of the senses, but also to be taken up by a state of awareness shaped by the rhythm of moving from one state to another—from light to dark and also from life to death. The wood represented a different world, a single ontological domain of otherness but crosscut by different perceptions and experience. A relationship with the spirits contained in the wood had to be achieved through a mythology; it could not happen automatically (cf. Humphrey & Onon 1996: 113). The mythology provided the context and the language for the experience.

Richard had said, via his spirit communication, that we would all be tested according to our ability. Several people reported experiences of hearing noises associated with the Hunt—references to black dogs, barking, dark presences. The 'sightings' of a medieval knight could be explained in terms of an Arthurian romantic and heroic overlay on an original mythical nucleus theme of a journey into the realm of the dead (Ginzburg 1992: 107–8). The Challenge combined heroic quest with a spirit of openness. The wood, as the antithesis of society and

the social order, is a liminal space where anything can happen and the initiate is told that she or he may not come back—to see the Wild Hunt is said to invite death or disaster, or to be caught up with it and swept away. As we were warned in the Challenge handout, 'Some have lost their lives or have actually joined the wild Hunt instead of being chased by it, but, please think of this as a great honour'. This had echoes of brave Viking warrior heroes who, escorted by Valkyries, were taken to Valhalla, the favourite home of Odin, where they could battle without injury, feast, drink, and spend their evenings hearing songs of great battles while being waited on by the Valkyries (Jones 1996: 444). The heroic element can be likened to an ascetic preparation for mastery of the spirits of the wood. As the historian Richard Kieckhefer has observed, with reference to the Norse god Odin who hangs on a tree, fasts and is exposed to the elements, a magical force is seen to issue from one who has performed heroic disciplines, mastered their body and strengthened their soul. With intense effort of will access to otherwise hidden energies is gained (1993: 53).

In a way, we all saw what we were prepared to see. Andy, the environmentalist was ambivalent about the Challenge, got lost but saw a badger's set and a deer instead. Mike got lost too in his search for UFOs. Despite a more frivolous component of the acting out of computer Dungeons and Dragons type game-playing, the wood was a place of real disorientation where unconscious and conscious fears could be aired—and might be overcome. The challenge raised psychological issues, in the words of psychotherapy it brought the contents of the unconscious to consciousness, and combined them with magical techniques for naming and symbolizing the unnamable in a manner common to shamanic healing rituals conducted in non-Western areas of the world (Vitebsky 1993, 1995: 98–103). In my case, I had to overcome my social conditioning that woods are indeed a dangerous place to be in at night. They are full of the fearful creatures that lurk in the dark recesses of the subconscious. Only when I had decided that I was not going to allow myself to be frightened by my imagination did I relax and enjoy the elemental feel of the woods. The image of the soft greys and shadow, the damp smell of vegetation, the fine misty rain and the shapes and sounds of the trees and the rustling undergrowth is an enduring memory; it is one that gave me a very different understanding of nature and of my place within it—it was a wonderful experience.

Ideologically nature religion embraces life and death; there is no transcendence, neither is there a radical separation between the living

and the dead—the dead are the essence of life and are a part of the living everyday world. They come alive through the mythology of the Wild Hunt as it sweeps through the darkness gathering those who open themselves up to them into their ghostly train. This encounter with the dark and with death is a form of initiation into magical consciousness; this is another way of knowing, one that is all encompassing and immanent rather than transcendent as Bloch would have it.

A search for nature often stems from a feeling of disconnection. It originates in the eighteenth century Romanticism movement's protest against the Enlightenment ideal of disengaged reason. Here the meaning of natural phenomena is not defined by nature itself, or the ideas which they embody, but is given signification by the effect of the phenomena on humans and the reactions they awaken: 'attunement with nature consists of being able to release the echo within' (Taylor 1989: 299). However, as the example of the Wild Hunt has shown, there is more to nature than releasing echoes within—there is the issue of participation and magical consciousness. In addition, Bloch's assertion that the essential core of ritual is a violent transcendent conquering of nature as natural processes of growth, reproduction, ageing and death does not account for why the Norfolk Pagans entered into the spirit of the Wild Hunt Challenge. Their aim was to open the senses and to expand consciousness to other realities and living beings. The world of the wood represented 'nature', wildness and another way of knowing and feeling that is cyclical rather than linear, and holistic rather than dualistic—to link into the spirits of nature through the mythology of the Wild Hunt.

The domain of nature was also to be controlled through a discourse of mastery and power, but it is also a moral area and one demanding respect as laid out in the terms of the Challenge. Initiation has to be worked at through conquest and encounter but also through an intentional opening to evocation, as Richard said 'You hear different things, your senses go on overdrive'; it is an experience that is hard-won (cf. Humphrey & Onon 1996: 113). As hunted we were also to become hunters as part of the act of transformation. We would gain a relationship with the spirits and, as Richard said, would be used by them paradoxically in a dualistic cosmic battle between good and evil. The theme of hunting is important and one to which I will return. Firstly, I look at how the mythology of the Wild Hunt has influenced two shamanic practitioners working in environmental education and healing.

Creating Connection

Midwinter is the 'hunting time' and from Samhain onwards the Wild Hunt forms a cycle of meditation, says shaman Gordon MacLellan who has been initiated by the Wild Hunt. Gordon told me that he had seen skull-headed people waiting in a rank, smelly and crowded cave. He had seen flashes of eyes and bits of limbs but did not know who was there. It was the Wild Hunt. He was accepted into their midst and he saw them ride. He told me that he had been hunted and had experienced shamanic dismemberment, 'The first dismemberment is shocking and it must be to drive you out of your shape. You have to rebuild your body after dismemberment; it is a teaching about embodiment—a disconnection to commitments to shape. It is different to processes such as illness or death which are awakenings to a wider world'. He could feel the Hunt coming; he could feel a tremble in his bones, like a horror film. When in a supermarket he might feel them but he has the right to stall them and set a time for the encounter in the immediate future so that they do not get him in front of a class that he is teaching.[9] The purpose of the Wild Hunt is like a spiritual or magical tornado—anyone could be taken up on a hunting night either hunting with or before it as entertainment. It was not a 'nice experience' but a 'part of things as is'. He explained that part of being a shaman was to be available to the spirits, and if they needed a victim he was available. If he was asked he could not refuse—the oaths he had taken made it inconceivable for him to refuse. Gordon is here referring to the deeper, darker aspects of the Hunt, a world apart from a superficial New Age workshop culture that does not engage with the dark in its frightening aspects.[10] Gordon said that the Hunt was something that happened to a person. It was a process that he would not seek to wake or facilitate in others, and definitely not with children. The Wild Hunt is not a subject for

[9] This important point demonstrates the difference between a shaman and someone who has no control over the situation and is 'possessed' by spirits. A shaman is a person who is in control of when she or he communicates with the spiritual realm.

[10] By comparison, the solitary witch Ann Moura, author of three volumes on 'green witchcraft', gives a meditation that takes the reader into a safe 'shadow side' of witchcraft. Using language that gives agency to a male Hunter and sees death symbolized jointly as Crone and earth, Moura's meditation gently introduces the reader to the Wild Hunt and takes them to an unthreatening dark entrance. Through this experience, a person should come to understand that death is a necessary part of life. (Moura 1999: 31–2).

the workshops that are so popular with practitioners of nature spiritualities because it involves dissolution of the self and an associated confrontation with fear, although he commented cynically, '…it may only be a matter of time before someone tries to reinvent them as a safe personal discovery process and dismemberment become a cheerful form of self-examination. O, wait for that howling on the edge of the senses that says the Hounds are running and then you remember that They are real. Trouble is, so many people never stop long enough to listen, let alone actually *hear*'.[11]

Jo Crow, who works individually and with Gordon in environmental education, told me how she first encountered the Horned God, who 'felt like the Holly King, the Oak King and the Green Man', in a women's Dianic witchcraft coven. The Horned God said to her, 'I am the Hunter and you are the Hunted; you are the Hunter, and I am the Hunted'. Jo said that some of the ways that she had encountered the gods were as Herne, Cernunnos, and the Horned One. For her they came as the spirit of the land, the greenwood, and the Hunt, amongst many other things. She said that she had only 'touched the tip of the iceberg of possibilites'. The gods could be the connection with the otherworld, and the process of being in process. The gods were a part of the Wild Hunt:

> The Hunt comes after you, hunts you. You run with it, run from it. There is a feeling of everything that you pass gets caught up in a whirlwind; you are a part of it. It feels like nothing is left untouched by the Hunt. For me, the Wild Hunt is the pulse that runs through life. The Wild Hunt is frenzy in the pack, the frenzy of the prey. It is an exhilaration that can carry anything in it. At any time the hunter can become the prey and the prey can become the hunter. The spirit of the hunt is in every aspect of life—the hunter and the hunted, that is life.

Jo told me that when she was visiting another witchcraft coven as a guest, they called the Wild Hunt to hunt those who in ordinary reality were hunting and leaving deer injured. She said it was a terrifying and exhilarating night:

> Wolf came inside me. It was terrifying. He was right in my face, standing on his hind legs staring at me face to face…I smelt his breath; his fangs were dripping. He was going to devour me. He said, 'You have to let me in. You let me in once before'. On another occasion, in a

[11] Gordon MacLellan, personal communication.

> dream I had mated with wolf on a village green. It was an ecstatic and wonderful experience. He showed me this dream and, although I was quivering with terror, I allowed him in. He came behind me and went into me at the base of my neck. I became filled with wolf and went on the Hunt. I ran with the Wild Hunt and I went on the rampage. I was taken by the Hunt.

It took her some time to return to everyday reality:

> When I came off the downs, one guy could see that I was not out of wolf and tried to bring me back. He joined his forehead to mine to try to call me back but wolf came out of me and almost bit his head off. Eventually I went to bed and I still had wolf in me and every time I looked in a mirror I saw wolf. I still had wolf inside me and came back down later. Sometimes he comes as a companion but does not sit inside me. Wolf helps me to walk in two worlds.

Wolf, for Jo, is a presence who comes to her at times and helps keep her connection with another reality; such an experience may bring insight. Jo said that when she works in environmental education she takes groups of people and sends them out hunting to discover their connection with nature 'through their psyches' to bring out their connections with the wood. Jo says it involves two dimensions: the physical collecting of material, and the imaginative opening of the senses; she asks people to interpret what they have experienced into something three dimensional, 'This acts as a connection between the worlds'. Making a fetish of gathered leaves, twigs or any other material may represent the experience; the aim is to make a connection with nature that people will remember.

Jo is a shamanic healer and counselor, she works on what she calls 'inner landscape' and this often involves the Wild Hunt, 'The Hunt is an opening up time—an exposure to spirits'. Jo said that sometimes she would take a client's hand and take a look at the Hunt. It was a process of 'getting them to hunt for themselves, a quest'. She said that when she works with someone it involves going inside to learn about strong physical feelings and emotions. When a person is comfortable with these she asks them to go out in nature to find a place of connection. The inner landscape has to connect with outer; the outer resonates with the inner and this leads to empowerment:

> I encourage them go out into nature once they're open. We are not separate, we are all on the web and impressions will come. There are lots of ways of connecting. It just involves a change in consciousness, a connection with a shamanic worldview—to deepen and open. If we

> really know we are connected and not separate from everything, how can we purposely do harm? It's about rebuilding connections, making bridges, or maintaining a knitting pattern so that the flow can come through—removing obstructions, or knots in a string.

This hunt is conducted within to find a self lost in restricting social roles and expectations. The hunt represents a process of self-examination as confrontation with the wild inside, and a connection with a wider web of connections.

Hunting and Rites of Regeneration

We can see then that the mythology of the Wild Hunt may be encountered through fiction, such as Alan Garner's *The Moon of Gomrath*, or in Brian Bates's *The Way of Wyrd*; it may be invited into witchcraft ritual as described by the Wiccan High Priestess Doreen Valiente, or in other Pagan practices such as the Wild Hunt Challenge in Norfolk; it may also be experienced as a cycle of meditation, or form part of an experience of shamanic dismemberment, as in the case of shaman Gordon MacLellan. The Wild Hunt mythos encourages a different way of knowing and an insight into an alternative way of being in the world, one that appears to be unfamiliar to Westerners but familiar to hunting and gathering cultures. In Malawi, according to Brian Morris, the hunt is a rite of transformation conducted within a pantheistic worldview that expresses life as an on-going process that includes the living and the dead. Hunting is highly ritualized and is an activity that links individual, social group (including ancestors) and the natural world (cf. Turner 1972).[12] The village must be peaceful with no illicit sexual activity taking place, the hunter must go about the hunt with no anger in his heart, and offerings must be made to the spirits of the ancestors

[12] Victor Turner's work on the Ndembu of Zambia—who practice subsistence cultivation growing cassava as well as hunting—shows how hunting is a highly ritualized activity that links hunter, the shades of the dead, and society with esoteric knowledge. Turner has noted how hunting cults have developed that involve propitiatory rites to a specific hunter ancestor and involve grades of initiation into esoteric knowledge. Hunting rites are a high-status and usually masculine activity in a society dominated by matrilineal descent, and an adept, perhaps accompanied by an apprentice, is assisted by guardian shades of a deceased hunter kinsman and by magical charms to seek out animals to hunt. He performs rites to propitiate the shades of hunter-dead before venturing into the wild bush, which is believed to harbour witches, sorcerers, ghosts, werelions and persecuting ancestors (1972: 281–4).

for their help in the hunt (Morris 1996: 28–31). The spirits of the ancestors are associated with the woodland and with animals. Death is not seen as the antithesis of life, but is viewed as a part of this world and necessary for humans to be mortal. The spirits of the dead ancestors are 'dead' but have life—they are reborn as living human beings; they are an aspect of life that includes humans and spirits. There are different modes of being between the dead and the living but there is not a radical dualism between a static transcendental order and the ordinary world, as claimed by Bloch, but rather they are seen as two aspects of a cyclic process—the spirits of the dead are a part of this process and reflect life's essence (Morris 1999: 160).

Aiming to create a non-detached anthropological account of hunting, anthropologist Tim Ingold draws on the lifeworlds of the Cree people of north east Canada—who say that an animal offers itself up intentionally in a spirit of goodwill, or even love, to the hunter—to illustrate the differences between embedded lifeworlds in the environment and dominant dualistic scientific perceptions which find the Cree view—that an animal should voluntarily offer itself to be killed—incomprehensible. Pointing out that the entire world for the Cree, not just the human world, is 'saturated with powers of agency and intentionality', Ingold calls hunting a 'rite of regeneration' (Ingold 2000: 14, 67). The Cree hunter is perceptually skilled and detects clues in the environment that reveal the movements and presence of animals. The hunter also narrates stories of hunting journeys and encounters with animals—often in a performance which aims to give form to human feelings about caribou, as living sentient beings. When it comes to the point of eye-to-eye contact with the animal at the point of killing, the hunter feels the animal presence; there is an intermingling of being with the animal tantamount to love, and also sexual intercourse in the human domain. In telling of the hunt that feeling is expressed (ibid.: 24–25). The hunter consumes the meat but the soul of the animal is released to be re-clothed in flesh. Animals will not return to hunters who have treated them badly: if proper respectful procedures in the process of butchering, consumption and disposal of the bones are not followed, or if undue pain and suffering is caused in the act of killing. Animals are offended if there is unnecessary killing, and if the meat is not properly shared. Hunting aids regeneration—consumption follows killing as birth follows intercourse, both are seen to be integral to reproductive cycles of animals and of humans (ibid.: 67). Human beings and animals are enmeshed in relationships of reciprocity:

> The animals in the environment of the hunter do not simply go their own way, but are supposed to act with the hunter in mind. They are not just 'there' for the hunter to find and take as he will: rather they *present themselves* to him. The encounter, then, is a moment in the unfolding of a continuing—even lifelong—relationship between the hunter and the animal kind (of which every particular individual encountered is a specific instance) (ibid.: 71).

People and animals are enmeshed in highly particularistic and intimate ties with both human and non-human others; the hunter does not transform the world, or dominate it, rather the world opens up to him through knowledge (ibid.: 72).

Referring to the Rock Cree of northern Manitoba, studied by Robert Brightman (1993), Ingold calls hunting an 'epitome of progeneration':

> In the unfolding of the relation between hunters and prey both humans and animals undergo a kind of perpetual rebirth, each enfolding into its inner constitution the principle of its relationship to the other. Actual events of birth and death, therefore, are merely moments in the progenerative process, points of transition in the circulation of life (Ingold, op. cit. 143).

Human beings and animals are linked in the same process of birth, death, and rebirth. Life is a matter of 'coming and going' rather than starting and finishing (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 25). All of existence is suspended in this process, '…animals come when, following the successful hunt, they enter the human community, they go again with the eventual disposal of the remains'; the animal does not cease to be, it still exists, but in another form, and, 'for this reason, there is always the possibility of its return' (Ingold op. cit. 143). Death does not mean the replacing of one generation by another, as in Western geneology, but is rather an affirmation of the continuity of the progenerative process. The life of every being, as it unfolds, contributes to the progeneration of the future as well as to the regeneration of the past (ibid.). All humans, animals, plants, and other persons,[13] leave trails of intersecting pathways that resemble a rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari 1988; Samuel 1990: 2). Persons pass along lines of movement and meet with other persons who may further their growth and development by experience

[13] Personhood, for the Cree, is not confined to humans but is open to animal and non-animal kinds (Tanner 1979: 137–138 cited in Ingold 2000: 49).

or by contributing substance by being killed and eaten. Knowledge is generated in the process:

> Knowledge, from a relational point of view, is not merely applied but generated in the course of lived experience, through a series of encounters in which the contribution of other persons is to orient one's attention—whether by means of revelation, demonstration or ostention—along the same lines as their own, so that one can begin to apprehend the world for oneself in the ways, and from the positions, that they do. In every such encounter, each party enters into the experience of the other and makes that experience his or her own as well. One shares in the process of knowing, rather than taking on board a pre-established body of knowledge (ibid.: 145–146).

Ingold's example of the Cree relations with non-human persons of the environment demonstrates both the nature of this reciprocal cyclic relationship, with its emphasis on participation and sharing in the process of knowledge, and the difference between a detached and dualistic Western point of view.

Hunting in this sense has not always been understood by Western scientific thinking. A stereotype of indigenous peoples being primitive and barbaric in their hunting practices has had devastating effects on indigenous aboriginal peoples. Ilarion (Larry) Merculieff, an Aleut, one of three distinct aboriginal races in Alaska, who was born and raised on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, argues that there is a breakdown of communication between what he calls the ingrained linear structures of Western scientific thinking—with its specialization and refinement of scientific methodology divorced from a direct involvement with nature—and the cyclical understandings of native peoples, who he points out, live by the seasons and respond to their immediate environment. There is a symbiotic and functional relationship between humans and animals that involves the hunting of animals, and among the Aleut this includes seals. This form of hunting has been the target of Western animal rights campaigners (Merculieff 1996: 406–13), many of whom are Pagan.

Western scientific attitudes to nature stem from being physically cut off from living on the land. A degree of variance of perception between Western and non-Western cultures appears that yawns like a vast chasm of cultural difference reflecting a Western alienation from nature—an absence of knowing about nature as the natural world. Due to the influence of industrialization, and its cultural reaction in the shape of Romanticism, nature in Western cultures is other to industrial urban

life; it is not lived in and confronted on a day to day subsistence basis, as among rural Malawians or the Cree, for example. Westerners tend to either control and dominate the natural world on the one hand, or romanticize it on the other. For a long time Western cultures have been divorced from a complex interconnection with nature as *process*, and any form of relationship is sometimes hard to achieve. The mythology of the Wild Hunt goes some way in working towards this. As far as practitioners of nature spiritualities are concerned, the Wild Hunt offers an initiation into the wild and an opening up of the senses; a sense of dissolution of self in confrontation with fear and death, an exposure to a 'whirlwind pulse that runs through life'. In short, engagement with the Hunt is a bid to restore a reciprocity and harmony between humans and nature. To be hunted and to be a hunter involves a metamorphosis—a shift from one to the other as explained by Jo Crow through her encounter with the Horned God and the movement from being hunted to finding herself a hunter. Paradoxically, one becomes the other in a process of coming to know the rhythm of nature—of the movement from life to death. A successful completion of the Wild Hunt Challenge earned the right of the cooperation from the spirits of the wood; and for Jo the metamorphosis into wolf enabled her to hunt those who had been leaving deer injured in ordinary reality. A confrontation with the Hunt may confer certain powers as the result of a relationship with spirits, and perhaps more importantly, an understanding of the fluidity of the processes of life.

The Hunt has an aim of restoring reciprocity between humans and nature through the cyclic process of relationship between the living and the dead—the hunter becomes hunted and *vice-versa*. This is fluid and ever changing, not a static dualism between a transcendent and a material world as outlined by Bloch, but rather represents a different form of knowledge and relationship with nature enabled by magical consciousness. This is an ecological model for Western cultures that have historically lost their participation with nature; they have to reconnect in whatever ways are available.

Inevitably, practices and mythologies are mixed and contradictory reflecting a deep historical past antipathetic to or romantically attached to nature. As I have indicated, some Pagans condemn hunting; they may be opposed to any taking of animal life. Interpretations of the Wild Hunt vary too; they may be dualistic, as in Garner's children's story that is based on a confrontation between light and the powers of darkness, and also in Louise and Richard's hereditary witchcraft tradi-

tion. In the latter, Herne was associated with the forces of good, and Richard, who identified with Herne, spoke about engaging in a cosmic confrontation with the forces of darkness. Richard clearly also wanting to engage with the process of nature. This would appear to demonstrate a Christian overlay on the original shamanic theme outlined by Ginzburg. According to Ronald Hutton, a dualistic interpretation can be traced to Alex Sanders, the founder of Alexandrian witchcraft, and his view of a universe divided into warring good and evil forces (1999: 335). Despite these later overlays, the mythology of the Wild Hunt provides the framework and language for a 'profound connection' between animals, souls, the dead and the beyond, a language of magical consciousness.

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RECLAMATION, APPROPRIATION AND THE ECSTATIC IMAGINATION IN MODERN PAGAN RITUAL

Sabina Magliocco

Ritualization lies at the heart of modern Paganism, or Neopaganism, as it is sometimes called. This religious movement, which emerged in Europe in the early 20th century, but has now reached worldwide diffusion, finds inspiration in the pre-Christian religions once practiced by peoples of Eurasia, North Africa and the Near East, as well as by indigenous religions from other parts of the globe. Modern Pagans revive, re-create and experiment with elements from those religions in order to create meaningful ways of relating to nature and the sacred. In many, if not most, modern Pagan religions, the goal of much ritual is to help practitioners come into contact with what I call the ecstatic imagination, a part of the human mind in which elements from the cultural register mingle with individual fantasy to create experiences that carry practitioners outside their immediate, everyday lives. Through the ecstatic imagination, ritual becomes a vehicle by means of which modern Pagans relate to nature, the sacred, and the past in meaningful ways. Ritual is thus a creative form in and of itself—one which, like any art form, ultimately helps humans transcend the everyday, quotidian nature of human existence.

In this chapter, I will first describe what Pagans mean by ritual and how it became the central form of religious expression in these religions. I will then discuss ritual as a form of creative expression used to bring about religious ecstasy, and examine the processes by which ritual was and continues to be created by Neopagans. My discussion will take me into issues of cultural property and appropriation as they apply to this particular case.

What Is Ritual?

There is no uniformly shared definition of ritual among contemporary Pagans. I will therefore adopt the definition of anthropologist Victor Turner, whose work in the 1960s had a pivotal, if indirect, influence on the development of Pagan ritual in the United States. Turner defined

ritual as "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers" (1967: 19). The notion of belief as applied to Neo-Paganism needs to be problematized, because this group of religions is united by similar praxis rather than by shared beliefs; it is completely possible for modern Pagans to participate in a ritual without believing in the existence of spiritual beings. Nevertheless, this definition is broad and flexible enough to cover the types of practices that members of this religious movement define as "ritual."

Rituals generally fall into three categories, and all are present and observable in modern Paganisms. These include life-cycle rites, which mark the transformation in the life cycle of an individual (for example, weddings, memorial services and initiations); year cycle rites, which mark significant changes in the seasonal year cycle; and rites of crisis, in which the community comes together to address a problem or disruption, such as an illness. The most diffuse model of the modern Pagan year cycle celebrates the solstices, equinoxes, and the days that fall roughly between each solstice and equinox: February 1 (often called Imbolc, Oimelc or Brigid), May 1 (Beltane), August 1 (Lammas or Lughnasadh), and November 1 (Samhain). In addition, Witches observe the full moons (some covens add new moons). Non-Wiccan reconstructionist traditions may follow very different calendars, however, which reflect those of the religious cultures they are reviving. For example, members of the Isis Ancient Cultures and Religions Society in Los Angeles, California, celebrate the goddess Isis with a re-enactment of the Isidis Navigium, the boat-launching in honor of Isis, in early March, reflecting the time of the Nile flooding observed in ancient times by her worshippers.

No discussion of modern Pagan ritual is complete without a reference to magic. Magic is the organizational principle underlying the cosmos which is shared by most adherents of contemporary Paganism.[1] Many adherents see the universe as interconnected, held together by a series of principles and rhythms that regulate time and space, growth and decline, and that allow otherwise disparate objects to influence one another. A key concept underlying this web is "energy." Modern

[1] Not all modern Pagans share a concept of magic, and some Neopagan rituals are not strictly magical in nature. Generally, traditions that derive from Wicca are much more magically oriented than more reconstructionist traditions. In the latter, the purpose of ritual can be simply to experience what was done by historical cultures, and thus to connect experientially with ancestors; or rituals can be simply devotional.

Pagans tend to see all living things, and some inanimate objects (for example, rocks, rivers, springs and natural features of the landscape) as possessing a life force. This energy can be channeled, raised, grounded and directed by human beings. Thus one central purpose of rituals is to raise energy and direct it towards a particular goal. In the case of year cycle rites, the energy is usually said to help "turn the wheel of the year," in other words, to further the natural cycle; but in rites of crisis, the energy is usually directed at righting the imbalance perceived as the cause of the crisis.

Religious Ecstasy and the Ecstatic Imagination

For many Pagans, magic is also the ability to change consciousness at will. Thus, the goal of ritual is to alter consciousness so participants can come into contact with other ways of perceiving the universe and their place in it. I call this state "religious ecstasy," and the stream of imagery it stimulates the "ecstatic imagination." Deriving from the Greek "extasis," the experience of being outside oneself, ecstatic experiences correspond to a range of states that can be classified as altered or alternate states of consciousness. These states feel qualitatively different from ordinary waking consciousness, and are measurably different in that they produce quantifiable changes in heart rate, blood pressure and brain wave activity. They also produce a drop in stressor hormones, like adrenaline, noradrenaline and norepinephrine, and an increase in the body's production of endorphins, the pleasure chemicals. I didn't hook any Neo-Pagans up to equipment that measured these factors in my studies, so what is important here is that people I interviewed felt their consciousness shift perceptibly during these experiences. I am assuming that many of those who reported these shifts actually underwent some kind of physiological change as well.

Ecstatic states range from a light trance in which the experiencer is quite conscious—most of us have experienced this while daydreaming or driving on the freeway—to full-fledged states of dissociation, in which people may feel they are no longer inhabiting their bodies or in control of their actions. Some elements they have in common include:

- Experiencers feel less aware of their surroundings;
- The experience seems to have its own trajectory; experiencers do not feel they are controlling the experience;

- These experiences feel intensely real, almost hyper-real;
- Time distortion, such that a short period of time may seem lengthened, or vice versa, is common to them;
- Subjects are fully engrossed in the experience, and are usually not able to step outside of it and question it while it is happening;
- Subjects may experience improved performance at certain tasks, such as oratory;
- Depersonalization and role-play: subjects may take on the role of a different person or entity;
- Personification: other people and objects are interpreted as part of the experience, and may take on symbolic roles in the drama of the vision.[2]

Ecstatic states can be brought on by a number of different factors. Some common triggers include illness and drug use, but they can also be induced through sensory overload, sensory deprivation, and repetitive rhythmic behavior, such as dance. Ecstatic behavior is learned: in cultures that institutionalize ecstasy, people learn techniques to bring it on, as well as the forms of ecstatic behavior that are appropriate to that culture. Ecstatic states are extremely common cross-culturally; anthropologist Erika Bourguignon estimated that 92% of world cultures had some form of institutionalized altered state of consciousness, generally as part of religious behavior. This suggests that they are an important part of the human experience (Bourguignon, 1976).

Visions and hallucinations (auditory, olfactory, sensual) usually characterize ecstatic states. Anthropologist Michele Stephen, working with ritual specialists in New Guinea, hypothesized the existence of the "autonomous imagination," a part of our imagination that appears to operate independently of our conscious control. It produces a constant stream of mental imagery that helps process experience. This stream of imagery can enter consciousness through dreams, trance experiences, hypnosis, and alternate states of consciousness. More freely creative than ordinary waking thought, it mixes material from the cultural register with elements from the ordinary world and our own memories, in a way that produces vivid hallucinatory images that feel extremely real. Stephen theorizes that this faculty is particularly strong in individuals with a religious or spiritual role in society, such as shamans or priest-

[2] This list of characteristics is an adaptation and combination of those listed by Evans (1979: 33–48) and Sturm (2000).

esses/priests (Stephen, 1989). It is part of what allows these individuals to re-create ritual experiences that transmit their cultural values and traditions in a way that powerfully affects participants on an emotional level. Such specialists often develop a certain amount of volitional access to their autonomous imagination which they can draw upon in order to create new religious rituals and traditions. This description also fits modern Pagan ritualists, who are constantly engaged in the creation of new religious rituals and traditions.

The Reclamation of Ritual and Ecstasy

In order to understand Neopagans' preoccupation with ritual and the ecstatic imagination, it is necessary to understand the emergence of this movement as part of the process of modernity which characterized the late 18th and 19th centuries in the West. As Europeans came into contact with non-Westerners and began to colonize them, intellectual structures emerged to justify colonialism by distancing Europeans from the indigenous peoples they were colonizing. The best-known of these is Edward B. Tylor's idea of unilinear cultural evolution (Tylor, 1849), which hypothesized that human cultures began in a stage of savagery, which was characterized by animistic religion heavily dependent on ritualization, and developed sequentially through a stage of barbarism, characterized by polytheism and more structured ritualization, to the final apex of civilization, epitomized by a monotheism smacking of high-church Protestantism and rather removed from ritual as a central form of religious expression. Tylor's idea did not emerge in a vacuum, however; it synthesized elements that had been part of the dominant European paradigm, at least among the elites, since the Protestant Reformation, and which found their fullest expression in the ideas of the Enlightenment.

As part of its effort to purify Christianity of pagan elements, the Reformation banned many of the ecstatic practices associated with saints' cults and the Catholic year cycle. Because Protestants sought an unmediated relationship between the individual and God, communication with ancestors, fairies, angels or any spirit occupying an intermediate position became suspect. Some of these relationships with spirits had already been stigmatized by the Catholic Church before the emergence of Protestantism, during the early period of the witch persecutions, when traditions about fairies became conflated

with an emerging mythology that equated these beings with demons. Protestantism intensified this identification, further stigmatizing many popular ways of relating to the ecstatic imaginary.

The Enlightenment created a discourse of rationality by devaluing traditional ways of knowing, including beliefs and practices associated with the ecstatic imagination. With its exaltation of human reason, it denounced manifestations that defied rationality as primitive, ignorant, superstitious or insane. In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault traces the idea that madness or insanity was antithetical to reason. While early modern concepts of madness included transcendence—the possibility that the insane were experiencing some kind of state of mind that put them closer to God and the spirit world—for Enlightenment philosophers, madness became not only the enemy of reason, but a manifestation antagonistic to new ideas about production. People preoccupied with transcendence and the ecstatic imagination were not amenable to the discipline and regulation inherent in an emergent industrial economy. In order to create "docile bodies," the state had an interest in suppressing ecstatic experience that could be personally empowering, disruptive of social norms, and critical of emerging paradigms. Ecstasy represented a blot on the bourgeois order, and it had to be suppressed. One way to do this was to pathologize it: to reinterpret the ecstatic imagination and its manifestations as symptoms of mental illness.

My argument is that contemporary Paganism reclaims ecstatic experiences, techniques and symbols that were once part of folk tradition, and inserts them into a new framework: that of ritual. Reclamation is a process by which groups reclaim, re-appropriate and rework elements of their culture previously devalued by a dominant culture. This can be a colonial culture, as in the case of postcolonial societies, or, as in the case I am describing here, a dominant culture of rationalism that excludes certain "alternate ways of knowing" from its register of accepted and approved cultural forms. Like other types of folk revival, it usually indicates a break with tradition, and a yearning to heal that rift. It differs from other forms of folk revival in that it assumes a relationship of power imbalance between a dominant culture and a marginalized, silenced, or subdominant folk group. Reclamation focuses on exactly those elements that the dominant culture considers hallmarks of the subdominant group's inferiority. By reclaiming them, groups give these elements a new and illustrious context that serves as a source of pride and identity.

Note that I do not claim that Neo-Pagans are carrying on an unbroken tradition of ecstasy, or that the images they draw from folklore come to them from an unmediated, continuous tradition (although the latter may be true in a few cases). Rather, Neo-Paganism grows out of a yearning for cultural elements which have been lost or repressed, and an attempt to re-create them, or an approximation of them, in a contemporary context.

We are used to thinking about ecstatic states as part of exotic religions, like the kind studied by anthropologists like Stephen and Herdt in New Guinea. But the West has its own traditions of religious ecstasy that were once a part of accepted religious behavior. One such type involves prophecy or soothsaying in ritual settings by specialized individuals. In ancient Greece, seers such as the Pythia, priestess of the Delphic Oracle, made her predictions in a trance. In Norse culture, the seiðr functioned in much the same way: as an institution allowing priestesses to enter a trance from which they made prophetic statements. Both these traditions presumably involved the ecstatic imagination, in that they involved visions, intuition and presentiments which emerged from the autonomous imaginations of the practitioners. We also know that some ancient rituals, such as the Greek mystery religions and certain yearly festivals, involved ecstatic states that were associated with spirit possession and healing; but we know nothing about the experiences of individuals undergoing these, so we cannot definitively connect them to the ecstatic imagination.

It would be mistaken to argue that Christianity attacked or destroyed the popular use of the ecstatic imagination, because there is just too much evidence to the contrary. Textual evidence, such as that of Acts 2 and II Corinthians, shows the importance of ecstatic states for early Christians. This is in keeping with the pattern noted by Max Weber (1922) and Anthony Wallace (1970) in the development of religions: ecstatic states and mystical experiences are characteristic of the emergence of new religious movements, or of the early stages of revitalizations. Over time, as religions grow and become institutionalized, the incidence of mystical experiences decreases, or becomes the purview of a select class of specially trained clergy. This is what happened to Christianity, although the human urge to touch the sacred, to directly contact the mythic realm, became incorporated into vernacular Catholicism through a variety of media, including the cults of the saints and the Virgin Mary, their yearly feasts, and traditions of folk

healing involving fasting, dance and trance. Catholicism preserved techniques of the ecstatic imagination in a way that was purged from Protestantism during the Reformation. But much of the imagery of modern Paganism comes from secular folk traditions.

Some of the most compelling reports of the role of the ecstatic imaginary come from medieval and early modern Europe. Carlo Ginzburg (1989) and Gustav Hennigsen (1992), researching Italian witchcraft trials, both described reports of women healers who seemed to be engaging in some form of ecstatic practice, reporting spiritual journeys to banquets presided over by a powerful supernatural figure, variously called Signora Oriente, Dame Abonde, Herodias, Diana, or Herodiana. She would help healers diagnose and cure illness, find lost items, and predict the future. Emma Wilby (2005) has detailed how 16th and 17th century British women accused of witchcraft often reported communicating with familiar spirits, described as ghosts, ancestors or fairies, who advised them in much the same way. These relationships were often of an intensely personal nature, involving imaginary experiences ranging from intimate conversations to sex. Historian Wolfgang Behringer (1998) tells the story of 16th century horse-herd Chonrad Stoecklin, who reported visions during which he experienced extensive conversations with angels, demons and spirits of the dead. He was eventually executed for witchcraft; but his story illustrates another instance of the ecstatic imagination at work in early modern Europe. My recent work with vernacular healers in contemporary Italy suggests that they work in much the same way, receiving spiritual guidance and personal comfort from saints or ancestors. It appears that conversations with spirits, be they personal ancestors, ghosts, fairies, saints or deities, are much more frequent than previously believed.

In my research with Pagans, I found that people who are drawn to these religions often share a cluster of characteristics that gives them an openness to the ecstatic imaginary. Some were what Sarah Pike calls "magical children" who interacted from an early age with imaginary worlds that included spirits, fairies, and other beings drawn from folk tradition (Pike, 2001: 157). Others were "bookish children" who sought those same imaginary experiences in the pages of books. Reclaiming priestess Macha NightMare wrote "When I was a little girl, my mother read stories of the Greek and Roman goddesses and gods to me. I spent many hours listening, entranced, dreaming of the possibilities. My mother also read stories of the brothers Grimm to me…as well as other fairy tales.…My interest in these genres continues. They stir

my imagination and remind me there are other ways of seeing the world, other ways of knowing" (NightMare 2001: 48–49). Both types of individuals were often misunderstood and ostracized by other children; magical children were sometimes labeled as mentally ill, or even as evil and dangerous by intensely religious parents.

Another, smaller group of Neo-Pagans came to these religions because of spontaneous experiences with ecstasy or trance. Paganism provides a framework in which these individuals can make sense of their experiences, learn to control them, and explain them in a positive context. Psychiatric explanations have stigmatized trance and ecstasy as "dissociative states," theorizing that they distance individuals from their experiences and create alternate realities for pathological reasons. The spontaneous occurrence of ecstasy can be a disquieting and disturbing experience for most mainstream Americans, who are likely to interpret it as a form of insanity. Laurel had her first experience of this kind while singing in a choir at her Methodist church. She felt transported out of her body and transformed into light as she was performing. Stunned and baffled by the experience, she turned to her pastor for help. Unfortunately, he was unable to help her make sense of it, and simply told her to forget about the experience. Disappointed, Laurel began to investigate other religious traditions, eventually finding her way to Wicca. In that context, she finally found a way to explain her experience, and eventually became one of the most gifted and respected channelers of deity in the community.[3] For Neo-Pagans, trance and ecstasy are ordinary, an expected part of religious experience and something that everyone can achieve. Far from being pathologized or stigmatized, people with a facility for ecstasy and trance are often highly regarded in the movement.

Many of the images in Pagans' ecstatic visions come from folklore and mythology: goddesses and gods, fairies, nature and animal spirits, ancestors. These elements are part of our shared cultural register; but they also emerge because they were preserved by the folklore collections of the 19th and early 20th centuries, with their Romantic re-evaluation of what appeared to be disappearing rural lifeways rooted in an ancient past. This portrayal is appealing to many Neo-Pagans, who seek inspiration for their rituals and imaginary experiences in this literature and in forms of fiction derived from it—like much of modern fantasy.

[3] For a fuller account, see Magliocco, 2004: 153–155 and 175.

Folklore collections preserve the kinds of materials that Pagans are revaluing and reclaiming. Folklore, especially folk narrative, provides a rich font for the imaginary.

Folktales are *par excellence* the most fictional of the narrative genres. The magic tales especially feature a landscape of transformations in which heroes and heroines triumph through the use of magic objects, flight, and other forms of enchantment. Material from European folktales is often understood by Pagans as a reflection of earlier ways of knowing, as well as through popular Jungian interpretations (e.g. the work of authors Joseph Campbell, Robert Bly, and Clarissa Pinkola Estes) as a metaphor for individual development, and as such, often forms a basis for rituals. Well-known Pagan author Starhawk (Miriam Simos) and Hilary Valentine co-wrote *Twelve Wild Swans*, a book based on the folktale of the girl in search of her brothers (AT 451), in which they actively suggest using this story as a basis for a series of ritual transformations (Starhawk and Valentine, 2000). Myths, sacred narratives about the actions of gods and culture heroes, are another popular font of source material for Pagan rituals. The sacred story of Demeter's search for her daughter Persephone is the key narrative in the re-enactment of the Eleusinian Mysteries put on yearly by the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn (NROOGD), a Pagan group in the San Francisco Bay Area. Legends, narratives set in the real world that explore the reality of saints, witches, fairies, the return of the dead, and acts of maleficent magic, also serve as bases for rituals or aspects thereof. Ballads, or stanzaic narrative folksongs, provide additional sources for legendary material.

Neo-Pagans reclaim folk narrative materials by inserting them in the framework of ritual, with the goal of bringing about powerful ecstatic experiences, causing experiencers to enter the world of the imaginary. The world of ritual is in many ways similar to that of the traditional folktales and ballads: an enchanted world in which animals speak, objects have magic powers, humans fly and perform other amazing feats, and deities interact with humans. Neo-Pagans are no strangers to this world; many of them report childhood fascinations with myths, legends and folktales, and an attraction to contemporary literary forms such as fantasy and science fiction which make use of the same motifs and devices. Skilled ritualists make use of this world in creating communal events such as rituals, festivals, camps and shared trance journeys or guided visualizations. For example, Reclaiming's Witch Camps are usually organized around a single folktale or myth; each night's ritual

takes participants into it via storytelling and dramatic performance. I have attended rituals constructed around the ballad "Tam Lin," the description of the otherworld in Irish myth, and legend motifs drawn from confessions in Scottish witch trials, to name only a few. The 2007 Samhain ritual of an eclectic California coven featured an elaborate otherworld journey through that led participants to the Land of the Ancestors to commune with their beloved dead, then to the Land of Faery for a visit with the Faery Queen, who offered them a gift, and finally to the cave of the Wyrd Sisters, where three hooded figures interpreted the significance of the gift by looking into the Well of Wyrd. This rite combined mythological elements (the visit with ancestors in the otherworld; the three fates or Norns from, respectively, Graeco-Roman and Norse mythology) with the stuff of ballad and legend (the Queen of Elphinhame) in a structure based on the folktale, in which each individual protagonist played the role of heroine or hero, receiving a magical gift and returning to the everyday world transformed.

Pagan musician and performer Holly Tannen described how the world of ballads, which she discovered through fieldwork in Great Britain, drew her into trance, and inspired her to focus on her life's work: "The rolling drone of the guitar, and the imagery of the song—the white hind, the singing dove—transported me; I was in deep trance. I experienced the reality of another world—the world of ballads, where characters shape-shift, . . . animals talk, otherworld beings interact with people. . . . I determined to learn how to sing this way, and it has remained the focus of my life."

As Holly suggests, folklore performance holds important techniques that can move audience members into alternate states of consciousness. This extraordinary capacity has also been noted by folklorist Brian Sturm, whose research demonstrates how people who are listening to storytelling at festivals and similar events "enter a qualitatively different state of consciousness" (Sturm 2000: 289) characterized by many of the same parameters we noted above as distinctive of ecstatic states. In these states, audience members can deeply identify with the characters in the story, to the point of experiencing physical reactions to plot, characters and emotions described. Neurologists Andrew Newberg and Eugene D'Aquili, who have studied the effects of ritual on human consciousness, confirm Sturm's findings, asserting that the use of narrative in a ritual setting "allows the worshipper to enter a mythic story metaphorically, confront the profound mysteries the myth embraces, and then experience the resolution of those mysteries in a powerful,

possibly life-changing way" (Newberg and D'Aquili, 2001: 95). In other words, traditional narrative is as powerful a tool as rhythmic behavior, overstimulation and understimulation in bringing about a change of consciousness.

This kind of oral storytelling was once an integral part of everyday life, on both a religious and a secular level. With the diffusion of the print medium and the spread of literacy, its importance decreased. In the 20th century, the development of films and television as storytelling media further eroded the importance of oral storytelling in popular culture—or perhaps it might be more accurate to say that they added visuals to a previously auditory mode of transmission, and removed it from the control of the individual to that of large production houses and corporations. In their rituals, festivals, camps and trance journeys, contemporary Pagans are reclaiming these tools, as well as the images they bring with them.

Ritual as Performance Art

One way to understand rituals is as artistic productions whose goal is to bring on states of religious ecstasy. All the elements of ritual—the structural framework, props, music, dance, costumes and other components—work together to help move participants out of the ordinary world and into a space "between the worlds" where they can experience ecstatic states. The actual experiences people have while in these states are very individual. They range from a feeling of unity with the sacred and harmony with the universe—what neurologists Andrew Newberg and Eugene D'Aquili call "unitary experiences," common to mystics in many world religions—to personal communication with goddesses and gods, ancestors and other spirits, to feelings of being inhabited or possessed by divine beings.

Ecstatic experiences are very powerful because they mix material from the individual's memories and personal life with cultural material—in this case, material from Neo-Pagan religious culture, much of which is self-consciously drawn from folklore. For example, at Reclaiming Witch Camp, a woman named Erin experienced a vision of a fairy or nature spirit who looked like a giant fungus. His message to her was to clean up the environment that humans had polluted. At the same ritual, another woman, Melusina, experienced a vision of an owl who confirmed to her that she was on the right spiritual path. Melusina is

part Native American, and the owl had a particular significance in her own folk traditions. A third ritual participant named Jim saw a vision of his ancestor, who explained the origin of his last name, McBride, as meaning "son of the goddess Brigid." Many of my consultants experienced personal visions of goddesses and gods; for Gus, his first vision of the goddess was "feminine, powerful, beautiful and loving… beyond anything I had ever experienced in my life." These visions and experiences are profoundly life-changing for many Pagans. Don, who had lost part of his memory as a result of a head injury, regained it after experiencing an alternate state of consciousness; Melissa went to the aid of a total stranger on the street after a unitary experience left her feeling that she was connected to everything and everyone else in the universe. For many, these can be conversion experiences that bring them into these religions.[4]

Ritual and Appropriation

It should be quite clear at this point that Neo-Pagans draw from a variety of sources for ritual materials. I have emphasized that much of it comes from European folklore, which Pagans privilege because they consider it to preserve in encoded form some of the pre-Christian culture of their ancestors. But they also mine other kinds of sources, including literature, popular culture, and the traditions of non-Western people. It is the use of the latter which often gets them criticized for cultural borrowing or appropriation. The question of appropriation leads straight into a thicket of issues characterizing late modernity: identity, cultural commodification, transnationalism and transculturation. As I have argued in this essay, Neo-Pagans are bricoleurs who combine material from a variety of sources to create rituals that bring on strong emotional responses. It is an aesthetic impulse, rather than a commercial one, which inspires them to borrow motifs from other cultural sources. In addition, Neo-Pagans idealize and romanticize the spirituality of indigenous peoples, whether those of European antiquity, or those of more contemporary groups. In some cases, that idealization has led to the adoption of motifs, deities and techniques from non-Western cultural contexts. These range from generalized

[4] For additional details, see Magliocco, 2004: 152–181.

concepts such as "power animal" or "spirit helper," to the incorporation of spirits such as Afro-Caribbean *lwa* and *orishas* in ritual, to the imitation of sacred Native rituals such as the sweat lodge and Sun Dance. This objectification of Native cultures as signifiers of spiritual authenticity, and the wholesale, decontextualized use of cultural materials, has garnered critiques from Native American spokespersons (Eller, 1995: 67–81; Pike, 2001: 123–54). As religious studies scholar Sarah Pike argues, "For many American Indians, financial competition and the false assumption of cultural authority by outsiders makes cultural appropriation intolerable" (Pike, 2001: 136).

Within the American Neo-Pagan movement, a range of attitudes towards cultural borrowing exists. At one pole of the spectrum are nativist and traditionalist practitioners, who generally avoid borrowing from outside their own traditions. Among the former are a few sects of Norse Heathenry whose membership is based on a shared Northern European ancestry, and whose liturgies are adapted from the Norse *Eddas* and Icelandic *Sagas*. Not unlike some of their Native American critics, these practitioners believe that genetic heritage creates a birthright to the use of cultural materials, and would disdain contaminating the purity of their own cultural traditions by borrowing from other ethnic groups. Traditionalists, such as Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wiccans, possess liturgical texts known as *Books of Shadows* from which they draw the basic parameters of their rituals. While these books themselves contain material borrowed from literature (notably Alexander Carmichael's *Carmine Gadelica* and Rudyard Kipling's "Puck of Pook's Hill"), many traditionalists feel they have all they need within these texts to create satisfying rites. When they do go outside of textual materials, they tend to draw on British or Celtic folklore, in which they believe their traditions of magic are rooted.

At the other end of the spectrum are eclectic traditions, which tend to see themselves as part of a human family sharing common elements cross-culturally, and united by similar beliefs and practices. These similarities between different cultures are interpreted as evidence of a greater spiritual truth underlying all religious traditions. Eclectic Pagans perceive cross-cultural borrowing as an act of admiration, and are much more likely than nativist or traditionalist groups to indulge in it.

There are also striking regional differences towards cultural borrowing within North American Pagan communities. While Pike found that numerous East Coast and Midwest groups engaged in the imitation of Native American traditions (Pike, 2001), my own fieldwork in California

revealed a greater sensitivity towards issues of cultural appropriation, at least in regards to Native American traditions. Reclaiming priestess Starhawk has published a strong critique of cultural borrowing, citing the necessity of respecting different worldviews and not engaging in racist, colonialist practice towards minorities whom Pagans consider allies in a struggle against a monotheistic dominant culture (Starhawk, 1990: 19).

On the other hand, the prominence in California of Latinos, and their participation in a number of Neo-Pagan organizations, has led to the borrowing of traditions across cultural boundaries. The Samhain ancestor altars of California Pagans are clearly influenced by those of the Mexican *Dia de los Muertos*, which occurs at the same time of year. Both types of altars can incorporate sugar skulls, *papel picado* (tissue paper cutouts), skeletons at work and play, marigolds, photographs of the deceased and offerings of food and candles. In some cases, individual Pagans may develop relationships with magical practitioners from other religions, and exchange items of material culture, as well as magical or ritual practices. One Bay Area Witch developed such a relationship with the owner of an Afro-Cuban *botanica*, or spiritual shop. Here, cultural borrowing is taking place in a more organic context of intercultural exchange between two expert practitioners.

Occasionally, individual Pagans may decide to formally study and seek initiation into a spiritual tradition from another cultural group. I encountered two such individuals during my fieldwork: one who became a priest in the Yoruba religion, and another who sought training from a priest of Umbanda. While the former kept his Yoruba practice separate from his Wiccan training, in the second case, my consultant reported that Umbanda spirits began to manifest in his Wiccan work. In both cases, these individuals were highly dedicated and deeply interested in spiritual and religious practice in general. They sought training and initiation for their own spiritual development, rather than as a vehicle to obtain ritual elements for use in Neo-Pagan practice.

One of the most intriguing cases of transculturation is the case of a group of Bay Area Norse Pagans who regularly began to attend rituals at a local Umbanda *tereiro* in order to familiarize themselves with techniques of spirit possession. The leader of this group, an experienced priestess, reasoned that pre-Christian Northern European religions had once had ecstatic and possessory elements which had been lost over the ages as a result of Christinaization. By learning Umbanda, an Afro-Brazilian religion that incorporates techniques of spirit possession, the

Norse practitioners could begin to re-acquaint themselves with some of the techniques their own religion had lost. The result was not, of course, the rediscovery of Norse ecstatic trance, but the introduction, in the context of the United States, of Afro-Brazilian methods, terms, and technologies of possession into the reconstruction of a European-based Neo-Pagan tradition.

In conclusion, while there exists within American Neo-Paganism a thread of critique against inter-cultural borrowing, the movement as a whole exhibits a range of attitudes towards it, from wholesale uncritical acceptance to disdain and rejection. These attitudes are influenced by regional differences, direct contact with practitioners from indigenous cultures, and the proclivities of Pagan traditions and the individuals who practice them. The rhetoric of cultural appropriation is rooted in a model of culture as commodity which has developed in the West as culture has increasingly become commodified; it is logical for indigenous peoples, whose cultures have suffered devastation at the hands of the majority, to invoke this paradigm in order to defend the integrity of their cultural and spiritual practices, and to protect them from those who would use them for their own profit. But magical and spiritual and practices have historically crossed cultural borders as easily as music and foodways; they are among the most plastic and easily transferable forms of folklore. In regions where modern Pagans have direct contact with members of non-European cultures, a certain amount of trans-culturation is inevitably taking place.

The Significance of Reclamation

At this point, it is time to address the significance of this reclamation. Why should we care that Pagans are doing this? Why and how is it important? I argue that there are at least three ways it is important. The first is simply what it suggests about the importance of the role of ecstatic experience to the human spirit. The ecstatic imagination is such a fundamental part of the human experience that no amount of stigmatization can keep it out of cultures for long. If a culture has excluded it, people have to reinvent it, or rediscover ways to use it to enrich their own lives. It is no accident that two of the most rapidly growing religious movements in North America today both make use of ecstasy: these are Neo-Paganism and charismatic Christianity.

More significantly, folklore—in the form of narrative techniques and motifs—provides a door into the ecstatic imagination for many people. We need much further research into the way storytelling affects listeners, into how listeners imagine themselves in relation to narratives, and how images from narratives enter into and affect the imagination of listeners. Likewise, we need to understand how performers structure narrative and modify delivery to draw listeners into the ecstatic imaginary.

Third, the process of reclamation concerns us because it directly involves the work of folklorists and the history of our discipline. The study of folklore and its reclamation are part of the same strain of thought that arose from the Enlightenment and the romantic reaction against it. Early folklorists were part of the crucible that gave birth to Romanticism, and, later in the 19th century, to the precursors of modern Paganism. Our research often provides the basis for Pagans' (and other groups') reclamation of tradition.

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ALCHEMICAL RHYTHMS: FIRE CIRCLE CULTURE AND THE PAGAN FESTIVAL

J. Lawton Winslade

I was once told that one does not really experience the true meaning of Paganism until one attends a festival. Performing ritual outdoors, living on the land, even if temporarily, sharing the experience with large numbers of like minds and bodies, having the freedom to be who you want to be without the usual societal constrictions—these are the foundations of Pagan practice. I still find this statement fascinating today, even after ten years of attending various festivals and gatherings. It is rife with assumptions about how Paganism is restricted and proscribed within contemporary urban life—that practitioners can only truly be "free" or "be themselves" away from these restrictions. For many practitioners of contemporary Paganism, this is certainly the case, even as that fact reifies a certain kind of fantasizing about counter-culture utopia or indulging in romanticization of the pastoral and rural so common in early Victorian formulations of nature religions. Yet, one cannot deny the awesome experience of entering festival space for the first time. The colors, the sounds, the bodies, the feeling that many participants describe as being "welcomed home." There is something to this confusing mixture that certainly *does* embody aspects of Paganism itself. Mostly festivals create an elaborate, synaesthetic composition of images, voices, and emotions that bring to life all the convergences, conflicts and diversities of practiced Paganisms, their communities and individuals. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the pervasive festival bonfires that often rage from dusk until dawn while participants dance and drum in a swirl of writhing bodies and intense, sometimes chaotic, rhythms.

A relative latecomer to the festival scene, I have been involved with various aspects of Paganism and ceremonial magick as both a scholar and a practitioner since the early 1990's, though it was not until 1998, after my PhD coursework in Performance Studies was completed, that I began to attend festivals, not as a scholar but as a member of a particular magickal community in Chicago. However, like so many other ethnographers, I soon realized that festivals are great environments for

research on people, practices, and issues within the various communities. In that first year, I joked that I was the only one I knew who used grant money to buy a tent and go camping. I have only attended festivals at a relatively small variety of sites since then, but my visits to those sites have been frequent and annual. They include both Starwood and Sirius Rising at Brushwood Folklore Center in eastern New York state, Elf Fest, Wild Magick and various smaller gatherings at Lothlorien Nature Sanctuary in southern Indiana, Pagan Spirit Gathering at Wisteria Nature Preserve in southern Ohio, and more recently, various small festivals at a young site, also in southern Indiana, called Our Haven. I have sometimes offered my own workshops at these sites, especially at Starwood, where I have led discussions about magick and popular culture, and about issues surrounding performance, ethnography and scholarship in Pagan Studies. In addition to my own experiences at these sites, I have begun interviewing a wide variety of participants, including landowners, ritualists, drummers, fire tenders, and dancers, as part of an ongoing project which will more than likely expand the range of festivals I will attend in the future.

Though various scholars have done extensive work on the festival as a major element of Pagan culture, I hope to enrich the conversation with some aspects of festival that have remained relatively unexplored and with my own insights and experiences. The groundwork for scholarly examinations of Pagan festival was certainly laid by Sarah Pike in her ethnography, *Earthly Bodies and Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search For Community* (2001). Other scholars who have studied the history of Paganism and particular Pagan communities, like Helen Berger (1999) and Chas Clifton (2006), have emphasized the role that festivals have played in expanding and defining the national Pagan community.[1] In the recent third edition of her classic *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and other Pagans in America* (2006/1979), Margot Adler devotes an entire section to festivals, unequivocally proclaiming

[1] Sarah Pike's earlier article, "Forging Magical Selves: Gendered Bodies and Ritual Fires at Neo-Pagan Festivals," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (1996), is also an essential addition to her book length work. She has also followed up on some of that work in an article in *Researching Paganisms* (2004) and in her own *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (2004). Helen Berger's *A Community of Witches* (1999) has covered elements of Rites of Spring, one of the longest running Pagan festivals in America, sponsored by Earth Spirit Community in Massachusetts. Chas Clifton has also recently explored some aspects of festival and its role in shaping contemporary Paganism in *Her Hidden Children* (2006).

that "festivals completely changed the face of the Pagan movement" and acknowledging the untrammeled growth of American festivals, from roughly fifty annual regional or national gatherings in 1985, when she was preparing the second edition of her book, to around three hundred and fifty within ten years (Adler 2006: 430). Adler claims that this number has more or less stabilized in recent years, even though new festivals and festival sites are being created every year. Yet despite Sarah Pike's extensive work on the meanings of Pagan festival, relatively little scholarly work has been done on the particulars of festival experience, even though festivals remain a prominent source of information for scholars studying Paganism, thanks to a setting conducive to handing out questionnaires and interviewing. However, Pike, Clifton and Adler have established crucial ways for thinking about the function of festival gatherings, their significance to Paganism as a whole, and the underlying issues of both conflict and consensus within festival community. In this article I will attempt to summarize some of these insights before I focus on some specific elements of the festival experience, mainly the ritualized performances of drumming and fire culture. Pagan festivals are vast canvases of often competing discourses and sensorial juxtaposition; hence this piece cannot hope to do justice to the entire festival picture. I have chosen these aspects of the festival experience not only because these were the areas in which I was most personally immersed, but also because, as a performance studies scholar, these improvisational elements of the festival experience strike me as the most caught up in issues of cultural performance. Therefore, it is important to first establish the relationship between Pagan Studies and performance.

The issues of performance are to be found almost everywhere in the study of Paganism. Theatre scholar Marvin Carlson summarizes the main concerns of Performance Studies as an acknowledgement of the constructed nature of most human activity, an emphasis on liminality, and a foregrounding of the body as a site of knowledge (Carlson 1996: 191). Despite historical struggles for authenticity and legitimacy, most Pagans currently admit to the constructed nature of their activities, rightly claiming that creativity as a strength, whether it be the creation of more vital religious and spiritual practices, choosing and forming new families and communities that are more fulfilling than those from their original environment, or redefining the self, through the use of renaming, costuming, initiation and personal training. Nowhere are these processes more on display than at a festival setting. Furthermore, Pagans are also constantly caught up in the discourse of

liminality, either by emphasizing their marginality or using the language of initiation whether they are involved in actual initiations or not. Liminality as a concept is fundamental to the study of festival experience. Recent studies of the Burning Man festival have acknowledged participants' pervasive use of the separation/liminality/aggregation scheme introduced by Arnold Van Gennep and fine-tuned by Victor Turner (Gilmore 2005: 44). The same is true for Pagan festival participants. Not only do festival participants and magickal practitioners often apply the notion of liminality to festival and magickal ritual, but they tend to use initiatory language to describe the challenges of their personal lives, referring to both traumatic and celebratory events, such as marriage, childbirth, divorce, accidents, or completing a graduate degree, as initiatory experiences.

Performance studies as an interdisciplinary field emphasizes the body as a site of knowing and performance itself as an opportunity for face to face encounters between ethnographer and subject. In one of several essays on ethnography, performance studies scholar and ethnographer Dwight Conquergood claims a positionality for the researcher that sounds strikingly similar to connections that Pagans and nature religionists like Starhawk make between immanence as a religious world view and social action (Starhawk 1990). He critiques ways of knowing imposed from a privileged, empirical position, valorizing knowledge that is "grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection . . . from ground level, in the thick of things" (Conquergood 2003: 312), privileging proximity over objectivity (ibid.: 315). Conquergood describes this embodied knowledge sought through performance studies: "[t]he performance paradigm privileges particular, participatory, dynamic, intimate, precarious and embodied experience grounded in historical process, contingency and ideology" (Conquergood 1991: 187). This language of immanence, often expressed by Pagans as a religious and political view, concisely articulates the immediate and tangible role of ethnography within performance studies.[2] Emphasis

[2] The anthropological trend of reflexivity, which picked up steam in the 1990s with Edith Turner's call for "radical participation" to replace the dominant paradigm of participant/observation, seems to be the basis for much ethnographic work currently happening in Pagan Studies. In fact, in the recent series of methodological essays in *Researching Paganisms* (2004), many of the scholars responded to the problems of participant/observation in Pagan ethnography. As has been suggested by Susan Greenwood (2000) and others, researchers are beginning to take seriously the experiences of practitioners and their own experiences while in ritual space.

on individual experience is also a key element of Pagan belief and practice, especially at festival. Sarah Pike certainly emphasizes bodily knowing when she writes about celebrants at various Pagan festivals who dance around the fires. These dancers use the body as a site for expression, healing, conflict resolution, exploration, and learning. Pike herself writes of her participation in the fire circle as a performance space where she awakens "sensual memories embedded in my body" (Pike 2001: 189). These elements of performance are pervasive in a festival setting, even when the activity does not necessarily occur within a theatrical or ritual frame.

Convention-al Wisdom

In her section on festivals in *Drawing Down the Moon*, Margot Adler sets the scene in the Pagan world of the early 1970s, before festivals and before the Internet. Solitary Pagans who were lucky enough to find like minds communicated through newsletters. "There was a feeling," she relates, "that this long and hard search was part of the growth process" (Adler 2006/1979: 429). Yet the seeds of the festival movement were being sown at this time, coinciding with early attempts at organization and routinization within the Pagan community. Broader umbrella groups were either forming, like the Covenant of the Goddess in 1975, or expanding, like The Church of All Worlds, formed in 1962. This move towards organization was certainly facilitated by gatherings like the Gnostica Festivals (sometimes referred to as Gnosticon), Llewellyn publisher Carl Weschke's hotel-based conventions in the Minneapolis area. These events, based on a science fiction convention type structure, involved an eclectic mix of workshops and discussions, as evidenced by the gathering's early title: the Gnostic Aquarian Festival of Psychological, Qabalistic and Spiritual Science (Clifton 2006: 45–6). Gathering some early figures of the Pagan and New Age movements, the convention was the birthing place of ideas and practices now considered fundamental to Paganism.

For instance, at the April 1974 convention, which had changed its title to the Gnostic Aquarian Festival of Astrology, Mind Power, Occult Sciences, and Witchcraft in the New Age, a mysterious group called The Council of American Witches drafted the oft-quoted 13 Principles of Wiccan Belief, a series of tenets designed to provide Wiccans with a common ground for belief and community. Although the principles,

available for perusal through a simple web search, are sound, very little information about the supposed 73 witches who drafted them is available, especially since the group disbanded a year later. In, of all sources, *Playboy* magazine, one learns who some of these key players might have been. Featured in the July 1974 issue, the article "Witches Brew," by Canadian novelist and frequent *Playboy* contributor Mordecai Richler, paints an unsurprisingly sensationalistic picture of that early Pagan scene: we have Lady Sheba, known for publishing (and plagiarizing) much of the material of the Alexandrian Book of Shadows, claiming to be the one eternal Queen of Witches while challenging a detractor to an astral duel, and Timothy (later Oberon) Zell and a young Isaac Bonewits attempting to magically control the weather and cure diseases. Richler makes the somewhat cynical observation that the convention is simply about moving paper, with authors trying to outdo each other for publicity, money and highest authority. The fact that this event was sponsored by what would become, some might say, the hegemonic voice in witchcraft publishing seems to lend credence to the criticism that this was all one big publicity stunt.

However, the drafting of the 13 Principles belies that notion, indicating one of the main strengths of the nascent festival movement that would soon spread to campsites across America: the capacity for creative action on the part of the individuals involved.[3] These were intense events where willful, influential people came together and argued for their vision of Paganism, determined to forge new paths and manifest that vision. Festivals were, and remain to an extent, crucibles of alchemical transformation for individuals, communities, and the diverse movements of Paganism, and it is no coincidence that fire would become so significant to these proceedings. Here, ostensibly small moves may have profound effects. Individuals involved in discussions of goals, ideals and policies can have a major impact on their communities when they return from festival space. In some cases, a consensus can be reached to produce something like the 13 Principles. In other

[3] Significantly, that 1974 event also saw the handfasting of Timothy Zell and Morning-Glory Ravenheart, who would become a prominent "power couple" in the Pagan movement and festival scene, with their leadership in the Church of All Worlds, activity with the Green Egg publication, Zell's theories of "theagenesis" (an idea also disseminated through lectures at Gnosticon) and their promotion of what they called a "polyamorous lifestyle," which would heavily influence Pagan views on love, sex, marriage, family and relationships. One of my first personal encounters with Zell and Ravenheart was at a Starwood workshop on polyamory.

cases, conflicts, tensions, and marginalized voices can still hold the potential for change. Though Adler probably underestimates that only ten percent of the Pagan community attends festivals, she maintains that the information those attendees bring back to their communities is invaluable for its influence on the movement as a whole.[4] These events are also laboratories to create and experiment with new ways of performing ritual or other activities that engage participants' bodies, psyches, and spirits, like drumming, trance dance, fire spinning, chants, body painting and countless others. More significantly, festivals have provided opportunities for those who wish to cultivate Pagan lands, sanctuaries where practitioners can not only pursue their spiritual paths openly, but can develop and steward land and ways of living that are not possible in urban settings.

Festivals serve many functions in the Pagan community. First and foremost, festivals allow practitioners to socialize and practice their traditions in a safe space free of (most) societal constrictions and in an environment "close to nature," as these events offer to some the only opportunity they have to escape from urban living. Many attendees describe intense feelings of connection to nature at festivals that starkly contrast their urban experience, to the point that festival going tends to make returning to the city more difficult. After my first festival in Lothlorien, I experienced this disconnect profoundly, unsure of how to react to seeing trees in small little plots on the city streets of Chicago when I had lived in the woods. Even though my stay was quite short (really only a long weekend), activities like covering ourselves entirely in mud while exploring the land lent to the uncanny sense that I was in a different kind of relationship with the environment, one involving tactility and imagination, and an altogether different rhythm of breathing and living.

The separation from "mundane" time and space also allows practitioners to network and reach other like minds. As Adler describes, many new attendees are surprised to find so many others who share their interests. She acknowledges that festivals changed the way practitioners entered into traditions like witchcraft, with festivals and networking organizations replacing small covens as the entry way into the Craft.

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[4] According to information compiled from Helen Berger's Pagan Census taken in the mid 1990s and published in 2003, 42% of the respondents attended at least one festival in any given year (Berger 1999: 75).

In this newer paradigm, practitioners may eventually find their way to a small group through festival networking, rather than the other way around. As was evidenced by the early Pagan conventions, festivals were an opportunity, in a pre-Internet world, for practitioners from diverse backgrounds and varying beliefs to confront and debate important issues for Paganism. In fact, some practitioners see festivals as the pre-cursor to net communications, listservs, posting boards, and chat rooms (Williams). According to Adler's informants, this new access to information and networking also tended to undermine traditional coven authority, destroying the hegemony of "gurudom" (Adler 2006/1979: 433). Some practitioners do not necessarily see this as positive, arguing that easy networking prevents students of the Craft from working through the coven process. Others protest that "there is a tendency to replace one hierarchy with another" and that celebrity authors and musicians exert the same kind of thrall over new Pagans as coven leaders once did (ibid.: 437). However, while the cult of personality created by celebrity practitioners may hold sway over some attendees, this certainly is not a factor for many festival goers, many of whom do not attend workshops at all.

Festivals allow for diverse interests, beliefs, and activities. One result is the creation of a subculture within the Pagan festival circuit; those who attend merely for the experience of the all-night bonfire and may or may not adhere to an established religious tradition at home. Although this group is by no means monolithic, some attendees may refer to themselves as a "drum tribe" or a "fire tribe." Indeed, festival makes innovations possible within ritual practice, with the creation of song traditions and with other performative activities like drumming that are ritualized, but ways not part of ritual per se.[5] Adler observes that festivals led to a creation of "a different type of ritual process—one that permits a large group to experience ecstatic states and a powerful sense of religious communion" (ibid.: 430). Rituals are common at most festivals, especially at Pagan Spirit Gathering, where ritualists are particularly innovative. Adler mentions the intense Spirit Hunt at PSG, whose participants take part in a shamanic rite involving fasting, crafting a talisman, and simulating a hunt in which the psychological and emotional quarry is different for every individual. Clifton also mentions

[5] Many Pagan songs have made their way across the festival through festival attendees, creating a kind of canon for song and ritual practice, as Adler notes (433).

a "Drawing Down the Moon" ritual at Lothlorien, where priestesses take on the aspect of Maiden, Mother, and Crone and act as oracles for the participants (Clifton 2006: 32). In my first year at Lothlorien, the Chicago community I was involved with at the time performed a similar ritual for the festival attendees, which was a powerful, emotional affair for all involved, and fully utilized the mysterious natural setting of deep woods. Often, some of the most compelling experiences I have had at festival are spontaneous rituals and ritualized moments that my friends and I have improvised. Festivals allow for experimentation in many realms of ritual activity, including rites that explore issues surrounding gender and sexuality (Pike 2004: 115), as well as both group ritual and individual practices that facilitate various healing modalities. Overall, Margot Adler's survey of festival goers gives us the broadest range for festival's function. Her informants found festivals important "because they exposed participants to new ideas, challenged assumptions, ended isolation and loneliness, reduced divisiveness among traditions and groups, renewed people's energy, provided stunning proof that unity can be achieved amid diversity, and beyond all, proved that an alternative culture was possible." One particularly articulate interviewee remarks "Festivals disempower the idea, just lurking below the surface of our consciousness, that we and our goals and our visions are somehow deviant" (Adler 2006/1979: 438). In fact, the historical precedents of Pagan festival demonstrate that these goals are not that deviant at all.

A Brief History of (Festival) Time

The precedents of the current festival scene are many. As previously noted, the science fiction convention is a direct influence on the indoor festivals, which are increasing as the community ages and outdoor camping becomes less appealing. One of the best known of these is San Francisco's Pantheacon, which Sarah Pike describes in detail in *New Age and Neopagan Religions* (2004). These particular gatherings, Pike suggests, are influenced by nineteenth-century phenomena like the Lyceum movement in lecture halls around the country, where speakers would expound on topics like abolitionism, temperance, and women's rights. Along with this model are Spiritualist conventions and Theosophist salons, where mesmerists and psychics would ply their trade. These events were forums to disseminate information and dialogue on the

social problems of the day as well as offer opportunities for showcasing the latest healing modalities (Pike 2004: 54). I would add to this category the academic conference, where new ideas are introduced, well-worn topics are debated, and particular academic communities affirm their solidarity while also airing their differences.[6]

Both Pike and Chas Clifton also note the cultural similarities between the communal experiments of the 1960s, including events like Woodstock, and the camp meetings and tent revivals of the late nineteenth century, particularly those associated with what was known as the Second Great Awakening, when frontier Americans retreated to the wilderness and sought intense religious experiences and instruction (Clifton 2006: 54). Current studies of the Burning Man Festival in Nevada also trace connections between the modern festival and the culturally diverse chaos of the ancient marketplace, "located at the borderlands of civilized communities, where tricksters offered combinations of entertainment, danger, opportunity, and delight." These sites were "remote, celebratory, and strange. People journeyed to them looking for excitement and even transformation" (Kozinets and Sherry 2005: 101).[7] Burning Man founder and organizer Larry Harvey points to his festival's similarity to the ancient Greek festivals like the Eleusinian Mysteries, in which large numbers migrated from the cities to attend elaborate rites and pageants, celebrate, and have intense initiatory experiences, possibly with the help of psychotropic drugs and often ending with a large conflagration (Davis 2005: 16). Both these ancient models for festival experience have particular resonance in today's festival scene, though not without controversy over issues like

[6] The similarity between the Pagan festival and the academic conference would often hit home for me when I would go directly from the Starwood Festival in New York, usually towards the end of July, to the yearly conference held by ATHE, the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, often held the following week. Starwood is known for having workshops and lectures by prominent leaders and authors. I would also give workshops here where I would bring my academic knowledge to bear. Panels at ATHE, where my field of performance studies would be strongly represented, would, in some cases, feel very similar. Of course I probably am overstating the similarities, but I would often feel that the only difference from a festival was that we were in a hotel, with more clothes on.

[7] This comparison to a marketplace is even more apt to Pagan festivals, since merchant booths are often a common fixture in the main areas of the festival sites, unlike Burning Man, which disallows vending of any kind, with the exception of a coffee shop.

drug use, sexual appropriateness, and whether the bonfire is indeed sacred or merely a "party."

Margot Adler credits the Midwest Pagan Council, a Chicago based collection of Wiccan groups, as being one of the first organizations outside California to consider large scale gatherings. Their first Pan-Pagan Festival was held in 1977 and by 1980, six hundred people were attending (Adler 2006/1979: 432). Around the same time, Andras Corban Arthen, of Earth Spirit Community in the New England area, was organizing the Rites of Spring, which was first held in May 1979. Before these early festivals, outdoor gatherings were primarily for local covens, and the notion of groups from different areas convening was relatively new. In an article published in Earth Spirit Community's journal, *Fireheart*, Arthen describes the original resistance to this idea. Groups wished to remain secret and many were uncomfortable mixing with other traditions. Arthen points out that the very simple idea of gathering different covens together was considered by some to be a violation of Craft "laws" that forbade contact with other covens. Still others thought such a festival "rendered us vulnerable to outsiders: the impending revival of the Inquisition would like nothing better than to catch a bunch of Witches and Pagans banded together at the same place and time" (Arthen 1988: para. 4). Yet, Arthen describes the positive response that he eventually received from groups around the country, and 100 people attended that first gathering. Among these were Selena Fox and Jim Alan of Circle Sanctuary in Wisconsin, who would organize the first Pagan Spirit Gathering the following year. Currently one of the largest midwest Pagan gatherings, PSG began humbly and moved to several sites in Wisconsin before settling in the Eagle Cave Campground, where it remained from 1984 to 1996. In 1997, PSG moved to private land at Wisteria, a site in southeastern Ohio, where it has remained since and grown to around 1000 attendees.

In 1981, the Cleveland-based Association for Consciousness Exploration sponsored its first Starwood festival (fig. 1), which featured among its speakers Raymond Buckland, the British Wiccan author widely considered to be responsible for bringing Gardnerian Wicca to American shores. Though many elements of Starwood are Pagan, the organization's name reveals a slightly different focus that hearkens back to the mixture of New Age and occult eclecticism that characterized the conventions of the early 1970s and their nineteenth-century predecessors (prominent speakers have also included Timothy Leary and Stephen Gaskin of the Farm). In 1983, another major festival site,

Lothlorien Nature Sanctuary (taking its name from the woodland home of Tolkien's elves) in southern Indiana, was founded by members of the Elf Lore Family, who have recently changed their organization's name to ELVIN H.O.M.E. and completed a three year process of achieving federal Non-Profit Status (501c3). Since the 1980s, particular sites have developed to the point that they may serve not only as a homebase for a particular festival, but as a permanent site capable of hosting a number of diverse types of festivals. For instance, the schedule of Our Haven, a fledgling site in southern Indiana operating since 2001, consists of small seasonal festivals (particularly for Beltaine), Babalon Rising (a festival primarily for Thelemites, OTO members, and ceremonial magicians), an Herbalist conference, the Heartland Polyamory Festival, a gathering for martial artists, and various fundraising events.

Not specifically invoking the term "Pagan" in their Articles, Our Haven's co-founders and landowners Mary Ellen Thomas and Manelqua see the land as a possible meeting place for what they call "any Positive path."[8] Acknowledging the aforementioned connections to frontier Christianity, Manelqua allows for the possibility of a Christian revival tent happening at the same time as a Pagan fire circle. As evidence, he points to the fact that an Episcopalian couple had been interested in building a cabin on the land, an option several individuals and families have already taken.[9] Manelqua, a Marine veteran of the Vietnam War, sees his land specifically as Sanctuary, referring to the "Our" in "Our Haven" as a communal space. In fact, Our Haven's initial outreach coincided with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when the family posted on an MSN group site, "the doors of Sanctuary are open. Anyone needing sanctuary, come home." Manelqua, sometimes referred to as Manny, relates that at the time they had no idea about the scale of the attacks (due to not having a television), and sincerely offered his 175 acres to anyone who wanted an escape.[10] Though the amount of actual visitation was relatively small, the online response was generally warm, involving messages from around the world. When asked what he means by sanctuary, Manny responds "a Safe Place—safe from terrorists, from others, from yourself." He also adds that Our Haven is a

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[8] "The Articles of Our Haven," Our Haven Staff 1999. http://ourhaven.info/site-files/articles.html?path=land/articles.oh.

[9] Personal interview 5/6/07.

[10] Similarly, Sarah Pike mentions a Lothlorien publication that promotes the site as "a safe place to escape to when everything falls apart" (2004: 149).

safe place for wildlife and that he does not allow hunting, though he is somewhat ambivalent about this as he notes that if it was a matter of survival, he would have no problem with killing. However he does follow Native American practices that honor and thank the animal's spirit.

This tendency to offer land as Sanctuary while attempting to fulfill the needs of a diverse spiritual population is a growing trend among festival sites, particularly those oriented toward Paganism. Unlike the eclectic Burning Man festival, which builds its city from scratch every year in the Nevada desert to serve over 30,000 revelers, determined to "leave no trace behind," Pagan festival sites serve significantly smaller numbers and put much effort into building lasting structures for practical and spiritual use.[11] For instance, one of Lothlorien's key innovations is the use of compost toilets instead of the ubiquitous Port-a-Potties that most sites use. They also make extensive use of solar and wind power for heating showers and several community buildings. Sites like Lothlorien are also known for their shrines, particular focal points of worship and devotion dedicated to deities, elements of nature, or emotional concepts. Some sites also attempt to re-create ancient methods of land work, such as Wisteria's several earthworks that approximate the mounds of ancient Native American sites nearby in southern Ohio.[12] Similarly, the Four Quarters Interfaith Sanctuary in southern central

[11] Many scholarly insights on the Burning Man festival also apply to Pagan festivals, especially in terms of participants' experiences and the language that participants speak. However, salient differences cannot be ignored, especially in terms of scale and size (Burning Man's massive 30,000 attendees as opposed to the approximately 2,000 of the largest Pagan festivals), attitudes around vending (Burning Man disallows it, while most Pagan festivals encourage it), religion (Burning Man is highly ambivalent about religion and spiritual practice even though participants are often adherents of alternative religions, like Paganism, while Pagan festivals exhibit various degrees of belief and adherence to particular dogmas depending on the focus of the event, the festival site, and the organizers), approaches to performance (Burning Man heavily emphasizes individual creative expression and aesthetic goals through architecture, performance art, and installation sculpture whereas Pagan festivals involve some of those aspects, but often tend to emphasize standard forms of live performance and ritual) and overall communal goals, as demonstrated by the differences between Sanctuary and Burning Man's "leave no trace" philosophy. Starwood Festival is an exception in that it seems to combine many aspects of the Pagan festival, including sacred shrines like the Druid-oriented Nemeton grove, with the more celebratory, rave-like atmosphere of a Burning Man-type event. This is due, no doubt, to the influence of psychedelic culture on the event. A quick glance at a Starwood program reveals a significant debt to that culture with various kaleidoscopic designs and speakers representing that culture (including the aforementioned Leary in 1992).

[12] I was privileged to be a part of the raising of one of these mounds at Pagan Spirit Gathering on the Wisteria land in 1999.

Pennsylvania stages an annual raising of a standing stone in a design approximating the Neolithic stone circles scattered throughout Western Europe. These earthwork projects are accompanied by elaborate and intense community ceremonies at particular festivals, in which participants contribute their own efforts, physical labor, energy and occasionally, ritual objects to the creation of a permanent site of ritual activity. Sarah Pike interprets this kind of land stewardship as "an alternative response to environmental problems that does not require social and political activism" (Pike 2004: 33). However, considering Lothlorien's particular innovations, for example, the mindset of environmental activism is certainly at play and many of these sites aspire to "getting off the grid" and becoming self-sufficient.

Additionally, these attempts at permanence seem to counteract the tendency to regard festivals as temporary communities at temporary events. Again, Sarah Pike points to festival activities that "are tailored toward a hoped-for future even though the gatherings are temporary communities" (ibid.: 154). Many scholars who approach the subject of festival often characterize it as a Temporary Autonomous Zone, borrowing situationist Hakim Bey's term.[13] The T.A.Z. is a space that supposedly eludes structures of control, whether that control is political, bureaucratic, economic, cultural or personal. Although Chas Clifton refers to Pagan festivals as Temporary Autonomous Zones (Clifton 2006: 32, 54), Bey's term is most often deployed in descriptions of the Burning Man festival, where it may be more suitable, due to the seemingly anarchist spirit of that event (see essays in Gilmore and Van Proyen (2005) especially Davis and Kozinets and Sherry). However many scholars agree the Pagan festival benefits from the sense its participants have of being separate from the "mundane." Separation from "mundania" is also part of a discourse in which the festival community is the individual's "tribe" or "family." Pike argues that these elements of the Pagan festival help Pagans "make marginality more real than the real world that excludes them" (Pike 2001: 32), while at the same time allowing Pagans to "downplay inner differences and contradictions" in order to emphasize a sense of unity at a festival site (ibid.: 37). In her work, Pike reveals many of these kinds of tensions and conflicts, including disagreements on boundaries between individual rights and

[13] Hakim Bey is the pen name of American political writer Robert Lamborn Wilson.

community ethics, the proper use of ritual spaces, what is considered authentic practice within ritual space, and what cultural practice is available (or not) for appropriation.

Pike particularly emphasizes these issues when she examines individuals who use festival's separation in order to establish identities different than those practiced in the outside world (ibid.: 18). In Pike's work, these identities are often bound up in questions of authenticity, especially as applied to practitioners who borrow beliefs and practices from cultures that are not their own. Here, she evokes another trope common to scholarly writing on festival: Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, which he describes as "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986: 24). Foucault points out that heterotopias exist in every culture and often contain its totalizing elements, such as in museums or libraries. In contrast to these spaces that are "linked to the accumulation of time" are the spaces associated with "time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival. These heterotopias are not oriented toward the eternal, they are rather absolutely temporal" (ibid.: 26). It is this one particular kind of heterotopia that scholars generally invoke when writing on festival, focusing on alternative spaces, rather than on the wide range of spaces that Foucault outlines. For instance, Kozinets and Sherry, describing Burning Man, emphasize "the social sparks created when diverse groups commingle" (Kozinets and Sherry 2005: 102), referring to Foucault's description of heterotopia as "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 1986: 25). When critiquing notions of authenticity and cultural borrowing, Pike most often offers those following Afro-Caribbean tradition, such as vodou, Santeria, and Ifa, and Native American traditions, as examples. Yet, it is at Pagan festival where groups that are very loosely connected to the Pagan community can interact in heterotopic space. Starwood Festival, especially, serves an example of this commingling, where Wiccans rub elbows with Druids, Thelemites, vodou and Santeria practitioners, ravers, hippies, and members of the Church of the Sub-Genius.

Though many who attend festivals share a common reverence for nature and the environment, at festivals like Starwood this sense of festival practice as part of a nature religion is by no means unanimous. Yet, despite their diverse identities, groups tend to have certain views

in common, especially with regard to the notion that an individual can directly influence his or her destiny, often through magical means. The sense of unity afforded by the feeling of tribe or family is also primarily served by the sharing of experiences. Participants and scholars often think of festival as a time apart, as well as a space apart. At festival, some participants leave behind urban notions of schedules and routine and attempt to remain fully present and ready for each experience as it arrives. Though I would argue that these individuals have probably never had to run a workshop or a ritual, this general attitude is pervasive at festival and is at least an ideal, since it emphasizes a break from the working world that participants leave behind. Ironically, such a situation tends to make individuals pay attention to the minutiae of everyday life. At festival, narrativizing one's nightly experiences is a common practice. I have heard and participated in animated conversations in which festival goers relate the details of what led up to their finally going to bed, how they slept and when they woke up in the morning (or evening), all topics that would be considered somewhat boring and uninteresting in the "real world." Because of that separation from the "real world," festival goers tend to focus on experiential processes that most would take for granted.

Writing on Burning Man, Jeremy Hockett makes the observation that "the establishment of critical distance from normative culture in order to reflect upon that culture" is essential for festival, which can be viewed similarly to Van Gennep's and Turner's notions of initiation and rites of passage:

> In a democratic, technological, and individualistic society where critical self-reflection and awareness are paramount values in the process of making meaning, it may become imperative for citizens to engage in collective performative practices that are distanced from the mainstream in order to effectively evaluate their circumstances and heighten social awareness of how values and norms are constructed. (Hockett 2005: 76)

Like Burning Man attendees, participants at Pagan festivals create performances, both planned and spontaneous, taking on certain fantasy roles, like pirates, fairy princesses and robots. Yet the less obviously theatrical elements of festival performance tend to more profoundly "heighten social awareness" through the nightly negotiations around the fire. Fire culture is certainly one of the most complex social aspects of festival in which fire tenders, wood busters, water carriers, a wide range of drummers and percussionists, each with different roles in creating

rhythms, various kinds of dancers who approach the energy of the fire in different ways, and an equally diverse amount of participant/observers, all interact in patterns that are at once chaotic and powerful.

Sacred Dynamic Fire

Many people report a sense of overwhelming energy when they first enter the Roundhouse at Starwood festival. The thundering drums, the blazing fire, the pulsating bodies, the whoops and yells, the smells of sage, firewood, and incense, and the unmistakable feeling that Something is happening. The individual who crosses the threshold into such a space may wonder where he or she can fit into this scene and how one can participate. What at first seems cacophonic eventually resolves itself into synaesthetic layers of various voices, sometimes competing, sometimes communicating, all struggling to be heard in some way. Once considered a mere social supplement to the workshops and rituals of a typical large festival, the fire circle has become a staple event and is often the locus for communal activity at these heterotopian events. In fact, the fire circle community increasingly consists of drummers and dancers whose main purpose in attending the festivals is specifically the nighttime fire circle. This seeming subculture within a subculture tends to have a more ecstatic and improvisational approach to spirituality than typical Pagan ritualists. Furthermore, these fire practitioners often eschew traditional categories of Paganism in favor of a more generally diverse communal and tribal identity.[14]

To outside observers, the festival fire does seem to be a loud, raucous party. Indeed, researchers like Sarah Pike have observed that "the relatively permeable boundaries at ritual fires promote freedom of expression and a 'party atmosphere,'" and both Pike and Helen Berger noted that this may cause conflict between those who have differing views about the definition and purpose of sacred space (Berger 1999: 75, Pike 2001: 186). However, those that dedicate themselves to the construction and maintenance of the fire, as well as those who help facilitate both the practical and the communal aspects of the fire circle

[14] On the Fires Rising website, in response to a FAQ about whether it is "one of those Pagan festivals," the response is: "The Fires Rising Gathering is a multi-denominational celebration of spirit and spiritedness. People of all spiritual and religious paths are encouraged to attend; and atheists too!" (*http://www.4qf.org/_FiresRising/_Fr05Faq.htm*).

during the night, tend to contradict these notions of a 'boundary free zone' and emphasize a ritual framework. Larry, a fire-tender in Indiana, refers to the fire circle itself as their "mandala," a sacred center that they create and sustain throughout the evening, a focal point for working energy.[15] One particular practice that demonstrates this framework (though perhaps 'encircled' is a better term than 'framed') which has only recently become 'tradition' at fire circles, is the use of rangoli at the beginning of the evening (fig. 2). Adapted from an Indian practice, rangoli involves the use of flour or corn meal to create elaborate designs on the ground. Cricket, a fire-tender who aids in this practice, describes the circular patterns that spiral around the center while small "runways" are created in the four directions to allow spirits and ancestors entry to bless the land and the community. During the day, and especially close to dusk, people can enter the space, leave offerings at various altars placed around the space that are dedicated to various deities or concepts (like an ancestor altar), and establish a quieter connection to the space and the spirits raised within it.[16] According to Cricket, "all this energy is being called in, so at dusk when the fire is lit, the spirits are right there and they've been invited in and then the community dances the prayers and the spirits into the earth. Then we start again tomorrow."[17] This method of ritually demarcating space is analogous to Navajo sand painting, Tibetan mandala making, and the vodun practice of drawing veves (which also happens at the Roundhouse, due to the influence of vodou and Santeria practitioners).[18] Thus, ritual framework is definitely in use at the Roundhouse and other fire circle spaces, but not everyone who attends these events is present for all the activities. Many people who do not arrive until later do not witness the construction of the space. However, the use of rangoli becomes another instance where practitioners continually find new ways to participate in fire culture and

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[15] Personal conversation, Elf Fest, Lothlorien, May 20, 2007.

[16] Some years, an ancestor altar is covered by pictures and memorabilia of community members who have recently died. These small dedicated spaces are powerful nodes in the geometric design of the Roundhouse.

[17] Fyrepanther, another female fire-tender, also mentions the practical aspects of rangoli, in that they create boundary lines for dancers and 'lanes' to allow fire-tenders to bring wood to the fire. However, these demarcations are by their nature temporary and disappear fairly soon once the activity around the fire starts.

[18] Like many festival traditions, the use of rangoli at the Roundhouse, grew out of a workshop. This particular one was held by Brushwood fixture, Catherine Cartwright Jones, who practices and teaches various forms of Middle Eastern and Celtic body art through the use of henna and woad.

to aid in creating and maintaining a communal vibe. The key social process here is finding 'a way in,' some way to participate, which may often involve creating new roles and activities when necessary.

This striving for inclusion that suits the inclinations and talents of any and every individual is a crucial aspect of fire culture. In particular, those involved in the "fire tribe" have developed their own kind of (not so secret) society, complete with improvised initiations and often unspoken guidelines. At many festival sites, particularly in the Midwest, fire-tenders are marked by wearing red suspenders, recalling part of the uniform of the professional firefighter. I have often observed the initiation process by which a pair of suspenders is bestowed upon a new member that the group has deemed worthy of the honor, with one of the more experienced fire-tenders often giving his own pair to the initiate (some tenders often bring extra pairs) (fig. 3). During a recent festival season, I sat down with several members of this amorphously defined group to discuss the fire tribe.[19] The consternations of Natalie, a recently suspendered initiate, who received the suspenders for reasons other than physically working with the fire, led to a fruitful discussion of what the suspenders actually signify. Cricket related her own story about receiving her own suspenders. A night nurse, Cricket originally made herself responsible for first aid and keeping people hydrated by carrying around water to drummers, dancers, and fire-tenders.[20] She declares that before she received her suspenders, "I had never put so much as a stick on that fire. I was in love with the fire and in love with the energy. It was just like being a part of any community—I found my place in it." Only later, Cricket claims, did she become a full-fledged fire-tender who physically works with the fire during the nighttime sessions, gathers logs, chops wood, and aids in the 'builds,' construction projects for the larger bonfires that are lit in the final day of the festival.

Johnny, another fire-tender, comments on disagreements some fire-tenders have over the significance of the suspenders, and what he believes is the unfortunate tendency for newer fire initiates to see the

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[19] All comments from Cricket, Johnny, and Fyrepanther from personal discussion and interview, 6/15/07.

[20] The role of waterbearer also tends to be a way in for younger members of the Tribe—Cricket's own teenage daughters often serve as water bearers—although it is by no means limited to them, just as tasks around the fire for teenagers are certainly not limited to carrying water.

suspenders as a "badge," something required to "walk the path." When he began his work with festival fires, Johnny felt he "had something to prove" so he could receive the suspenders. "It wasn't until after I'd gotten them that I realized—they told me, you'll be 90 years old in a wheelchair, wheeling yourself up to the fire and poking a stick at it—if you got it in you, you're going to do it, no matter what." Similarly, Cricket considers the suspenders "a thank you for a work already done. The person is already dedicated to honoring the fire, [which is] a gift from their heart. It's not something they're doing to earn suspenders or to be seen by the crowd or anything like that." Returning to Natalie's case, Cricket describes how Natalie, as a dancer, works to maintain the energy of the circle (in this case at the Our Haven site): "She's one of the main dancers. She gets other people to come up and dance. She dances when nobody's dancing. She's there all night. She's bringing water. She . . . interacts [with the drummers and fire-tenders] and blends their energy and brings it . . . around to everybody, carries it out from the center of the ring to the outer reaches of the crowd." At the fire, facilitator roles come in many shapes and sizes and the Tribe honors those members.

Cricket further suggests that suspenders "just indicate that I'm a person there dedicated to being sober and keeping people safe—it gives them a visual, someone to key into that's holding the container for the crowd."[21] As a fire-tender, Johnny also acknowledges his facilitator role as a container for the event: "we're the ones who aren't going to let things get out of hand or make things more out of hand if they're getting stagnant." This seemingly contradictory statement fully embodies the range of roles that fire-tenders play at the fire. On the one hand, fire-tenders are always on the lookout for safety issues, whether someone is getting too close to the fire or an occasional intoxicated individual falls.[22] They even tend to be traffic cops of a sort, ensuring the flow of

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[21] Despite loose definitions, fire-tenders do take wearing suspenders seriously. Cricket also relates incidents where off-duty fire-tenders have been caught intoxicated or sleeping at the fire while still wearing the suspenders, a definite faux-pas in fire-tender etiquette. However, instead of punishing any offenders, in true trickster spirit, other fire-tenders tend to play practical jokes on the culprits, sometimes taping them to their chairs, adorning them with outrageous costumes and otherwise drawing attention to them, hoping that embarrassment will solve the problem.

[22] At a recent Our Haven festival, fire-tenders sprung to action when an incident involving such an intoxicated fall led to a minor injury that required hospitalization. In a morning meeting the next day, the possibility of a more clearly defined role for fire-tenders as safety officers was brought up. However, most of the meeting's attendees,

constant movement around the fire is unimpeded, as dancers move in circles around the fire, what is referred to as "doing O's." On the other hand, some fire-tenders tend to take on a kind of trickster-like "Master of Revels" role, by instigating and enacting spontaneous performances, game playing, and activities like placing colorful flash powder and other pyrotechnics into the fire, in a constant attempt to keep people engaged. Johnny also sees himself as a "conduit" of universal energy, and that the process of building and maintaining fires is itself a sacred act.

Indeed, the thinking behind building festival fires is very indicative of community dynamics. For instance, Johnny and Cricket discuss wood conservation—"how to burn warm and bright without using too much wood." Here, one is reminded of the challenges involved in building and maintaining the ideal community, in which everyone can have a way to both contribute and have their needs met. Accordingly, building fires is a constant negotiation. A frequent sight at festival fires is two or more fire-tenders discussing a plan of how to reconfigure a wood setup, or how to add other structures, like the hollowed out "chimney" logs that provide a more constant and aesthetically pleasing burn, and then putting that plan into action with several bodies at once, amid shouts and sometimes acrobatics to avoid too much exposure to the fire (fig. 4). A common configuration, especially for the larger bonfires, is a cabin-like structure that shifts as it burns away. Once such a structure is set up, fire-tenders must continually adjust the burning wood so that it eventually "folds in on itself" leaving nothing but a pile of smoldering coals by the morning (I've often heard fire-tenders refer to this process as a giant, complex game of Jenga). Johnny and Cricket discuss the challenges in maintaining such a structure, while Johnny rhapsodizes about the perfect chimney log: "It's a sacred gift from the trees. It shows

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including the elders, felt that the fire-tenders involved did exactly what was needed and that no further formal authorization was necessary. Other festivals, such as Pagan Spirit Gathering utilize a much more formal initiatory group to deal with issues of safety. Similar to Burning Man's "Rangers," the Guardians, led by Sir Joe, a former Colorado State Trooper, formally train their members, who are often ex-military or emergency service and medical workers. Dressed in a uniform of black clothes with a red sash, they operate as a combination of safety officers, bouncers, disciplinary panel, vice squad (one year I witnessed an attendee's ejection by the Guardians because he was selling hallucinogens) and border patrol, since they monitor any unauthorized entry into the private festival grounds. As festival sites are often in rural areas, local interlopers are not unheard of, due to curiosity in some cases, while others may have a more anti-Pagan agenda. Sarah Pike covers this extensively in chapter 3 of *Earthly Bodies* (2001).

their beauty and strength, along with the diversity and power of nature, since carpenter ants helped make it hollow. What we're doing with the chimney log is sending energy to the heavens. It's a great medium for fire." In our discussion, we also note how the chimney log, with both its phallic size and hollow container, displays both masculine and feminine imagery and perfectly represents the alchemical transformation happening in the space, the mixing of opposing elements that are the foundations of the fire circle experience (fig. 5).

Alchemical Rhythm and the Politics of Drumming

In the ten years I have attended pagan festivals, the fire circles remain the most alluring and the most problematic for me as a festival goer. They are a place I often struggle with my participation and the ways to engage the communal dynamic, not as a researcher, but as an individual practitioner striving to determine my place within community. In her work on pagan festival fires, Sarah Pike notes that "it is at these fires that tensions between self-expression and the needs of the festival community, which have spread at every moment of festival going, are worked on at the most intimate level of festival experience" (2001: 183).[23] I constantly observe these tensions around me and experience them myself. Although she concentrates primarily on the dancers, Pike calls drumming "an arena of both contention and cooperation." Drumming itself becomes a medium for performance, a method for exploring relationships between the individual and community. Drumming is a performative practice that both challenges traditional notions of ritual and liturgy and encompasses conflicts experienced by the broader Pagan community. Particularly, these practitioners confront issues surrounding leadership and egalitarianism, ethical behavior and etiquette, and individual and community identity. Drumming also is a way for participants to explore their own attitudes about performance and what it means to "take center stage" or blend in with the crowd.

[23] The fires are also the place where Pike felt that she "separated from my identity as researcher and observer. I suspect it is in similar ways that other dancers and drummers leave their mundane habits and selves behind as they became caught up in the circle" (2001: 186). I definitely agree with this observation, as I have witnessed such a transformation in some unexpected people that I know from outside festival settings. I have also felt myself change in that sense as I let myself get more caught up by drumming, dancing and the experience of the fire.

In a recent essay in *Researching Paganisms* (2004), Wendy Griffin writes of her experiences as a frame drummer in Goddess rituals and her challenges negotiating both her practitioner and researcher identities. She notes that the drum provided a kind of safety "whenever I felt that I was outside my comfort zone or being drawn in too far into emotions or self-revelation." Further, in her essay, Griffin regards her drumming in a ritual as "not the same as being a full participant" and that performance is "still a way to remain safe" (Griffin 2004: 64). Yet, perhaps here, "performance" is akin to a kind of occultism in which a dynamic of concealment and revelation is constantly in play. Drumming seems to occupy a highly proscribed space within the structure of ritual, providing a beat for movement and chant or aiding in the achievement of heightened states of consciousness. In these situations, drums are magical tools to support the ritual participants and supplement the goals for the ritual. However, the dynamic in fire circles is remarkably different. Whereas ritual gesture, chant and liturgy are central to ritual, a more improvisational dynamic between drums, bodies and fire is central to the fire circle. Here, the decision whether to use performance as a way to hide or a way to engage is up to the individual. At the fire circles, drummers also negotiate between "putting themselves out there," highlighting their individuals skills and talents, and seamlessly blending into the rhythms established by the group present at the bonfire. Performance at the fire circle, although it can be a means to hide, is also the primary method for engaging with community while negotiating conflict and attempting individual transformation.

Since entering into Pagan spirituality fifteen years ago, I have experimented with drumming in various forms, usually on small drums that were given to me by other practitioners. I have achieved a level of proficiency that allows me to participate in drum circles that consist of skilled drummers. However, in drum circles, size often does matter, and the drummers who stand and play large, strapped-on djimbes are the ones that tend to stand out from the crowd more and lead the rhythms. Therefore, even though I have earned a place in the foreground amongst these skilled drummers, it would be fairly difficult to dominate such a circle with my smaller djimbe that tends to emit higher end sounds often used as accents to the main rhythms. And I have to sit down to play it. My participation at these circles, which also involves dancing and movement around the fire, has increased more recently as I have been able to extend my endurance and overcome exhaustion, boredom, blistered hands, and other more personal frustrations, to stay with the

fire throughout the night into the next morning or even afternoon. Although the fire circle is a social space that attendees enter and leave at will throughout the night, the space seems to wield a particular magic when experienced fully throughout the night into the next day. This may be due either to participants' shared feelings of having experienced and endured the circle together for so long, or to simply a heightened state of consciousness that comes from sleep deprivation, physical exertion, and the trance-like state that many achieve through communion with fire.[24]

Margot Adler and her informants comment on how drums are a more recent addition to the Pagan festival experience, relating how (according to one informant's observation) the emphasis shifted from "a few frame drums" in the late 1980s to Middle Eastern doumbeks, to the African djembes that eventually became the most common festival drum today (Adler 2006/1979: 439). In festival space, drums are ubiquitous, from workshops about playing, making and maintaining drums, to more communal situations in which small groups gather around personal campfires and play, as well as the many rituals that may incorporate drums. But the main showcase for drumming is the ritual bonfire. Although the fire in the main pit is lit shortly after sundown, the fire circle itself does not really begin properly until much later in the night, depending on the size of the festival. Drummers often speak of distinctions between various "shifts"—first shift being the most crowded and loudest part of the night, the most reminiscent of a party atmosphere, with children, those casually interested in the circle, and beginners who attempt to bang out a rhythm on their instruments. Second shift seems to be a transitional period in which those who have already peaked for the night tend to weaken, and finally third shift, the late night period that leads into dawn, when the more skilled drummers take over and subtler rhythms may dominate. Third shift may also be much quieter, intense and trance-like.[25] Within these divisions, a certain kind of elitism

[24] Of course, some participants do enhance this experience with hallucinatory drugs, like LSD, psychotropic mushrooms, ecstasy, and various other entheogens, but this seems to be the case much more at larger festivals than smaller ones, where this kind of activity is often frowned upon. Alcohol is a more common factor, though some festivals, like Fire Rising, forbid the use of any illicit substance at their fire circles.

[25] Many Starwood attendees argue that Starwood's fire circle often does not achieve a true third shift, simply because of its size, preventing the circle from ever truly quieting down, whereas at festival sites like Lothlorien, that impose late night quiet hours, third shift is by necessity more trance-like.

forms, with third-shift drummers rejecting the more chaotic atmosphere of the earlier shifts, with some even adjusting their sleep schedules so that they can awaken directly for third shift.

At most large fire circles, drummers are concentrated in one section of the circle, in order to avoid conflicting rhythms from scattered drummers who may not be able to hear each other. At Brushwood, this area also has some rain shelter. The stars of the drum circle are the large djembes, goblet-shaped drums with rawhide heads, as well as the more conical ashikos. Papillon, a prominent drummer at Starwood, calls these drums "the power horses, the shapers of the rhythm," while higher-end drums like smaller djembes and various sized doumbeks provide accents and flavors, as do other percussion instruments like woodblocks and cowbells. Towards the back are the dun-duns (or djun-djuns), lower-pitched, double-headed drums usually played with sticks. These drums provide the foundation, or as Papillon puts it "the booty . . . the unh." Dun-duns hold an interesting place in the drum hierarchy—although these drummers are generally in the background and do not receive as much attention as the standing, strapped-up djembe players, they are essential to maintaining the rhythm. An inexperienced dun-dun player will easily derail an entire circle through inconsistent playing or dropping out of the rhythm. On the highest end are the shakers and rattles, hand-held percussion instruments of various sorts which can, according to Papillon, "create an intensity that brings the level of ecstasy even higher" if played loud enough. Again, if shakers are not played properly they can provide conflicting energy that will obstruct cohesive rhythms. Also, since shakers are quieter and more portable, percussionists can help dancers to maintain the rhythm on the other side of the circle away from the drummers (some refer to this as 'keeping the energy in') or even follow dancers to aid in individual trance work.

These are just some of the diverse sounds and vibrations that can occur at these large circles. If you are able to truly listen to the multivalent layers of aural communication, you can begin to process the complex conversations happening. Sometimes individual drummers can dialogue between themselves amidst the larger din. A good ear will also be able to track how certain drums and particular rhythms will raise the intensity of the circle, a change that manifests not only in sound but in more frantic dancing. Often this is influenced by the size and intensity of the fire itself, as the fire tenders continually adjust the shape and heat of the fire throughout the evening. Often when magickal practitioners talk of 'energy,' they represent it as an uncritical,

non-specific force, and they struggle to clarify an extremely subjective and amorphous concept. However, at the fire circle, the idea of energy cannot be more directly manifest and lucid. A mere listen will be able to tell you whether the circle is chaotic and unfocused or directed and energetic. Yet, more critical assessments vary wildly based on individual experiences and individual notions of skill and virtuosity.

At Starwood, drummers and dancers struggle with attitudes of openness and community conflicting with a strong desire to critique and correct those who are seen as disrupting the energy they want to raise. Experienced fire practitioners can be highly critical and evaluative of their own and others' performances, and even in non-interview situations will continually discuss their experiences of the night before, relating tales of both ecstatic union and conflicting tension in the circle. An older drummer, who calls himself Nighthawk, relates one such tale. He speaks of 'accidental double connections,' when two or more drummers decide to start a rhythm during a lull and must negotiate which rhythm will win out. He associates this with two surfers trying to ride the same wave, another metaphor that drummers often use. Relating several instances when he was forced to concede to another drummer's rhythm, he complains that "every time I tried to take my turn (to say something), I was getting crushed." Despite his obvious disappointment in these encounters, Nighthawk still finds a way to "say what he needs to say," proclaiming that the drum circle is not a place for anger. Conflicts like these are additional demonstrations of Pike's assertion that "Neo-Pagan festival communities both cohere and fragment through conflicts around the ritual fire" (Pike 2001: 123).

Issues around listening and dialogue are at the heart of various tensions that occur in such circles. In one of my earlier experiences with festival fires, a particular drummer was communally ostracized from Pagan Spirit Gathering, a festival with much less emphasis on drumming than Starwood, after he was reproached for not listening to other drummers during the circle. This particular drummer argued that his skill dictated a certain freedom to play how he wanted, while the rest of the community felt that he was not honoring the community by showing off, "trancing out" and ignoring the needs of other less experienced drummers. However, this conflict seemed indicative of a general emphasis on community over virtuosity in circles where drummers are less experienced and at festivals where drumming is not as central an activity. Whereas the Roundhouse is central to the Starwood festival space at Brushwood, the drumming fire at Wisteria,

the home of Pagan Spirit Gathering is located quite a distance from the center of "Pagan Town." At the time, many participants noted that this location reflected the ambivalent attitudes of the festival organizers towards drumming. In these situations, festival-goers may complain of the noise late into the night or the rampant party atmosphere that they see as antithetical to the spiritual purposes of the festival.[26] However, drummers and dancers at Starwood articulate the importance of the drum circle to those working magic at night in other areas of the festival, claiming "Where the real magic is happening is outside in the community… [drumming] affects the whole village whether they see it or not." Here, fire practitioners express a common view at festival, arguing for a sympathetic magic approach to the raising of energy at fire circles which benefits the entire community.

Fire circle participants also struggle to articulate their experience of community and how fire circles serve that community. Spencer, a drummer who is also a fire-tender, explains "It's all about creating a space for drummers to do their thing, dancers to do their thing, whatever that thing may be. Not everybody who comes into that circle has the exact same goal. But there is a generic, overhanging, 'good vibe' feeling that everybody wants." Gypsy, a dancer who occasionally drums, further expresses the notion of shared experience. She, like many other drummers and dancers, often uses metaphors of travel. Some people talk about 'driving the bus' when pointing out those who lead particular rhythms and those who join the rhythm 'get on the bus,' perhaps unknowingly invoking Ken Kesey's famous statement about his Merry Pranksters ("You're either on the bus or off the bus"). Dancers who 'do o's', processing around the fire to the drum rhythms, are said to be "on the train." Gypsy also uses the term 'getting on the spaceship' to imply not only a sense of communal travel, but of travel that transcends the mundane, physical world. These travel metaphors seem to confirm Sarah Pike's use of Richard Schechner's term, transportive performance, though many practitioners would argue that it is also transformative (Pike 2001: 216). Gypsy affirms that whatever role an individual plays in the group experience, as a beginning or experienced drummer, dancer,

[26] In an email discussion with Tessa (5/10/07), one of the organizers of PSG, she relates how even though PSG has less emphasis on ecstatic drumming, drummers are fully integrated into "Town Life" to the degree that they wish to be, through participation in morning meetings, rituals, performances, and merchanting, and that the location of the drum circle is probably more about space considerations than anything else.

or even spectator, "if everything's dialed in correctly . . . everybody gets to go all at the same time and it's really nice to share a good experience." She also uses communication metaphors like 'dialed in,' especially when she talks about 'being called' to dance by the drums, in which certain rhythms 'dial up her phone numbers.'

Metaphors like these also indicate the seductive, sexualized atmosphere of the drum circle in which dancers are often women and drummers are often male.[27] Female dancers like Gypsy will often speak of a drummer's ability to 'get her going' and drumming prowess seems to stand in for sexual prowess. However, while the atmosphere at drum circles is highly sexualized with tribal rhythms, nudity and gender play, overtly sexual behavior is often criticized and corrected, especially if a man is accused of unwanted sexual advances. Similarly, drummers and dancers also spoke disparagingly of 'drum bunnies,' female groupies who focus their romantic attention on particular male drummers. When Papillon talks about ecstasy as the goal for the circle, he also concedes that many different ideas about ecstasy are in play: "Some guys like to stand out front and ride the whole thing and overpower everyone else sonically, to take all the energy into themselves and 'ejaculate' it into the circle." Papillon contrasts this "testosterone drumming" with drumming that is based more on listening and dialogue, a more subtle seduction. Although he does admit to noticing a particular connection between his drumming and female attention, he maintains that this connection is not limited to women. He claims that "it doesn't have to do with gender, but with a deeper relationship between drummers and dancers." Through exploring this relationship, Papillon also discovered that he "had a personal stake in starting to work with the sound and then from sound and music there was a deeper understanding of the energy that was moving."

Furthermore, for drummers and dancers interested in exploring these kinds of relationships, drumming as a channel for energetic communication can become central to the experience. Emphasizing the improvisatory nature of such exchanges, Papillon notes that "there's no ancient text to look at, no source material. Everyone's sort of feeling it out and trying to figure out what works and what doesn't and just staying in conversation with other people in the fire circle community." He further explains that "by drumming with different drummers at a

[27] Of course, this is a generalization with many notable exceptions.

circle, I'll be able to feel out who understands what's happening on an energetic level and who doesn't, and who's willing to dialogue and who isn't. And then sometimes outside the fire circle I can approach other drummers who are 'on the bus' so to speak and start talking about different ways to dialogue." He also struggles with ways to communicate with individuals who are disruptive either intentionally, because of an ego-driven desire to dominate the circle or because of a lack of experience and discerning ear. To address this, Papillon explains the concept of "entrainment," a method of discussing boundaries with fire practitioners that he has implemented when preparing for smaller fire circles that are alternatives to the overwhelming chaos of the large bonfire. In entrainment, he begins with the question "Can we agree that our intention is to be here and celebrate and be loving to each other?" After everyone generally agrees, he further asks "How can we support each other *and* call each other out? How can I let you know that you're playing so loud I can't hear myself without hurting your feelings? How can I have my needs met without hurting you? It's made for some beautiful drumming."

This negotiation further reflects issues around individual ego and the notion of performance. Papillon has noted that because of his skill, he is often called upon to enter a circle to "fix it" with his drumming, an urge he attempts to resist. Although the Starwood fire circle has no obvious "leaders," a certain kind of elite group of drummers and dancers does seem to emerge, and I sometimes find myself jockeying for position among the more experienced drummers. In some cases, a vacuum creates that elitism. I have attended smaller circles where I felt pressure, similar to what Papillon describes, to "ramp things up" because no one else felt comfortable or experienced enough to take that role. Jone Salomonsen's observations about feminist witchcraft, that in the absence of an overt hierarchy, a "covert hierarchy" is likely to develop, could apply here (Salomonsen 2002: 60). When asked if he sees himself in a leadership or facilitator position, he admits his discomfort in these roles: "Ideally, it's not just me. Ideally, every single one of us at the circle will step in at a particular moment when the energy needs to rise up.... If I go in and I'm trying to make something happen, how often is it going to happen and how often am I going to be frustrated?" He also notes that within the fire circles, he is learning lessons of non-attachment. "I can't control it, but I can sorta nudge it a little bit...Just being there and doing what I can and having an intention, but having no attachment, because I can't control it. It's an organism."

What that intention is always seems to be at issue when discussing fire circles. Although Pike notes that conflict arises from the confusion over goals at the fire circle (Pike 2001: 186), this kind of organic improvisation appeals to many drummers at Starwood. However, in recent years, many drummers at Starwood and elsewhere were looking for alternatives to the 'party atmosphere' and barely controlled chaos. Some practitioners discuss these goals in the language of alchemy, particularly with regards to fire circles as transformative experiences. Recent festivals like Fire Dance and Fires Rising use an alchemical metaphor in the structuring and execution of their circles, in which participants seek to transform their lead into gold by engaging with the fire all night and greeting the sunrise in the morning. At Fires Rising, popular Vegas stage magician and magickal practitioner Jeff Magnus McBride and his partner Abbi Spinner elaborately structure their fire circles based on elemental, planetary, and alchemical correspondences, with detailed information that they present to the participants when registering, as well as workshops to help prepare participants for these circles. For instance, the layer of dancers who are closest to the fire and move the most frantically are referred to as the "Mercury" track in relation to the fire, the solar center that is the gold of alchemy and the attainment of wisdom and self-realization associated with alchemical transformation. McBride maps out the rest of the circle according to these correspondences, in which every possible individual role for drummers, dancers, and other participants is imagined and encircled. However, on their website, McBride and Spinner emphasize that although the structure for their fire circles is highly routinized, the content is entirely improvisational and spontaneous, consisting of a kind of inter-performance:

> By re-solving ourselves to dis-covering each other within the mystery of sustained, mindful engagement, and by consciously choosing to cross the threshold into the collaborative process of introducing, inventing, spinning and galvanizing spontaneously emerging themes, celebrants are empowered to witness and nurture each other's creativity, beauty, process and art, thus becoming a harmony of communal inspiration, as we dance through the alchemical stages from darkness into light. (http://www.4qf.org/_FiresRising/_res_alchemy.htm, par.10)

Thus, for the attendees of Fires Rising, an evening of spontaneous interactive performance that leads into the morning is their alchemical ritual, their way of transforming lead into gold as the sun, the macrocosmic symbol for that gold, rises on the participants around the fire,

the microcosmic representation of both the gold itself and the process of achieving it.

Similarly, the "Fire Tribe" associated with Midwest festivals follow a tradition of greeting the sun with what they call "Resh," an abbreviation for Liber Resh vel Helios, a series of Egyptian-influenced adorations to the sun developed by Victorian magician Aleister Crowley, and used by practitioners of Thelema and members of the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO).[28] When the first disc of dawn is spotted from the fire circle, participants gather, often with many people precariously balancing on a log and loudly recite the brief text, followed by a long, sustained shout of "BULL." This final innovation was introduced by Brushwood elder Dennis Murphy as a way to both empower and undermine belief systems and personal experiences, offering participants a chance for release at the end of a long night's festivities. Emerging from a combination of Hermeticism, New Age Spirituality, Taoism and Chaos Magick, Murphy's philosophy considers this bullish performance as a mantra of sorts, as a way for individuals to release any negativity or regret, indeed, to release meaning itself. Furthermore, Murphy, as one of the first to incorporate the practice of red suspender initiations with fire-tenders, sees the practice of shouting BULL as an initiation into "the Cult of the Living Bull," his name for the "tribe" that creates and maintains the fire circles at festival.[29] Cricket relates her own struggles with the positive aspects of this concept, that "this is just all a bunch of nonsense and imagery and it's what I make of it and if I want to make it into negative, crabby-ass bullshit then that's my choice but if I want to release it all and laugh at the universe, I can do that too."

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[28] The full text of the morning Resh is: "Hail unto Thee who art Ra in Thy rising, even unto Thee who art Ra in Thy strength, who travellest over the Heavens in Thy bark at the Uprising of the Sun. Tahuti standeth in His splendour at the prow, and Ra-Hoor abideth at the helm. Hail unto Thee from the Abodes of Night!" This is taken from various sources in Crowley's bibliography, including *Magick Without Tears* (1973) and *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* (1929). Although there are four adorations for dawn, noon, sunset and midnight, it is the morning Resh that is the most commonly practiced at these festivals. Crowley also provides a series of hand gestures and stances to go along with the recitation, though these are rarely adhered to in festival settings, where participants do not often know of the Thelemic origins of the adorations.

[29] Murphy explains the Cult of the Bull and the elaborate philosophy behind the BULL mantram in several unpublished treatises that he has distributed to members at festivals and through email correspondence. Among the concepts he explores is the meaning behind Meaninglessness and Nothingness and how dancing 'O's' around the fire is part of a universal movement of chaos and order.

Ultimately, many fire circle participants view their nocturnal activities as opportunities for personal growth and healing and the Resh adoration is merely one example of how this healing may occur through performance. Again, Cricket relates her fire circle experience with her experience as a night nurse: "Somewhere around 3 and 5 am, whether the center of the ring is a hospital bed, or a bonfire, people's boundaries, their walls, are down. Their pain comes out and they can't stop it and it's safe to have a nervous breakdown in the dark with your friends standing there, and with this fire to connect with. People just spill their pain and bleed out over the ground. They're trying to heal. I've had the same conversations in a hospital room that I've had around the bonfire." Similarly, other fire practitioners seek to create that environment for healing in spaces that are not as chaotic and raucous as a Roundhouse bonfire. Jason Cohen, founder and primary member of tribal band, *Incus*, has begun to organize festivals known as "Forest Dance," consisting of smaller, more concentrated events that are not just about loud drumming. Like the Fire Dance and Fires Rising festivals, whose methods Cohen has partly adapted, these circles highly discourage the consumption of alcohol and drugs, cigarettes, or even casual conversation in order to promote a more focused atmosphere.

Cohen maintains that part of his intent is to offer an alternative to the more aggressive energy of the Starwood bonfires, where "you don't get the opportunity to really open up to the softest and subtlest aspects. So what I'm trying to help instill into the fire circle tradition and the culture in general, is the ability to honor all these aspects of ourselves in one circle, in one night and hold space for all of it." Cohen offers what he calls the "Sacred Dynamic Fire" as a space for individuals to work through their own issues and journeys. "We talk a lot about service and fine tuning ourselves. We all have imbalances. We all are looking to be heard. We're all looking to be what it was that we never felt that we were supported in being… We're trying to create these moments in the circle where you can come and unfold the layers of this thick skin." At Cohen's circles, drumming is certainly a focus, but unlike the large tribal fires, silence can also come into play. One person can start a chant, sing a song, say a prayer, all while being accompanied or witnessed by others. Cohen explains that the purpose is to offer individuals the support of the community, "creating a safe space to go into trance, and really holding space for the softest voices and the shyest people."

Fire circles like Cohen's Sacred Dynamic Fire seem to reinscribe ritual space, where individuals may have more specific goals, while maintaining the improvisatory nature of the festival bonfire. After much discussion with other practitioners, it seems that my own increased involvement in these kinds of circles is indicative of a general move away from or bias against established ritual forms, mostly associated with Wicca and other Pagan traditions, and seen as dry, liturgical and uninspired. In fact, much of the criticisms these practitioners have about ritual involves their distaste about the overtly theatrical aspects of ritual practices, considering drumming and fire dancing as a more authentic and unmediated form of expression. Further examination of the various forms of fire circle practice is absolutely essential in tracing the evolution of Paganism, particularly its approaches to social and political issues, as well as its notions of performance. Here, the common assertion by practitioners that the fire is the microcosm of the community certainly seems to ring true. Conflicts around the fire, particularly among the drummers, are undoubtedly reflective of controversy in the Pagan community about leadership, community, and political consensus. Moreover, the future of the Fire Tribe is strongly indicative of the direction that the next generation of Pagan practitioners will take. Especially at Starwood, teenage and even younger pre-adolescents, affectionately known as "woodchucks" are interested in training as fire-tenders (fig. 6). As many Pagan Studies scholars, like Berger, Pike and Clifton, have noted, Paganism in general, especially the festival movement, has had to adapt and change as more children are being born and raised in these environments. Johnny the fire-tender also acknowledges how having children involved in the fire circle shifts the emphasis into a more educational realm. Having a younger generation interested in training also forces the adults to both solidify the traditions that exist and innovate them further, such as the introduction of white stripes on suspenders to indicate a younger trainee's age and experience. Although he laments the fact that the responsibility of mentoring does diminish the chaos factor he finds attractive, Johnny enjoys the "bonding experience, that extra dynamic of being a role model" especially when it involves valuable discussion about what responsible fire behavior is and what is important to pass on to younger initiates.

Thus, the fire circle—and all the activities and performances that occur within it—is an alchemical container for the issues and conflicts of the festival movement, which itself is experiencing a struggle for identity

vis-à-vis Paganism in general. As Sarah Pike has noted, the festival fire also prominently manifests issues of gender and postcolonialism, from the masculinity of the drummers pounding on the supposedly female djembe drums and the many forms of bodily display, to the presence of various elements of vodou, Santeria, and Ifa, such as the use of veves and ritual altars. This space is undeniably microcosmic. The fire at the center is that barely controlled desire, the excess of sacrifice and the attraction of dissolution that Artaud and Bataille imagined. In the circle, we are actors signaling through the flames, attempting to both contain the conflagration and immerse ourselves in this energy that brings us together and drives the community, while at the same time providing fuel for collision and conflict. I can only continue to find my way to engage with this energy and to play my drum, no matter how exhausted my hands may be.

Yet the question remains for those who wish to quantify the importance of festival to Paganism and society at large. As we have discussed, both researchers and participants tend to see festival as a space separate from "mundane" time and space. Yet perhaps this fantastical dichotomy between festival space and "mundania" is somewhat regressive for Paganism. According to Pagan Spirit Gathering organizer, Tessa:

> One of the biggest problems for folks is that misperception that PSG represents some kind of ideal and needs to be protected with the Mundane kept outside, at bay. That doesn't teach people how to function outside the festival… The two sides—'magical' and 'mundane' could each be more effective when informed by one another. I certainly use my skills in the mundane to make my role at PSG function, as do many others. And I use my magical skills to function outside of PSG, as do others.[30]

Those who thoughtfully facilitate fire circles also desire to foster this connection between the inside of the circle and the outside. Magnus McBride similarly rhapsodizes:

> The magic we co-create in the sacred container, through sustained engagement, ripples out exponentially into the rest of our lives, for the highest good. The mightier our ability to remain engaged in the Fire Circle process, the richer and fuller our experience becomes, a truth that is mirrored in the greater mystery of life. Though it can be challenging to stay fully committed to the creative process from midnight, or earlier, until after sunrise, it is specifically this kind of initiatory, inventive

[30] Personal email correspondence, 5/10/07.

> ordeal, virtually unheard of in our culture, that furnishes us with the utmost opportunity for personal and collective growth (http://www.4qf.org/_FiresRising/_res_alchemy.htm, par.28)

Are festivals merely a vacation, a time away from "mundane" life to recharge the spiritual batteries of participants who find themselves trapped in the urban work world? Perhaps festivals are not just about a change of scenery, but rather a shift in boundaries that allows for participants to concentrate on the crucial aspects of their practice and on community building, a hyperreality where small moves have profound effects. Again, to use the alchemical symbolism that McBride and others apply to fire work, perhaps the fire circle is indeed a crucible that holds within it the desires and conflicts inherent to the Pagan festival and, indeed, to a broader sense of magickal culture that includes Paganism within its mix. Exactly what kind of gold is obtained through that process remains to be seen.

Fig. 1. Morning at the 2007 Starwood Festival, Sherman, NY.

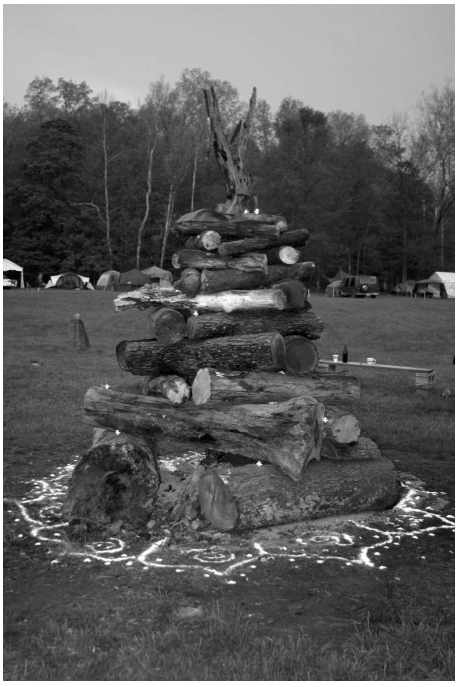

Fig. 2. The constructed fire space (with rangoli) for the 2007 Beltaine Festival in Our Haven (French Lick, IN).

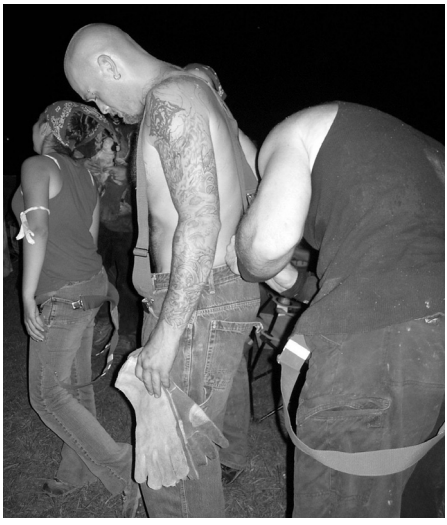

Fig. 3. A new firetender initiate receives his red suspenders.

Fig. 4. Our Haven firetenders adjust a large chimney log.

Fig. 5. A chimney log in use at a smaller fire space, 2007 Starwood Festival.

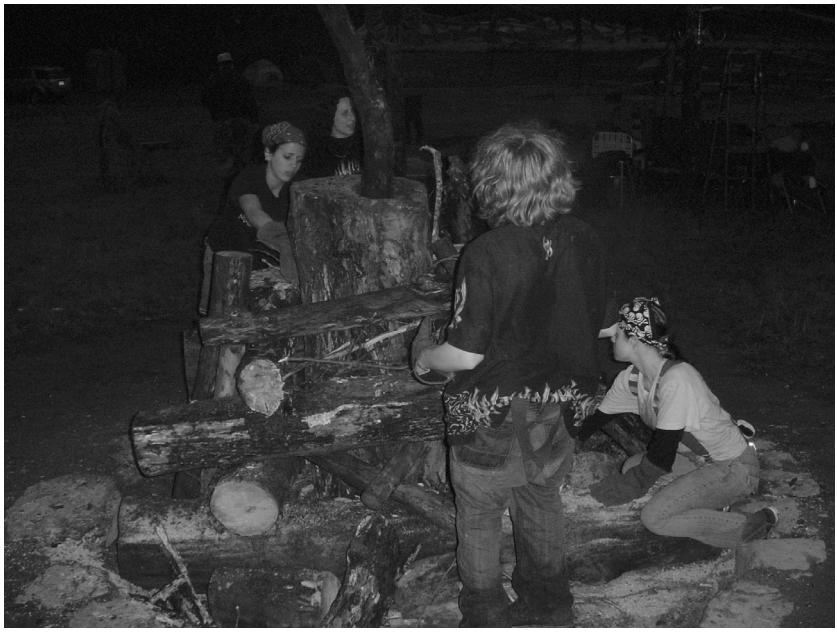

Fig. 6. Junior firetenders, known as woodchucks, help prepare the Beltaine fire, Our Haven, 2008.

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PAGAN THEOLOGY AND THE GODDESS

PAGAN THEOLOGY

Michael York

'Paganism has no god' and 'paganism has many gods'.[1] Both these assertions are true, and it may be asked how this is possible. Obviously, paganism in general does not retain a figure comparable to the monotheistic God of Abrahamic tradition. An exception to this last statement might be the Olodumare figure as supreme creator in Santeria and Yoruba tradition. Nevertheless, Olodumare is more akin to the Demiurge of Gnosticism or the *deus otiosus* or *deus absconditus*, the 'lazy' or 'absent' God, of Deism. Moreover, Olodumare is a supreme fashioner and not a creator *ex nihilo*. All in all, paganism does not espouse affiliation to a transcendental God who is wholly other than the manifest world known to us through our senses.

But additionally, paganism may be said to have no god because its emphasis is clearly placed upon empirical reality. For many pagans, belief in anything comparable to the supernatural is not important. In fact, numerous pagans do not *believe* in the supernatural in any sense. We are reminded in this of Margot Adler's assertion that contemporary paganism is not about belief but rather on what is done.[2] Vivienne Crowley puts forward that apart from "a very simple belief in the life force and the powers of the human psyche," it is the working within a particular framework of ritual and symbolism that is the essence of paganism.[3] It is this that allows over time the hidden understandings of the practice to manifest and become clearer to the participant.

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[1] Author's usage note: I employ the terms 'pagan' and 'paganism' (with lower case *p*) throughout in a generic sense. I recognize that this runs counter to current fashion that seeks to present 'Paganism' as a *bona fide* religion. My sympathies remain with this effort, and in the case of 'Neo-paganism' or 'Neo-Paganism' capitalizing the *P* is acceptable to the degree that the designated spirituality represents a *specific* and identifiable practice. In general, I judge capitalization of anything other than personal names and place names to be hubristic—often amounting to the waving of a red flag before a contentious bull. Accordingly, I will capitalize 'Abrahamic' but not 'secular' or 'dharmic' except that in the last case my Outlook Express spell check has the tendency automatically to convert 'dharmic' to 'Dharmic', and I have then left these for the most part.

[2] Adler (1986); York (1995b: 102).

[3] Crowley (1989: 16); York (1995b: 121).

Consequently, in as much as paganism—especially contemporary Western paganism—is a form of naturism, worship or honouring of natural cycles and processes, it is also largely a form of devotional humanism. Either way, to the degree that either nature or humanity is central, the emphasis of paganism is not on deity as such. In this sense, paganism is a spirituality that may be assessed as having no god per se.

There is also another manner in which the statement, 'paganism has no god', might be true—namely that Wicca and some other forms of contemporary Western paganism concentrate more, and sometimes exclusively, on *The Goddess*. True enough, this deity has a son and consort generally designated *The God* who is variously recognized in the figures of Cernunnos, the Horned God, the Green Man, Oak King, Holly King, etc. But both genealogically and in terms of importance, The God is secondary so that the statement, 'paganism has no god', might be interpreted as 'paganism has goddess first and foremost'.

From a theological perspective, modern witchcraft or Wicca may be described as a form of bi-theism. While names of deity and gods from Astarte, Ishtar, Demeter, Diana, Apollo, Mabon, Pan, etc. are often used and may even be individually worshiped, they are almost invariably considered to be instances or manifestations of either The Goddess or The God. So while someone like Charlene Spretnak might deny that the Wiccan goddess represents essentially the Abrahamic God in a dress, Jehovah in drag so to speak,[4] in general Wicca and related Neo-pagan spiritualities focus on the interplay of the feminine and masculine in and throughout nature as well as the civilized world of humanity—the *yin* and *yang* of the cosmos. But while this bi-theistic perception dominates in Neo-paganism in both ontological and psychological senses, Neo-paganism is itself only one expression of paganism within the world more widely—albeit in the West it is currently the most dominant and popular form of paganism primarily under the guise of Wicca and Witchcraft.

Nevertheless, paganism may be said to have no god also in the sense that it is monistic or pantheistic, namely, all substance is divine or the

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[4] Spretnak (1982: xvii). "No one is interested in revering a 'Yahweh with a skirt.' A distant, judgmental, manipulative figure of power who holds us all in a state of terror." I heard the 'God in a dress' assertion first in a talk by Melissa Raphael who Wendy Griffin informs me (personal communication, 23.12.6) Raphael borrowed from Spretnak. See further, Raphael (1998).

whole world—all existence—is god. There is a tendency within both contemporary and traditional forms of paganism to consider everything to be sacred and of divine nature. Usually, this understanding of pantheism is what provides the explanation of polytheism—who and what the gods actually represent, but in the sense that all is god, this may portend for some that there is no individual god or even goddess.

In general, however, paganism in its more traditional and non-exclusively contemporary Western manifestations is at home with the assertion that 'paganism has many gods'—'gods' of course in the understanding of both 'gods and goddesses'. We can summarize the longstanding polytheistic emphasis within pagan orientation by noting the radical spirituality's stress on gender-differentiated and multiple understandings of godhead. The honouring of male and female as complementary but distinguishable aspects or forces of nature are reflected in the yin and yang of classical Chinese religiosity, in the inherent *anima* and *animus* projections of classical Western paganism, in Ku and Hina of Hawaiian Kahuna, and in The Goddess and The God of contemporary Wicca. But in addition to these or any other over-arching principle or set of principles, throughout most of its various manifestations—both historical and contemporary, pagan godhead is understood and celebrated in pantheonic formulations: Shinto's *kami*, the Greco-Roman Olympians and chthonic deities, Las Seite Potencias Africanas of Santería, Vodun's *loas*, the Chinese *ch'i* and *shen*, the Nordic *aesir* and *vanir*, the Amerindian divine ancestors (e.g., Sedna, Tlaloc, Quetzalcoatl, Water-Woman, Mother Earth, Coyote, etc.) as well as the figures of Ku, Kane, Lono, Kanaloa, Papa, Pele, Kapo, etc. in Kahuna. Whether we look to the indigenous hypostases of Africa, Asia, Australia, Polynesia, Europe or the Americas, we invariably find multiple gods and goddesses grouped together into ever-changing pantheons in line with the perpetual shifts of cultural needs and fashions. The multiplicity of paganism remains at the root of anthropomorphic projection and, concurrently, spontaneous and natural perceptions of the numinous, animistic and awesome.

To understand pagan theology, one must understand paganism as root-religion—the foundation to all subsequent religious development or positioning, whether Abrahamic, Dharmic or secular. This begs us to question how paganism in its many forms differs from Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox), Islam (Sunna, Shiite), Judaism (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox), Hinduism, Buddhism (Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana), secular humanism, Marxism, etc. It must still be borne in mind, however, that to speak of religions broadly in this

way, we are making reference to *ideal-types* or hypothetical standards and idealizations rather than to the actual specifics of church, sect, denomination and cult. In any given case, we are more likely to find elements of all four religious ideal-types (Abrahamic, Dharmic, pagan and secular) since the ideal-type is a heuristic sociological tool that is used *to measure* any specific practice or expression against in order to determine its predominant orientation and to locate where, how and why it differs from the 'pure' form. The detailed analysis that such a comparative investigation merits, however, is beyond the scope of the present enterprise.

Instead, we need to recognize that pagan expression finds its true home at the immediate, local level of place and community. It is within the immediacy of time and place, the here-and-now, that the distinguishing features of paganism's nature orientation, polytheistic pluralism, celebration, this-worldliness, sense of the awesome and corpo-spirituality are to be located. It is particularly with the corpo-spiritual, the recognition of the physical as intrinsically and integrally sacred, that paganism differs from any secular perceptions of the cosmos as mechanistic as well as any gnostic devaluing of the material world as illusory, secondary or imprisoning.[5]

A key avenue into a pagan mindset is through an appreciation of its inclination toward idolatry. Tolerated at best through Hindu *bhakti*, denounced by Judeo-Christian and Islamic antipathy, and ridiculed and dismissed by scientism and secular evolutionism, the idol in paganism is foremost an encyclopaedic repository of mantic energy, folkloric insight and cultural tradition. While I wish to return to idolatry, for now let us address it simply as a representation of deity in concrete form. In paganism's ubiquity of divinity, everything is potentially a representation or symbol of deity—let alone an instance of divine nature in and of itself. But inasmuch as paganism is the root of all religion, it has also generated contra-pagan spirituality (e.g., gnosticism, Abrahamic religion, secularism, dharmic outlook) that posits the non-pagan tenet that there is something beyond, outside of or completely other than

[5] The term 'gnostic' (with lower case *g*) I employ throughout in the sense of 'theosophic' as described under "theosophy" in Bridgewater and Kurtz (1963: 2124). The entry refers to "Neoplatonists, the Gnostics, and the Cabalists [as] generally considered types of theosophists."

nature. In paganism as *a* or *the* religion of nature,[6] there is *nothing* other than nature.

However, in the ubiquity of representation that stems from aboriginal pagan sentiment, even the anti-divine, the transcendent and non-immanent can be symbolized and represented through both idol and/or concept. Pagan theology, therefore, often involves tracing or delineating the lineage and origins of any theomorphic figure belonging to myth or cult.[7] For example, in tracing the Old Testament Judeo-Christian 'God' to the seminal figures of Yahweh and El, it becomes clear that there is an original antagonism between the Hebraic hypostasis and the pagan-fertility emphasis of Baal and his allies within the Canaanite pantheon. Another example is to be found in radically discerning the Aesir of Scandinavian pagan sentiment. As enemies of the Vanir fertility figures, whom the Aesir could not defeat but ultimately with whom they were required to accept begrudgingly a compromise truce, upon careful scrutiny, most figures recorded by Snorri and the *Elder Edda* reveal themselves *not* to be Aesir. Thor and Tyr, cognates of Perkunas and Dievas, the thunder-lord and the Greek-Roman Zeus-Jupiter, are *tivar* or generic gods rather than enemies of the gods. A case can be made, in fact, for most of the remaining *aesir*—leaving essentially Odin/Woden as the only bona fide *ās*. As a figure of rage, deceptive magic and treachery, Odin is more an illustration of a demonic usurper than a legitimate divine ruler.[8]

The discovery that a popular pagan figure is not a deity but has originally anti-god credentials presents a nuanced facet to contemporary pagan practice and theology. While academic authority retains a modicum of respect throughout the contemporary Western pagan community, the prevailing code suggests that there are no doctrines or dogmas for the practicing pagan, that everyone has the right to worship who, what and as one prefers, and that one's beliefs are always personal and legitimate—even if and when such contravenes any discerned ancestral or ethnic tradition.[9] The fundamental pagan *ethos* is and remains one of freedom. Differing from much institutional religion, paganism is not a practice that is based on Credo but rather is one

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[6] Corrington (1997).

[7] See my *Divine versus the Asurian* (York, 1995a) for the representation of the anti-divine as hostile non-existence in Indo-European tradition.

[8] For details on this analysis, see York (1995a: 186–94).

[9] York (1995b: 102).

that, as Adler discerned, is determined more by what is *done* rather than what is *believed*. And what is done is something that for the most part is done personally—whether solo, with a few others, in conjunction with a coven or grove, or as a member of a tribe or community.

But be this as it may, what is the theology, if any, that could be detected behind such personal and diversified practice? In the West, theology as an area of concern has been traditionally appropriated by Christianity. Until relatively recently, any search on the internet or visit to the theology section of a book store would disclose a culturally engrained assumption that *theology = Christian theology*.

> Every religion produces some theology, but Christianity has been intellectually active to a unique, perhaps excessive, extent. The term is therefore mostly used in a Christian context. It may cover the historical study of Christian scripture, history, and thought on the largely tacit and unexamined assumption that these subjects are important because the Christian faith is correct; or it may refer to an explicit, systematic, and often-renewed attempt to work out doctrines in the light of this faith.[10]

Otherwise, Bullock, Stallybrass and Trombley consider that theology is the attempt to talk rationally about the divine, and they note the more encompassing, let alone neutral, investigation that is promulgated by the study of religions on a comparative basis. A pioneer and major influence on this last front has been Ninian Smart (e.g., 1999). Contemporary religious studies *á la* Smart make no assumption on the validity of any given religion but seek in as unbiased a manner possible to examine its overall experiential features, social constituency, narrative traditions, systematic beliefs, ethical stance, ritualistic aspects and material manifestations. Among these dimensions, it is the beliefs and how they conform to reason and logic—what Smart refers to as the 'dimension of dogma'—that essentially comprise the religion's theology—especially, though not exclusively, as deliberately articulated. To a lesser extent, the narratives of a faith also retain and convey the theological inheritance.

If we turn to the 1949 Unabridged Second Edition of *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, we find the following understanding of theology:

> The ideational element in religion; religious knowledge or belief, esp. about God, and more esp. when methodologically formulated. Esp. in its

[10] Bullock *et al.* (1988: 857).

> Christian form it is sometimes regarded as a deductive science in which the premises are supplied mainly by authoritative revelation…; sometimes more empirically, as a more or less scientific systematization of truths learned from religious experience; sometimes as a scientific statement, whether descriptive or normative, not of what God is, but of what the faith of a given church or religious fellowship either is or, in the light of its experience of religious values, ought to be; sometimes as practically identical with speculative philosophy in its more comprehensive developments; and finally, often a combination of two or more of these variant methods or forms.[11]

More loosely, Webster's sees theology as the scientifically critical, historical and psychological study of religion and religious ideas—that the dictionary still then dovetails into biblical Christianity, but it does allow that theology can simply refer to "A system of religious theory or observance; as, certain pagan *theologies*;" etc.[12]

The upshot of the development of the term 'theology' in modern academic discourse is that it has become more a reference to the study of people's belief about deity rather than strictly the study of deity itself. Nevertheless, *pagan theology* as such, though relatively nascent or newly rediscovered, and while open to, and completely at home with, phenomenological investigation, is involved with discourse on the godhead—both the gods and cosmology. This discourse is both an internal affair (between pagans) and an external exchange within the global forum that compares, discusses, challenges and distinguishes both pagan monistic, polytheistic and pantheist convictions, on the one hand, and the theistic and atheist beliefs of non-pagan others, on the other.

For paganism, there is a return to the first century BC Roman grammarian, Marcus Terentius Varro, who divided theology into three broad areas: the mythical (fabulous) for the poets and the theatre, the rational (natural or physical) for the philosophers, and civil (or political) for the people.[13] This last concerns the rites and duties of public religious observance, but since contemporary Western paganism is both private and pursued by relatively few vis-à-vis the wider population, it is not a relevant concern at present. Varro's mythical, however, relates to the gods and goddesses of paganism, such as their pedigrees and hypostatic identities as already mentioned, for example, in connection

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[11] Neilson *et al.* (1949: 2620).

[12] Ibid.

[13] For the *theologia tripertita* of Varro, see Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* (Dods, 2000) Book VI Chapters 5–8.

with Odin. In the absence of sanctioned scripture, myth for the pagan is an important resource by which to access the nuance of deity and regain or renew lost associations, provinces and esoteric understandings connected with any particular theomorphic entity.

Along with the mythical, it is Varro's rational or physical that relates to philosophical analysis of pagan gods and pagan cosmology that is perhaps the most relevant in the broader sense of theology. According to Augustine,

> "The second kind which I have explained," [Varro] says, "is that concerning which philosophers have left many books, in which they treat such questions as these: what gods there are, where they are, of what kind and character they are, since what time they have existed, or if they have existed from eternity; whether they are of fire, as Heraclitus believes; or of number, as Pythagoras; or of atoms, as Epicurus says; and other such things, which men's ears can more easily hear inside the walls of a school than outside in the Forum."[14]

But despite the contended rationality for philosophical theology, already here there is a potential difficulty if we attempt to rationalize present-day worship of a figure such as Odin with behaviour that is *not* cognitively dissonant. Much pagan practice, both indigenous and Western, is atavistic and vernacular and unaffected by philosophical and theological analysis. We see much the same response in the automatic and spontaneous reactions of Hindus in the presence of a revered Muslim saint's tomb or within a Christian church that conforms to the casual *pūjā* one might more usually perform in a Hindu temple or shrine or toward a holy well or sacred tree. Like Hindus, pagans can and do respond to what they perceive as sacred per se regardless of the logicality or lack of logicality in any particular instance. When it is a matter of honouring the sacred as purely something to be honoured, pagans are, as a general rule, flexible, readily adaptable and more embracing of variety and difference than are people of other persuasions.

So to the question whether theology is only appropriate to the logical study of deity (a deity, a theos), the pagan answer is 'no'. Can in fact a pagan deity be studied logically? Not in all cases. If a figure is particularly awesome and mysterious, logical analysis and explanation may not be possible. Moreover, does paganism present situations akin to Buddhism in which there is no ostensible deity and the very applica-

[14] Ibid. Chapter 5.

tion of theology is then brought into question? The deep humanistic strain running throughout paganism might, in the opinion of some, put paganism into the same category as Buddhist philosophy. In general, however, paganism, in its more historical course at least, has many gods, and these gods may for the most part be studied logically, their genealogies deciphered and their natures analyzed. An important part of this process involves mythography, Varro's mythical branch of theology—the study of a god or goddess' mythology—supplemented by information acquired from other surviving literature as well as etymological input, epigraphic material and archaeological discovery, if not current anthropological investigation as well where appropriate.

At the end of the day, however, pagan theology is perhaps more akin to ideology than to theology as a strictly rational discourse on the godhead. In this sense it is likely to be more likened to Hindu *darshana* as something that involves formulating a distinguishable view, viewpoint or world outlook. Hopefully the present reader might imagine the potential magical thrill that could be possible in a truly open theological exchange within a global roundtable of religious discourse. From a pagan pluralistic perspective, there can be no *one* theological position; from the pagan perspective, there are many forms of paganism as there are many differing religions, and, consequently, there are many different theologies—whether as rational discourses, cosmological arguments or darshanic viewpoints. For an understanding of pagan theology, therefore, there are two implicit processes that are necessary: one is to discern what might be the common denominators that unite the various pagan paths together as *paganism* and how paganism contrasts with other, non-pagan theologies; and the other is to locate *a* pagan theology, more specifically, a pagan cosmology—not as anything definitive but more as a gauntlet for further reflective discussion both within the pagan community and beyond.

Pagan Theology

Religious practice is among the most multifarious of all human activities. Within any given religion, there can appear the most divergent range of ritual performance and forms of worship. Smart's dimensions of experience, ritual and material expression are conceived less as a means to identify one religion from another as they are to locate immediate individuality as well as broad similarities across the full scope of

possibility. A specific religiosity is perhaps most defined by its ethical stance and theological outlook. For paganism as a generality, ethics are not commandments derived from some external entity's dictates but are determined instead primarily through aesthetic choice. While tribal and communal pressures do indeed exist in some local and/or ethnic traditions, paganism adheres more to what might be described as ethical relativism. Right behaviour is contextually determined and does not or at least need not intrinsically conform to some *a priori* categorical imperative. For pagans, there is no absolute good or absolute evil. Pagan ethics are invariably founded on an affirmation of freedom—for individual or community or both, and a person is encouraged to choose rightful action because it conforms with, or is commensurate with, a greater aesthetic. One does not harm or reduce another against her will because, to do so, violates an implicit standard of beauty, and, in the service to deity, the pagan endeavours to avoid ugliness—especially ugliness as understood as desecration of others, whether humans, non-human others or the earth and nature.

I have already stated the definitive features of paganism *qua* paganism but shall once again present these.[15] But it must be kept in mind that not all pagan religiosities will embrace *all* these features; they are instead those elements or expressions that we are *most apt* to discern or that most (though not necessarily *all*) of which will be present within any broadly pagan identifiable spirituality.

Perhaps foremost of all is the point that paganism is primarily a nature religion—one that either honours nature as the supreme embodiment of godhead or divinity or draws its deities essentially as personifications of different aspects and features of nature or both. The natural register is the primal source for the metaphors and understandings of cyclical rhythms used by a pagan orientation—its 'bible' so to speak.[16] Robert Corrington has titled his 1997 book *Nature's Religion*,[17] and nature's religion is and could only be what we otherwise designated as paganism. Speaking of 'paganisms' in the plural, Harvey (2005: 88) allows that they "are necessarily ideologies and projects of relationship

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[15] York (1995b: 60).

[16] Capturing the interplay between metaphoric understanding, ritual and nature in what is now comprehended as a pagan orientation, Highwater (1978: 14) maintains that "Ritual is not a product of *primitive* people. Rather, it is produced by all peoples still in touch with the capacity to express themselves in metaphor."

[17] Corrington (1997).

with nature, and their most common and central manifestations are in the celebration of seasonal festivals." My own contention is that paganism is as much about humanism as it is naturism, but the humanism to which I refer is not the humanism of the Deists or secularists but one which is centred on a humanity that is integrally a part of nature rather than a humanity that dominates and exploits the natural world and in some way considers itself separate and superior. This, in paganism, would be a 'natural humanism' in place of a 'rational humanism'. But like humanism in general, paganism places the burden of responsibility upon humankind itself for its well-being, growth and ascent. The earth is 'our mother', and we humans (literally, 'earthlings') are her children and personifications. And, consequently, as we do with our parent, we honour, protect and preserve our living source and nurturer. So while pagans are not the only ones preoccupied with environmental ecology, we are at the forefront of all efforts to restore a manageable balance to the planet. Pagan theology is both naturalistic and humanistic.

In comparison to paganism, while Islam has a more especial reverence for the natural world than doctrinal Christianity or rabbinic Judaism, the Abrahamic religions as a whole do not hold nature in anything close to the esteem that pagans have for it. In a pagan understanding, nature is the source, the mother, the matrix; in Abrahamic religion, nature is secondary, a gift at best from the Creator. According to the injunction of Genesis 1.26–8, mankind is given dominion over the natural world. It is his subject and resource for the taking. By contrast, secularists tend to approach our planet and cosmos not as a living, organic entity but as a mechanistic storehouse. The notion of worshipping, even honouring, the physical is foreign, bizarre and absent. With the Eastern faiths of Hinduism and Buddhism, the material world is illusion (*māyā*) for the former and simply valueless for the latter. There is little in the dharmic faiths that would exalt or revere the material realm.

Paganism does indeed overlap with secularism on its focus of being this-worldly. If the emphasis in Abrahamic practice is otherworldly salvation and in Dharmic pursuit is transcendental release (*nirvana, mokşa,* s*amadhi*), the secularist and pagan are both concerned with *this* world rather than the next one. Pagans can and do entertain the possibility of an afterlife in the Western Isles, the Elysian Fields, the Blessed Isles, Summerland or some form of a paradisiacal otherworld, but that is virtually never their focus. The otherworld at best serves two functions: (1) as a directional focus for honouring one's ancestors, and (2) as an exploratory resource for shamanic knowledge that is still *brought back* for

the benefit of individuals or community in *this* world. Consequently, as a this-worldly concern, pagan theology is pragmatic, practical and rational. It eschews any all-consuming escapism as a detrimental fantasy. Pagan theology supports concern with the here-and-now of life, with living in the present while preparing for a future that is an extension of the present rather than a refutation.

Within its pragmatic pursuit, however, there is also the incorporation of the magical. Magic is variously understood as the psychological harnessing of the will to achieve particular ends beyond the norm, as the cultivation of a sense of wonder and enchantment, and as the utilization of preternatural energies. The magical is much debated within pagan conversation, but there is almost inevitably a recognition of its reality in some dimension however non-empirical and non-demonstrable it remains in laboratory settings. The appreciation of the magical is initially an intuitive understanding, but its acceptance opens the pagan to a more imaginative world of wider horizons. It is neither the seducing Dharmic power of *māyā* nor the nefarious Satanic resource of the Abrahamic ungodly. And nor is it the fiction and aberration that it is for the secularist. Instead, it is seen as a largely amoral force that can be used both positively and negatively. The ethical-aesthetic mandate of paganism, however, precludes the rationale for sinister application of the magical. It is instead something that is to be applied for the benefit of self and other as long as no one is harmed or reduced in that application. But beyond even this, the magical is something to be cultivated as a self-directed state of enchantment within which the pagan can commune with her deities. It is part and parcel of the expansion of awareness and, as such, is a resource and possibility that requires judicious and wise use. It is often likened to a force such as electricity or fire—powers that can be hugely detrimental but, if harnessed correctly and carefully, can be immensely constructive and beneficial. No pagan will deny the risk involved with using or attempting to use the magical, but, by the same token, no pagan will deny the risks that are necessary for living and life.

Other constituent features of paganism that inform its theology include its polytheism and its hedonism. To the degree that there is a pagan godhead, its deities are multiple and gender-differentiated. This pluralism is perhaps directly inspired by the inherent multiplicity of the natural world. But it encourages in turn the variety and acceptance of difference found throughout paganism. There is a deity for everyone; often more than one. The individual is free to worship whoever

he wishes as well as not worship if that is one's wish. While there are exceptions, pagan gods as a rule are not vindictive or demanding. If ignored, they are believed simply to ignore the ignorer in return. The gods for the pagan are available resources. The burden of paganism is its necessity to accept the pleasurable without guilt or intimidation. The hedonic is for the pagan the *gift* of her gods, one to be celebrated and enjoyed. There is no denial or austerity unless these are directed toward a particularly sought goal—such as initiation or shamanic trance. In general, the pleasurable—whether sensual or intellectual—constitutes the *raison d'être* for living the pagan life. A puritanical god that forbids and rejects this-worldly pleasure is one that the pagan will in turn reject.

Consequently, if nature orientation, humanistic valuing, pursuit of pleasure, pluralistic godhead and this-worldly concern are common elements of pagan theology in general and most individual pagan expressions specifically, they can still be seen as overlapping with features of other non-pagan religions as well (e.g., Hindu-Buddhist polytheism, secular hedonism and this-worldlyism, even Abrahamic appreciation of nature when it exists). What distinguishes paganism from the other world religions is the inclusion of *most if not all* of these elements within the rationale of its theological outlook. Beyond this, however, the one feature that distinguishes paganism across the board is what we are permitted to call its *corpo-spirituality*.

Paganism embraces the material world as itself spiritual. In general, physical reality is not the product of external spirituality—whether a creator *ex nihilo* or an all-emanating One. It may be something that has always existed, but it is usually recognized as the matrix of life and the spiritual rather than vice versa. Because of Judeo-Christian indoctrination, in the West this is frequently a difficult concept to grasp. The spiritual has become defined as something *other* than the physical—and the material and sensual are 'lower' manifestations or rungs of reality. The concept is also difficult for many pagans themselves to comprehend. Gnosticism is an early outgrowth of paganism. Its theology inverts the natural order as understood by pagans both atavistically and intellectually. But because gnostic or theosophic ideas employ many of the same terminologies, constructs, theonyms and cosmological/cosmogonic elements from the pagan matrix from which they have sprung, many pagans have themselves been unable to appreciate the baseline distinction between a pagan theology and a gnostic one. For this last, matter is evil, imprisoning and the furthest pole from the divine source and ultimate destination. It is not to be cherished and honoured. At

best, in some circles, the corporeal is tolerated and may even be given some kind of auxiliary status of sanctity, but the panentheistic and/or transcendental is invariably considered *greater* and *more sacred*. There is still something of the physical that is inferior and encompassed. By contrast, for a pagan theology *qua* pagan, the material is an all-generating matrix—one that gives birth to all the diversity of the cosmos, including the ethical, aesthetic and spiritual, and there is no fixed or ultimate destination. Matter is *mater*, and its growth, evolution, ascent and transformation are open-ended. There is no final goal, or at least, there is no final goal apart from the durable organic harmony between matrix and what the matrix produces.

Consequently, I wish to posit the corpo-spiritual as the definitive distinguishing element of a pagan theology. It is what allows the pagan to trust the life process rather than to fear it or seek escape from it. It is also the element that without which we have no pagan identity. Recognizing the physical as divine separates the pagan from the impersonal mechanism of secularism, from a purely Newtonian world of cause and effect, and, at the same time, it separates the pagan from Abrahamic theism and Dharmic nihilism. It provides instead the very rationale for the this-worldly endorsement that characterizes paganism, for its 'nature worship' and for its acceptance and love of the hedonic. But to complete this discussion, I wish now to turn toward the present discourse on the godhead, that is, on a pagan theological conversation about the gods and cosmology. Let us begin first with the pagan deities.

Complexity Theory

In paganism, a god is generally understood as a particular energy complex. While there are numerous exceptions (particularly in Santería and perhaps with a figure such as the Kahuna Pele), in general the pagan gods are considered to be benevolent entities, not vindictive and, if ignored, ones that simply ignore, in turn, the person who ignores them. To the pagan, the gods exist as potential and generally willing allies.

But to the degree that a pagan god is comprehended as a unique constellation of energies and values, she or he may be theologically approached via the language of contemporary complexity theory.[18]

[18] For a general lucid explanation of the history and evolution of complexity theory,

Metaphorically speaking, a god may be likened to a magnet. The worshipper, through proper (self-)cultivation, that is, through acts of devotion and service, transforms herself/himself into, again metaphorically speaking, an iron filing that can be drawn to the 'magnetizing' deity. Interestingly here, the Latin source for our word 'cultivation' (as well as 'cult' and 'cultic') is *colere* (*colo, cultus*) 'to cultivate' ('I cultivate', 'cultivated')—the same word that in Latin signifies 'to worship'. In other words, our pagan Roman ancestors understood tilling and worshipping as the same fundamental activity. Here we can appreciate the typical sort of grounding of the spiritual that is characteristic of paganism almost ubiquitously.

In their ascent and subsequently, Christians have of course denied that the pagan gods are *bona fide* energies. This denial may be understood both as an attempt to deny the pagan gods and to deny their physical reality. Abrahamic thought conceives of its gods or God as purely transcendental and without physical body. To deny the pagan gods as themselves energies is to deny that the pagan gods have bodily form. But to take a cue from Einstein, the physical may be understood as a solidified state of energy. If the gods are energies, they can also have bodies; if the have bodies, they can also be energies.

How this might work in a pagan context is through the media of idolatry and divine transport. The idol or vehicle of a deity is simply an instance of the physicality or physical presence of the god complex. For instance, a 'carrying medium' and consequently 'icon' of Jupiter is the eagle and swan. Juno's vehicle is the peacock and goose; Mars', the horse and milch cow; the dawn-goddess, the turtle dove. In the organic plasticity of paganism, a god is often encountered through his or her vehicle or symbol. In a sense, then, the 'body' of a deity may be understood as comprised of all the god's icons, idols, symbols, representations and vehicles. These concrete tangibles would be said to delineate the 'phase portrait' of the deity in which the god's attractors and basins of attraction could be topologically mapped and identified. If the representation and iconization of Christianity's Jesus Christ throughout the world might appear to give that religion an edge in terms of its revered figure having an extensive iconic body or larger 'phase portrait', we need to remember that the pagan deity prototypes are served not only by their pictorial representations and symbols but also by their physical

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see Waldrop (1992). Brady (2006: 163–7) provides a useful "Glossary of Chaotic Terms."

realities. In other words, the dawn is also the actual dawn, Jupiter is also the actual bright sky, the sun is the sun, the moon the moon, etc. And while the dawn may be relatively ephemeral, there is always a dawn somewhere on the planet. Likewise, the daytime of the bright sky may be balanced by the absence of light during the night, but half the planet is experiencing daytime at all times. But finally, the earth is *always* present—let alone that at least 99.99% of everything we use, eat, wear, shelter within, etc. is a product of the earth. Consequently, it is safe to say that, for the pagan who is comfortable with a geocentric ritual perspective and valuing, the earth is the greatest and most ubiquitous idol of all.

Complexity theory has developed with the realization that reality is greatly more non-linear than the linear assertions in the strict terms of cause and effect of Newtonian science would otherwise suggest. In a non-linear state of affairs, predictability greater than chance—the backbone and rationale of science as science—is no longer a safe assumption. Instead, predictability is replaced at best by 'retrodictability'. One may be able to explain why something happened the way it did *after the fact* but not be able previously to forecast which of a range of possibilities will be the one to materialize. But this range of possibilities is itself important. If a deity were to be thought of as metaphorically magnetic, he or she is an 'attractor'—less in the sense of a 'point attractor' (e.g., the bottom opening of a funnel) and not necessarily as a 'periodic attractor' either (e.g., the periodic oscillation of the planets around the sun) but rather, in the language of complexity/chaos science, as a 'strange attractor'. For this last, the attracting focus is in motion so that, in effect, there are several different foci. The pattern that exists between the pluralistic focus and the 'objects orbiting' around it (or them) graphically delineates the 'strange attractor'. Pagan deities are not point attractors, and nor are they periodic attractors when it comes to human-divine interactions. They may be understood instead as a particular kind of strange attractor.

Complexity theory centres on two key notions: the feedback loop (iteration) and spontaneous self-organization. Feedback refers to the process in which information, relationship or the generated product is 'fed back' into the source. Auto-urine therapy, the hydrological cycle and worship may all be understood as examples of feedback cycles. Complexity seeks to study the kinds of saturation that can develop when output is returned to input and possible new and emerging patterns result. In non-linear activity, while entropic dissolution is one possibil-

ity, the more interesting option occurs when an emergent is other than simply the sum of its constituent components. A human or animal body, let alone an economy or social culture, is something more than a mere collection of parts. Complexity terms this process of becoming more, becoming unpredictably more, 'spontaneous self-organization'. Pagan gods may themselves be spontaneous self-organizations from a feedback loop between the attentions of devotee or worshipper and the values perceived to be inherent within the physical and cultural environment. Along the lines of complexity dynamics, it is not inconceivable to the pagan that her deities assume an operative reality that surpasses and is independent of the matrix of realities from which any specific theomorphic figure has taken birth. For many, pagan gods may be other than this—ranging from metaphorical fantasies to flesh-and-blood realities, but complexity dynamics supplies the pagan theologian with one fruitful possibility by which to understand the mechanism of deity.

As a theory and/or science, complexity/chaos is preoccupied with the 'zone' that separates chaos from stasis. This is the region in which new order originates. Often referred to as the 'edge of chaos', it is the matrix in which additional relationship or information is fed into so that greater patterned order emerges. This *edge* is likened to a membrane. Too far into chaos or infinity, the redistribution of energy is dissipated and entropy results. All order is lost, and none emerges. By contrast, too far into stasis or the realm of closed and fixed shape, and the inputted energy is blocked and rejected, and no change occurs. An example of the generative border between chaos and stasis is the relatively thin zone that comprises the surface and immediate atmosphere of the earth. 99.99% of all life, human and otherwise, plus technical and cultural achievement, occurs in this region of advantageous change and increasingly complex order. Along with fire, water, earth, sun and moon, humanity itself is one of the prototypic deities in generic and root-level paganism. And humanity lives at the very 'edge of chaos'—at the heart of dynamic change and new forms of order.

Nevertheless, complexity theory also considers the concept of 'lock-in'. Homeostatic lock-in occurs when a pattern becomes fixed and is unable to be dislodged within a culture. Lock-in refers to when a less advantageous instrument, construct or pattern becomes dominant. A prime example of lock-in is the QWERTY/AZERTY layout of the keyboard—an arrangement no longer necessary since we have moved beyond the mechanical typewriter with its propensity for the letter bars to become jammed. Though this propensity no longer exists, the

keyboard arrangement of letters, rather than more advantageously alphabetically placed, remains the inflexible standard. Another example of lock-in is the success of the VHS videocassette recorder over the superior Sony Betamax due to rival JVC's more aggressive and better advertising as well as contractual agreements in the initial days of competition. Lock-in, therefore, concerns the dominant persistence of a less technically sophisticated product of inferior quality that is more readily available and commercially successful. From a pagan perspective, the Abrahamic notion of Yahweh/God may be considered to be a theological lock-in. By contrast, the genealogy and orb of cult belonging to a pagan deity, the phase portrait with it strange attractor and basin of attraction, may render the god more positive and generating of newer patterns and order. Complexity theory appears to lack a concept of a counterbalancing *positive* 'lock-in', but this could be of possible application to divine hypostases within a pagan framework. The strange attractor might be another name for the 'magic button' that many pagans wish to find and push. Because the pagan deity is comprehended as organic energy, she or he is always recoverable and unable to conform to the non-dynamics of homeostatic resistance to change and, hence, negative lock-in. The phase portrait of a pagan deity helps to locate the hypostatic core that underlies the constellational overlay and transformations, inversions, bifurcations and conflations that occur in the historical development of the deity.

Other Pagan Theologies

There are of course other theologies within paganism that contrast with the complexity dynamics of corpo-spirituality as I have sought to sketch them. diZerega (2001), for instance, champions panentheism as inclusive of *both* the immanently divine world of pantheism *and* the transcendent world that embraces nature and the cosmos. To me, this is wanting to have it both ways. Either nature is the sacred all or it is not. Corrington's Ecstatic Naturalism posits that "there is *nothing whatsoever* outside of nature. The sacred is in and of nature and cannot outstrip nature."[19] The difficulty with panentheism, the 'all in God', is that Christians tend to suspect it as 'collapsing' into pantheism, while

[19] Corrington (1997: 10)—my italics.

pagans see it by-and-large as a dressed-up disguise for theism. diZerega might welcome this rejection by either party as allowing the term to be embraced by both pagans and Christians in the spirit of all-encompassing interfaith, but if the term becomes counter-expressive for what actually distinguishes pagans from Abrahamists, it is not commensurate for an accurate elucidation of pagan theology. Pagan 'materialism' or Corrington's 'ecstatic naturalism' seeks to affirm the transcendent as an evolutionary development of the matter-energy matrix—even if and when that transcendent may ultimately surpass its originating space-time constraints. What paganism denies is the contention that the physical is in any way secondary and inferior to an *a priori* transcendent that is alleged to be the creative source of corporeal reality—in other words, that our cosmos has come into being through an external *creatio ex nihilo*. Starhawk's theological musings in her 1979 book, *The Spiral Dance*, are yet again an instance of *ex nihilo* creation. Accordingly, The Goddess unfolds the cosmos as a mental projection. She does not give birth to the world as something originating within her womb, the geo- and generic pagan understanding, but rather as something that springs from her head. In this sense, Starhawk's deity comes closer to a feminized version of the Judeo-Christian God than to a pagan understanding of the Earth Mother. This here is a feminized Gnosticism rather than pagan evolutionism and complexity.

A more compatible theological possibility is presented by Harvey (2005). In his *Animism*, Harvey endeavours to by-pass supernatural/preternatural consideration[20] for a new, post-colonial discursive understanding of animism—not as belief in panpsychic souls or "a recognition of mind, experience, sentience or consciousness in matter," but as a more innovative usage that is concerned "with knowing how to behave appropriately towards persons, not all of whom are human" (Harvey, 2005: 17, xi). Following Hallowell, Harvey finds the animistic richness of nature in personhood—a personhood that includes rock-persons, tree-persons, etc. along with human-persons. Discarding spirits as the animating principle ubiquitous through the physical world of nature, Harvey opts for personhood. He grants that 'personalism' is a "near-synonym" of the new animism (p. 22), and what he comes to differentiate

[20] Harvey (2005: 51): "The fecund vitality of this evolving universe is expressed not in supernatural forces requiring us to become mystical electricians, but in far more commonplace encounters."

could appropriately be summed up as 'polytheistic personalism'. Commendably, Harvey (2005: 135) is searching for ways "to speak of souls in relation to animism without importing understandings from religions or philosophies with a more transcendent focus," but as the philosophical school that accepts the person as ultimate, personalism itself is traditionally a quasi-Platonic concentration on the personhood of God in opposition to the positions of both pantheism and materialism. Personalists consider that God is more relevant as a divine person than if approached as an abstract and absolutely transcendental principle. It is to be granted that Harvey is less interested in ontology or metaphysics than he is in the ethical mandate to "attempt to live respectfully with all who might be persons" (p. 114), but there remains in his analysis a subtle non-pagan emphasis on the idealistic, the non-substantial person or personhood. There could be a danger that the very material or hylozoistic dimension of the sacred or divine might become lost in the idealistic bias and basis of personalism. In pagan thought, matter possesses an inherent but natural and automatic impulse to become conscious or to produce consciousness. It is this tendency that is emphasized in paganism and sets it apart from Abrahamic and Dharmic forms of theology as well as secular cosmologies.

Corrington's understanding is informed by semiotics and the functioning of signification in human and non-human orders of infinite nature. His theological reflections concern infinity rather than any closed and finite system. To this end, he turns to the medieval expressions—first coined by Thomas Aquinas and used later especially by Spinoza—that designate the active side of nature (*natura naturans* 'nature naturing') and the passive (*natura naturata* 'nature natured')[21] and whose infinitesimal separation constitutes the fundamental "divide that can be experienced by [human] thought" (Corrington, 1997: 7). The *natura naturans* designates the vital process of becoming in contrast to the actual forms and qualities of all things that exist (*natura naturata*). When these two sides of nature interpenetrate deeply and in evermore complex manners, we have what Corrington refers to as 'semiotic plenitude or density'—the richness and embodied meaning we might ascertain in a sacred place (e.g., Delphi, Stonehenge, Mt. Shasta), a sacred festival (e.g., yule, Ostara, Divali), an idol (e.g., Kashi Vishvanath, Athena Parthenos,

[21] Spinoza (*Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* 1.8. See further, *Ethics* I Propositions 29 & 31 [II/71f] and II Axiom 5 [II/86] {Curley, 1996: 20f & 32}).

the New York Harbor Liberty) or a god himself/herself (e.g., Macha, Persephone, Dionysus).[22] This richness is especially captured by or found within the archetype whose mysterious presence can never be fully understood by human cognition. Instead, its encounter "is always filled with awe and a kind of ontological shock" (Corrington, 1997: 195). Nevertheless, it is within this 'edge of chaos' existing between nature naturing and nature natured that Corrington finds the key archetypes that manifest nature's self-revelatory potential and her/its unique way of reading and processing signs—particularly those that "refuse to be confined to either primal dimension of nature" (ibid.). In other words, it is within the liminal zone found between infinite activity and passive finitude that the numinous yet incomprehensible dwells.[23] Whether his full intention or not, Corrington helps to open a new, post-Christian and, in this case, pagan way to understand religion and formulate an earth-centred, nature-centred theology.

Consequently, and like the human person, our social collectivities and cultural matrixes, if a pagan god is understood to be a strange attractor that spans across the divide between the nurturing and being natural processes, on the one side, and the actual forms and manifestations of nature, on the other, a pantheon is to be comprehended as a strange attractor of strange attractors. In its evolutionary complexity, a pagan theology will never reject the physical, or the matter-energy continuum, but will embrace it and even begin with it. What is rejected is the notion of a purely hypothetical or transcendental origin to the cosmos. As Abram seeks to convey, the inherent reciprocity between physical objects or entities, such that to be touched by the one is automatically to touch the toucher in return, renders a wholly immaterial mind being one that would be unable to touch, feel or do anything at all.[24]

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[22] As Corrington expresses the semiosis of sacred place or object along with the significance engendered by community projection, "Any sacred grove can become filled with greater and greater semiotic density until it becomes the one and true location for the finite/infinite participation that can center and ground community" (Corrington 1997: 66f).

[23] Highwater (1978: 25) prefers the Iroquois *orenda* as a designation for the numinous or supernatural energy that is to be found in everything in the world. He suggests *orenda* or the "*orendas* of the innumerable beings and objects in the universe, real and 'imagined'" as a more accurate term for 'power' or *nature*.

[24] Abram (1996: 68).

A Pagan Cosmology

With these fundamental parameters in mind, it is easy to distinguish a pagan cosmology from a non-pagan one. I wish to conclude this essay with a cosmological illustration based on speculations drawn from Indo-European Studies, that is, a delineation of a cosmology belonging to the pagan ancestors of the lingual family whose descendents number today approximately one-half of the earth's human inhabitants despite their present-day Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist or secular differentiating identities. Drawing principally from Hesiod's *Theogony*, the speculative hymns of the *Rigveda*'s first and tenth mandalas, and the Old Norse *Elder Edda* (*Völuspa, Grîmnismâl, Vafthruđnismâl* and *Hyndluljôđ*), the first mythological beings range from Chaos or the *ginnungagap* to Earth and Eros. In Greek mythology, variants of Chaos include Nyx or 'Night', Erebus or 'Darkness', Tartarus, Uranus, Oceanus, Aether/Aer and Chronus.[25] Apart from the insertion of Tartarus, Hesiod's fundamental theogonic trio would appear to be Chaos, Gaia and Eros. Chaos itself is bisexual, hermaphroditic, uroboric, fluid and opaque. As essentially dark water or at least dark and windy, Chaos in the Hellenic portrayal is less the *mega chasma* of Orphic doctrine or the void or emptiness understood by Pythagoras, Zeno of Elea and Plato (in the *Timaeus*). Nevertheless, the Hindu *Brāhmaṇas* and at least one *Rigveda* passage (10.72.2f) identify the earliest state with non-existence, although, additionally, *Rigveda* 10.129.1–3 pictures the primal void as the formless dark space and undifferentiated waters to be found *between* existence and non-existence, the 'edge of chaos' so-to-speak. Consequently, and although described by the ancients in physical terms, Chaos may be accepted as symbolic of infinite disorder.

However, in Hesiodic understanding, and this is the significant point, it is that Chaos *geneto* ('came into being') rather than *Chaos ên* ('Chaos was'). In other words, Chaos is not eternal but has a precedent. Unlike with Hesiod, the fragments that survive from Pherecydes of Syros name Zas (Zeus), Chronus (Chaos?) and Chthonie (Ge) as having 'always existed' (*ēsan aei*). All the same, the two versions may not be in conflict. The Hesiodic presentation of the *archai* or 'first beings' as Chaos, Gaia and Eros and the Pherecydian trio of Zeus/Zas, Chronus and Chthonie-Ge may simply be mythic variations of the same thing. Regardless of

[25] For the source of this and the following digest, see York (1995: 541–59).

whatever else he may be, Eros is a trickster, and a conflation of both Hesiod and Pherecydes suggest that Eros is the agent who inverts the primordial Earth-Tartarus (Chthonie-Ge) unit into the Heaven-Earth cosmos—making Chaos as originally the gap between Gaia and Tartarus into the atmospheric space between heaven and earth and Chaos as the first *to come into being*.

It is safe to say that the "cosmogonic precedence of the earth over any all-emanating One or abstract Idea is a basic Indo-European tenet,"[26] and to elucidate the antecedent of Chaos it is helpful to return to the *Rigveda*. Here we find the notion of desire as the *archē*—named either as *kāma* ('desire')—the primal germ of *manas* ('mind, spirit'), or as *tapas* ('warmth, heat, fervour')—the generative force within the waters (*RV* 10.129.3f, 10.190.1; cf. 10.121.7). But Hesiod too, in line 201 of the *Theogony*, introduces for the first time *Himeros kalos* ('comely Desire'). "If Hesiod has not recorded genealogical predecessors for Himerus, it would be because the god did not have any. He is the first principle."[27]

> In the cosmogonic sense, Himerus does not represent a personal god or personal creator; he is instead an expression of pure will. This is not yet consciousness but rather the unadulterated force of straightforward desire *qua* desire. To want, however, automatically implies to want or lack something. The existence of will immediately presupposes that *chaos geneto*—for Chaos is simply the time-space interval between desire and the desired object…[28]

In a pagan cosmology that is based on a creative cosmogony, if desire exists, then that which is desired also comes to exist. It is pure will—the desire to be and perhaps see oneself—that is the factor behind the Big Bang and the ending of initial singularity. The universe's desire to see itself is the a-temporal generative impulse of Earth, cosmos or the matter-energy continuum. Metaphorically speaking, Gaia bursts into existence by and of herself—with no external conscious agent directing the show from offstage. It comes down simply to matter itself desiring to be and become conscious.

Consequently, a pagan cosmology that is based on raw desire or unformed and pre-conscious will distinguishes a pagan theology from the other theological alternatives. In Dharmic thought, especially

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[26] Ibid. p. 557.
[27] York (1995a: 558).
[28] Ibid.

as exemplified in Buddhism, it is the cessation of desire that is the goal—the sole means by which to obtain nirvana or the ultimate void and meaningless of non-existence. In Abrahamic outlook, by contrast, the will is to be submissive and subservient to the 'greater will' of a cosmic dictator. Individual desire must conform to the dictates and commandments of a personal God who has created the cosmos for no particular reason beyond his/its self-satisfaction. In a secular perspective, the will is a psychological rather than a cosmological factor. The cosmos is mechanistic. But for a pagan theology, desire is central: it is the well-spring of everything, not something to escape or repress and not something to curtail before some external or transcendent will. The basics of desire are to be affirmed as life—affirmed and managed in conformity to the sensitivity of other personal wills and the collective will of the cosmos of which humanity is part and vehicle.

Conclusion

I have occasionally heard paganism referred to as 'earthen spirituality'.[29] From my perspective, this is a commendable terminology. As an 'earthling', humanity is a part of the 'earth-tribe' so to speak—a tribal identity that includes all animal and vegetable life on this planet as well as all mineral existence, whether personified or animistic or not. Earthens include all that descends directly from the earth. Their 'companion' tribe is the elven—comprising those denizens (elves, fairies, brownies, gods, etc.) who may live within nature but are other than the earthen. In a hermeneutic sense, the earthen is comprehended by *natura naturata*; the elven, by *natura naturans*. These last are the potencies of nature—as well as the potential, if also mischievous, allies of the earthen. It is perhaps interesting that the creations of Tolkien and Rawlings are used in some respects today to mask off any compromise with the living tradition of elves and fairies that is more broadly comprehended as something to be repressed and hidden by the Christian and post-Christian legacies. Nevertheless, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* allow a surrogate appreciation of the elven within contemporary society. From a pagan spiritual perspective, the elven as a further but other product of nature permits us *not* to face nature purely

[29] For instance, *vide* Taylor (2001a&b); Taylor and Kaplan (2005: *passim*, Bron Taylor, Graham St. John, etc.).

in her impersonal and brutal possibilities alone—the very 'reality' that Freud argued is the enemy of civilization's security.[30] While the elven is *earth-oriented*, we 'earthings' (i.e., *hum*ans)—along with the rest of the earth-tribe—are actually closer to our vital source. We are all physical entities. The elven may be comprehended as here to help us appreciate that fact. We may supplicate the otherworldly—but only under the understanding that it is we ourselves who are the ones with the greater power. From a pagan theological perspective, the whole purpose of material evolution is to produce more complexity, more choice, more conscious enchantment and freedom. With their natural orientation to locality and connectedness, the pagan seeks 'at-home-ment' rather than either atonement or New Age 'at-one-ment'. This being at home is what connects the pagan to the earth, physicality, groundedness and any world outlook or theology she might entertain.

A pagan theological outlook comprises three ontological 'operatives': empirical existence, non-empirical existence and operative non-existence. The first comprehends the binary nature of being—whether male-female, light-dark, positive-negative, matter-energy, beauty-ugliness. It corresponds to what I am labelling the 'earthen'. There is, however, a further binary compound, namely, the duality between the corporeal and the spiritual—between the earthen and elven. For the early Indo-European-speaking peoples, the divine twins represented both the pairing between earthen components and that between this-world and the other.[31] Operative non-existence, by contrast, was conceived as inimical to the whole round of nature—a counter-desire that sought to return creation to a void of pre-existence.[32] Whereas Hindu Dharmacists comprehend operative non-existence as *māyā*—the illusive power behind

[30] York (2001).

[31] The revered and/or numinous idol, therefore, may be comprehended as a fulcrum or blending point between the *natura naturans* of elven or spiritual enchantment and the grounding *natura naturata* of tangibility.

[32] In my *Divine versus the Asurian* (York, 1995a), 'operative non-existence' is the *asurian*—the *aesir-ahuras-asuras* or anti-gods whose impetus is toward annihilation and entropy. This would be the 'forces' leading to 'entropic chaos' rather than the 'divine dynamics' that are to be located behind 'deterministic chaos'. See also Brady (2006: 67–9, 163). Obviously, 'non-operative non-existence' has no possibility for reification; it acronyms as NONE. While 'operative non-existence' does not exist, metaphorically it nonetheless has effect. For the pagans, it is personified as the ONE and other monotheistic entities that may appear to be fostering advantage but otherwise invariably result in disadvantageous oblivion if not first checked and thwarted. Being itself, as 'binary existence' (BE), is the full gamut of ontological possibility and presence.

all appearance and phenomenal reality, pagans tend by contrast to recognize *māyā* as a fiction that would undermine the functioning and growth of the manifest world and the potencies behind it. These last are inclined to view the Abrahamic position merely as the attempt to personify *māyā* into an omnipotent and omniscient Creator. At best, in a pagan perspective, this figure amounts to being a Demiurge rather than a wholly other, transcendent God. Secularists, of course, deny both non-empirical existence and non-existence alike. Unlike pagan inclination, there is no recognition of the spiritual or elven, and the *natura naturans*—denuded of any true sense of enchantment—is mathematical, abstract and even mechanistic. Out of the four basic theological positions, it is the pagan alone that can and does approach the otherworld of enchantment as the divine twin of this-world of corporeal life and physical reality. While there are countless cautionary tales that narrate the foolish and unwary as stepping irretrievably into the world of fairy, the pagan advocates by-and-large a treading that does not penetrate the 'edge of chaos' too far into entropic chaos but finds a careful access as enlisting the otherworld as ally in the endless search for new and emerging patterns of dynamic order.

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DRAWING DOWN THE GODDESS: THE ANCIENT {FEMALE} DEITIES OF MODERN PAGANISM

Marguerite Johnson

The rise of neo-Paganism and its scholarly analysis is now an established field of academic enquiry, yet there is a paucity of analysis as to the ancient (Greek and Roman) origins of this multifaceted religion.[1] This paper is an attempt to begin to rectify this under-researched area of neo-Pagan studies and to offer some possibilities as to the influences of ancient religious and magical traditions on modern spiritualities. The focus is on the societies of Greece and Rome, which were imbued with magical and occult sensibilities that permeated many facets of day-to-day life, and it is the female deities of the ancients that are of chief consideration. Therefore, the modern practitioners discussed are, in the main, followers of non-Celtic paths, non-Druidic paths (among others) but are, rather, Pagans from the United States, writers and public figures who have openly chronicled their experiences with such goddesses.

A much discussed topic in the study of ancient magic is the extent to which magic and religion were interchangeable. While I would posit that on a public level the ancients differentiated between the two,[2] existing evidence concerning the multifarious magical traditions in operation in antiquity indicates that practitioners and, in particular, their clients, were not concerned with the distinction but recognised the difference in approach to the deities and the intentions that motivated this. There was a consistent incorporation of a variety of deities from the Greek and Roman pantheons into spells, magical invocations and related activities. Indeed the gods and goddesses were flexible entities that were worshipped by the people and their religious officiates yet also called upon to activate the will of a magician. Admittedly the

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[1] See, for some discussion, Frew (1998) and Hutton (2000). For a more complete overview, see Campbell (2000).

[2] In the form of, for example, legislation and public pronouncements, which tended to favour active discouragement of such practices, thereby distinguishing between state-ordained religious rituals and the much more private activities of occultists. See, Phillips (1991) and Dickie (2001).

format of invocation varied between a religious and magical operation, nevertheless the gods remained the same, as did their various portfolios of influence.[3]

The goddess Hecate (or Hekate) remained the quintessential deity of ancient magic in both Greek and Roman societies.[4] An ancient goddess, incorporated into Greek religion from the Near East, possibly Caria (south-west of modern Turkey),[5] Hecate is first mentioned in Greek literature by the Archaic poet Hesiod (*c.* 8th Century BCE), with the first inscriptional evidence confirming her worship in Greece dating to the 6th Century BCE.[6] In Hesiod's *Theogony*, an account of the creation of the universe, the gods and humankind, Hecate is the only child of the Titans, Perses (god of destruction) and Asteria or 'Starry One' (409–11). Although Hecate goes on to become synonymous with witchcraft of the most sinister kind, and is embraced as the patron goddess of magicians, her origins, as reflected by Hesiod, are far removed from any magical associations. Hesiod's long and textually unexpected homage to the goddess, which occupies 41 lines of the poem (*lines* 411–52), presents her "as a deity closely involved in the affairs of the community with powers broadly founded in the natural world" (Marquardt 1981: 243). What is a noteworthy detail in Hesiod's account is that Hecate's power and authority remain independent of the supreme reign of the Olympian conqueror of the Titans, Zeus. While the latter reigns over all gods, Hecate retains her pre-Olympian agency, receiving honours on the earth, and in the sea and sky. Her influence traverses these three realms as she aids, for example, legislators busy making decrees (the earthly sphere) and fishermen in the harvesting of bountiful catch (the aquatic sphere), while her heavenly influence is based on the intermediary role she performs between gods and humankind, carrying prayers from an individual to the heaven-dwellers.

This positive, all-encompassing portrait of the goddess by Hesiod will be further discussed below, as we now turn to the dramatic change

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[3] Aphrodite/Venus, for example, was a regular source of invocation in love or erotic magic, her chief religious function being relegated to areas of fertility, successful unions, and so on.

[4] For a discussion of Hecate, see Berg (1974), Marquardt (1981), Boedeker (1983) and, for a more general approach, Von Rudloff (1999).

[5] See Kraus (1960: 24–56) and Marquardt (1981: 250–51); for a counter argument, see Berg (1974).

[6] This is on a temple to Apollo at Miletus where Hecate appears with this god in their capacities as the protectors of entrances.

in ancient perceptions of Hecate in the post-Archaic era. Why these changes occur is uncertain and scholarly hypotheses vary. Kraus, for example, suggests:

> Hecate was transformed from a great goddess of witchcraft through identification with the Thessalian road-goddess Einoidia, who appeared in Athens in the fifth century carrying with her the strong traditions of Thessalian witchcraft. (Kraus in Marquardt: 252)

Another explanation is that Hecate's association with the legendary witch *par excellence*, Medea, which was chronicled by Euripides in his tragedy, *Medea*, performed in 431 BCE, was the cause of the change of image. This view, however, is problematic, for Euripides may well have been reflecting the current shift in focus rather than creating it. Whatever the reason, by the late 5th Century BCE Hecate begins to assume a decidedly sinister persona that was to come to dominate cultural and, to a lesser extent, religious impressions of her.[7] Her close association with magic is reflected in the numerous references to her in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (*Greek Magical Papyri*), a collection of spells from Greco-Roman Egypt, dating from the 2nd–5th Centuries CE but with decidedly older origins. Herein Hecate is invoked for many reasons; in love or erotic spells (*PGM* IV. 1390–1495), slander spells (*PGM* IV. 2622–2707) and revenge spells (*PGM* III. 1–164). Hesiod's reference to the goddess' role as an intermediary between human and divine is recalled in these spells, in which Hecate appears to function as the conduit between magician and the supersensual workers of enchantment.

At the time of these changes, we also witness the growing emphasis on the goddess as triple-formed. As with much of Hecate's religious and magical history, its transformations and permutations, the reasons behind her embodiment as a triple-goddess are uncertain. Perhaps the triple aspect was there all along, even as early as Hesiod's portrait of her, as she watches over and guides the three realms of earth, sea and sky. Indeed her association with crossroads, where she guards the ways, mentioned previously in connection with Einoidia (or Enodia), meaning 'The One at the Crossroads,' is directly and logically related to her triple persona as Hesiod chronicles it, though once again, which came first, triple Hecate or Hecate, goddess of crossroads remains a mystery.

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[7] Local household shrines to her as a goddess devoid of magical connotations did continue to survive, however.

To modern Pagans and Witches, Hecate is an important goddess. While her worship and occult meanings are regularly positive, especially among Wiccans and Witches of right-hand path traditions, she is sometimes invoked as the Dark Mother. In a sense, then, modern worshippers embrace Hecate as a deity to be worshipped in one of two ways: as a bounteous and beneficent goddess reminiscent of Hesiod's portrayal or as the figure of later times, namely the chthonic, threatening goddess of curses and dark crossroads. As an example of the latter, occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), a devotee of Hecate, wrote one of the most powerful modern invocations to her:

> I hear the whining of thy wolves! I hear
> The howling of the hounds about thy form,
> Who comest in the terror of thy storm,
> And night falls faster, ere thine eyes appear
> Glittering through the mist.
> O face of woman unkissed
> Save by the dead whose love is taken ere they wist!
> Thee, thee I call! O dire one! O divine!
> I, the sole mortal, seek thy deadly shrine,
> Pour the dark stream of blood,
> A sleepy and reluctant river
> Even as thou drawest, with thine eyes on mine,
> To me across the sense-bewildering flood
> That holds my soul forever! (Crowley 1905: Stanza III)

In *The Confessions* (1929–1930) Crowley states that he recited the invocation with magical intent at Akyab (in Burma) and that the goddess manifested in the form of the Hindu goddess, Bhavani ('Giver of Life'). In his 1929 novel, *Moonchild*, Crowley also refers to Hecate on several occasions; in his musings on females and the cycles of life, for example, he writes: "Hecate is the crone, the woman past all hope of motherhood, her soul black with envy and hatred of happier mortals" (Crowley 1929: 188). Other references are no less potent; in describing preparations for a ritual to Hecate, Crowley states:

> …none may look on Hecate, and remain sane. The proper conjurations of Hecate are curses against all renewal of life; her sacrament is deadly night-shade or henbane, and her due offering a black lamb torn ere its birth from a black ewe. (ibid.: 272–73)[8]

[8] See also, Ford (2006) who places Hecate at the centre of his chaos magick system of Luciferian witchcraft.

Another devotee of Hecate from the left-hand path was Australasian witch and occult artist, Rosaleen Norton (1917–1979). Norton regarded Hecate as a powerful deity who both frightened and protected her, and whenever she practiced hexing, it was Hecate that Norton relied on.[9] In this sense, Norton understood the goddess from a dual perspective: as the awesome, menacing, spell-working deity well known from the 5th Century BCE onwards, and also the earlier benign life-force. Indeed Hecate was very much a protector in antiquity. As a goddess associated with liminal points, places such as crossroads, thresholds and gates—hence the association with and, sometimes, the actual epithet of, 'Einoidia'—Hecate "helped men cross the more mundane boundaries that they faced daily" (Johnston 1990: 26). Places where social outcasts such as robbers and prostitutes frequented—as well as ghosts—roadways and crossroads were sites of legitimate anxiety in antiquity, and the presence of Hecate at such points of disassociation and transition eased the apprehensive mind of the traveller. Such physical points of transition were also matched by less concrete concepts of the same, and so Hecate was also goddess of "temporal *limines*" as discussed by Johnston:

> Several sources say that Hekate "suppers"…were taken to the crossroads each month at the time of the new moon; that is, on the night the old month ended and the new one began…The goddess who eased transitions was supplicated at the crossroads—that liminal point *par excellence*—on the night between old month and new—a temporal *limen*, a time of potential dissolution. (ibid.: 26)

As stated earlier, most Pagan worshippers of Hecate, as opposed to occultists like Crowley,[10] worship her as the protector, as the life-giving goddess. One Pagan worshipper describes Hecate thus:

> Birth and death are sacred to her. She represents working with transition—it can be psychological or physical. Anytime anything is shedding its old way and moving into a new way—that's her realm. She's a crossroad goddess, and one of her main symbols is the junction where three roads meet. Mythologically, that's where she's present: helping travellers make choices. She won't tell people what choice to make, but will point out different paths available to them. (Webster 2001: 108)

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[9] On Norton, see Drury (1988). For a related invocation of Hecate, see Greenwood's (1996) account of Z. Budapest's invocation of Hecate in a "Righteous Hex."

[10] Norton's pluralistic approach to the goddess was, I would argue, unusual for a practitioner of the left-hand path.

This spiritual interpretation of the goddess is very much in keeping with the ancient view of her; Hecate's association with death was linked to her role as the deity of liminal zones. This facet of the goddess is powerfully presented in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, an Archaic poem by an unknown author. Therein, Hecate is witness to the abduction of Demeter's daughter, Persephone, by Hades, god of the Underworld. Alone in her earthy cave, Hecate hears the maiden's cries. Demeter also hears them as does Helios, god of the sun, who also sees the abduction. It is Hecate who assists the grieving mother in her quest for her daughter; taking a firebrand, Hecate leads the way to Helios, and Persephone's location is revealed; hence she receives the epithet, *phosphoros* ('light-bringer'). When mother and daughter are reunited, Hecate is there, witnessing the transition of Persephone from the land of the dead to the land of the living. The hymn also tells us that Hecate becomes the young goddess' attendant and substitute queen, meaning that when Persephone spends half of the year with Demeter, it is Hecate who takes her place as queen of the dead. This hymn reflected essential cult components of the worship of Demeter, Persephone and Hecate, encapsulating key mythic ingredients of their worship and religious significance to the ancient Greeks.[11]

As Hecate is a goddess of death, or a chthonic deity, she is, as attested in the previous quotation, also associated with life. Hesiod's paean to her expressly links her with love of the young (*lines* 450–52), and she receives the appellation *kourotrophos* ('child's nurse'). In view of these major attributes of the goddess, it is understandable why she has so much to offer Pagans, especially women. Her association with the life force, with various realms within the universe, with assisting the young at times of painful transition (typified by the goddess Persephone who is forced to make the lonely journey from maiden to matron), with a general guiding of the way, has led Hecate to be invoked as a major spiritual entity by modern Witches. The appeal of Hecate to women is also associated with her connections to the triple-goddess, translated by Pagans as the maid, mother and crone.

While Hecate was clearly a goddess represented in triple-form, the Pagan interpretation of her as the embodiment of maid, mother and crone is without ancient precedent. Various goddesses, as embodied in

[11] The mystery cult at Eleusis was centred round the three goddesses, although little is known of Hecate's role therein. On the Eleusinian Mysteries, see Foley (1993).

the Pagan concept of the generic 'Goddess,' occupy the role of triple moon goddess[12] who symbolises the three phases of womanhood: youthful (maiden), maternal (mother) and aged (crone); in *The Witches' Goddess* (1987) Janet and Stewart Farrar interpret the triple-goddess along these very lines. Often each aspect of the triple-goddess corresponds to the three phases of the moon, namely, the new moon (maiden), the full moon (mother) and the waning moon (crone). Hecate as the 'Goddess' per se can manifest all three aspects, although she is most closely associated with the crone; in this latter instance, her connection with other deities in the Greek pantheon, especially Demeter and Persephone, is utilised to create the triple figure: Persephone (maid), Demeter (mother), Hecate (crone).

The association between Hecate and the waning moon is utilised by Pagans who worship Hecate specifically, or a Dark Mother Goddess equivalent. RavenWolf, for example writes of the time leading to the new moon:

> The three days before the New Moon is known as the dark of the moon… Traditionally, this is a time when no magick is performed.… However, Hecate rules this time, and if her magick is needed, now is when you should use it. (RavenWolf 1993/2003: 39)

RavenWolf is referring to necessary cursing—that is, the magical means of enacting justice. In another work, RavenWolf (2000) lists various spells involving Hecate, including a car-protection ritual and a banishing rite to remove negative energy. Among her most endearing, and possibly tongue-in-cheek spells, is RavenWolf's invocation of Hecate to help in matters of the heart:

> Hecate, Goddess of the night,
> come forth and hear my angry plight
> filled with rage and hate and pain
> I stand before you half insane
> with herbs and coal to match the night
> take this anger from my sight
> release foul feelings from my brain
> and bring back love to me again. (RavenWolf 2001: 251)

[12] Interestingly, Hecate was not originally a moon goddess. Johnston (1990) notes that the evidence associating Hecate with the moon cannot be traced to a period earlier than the 1st Century CE.

This calling on Hecate, a goddess not renowned for her associations with the romantic or erotic realm, taps in on her energy as a force of anger and revenge. This rather light-hearted,[13] though, we suspect, not unserious spell for the renewal of attraction and the cessation of a broken heart, recalls a passage from Euripides' *Medea*, in which the protagonist, one of the most famous mythical witches of antiquity, calls on the goddess to assist her in exacting revenge on her treacherous ex-partner, Jason, and his new bride-to-be:

> By the mistress I worship
> most of all and have chosen as my co-worker [in magic],
> Hecate, residing in the inmost recesses of my hearth,
> no one will pain my heart and rejoices in it.
> I will ensure a marriage bitter and mournful,
> bitter the royal connection and [bitter] my flight from this land. (Euripides: *lines* 395–400)[14]

The intent behind the ancient and modern invocations may be different—indeed Medea is aiming to murder people through her use of magical *pharmakon*[15]—but the interpretations of Hecate are remarkably similar: RavenWolf intuits the goddess' connection with revenge and the assistance therein, as does Medea.

Hecate offers modern Pagans, especially females, a self-empowering and protective deity who, if need be and the individual's ethics permit, can enact righteous revenge. Her role as the goddess of liminal points, and as the goddess who leads the way, are especial facets of the reassurance represented by this deity; she is interpreted by modern Pagans as a guide, a guide who, if she so deems it, is there to watch over the worshipper as she (or he) traverses a liminal point, be it a physical journey or, more importantly, an inner, transitional journey from one phase of existence to the next.

As a goddess associated with the moon by contemporary worshippers, Hecate is regularly connected with Artemis (or Diana). So too in antiquity, the goddesses were linked, most notably by ancient magi-

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[13] Indicated through the use of colloquial language.

[14] All translations are my own unless stated otherwise. Medea has a long association with Hecate, the earliest extant text attesting the connection being Euripides' tragedy. Later sources vary the origins of the connection, some making Medea the daughter of Hecate.

[15] Literally, a drug; concocted medically or, in the case of Medea, magically.

cians in the triad grouping of Artemis, Selene[16] and Hecate. There is no particular explanation behind this, and ancient magicians used the names interchangeably in spells.

Artemis/Diana was the daughter of Zeus and Leto, daughter of the Titans, Coeus and Phoebe.[17] Leto conceived Artemis along with her twin brother, Apollo, god of light, medicine (and plague), music and prophecy. A virgin goddess, like Hecate, Artemis was associated with the wilderness, animals (particularly young ones), hunting and childbirth (assisting mothers in delivery and guarding babies and children). Her literary history dates back to Homer's *Iliad* (8th Century BCE) and she is honoured in another Archaic text, *The Homeric Hymn to Artemis*, which, like the aforementioned hymn to Demeter, is of unknown authorship. In a later hymn, Artemis is presented as the virgin *par excellence*, begging her father to allow her to remain a maiden all her days:

> We begin when she, sitting on her father's knees,
> still a little child, said:
> "Daddy, allow me to keep my virginity forever,
> and to have many names, in order that Phoebus may not compete with me.
> Give me arrows and a bow. O father, I don't ask you for a quiver
> or a big bow. For me the Cyclopes
> will at once make arrows and a well-bent bow.
> But give to me the bringing of light and to wear a tunic
> reaching the knee with a coloured border, in order that
> I may slay wild beasts.
> Give to me sixty Ocean Nymphs as members of my choir,
> all nine years of age, all still girls not wearing the girdle." (Callimachus: *lines* 4–14)[18]

Artemis is depicted by Callimachus as dedicated to maintaining her virginity from the earliest stages of her life. This particular hymn captures the youthfulness, the everlasting child-like quality, of the goddess. As a *parthenos* (maiden or virgin) Artemis maintains the aspect of juvenile innocence as well as independence unbeknown to married women.

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[16] Goddess of the moon; sometimes Artemis in her manifestation of the same.

[17] Roman versions of her parentage differ; see Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods* (1st Century BCE): "Likewise there are a number of Dianas. The first is of Jupiter and Proserpina, who is said to have begotten winged Cupid. The second is better known, she whom we are told was born of Jupiter…and Latona. Of the third, the father is reported as being Upis, the mother Glauce; the Greeks often call her 'Upis' from her paternal name." (3.23.58).

[18] From *Hymn 1*; Callimachus was a Hellenistic poet, *c.* 310–240 BCE.

To the Romans, Artemis was Diana, a goddess with the same portfolio and very similar representations in literature and art. In terms of mythological narratives, the Romans adopted the Greek originals that chronicled various episodes in the life of the goddess, quite often for didactic purposes. Of the many stories concerning her, several deal with her ruthless punishment of those perceived to have compromised her chastity or the purity of her followers. Arguably the most famous of these revenge stories concerns Actaeon, a young hunter who accidentally stumbles across the goddess while she is bathing in an earthly stream. Enraged that the youth has seen her naked, Artemis turns Actaeon into a stag and he is viciously dismembered by his hunting dogs.[19]

In later Roman culture, Diana is associated with magic, partly—as noted above—through the connections with Hecate. This is reflected in various pieces of Roman literature of the Late Republic and Early Imperial ages, such as Horace's *Epode V*, which narrates some of the most ghastly occult practices in all of Latin poetry. Therein, one of the witches, Canidia, calls on Diana to preside over her murderous magic.[20] Inspired by the images of the goddess in Latin works, the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, were particularly taken by Diana, representing her as a deity or, more expressly, a demon, of Early Modern European sorcery. Compared to the scant references to Hecate, Diana is somewhat of a protagonist in the text, symbolic of feminine wickedness and the ultimate goddess of witches. In the first part of the book, for example, the monks state:

> It must not be omitted that certain wicked women, perverted by Satan and seduced by the illusions and phantasms of devils, believe and profess that they ride in the night hours on certain beasts with Diana, the heathen goddess, or with Herodias, and with a countless number of women, and that in the untimely silence of night they travel over great distances of land. (Kramer and Sprenger: Part 1, Question 10).

The equation of Diana with Herodias, the witch or fairy queen of the Middle Ages, was taken up by Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903) in *Aradia: The Gospel of the Witches*:

> For brief explanation I may say that witch craft is known to its votaries as *la vecchia religione*, or the old religion, of which Diana is the Goddess,

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[19] See, for example, Ovid's version in the *Metamorphoses* (1st Century CE), Book 3, lines 138ff.

[20] See, Horace, *Epode V*, lines 49ff.

> her daughter Aradia (or Herodias) the female Messiah, and that this little work sets forth how the latter was born, came down to earth, established witches and witchcraft, and then returned to heaven. With it are given the ceremonies and invocations or incantations to be addressed to Diana and Aradia, the exorcism of Cain, and the spells of the holy-stone, rue, and verbena, constituting, as the text declares, the regular church-service, so to speak, which is to be chanted or pronounced at the witch-meetings. There are also included the very curious incantations or benedictions of the honey, meal, and salt, or cakes of the witch-supper, which is curiously classical, and evidently a relic of the Roman Mysteries. (Leland 1899: viii)

The influence of *Aradia* on the origins of modern Wicca is not to be underestimated.[21] Leland's placement of Diana and her daughter by Lucifer[22] as the principal figures of an (allegedly) ancient witch cult forevermore established the former (in particular) as a deity whose name, energy and presence are regularly invoked by modern Pagans. As Davey (2006) has noted, the resurgence of Diana as part of the early history of neo-Paganism has its origins in part in the Romantic age with poets, artists and novelists waxing lyrical about the countryside and invoking such deities as Diana and Pan in their paeans to rusticity. Leland followed suit, and his *Aradia* reflected the Romantics' recent Pagan sentiments—although they saw it more as homage to Greek and Roman antiquity—and transformed it into a living, breathing world of fading Italian sorcery.

Diana's contemporary Pagan significance is also the result of the writings of Margaret Murray (1863–1963) and Gerald Gardner (1884–1964). Murray, like Leland, saw the goddess as the embodiment of the survival of ancient witch cults throughout Europe, a theory she argued most emphatically in the last of her books, *The Genesis of Religion* (1963) and, while not stressing the goddess as much in her better known work, *The Witch-cult in Western Europe* (1921), Murray did posit therein that the name 'Diana' "is found throughout Western Europe as the name of the female deity or, leader of the so-called Witches," arguing that it was for this reason that she coined the phrase "the Dianic cult." (Murray 1921: 12). Gardner adopted several key components of Murray's thesis in his

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[21] For a concise overview of *Aradia*, see Hutton (1999) and Davy (2006). Valiente (1989) also offers an excellent interpretation from a witch's point of view.

[22] Lucifer ('Light-bearer) was deceived by Diana in order for the goddess to conceive; this is, in itself, a mythic motif recalling stories from antiquity concerning not so much conception per se, but sexual deception, paternity deceptions, etc.

magical system, including her incorrect affiliation of the Roman god Janus with Diana. Gardner states that Diana was Janus' consort, both of them being "two of the oldest deities of Western Europe" (Gardner 1959: 34). While Diana per se is not a necessarily major feature of traditional Gardnerian magic, with members worshipping the God and Goddess as 'generic' forces,[23] it may, nevertheless, seem puzzling that Gardner regarded an emphatically virginal deity as a divine consort.

There are clearly many problem areas inherent in any attempt at tracing the goddess of the Greeks and Romans, Artemis/Diana, with the practice and beliefs of modern Pagans because of the chronological intervention of Leland (especially), Murray and Gardner. Obviously the Roman deity prefigures somewhere in Leland's cosmology, but the end product of *Aradia*—Leland's Diana—bears little if any resemblance to her ancient namesake. Therefore, owing to Leland's influence on Murray and Gardner, their own visions of Diana are, from the point of view of a scholar of ancient religions or even a historical purist, contaminated to say the least.

Today Diana is worshipped by many Wiccans, particularly females, to whom—like Hecate—she offers various gender-specific gifts. Owing to the complex history of Diana and modern Paganism, her survival post-Leland, post-Murray and post-Gardner is best summarized by Guiley: "Though most modern Witches no longer believe in Murray's medieval Dianic cult, they do revere Diana as an ancient Pagan deity and an archetype." (Guiley 1989: 103). Of related interest here, is the effective summary by Jencson, on the dwindling significance of Leland's legacy on modern Wicca: "Leland himself has all but been forgotten, but entire passages from his *Aradia* have entered the oral lore of modern witches." (Jencson 1989: 4).[24]

Dianic Wicca was developed by Z. Budapest (1940–) in the 1970s. As with most Pagans, Dianic Wiccans embrace the goddess as a generic being and invoke her using a multiplicity of names and titles. This form of Wicca is unique, however, in respect to one particular adherence to ancient ritual worship, namely its segregation of the sexes.[25] As

[23] As is the case with traditional Alexandrian witchcraft, in which the goddess (or the horned god) is known by many names: Isis, Hecate, Ishtar, Cerridwen as well as Diana.

[24] Of course the Witch's Charge is an important passage still in circulation. See, Valiente (1989).

[25] Many ancient cults from both Greece and Rome were characterised by women-only and men-only rituals. Artemis/Diana was surrounded only by females in the various

previously mentioned, Artemis/Diana, as a virginal goddess, fiercely guarded her chastity and shunned the community of males. The story of Anacreon testifies to this goddess' rejection of the masculine world, which is why a sexualized image of Artemis/Diana, be it Leland-inspired or otherwise, sits somewhat uncomfortably if one were to view it from an ancient perspective. If invoked especially in any ritual acts of sex or fertility magic, it seems that Artemis/Diana would be the least likely of the ancient Greek and Roman deities—Athena/Minerva aside—to answer.

Budapest, though she and her groups worship the goddess per se, as stated above, specifies Diana in a variety of her publications on ritual and worship. In describing casting a circle and the entrance of women participants, for example, Budapest writes:

> The HP sprinkles purifying water on each one, saying:
> *I purify you from all anxiety in the name of Diana.*
> Woman answers:
> *I enter the circle in Perfect love and Perfect trust.*
> HP kisses and embraces the woman:
> *Welcome to the Goddess' presence.* (Budapest 1980/2007: 21)

Here Diana is invoked as a protective deity, purifying the female participants in a symbolic renewal ceremony that welcomes the women into her presence. Diana is prayed to in her role as the maiden goddess (other goddesses, such as Luna and Athena, also belong to this archetype). For the mother aspect, the women of Dianic Wicca as taught and practiced by Budapest, may worship other goddesses from Greek and Roman antiquity, such as Hera [Juno] and Minerva.[26] The crone is worshipped in the form of Hecate or other non-Western deities such as Kali. This reflects Budapest's creed: "In witchcraft, the most important cornerstone is a *trinity*, not a duality." (ibid.: xxviii).

Dianic Wicca is, as stated many times by both practitioners and non-practicing scholars, woman-empowering. In the context of it being a cultural-historical phenomenon, it therefore has a political aspect to it. Budapest, once again, is a leading voice against the oppression of women. She takes a political stance in speaking out in a way that

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mythical narratives featuring her. Artemis (along with Athena, Hera and Aphrodite) had female only officiates. On women and cult in antiquity, see Blundell and Williamson (1998), Goff (2004) and Parca and Tzanetou (2007).

[26] Again, from a purist's perspective, Minerva, the Roman equivalent of Athena, seems an incongruent choice in this category.

directly connects her politics with her religion: "Women, witches or not, have had to live with religious oppression. We experienced it on our skin; some were burned, some beaten." (ibid.: xxix).[27] In this sense, the name 'Dianic' is particularly symbolic, conjuring images of feminine freedom and independence from the masculine realm. The name is also appropriate for feminist Wiccans who wish to reclaim women's heritage, and recognize that part of this process is acknowledgement of its horrendous and oppressive history. 'Diana' in this context is a challenge to patriarchy, a religious, spiritual and political resistance to a system these Wiccans regard as having a past and present history of denigrating the eternal feminine principal—the goddess—and her mortal daughters.

The healing process that characterizes some feminist Wiccan rituals for women also reveals a debt to antiquity and its religious practices. Interestingly, Budapest understands the goddess as the life force, as an all-consuming energy—the origin of life, the origin of all things—which is very much at the centre of her ritual approach. The ancient Greeks also connected the concept of the life force (*bios*) with Artemis, including this goddess in rituals concerning birth and death, among other transitional phases of life.[28] Artemis, for example, as her role as goddess of birthing and the young was called upon by pregnant women to watch over both mother and unborn child; similarly, she was prayed to during labor—sometimes with the name Artemis Lochia, goddess of childbirth.[29] Hecate as a goddess of liminal points, as a deity who lights the path of transitions, was previously discussed and one can detect the connections between her and Artemis in the latter's role in rites-of-passage. The whole process of birthing concerns the life force or *bios* and Artemis' function here reflects a dual purpose: she protects the mother during what was in antiquity (especially) a dangerous phase in life, and she guards the baby as it is expelled from the womb and begins a new phase of life.

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[27] The political sentiments of Budapest, or, more exactly, the political sentiments that shape and re-shape her interpretations of history—from prehistoric times, to antiquity, to the era of the witch trials—are laden with booby-traps from a historian or anthropologist's perspective and are not the subject of this particular analysis.

[28] On Artemis and *bios*, I acknowledge the PhD research of my former student, Dr Mary Galvin (*Bios—Artemis*, unpublished dissertation, The University of Newcastle: 2007).

[29] Galvin explains that 'Lochia' defines the passing of the afterbirth/placenta.

Artemis as a goddess intimately connected with rites-of-passage was honored in various rituals connected with this concept. Among the most beautiful of all ancient rites were those concerning girls and boys who worshipped the goddess at certain stages in their lives, marking transitions from one stage to the next. One example of such a rite is the cult of the bears at Brauron (a site to the east of Athens). This was associated with menarche; little girls (between the ages of five and nine) became temporary 'bears' of Artemis in preparation for the later stage in life when they would leave girlhood behind and begin to be readied for marriage (usually around the ages of 14 to 16). While nine was the ideal age for the Bruaron initiation, younger girls could still become 'bears'[30] as the rite was related to puberty but the physical signs of maturation were not necessary in order for participation, so long as the girl completed the rite before she reached menarche.[31]

While a goddess of the young in particular, Artemis, as the life force, was also a goddess of the aged. Old women, past their bleeding, were trained as midwives,[32] and so the goddess of childbirth had a new relationship with the individual woman. Dillon writes:

> Plato mentions that women became midwives only after their period of having children had passed…Artemis was childless and so gave midwifery to those who are past childbearing (and in this sense virgins), but they were women who had given birth to children and so had experienced what it was like and had good practical sense. (Dillon 2002: 178)

Modern Wiccans call these older women crones (in a spiritual and respectful sense) and see a special place for them in the Pagan community. Wiccans have created many crone rituals, honoring the aged and aging woman and enhancing the powers she possesses as an elder.

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[30] There are several aetiological myths behind this ritual; one explains how a tame she-bear was killed by some local youths and as punishment, each year Artemis makes young girls 'play the bear.'

[31] On modern ceremonial equivalents, see Griffin (2000). Barrett (18) provides an excellent summation of modern Dianic Witches and their rites-of-passage: "The heart of Dianic spiritual practice focuses on women's mysteries. These rites of passage include the essential physical, emotional, and psychic transitions that only women born with women's bodies can experience. These are the five uterine blood mysteries: being born, menarche, giving birth/lactation, menopause, and death, which acknowledge women's ability to create life, sustain life, and return our bodies to the Goddess in death." See also Griffin (1995) for a description of a Dianic ritual.

[32] The ancient Greeks believed that a man's wife, once she reached a certain age, was no longer an object of sexual desire and could be relied upon to freely travel the city un-chaperoned.

While not connecting the crone to Artemis as did the ancient Greeks, modern Wiccans align her to the goddess' third aspect in its various manifestations.

Just as the crone is worshipped as both goddess and woman, the virgin is celebrated in both divine and human form, so too do we find the archetype of sexual energy present in modern Paganism. Her Greek/Roman embodiment is Aphrodite/Venus and she occupies a pivotal place in various contemporary groups.[33]

As is usual in Greek mythology, there are varying accounts of Aphrodite's birth. One prominent version makes her the daughter of Zeus and Dione (a Titan whose name simply means 'Goddess'), while another makes her daughter of the castrated sky god, Uranus (or Ouranos), supreme deity prior to the reign of the Cronus (or Kronos) and Gaia (Mother Earth). The latter version, first recorded by Hesiod in the *Theogony*, is the origin of the still famous images of the goddess rising from the ocean, images such as Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus.* As the goddess of passion and erotic desires, Aphrodite or Venus is associated in both the Greek and Roman worlds with fertility and forms of sexual expression ranging from love within marriage to adulterous liaisons.[34] She also had a strong role in the lives of prostitutes and courtesans, for this goddess was above the moral strictures of mere mortals and could be invoked for any matters concerning the sexual act. As with all worship and ritual celebrations of the deities of antiquity, the honoring of Aphrodite/Venus did not involve unbridled sexuality or the orgies so often associated with life in Greece and Rome. Rituals and public festivals were organized and procedures highly regulated and while there was frivolity at particular fertility rituals, the ancients were too socially constrained by gender roles and expectations to let down their hair.

As the goddess of love, Aphrodite was regularly included or invoked in spells concerning 'matters of the heart;' one example of this is the following attraction-curse spell, inscribed on a tablet:

> Pausanias binds Sime, daughter of Amphitritus (may no one except Pausanias undo this spell) until she does for Pausanias everything Pausanias

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[33] While Aphrodite may not be worshipped per se, her symbolic connection with sexuality and fertility renders her an important archetype at the very least to many Pagans.

[34] Although there were strict regulations concerning adultery—as with all forms of sexuality—in both Greece and Rome.

> wants. May she not be able to lay hands on a sacrificial victim of Athene, nor may Aphrodite look kindly upon her, before Sime holds Pausanias tight. (Ogden 2002: 229)[35]

This spell, dated to the 3rd or 2nd Centuries BCE, written in Greek and found in a cemetery in Jordan, is a typical example of its genre; while aimed at winning a particular person, the wording is aggressive and curse-like. Sime, the unfortunate object of Pausanias' desire, is cursed not to be able to worship Athena or experience the gifts of Aphrodite until she falls for the spell-caster. In addition to featuring in such forms of erotic magic, the goddess was often named on magical artifacts such as amulets designed to bestow sexual success.

Today Aphrodite/Venus is invoked by Pagans for similar reasons, although the aggressive, commanding tone of those ancients intent on winning a partner—permanent or otherwise—is usually omitted. One can cite numerous publications on modern love magic that invoke Aphrodite/Venus for securing the heart's desire, and this reflects a common, age-old motivator for magic, namely the use of such for utilitarian purposes and as recourse for the disempowered. The use of such spells by modern Wiccans is, however, problematic—although this depends largely on the wording of and intent behind the incantation—because of the Wiccan Rede, which discourages exercising power over another through magical means. Rules, however, are meant to be broken or, more aptly, interpreted, and some Wiccans are no less capable of clever, justifiable inventiveness when it comes to their Rede than any one else.

In the United States, worship of Aphrodite has a comparatively long history. The Church of Aphrodite, founded in 1938 in New York by Gleb Botkin (1900–1969) was significant in its role in revitalizing the worship of this goddess and in initiating the neo-Pagan movement in the United States per se. The Church, "believed to be the first American pagan body" (Clifton 2006: 7), was a nature-based religion that featured Aphrodite at its centre, defining her, however, not as the typical Greek archetypal goddess of love, but as a celestial force that revealed a debt to Neo-Platonic ideologies of a world mother or world soul.[36]

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[35] Translated by Ogden. There is another spell on the other side of the tablet—aimed at another woman!

[36] Hecate too had a re-birthing, so-to-speak, in Neo-Platonic mystery religion, embodying a similar concept to Botkin's understanding of Aphrodite. On Hecate as such, see Johnston (1990).

Botkin's *In Search of Reality* (1967), the belief system of the Church and the understanding of the meaning of its principal deity, is summarized by Clifton (ibid.: 141) as a text that "presents Aphrodite not as the Olympian deity of love and beauty… but as the sole Goddess of a somewhat Neoplatonic Pagan monotheism." Adler (1979/1986: 235) describes the religion thus: "Bodkin envisioned the Aphrodisian religion as a formal structure, complete with church, clergy, and liturgy. Unlike most Neo-Pagans today, he believed in monotheism and creed and dogma." Nevertheless, in a reproduction of the Church's creed, as provided by Adler, one discerns the calling of the goddess delivered in a style that foreshadows various neo-Pagan invocations:

> Beloved thou art, O beautiful goddess; and our love for thee is like the sky which has no bounds; like thy beauty itself that no words could describe. For we love Thee with every atom of our souls and bodies, O Aphrodite: holiest, sweetest, loveliest, most blessed, most glorious, most beautiful goddess of beauty. (ibid.)

While, as Adler has stressed, the works and beliefs of Botkin are incongruent with most modern Pagans, his view on Aphrodite as revealed in the quotation above, reflects similar ideas and ideals to the new interpreters and worshippers of her. For contemporary Pagans, particularly women, Aphrodite represents a freedom from the strictures—and scriptures—of traditional, monotheistic religions. For women, she is symbolic of the drive to come to terms with, indeed, to shed, the guilt associated with sexuality and its expression; hence she is far more important on an esoteric level than one may first glean from reading the multiplicity of publications on love spells and the like. As an ancient goddess of nature and fertility, Aphrodite represents the very naturalness of sexuality and sensuality. She may be called upon, therefore, in rituals encouraging women to become connected with their passions, their bodies and their desires. Modern Pagans such as Christ (1987) regard this component of the goddess as a liberating one, allowing women to engage in a physical experience in a ritualized and sacred space. In short, the goddess represents the sacredness of sexuality. This is well described in the words of one priestess and coven leader:

> Aphrodite's rituals of love and pleasure are the acts which connect the inner and outer planes… we must actually dance, sing, feast, make music, and love in Her honor. It is with our bodies that we worship Her, and through our bodies that She blesses us. By these earthy rituals the false divisions between body and spirit, between mind and nature, are healed.

> We find the Sacred within us and all things, within our beautiful, living Mother Earth. (Harrow 1990: 17)

Another perceived remnant of the cult of Aphrodite/Venus among modern Pagans, though one far from mainstream, is the practice of sacred prostitution, its best known exponent being Annie Sprinkle. Sacred prostitution in ancient Greece, Italy and the Near East was also far from the mainstream and its actual practice is seriously questioned if not refuted by some academics.[37] Those scholars who argue in favor of the practice claim that it existed in select, multi-cultural areas such as Corinth and Sicily. Their premise, based on ancient written evidence, is that in certain temples dedicated to Aphrodite, there were priestesses who 'worked' for the goddess by prostituting themselves for clients who, in paying for the services were, in fact, making a donation to the temple fund and partaking in a religious experience.

Sprinkle is not well known for her Paganism, although she once stated, in response to the question "Are you a Pagan?": "I've never really studied Paganism or Witchcraft officially, but… I guess that I am. Certainly, when I do my performances and my workshops there is a strong Pagan element. It just sort of happened naturally, somehow." (Sprinkle 1996: 146). Sprinkle, like other practitioners of this art, such as D'vora, tend to be informal and eclectic in their worship and the goddesses they invoke, combining Tantric methods in their rituals.

The concept of sacred prostitution and the general idea of sacred sexuality permeate many modern Pagan forms of worship, and are not confined to devotees such as Sprinkle and D'vora, nor are they confined to Aphrodite/Venus. What sacred sexuality reveals, as shown above in the quotations concerning Aphrodite, is that the movement away from established religions towards neo-Paganism, brings with it a sexual freedom that is safe—basically because it is in a ritualized context—that has, in many instances, as much to do with self-healing as it does with the worship of the forces of sensuality and eroticism. This is the understanding of sacred prostitution and/or sacred sex that is adopted by Laurelei Dabrielle, Priestess of the Cult of Aphrodite Asteria,[38] in the United States. Dabrielle (2007) even discusses sacred prostitution as a legitimate means of serving the goddess, so long as

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[37] See Budin (2008) for a dismissal of the existence of the phenomenon.
[38] See above for Asteria ('Starry One') as the mother of Hecate.

it is done correctly and with the appropriate devotional intentions on the part of both the 'prostitute' and the 'devotee.' In addition to the sexual component, which Dabrielle does not regard as (physically) necessary for a priest or priestess of Aphrodite, she sees healing as an important role for an officiate: "I believe that one of the key roles of a Priestess of Aphrodite is to help to heal the hurt of the people around her." (2007: 21).

Dabrielle describes various rites in her book on the cult, including sensuous ceremonies designed to worship Aphrodite through participants experiencing the principal gift of the goddess, namely the gift of sensuality and erotic bliss. One such rite is called 'Sacred Touch,' which Dabrielle regards as "an integral ceremony for the Aphrodite priestesshood" (Dabrielle 2007: 33):

> The participants sit in a circle . . . The first person moves to the center and is given as much time as she needs to describe the limits of the experience she wishes to receives. She may include a list of the "don'ts" . . . once this limit-setting has taken place, she either sits, stands or lies down, and the people around her give her a loving touch within the parameters that she set. Many hands, lips, teeth, tongues and voices move as one to pour out love and pleasure to this one person. A person's turn in the center ends either when the group stops giving (usually by a beautiful and unconscious consensus that the work is complete) or when the person in the middle speaks the group's safe word. (Dabrielle 2007: 33)

The giving of a sensual experience in honor of Aphrodite is an example of the celebration of 'sex' in a safe environment, mentioned above in the context of the meaning of the goddess to her modern worshippers. Yet apart from the (possibly doubtful) presence of sacred prostitutes in antiquity, little is known of any other practices performed in honor of the goddess that involved sexual expression or sacred sex per se. As the ancient Greeks and Romans worshipped their gods in public, in mystery cults and/or in more private environs, it is impossible to even speculate on the role ritualized sex or sexuality per se played in the ancient rites of Aphrodite.

What is noteworthy in Dabrielle's writing is the focus on her relationship with the goddess as a religious or spiritual one, and one quite distinct from the Wiccan tradition that incorporates magic as well as more straightforward worship. This is a topic addressed by Timothy Alexander, a self-defined practitioner of Hellenismos (the modern revival of ancient Greek polytheism). Whereas Wiccans like RavenWolf or Budapest invoke a variety of deities, worship them and also practice

magic using or calling on the same forces, Dabrielle and Alexander do not participate in magical rituals or cast spells, but rather simply see themselves as religious people following an alternative path.[39]

The dynamic between the old and the new, between static worship and revised deities, is partially explained by Harms (1999)[40] as the post-modern underpinnings of neo-Paganism. Hunt (2003) summarizes Harms' position thus:

> Harms insists that the 'post-modern' can be identified by an emphasis on fluctuating beliefs, humour, playfulness, and the relativism of personal and local context.... There is evident a mix and match of beliefs and practices which have little regard for tradition, history, or systems. (ibid.: 163)

Hunt partially agrees with this approach, but further notes that the "mysticism involved" (ibid.: 164) is also reflected in the (outsider's) difficulty in pinning down the beliefs and also the practices of Pagans. The practitioners often provide answers, to their readers (if they happen to be authors), if not to academics, about their eclecticism, their variable beliefs and the other post-modern characteristics of their creeds and deeds. Dabrielle (2007: 3), for example, claims her combination of Greek and Celtic religion came to her from the gods "or from the Dragons" with whom she works—thus illustrating Hunt's reference to the "mysticism involved" (Hunt 2003: 164). Mysticism is at odds with logic, and it is the former, not the latter, which Hawkins regards as a feature of modern Paganism (1998: 30): "Neo-Pagans tend to denigrate or deny the application of logic to revelatory truth. Logic is deemed inapplicable or inadequate for discovering truth." While Hawkins is not writing with the intention of presenting a positive spin on neo-Pagans—quite the opposite—neo-Pagans may not have difficulty in agreeing with him.

One of the most recent manifestations of Paganism is Hellenismos. Unlike the Witches, Wiccans and Pagans discussed here, the New Hellenes are strict in their adherence to tradition, belief system and the ethical codes that accompany these (with concessions to modern sensibilities regarding practices such as animal sacrifice). Rather than

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[39] This is not to suggest that all Reconstructionist Hellenes do not practice magic—some do—but this is a private aspect open to individual choice. Having said that, in the writings of practitioners in, or believers of, Hellenismos, it is common to find an equation of magic with *hubris* (arrogance towards the gods, impiety).

[40] Unpublished dissertation (University of New York at Buffalo).

selectively adopting facets of a particular belief system and combining them with others, Hellenes aim to absorb as much of the ancient culture as possible, including vital concepts—in a religious context—as *hubris* and *nemesis* (essentially, respect for the gods and an awareness of the punishment that comes from disrespect, respectively).

In the research for this paper, the unorthodoxy involved in incorporating the Greek goddesses Hecate, Artemis/Diana and Aphrodite into various systems of modern Witchcraft and Wicca became manifest quite early, although there were, of course, exceptions. By unorthodoxy I mean the incorporation of deities from the Greek and Roman pantheons alongside ones from other, sometimes quite divergent, traditions. Wiccans would see no problem with this owing to their focus on the goddess and god as generic (or, in the case of Dianic or feminist Wicca; one generic goddess). Yet to the non-believer, the combinations can seem not only anarchic but spiritually, magically and/or religiously ambiguous. For a confused believer, on the other hand, the combinations and also the alterations to the personae of historically established deities, may seem troubling—would the Greek Artemis, for example, recognize herself as Budapest sees her—and if not, would she refuse to answer her call? The inexhaustible entries on the World Wide Web, particularly in the form of 'blogs'—testify to the level of confusion out there, especially among neophyte Pagans struggling to establish or fortify a personal belief amid the tensions between established traditions, be they Greek, Roman, Celtic or Druidic, and their modern manifestations.

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THE RETURN OF THE GODDESS: MYTHOLOGY, WITCHCRAFT AND FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY

Carole M. Cusack

Introduction

The historical transition from the Late Antique world to the Early Middle Ages was characterized by the decline of traditional polytheistic paganism and its replacement by Christian Trinitarian monotheism in Europe. In the early modern era colonial expansion and missions established this form of religion throughout the world (Neill, 1975 [1964]; Lewis, 2004). The Christian God is male, transcendent, and separate from creation, and Christian institutions and social *mores* exemplified these qualities, with male religious functionaries and patriarchal social organizations. With the advent of modernity and particularly the Enlightenment, reason and secularism challenged Christian normativity and the influence of churches declined. The secularization thesis initially argued that religion would wither and die entirely; such faith would be unnecessary, as science would provide undisputed and rationally evidenced meaning for human life (Clark, 2003: 559–560). However, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw an upsurge in scholarly and popular interest in non-Christian religions, both ancient and modern. Of particular importance was a strand of ideas that argued for matriarchy as the original human social organization and the worship of the Goddess as the original religion of humanity. Early anthropological writings on magic and witchcraft, and publications in the Western esoteric tradition (for example, on hermeticism and Kabbalah), also contributed to interest in alternative religion and the Goddess (Jencson, 1989: 2–4).

In the twentieth century these intellectual currents crossed the boundary between academic interest and actual religious practice, and dramatically manifested in a variety of new religions devoted to the revived worship of the Goddess, including Wicca (the Craft), Feminist Spirituality and Ecopaganism (Hanegraff, 1998: 85–88). This paper investigates the mythology of originary matriarchy and the Great Goddess, and examines Wicca, Feminist Spirituality (primarily

Goddess-centred but also within the Judeo-Christian tradition) and the broader Pagan movement as new traditions actively reviving the Goddess, whether as sole deity or as part of a revisioning of polytheism, where the goddesses and gods are worshipped. In both cases the Goddess serves to critique the Christian God; her gender challenges the masculine norm and her sometime multiplicity challenges monotheistic unity and erasing of difference (Morgan, 1999: 51–59). Goddess religion particularly seeks healing from wounds created by the patriarchy, and worshippers of the Goddess, male and female, view themselves as revitalizing a decadent and dying Western society, and as participants in a revolution that will save the environment and assure a better future for humanity (Rountree, 2002: 486). Finally, this paper will comment briefly on the effect of the return of the Goddess on the academic study of religion.[1]

The Great Goddess and the Golden Age of Matriarchy

Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE), the Late Antique bishop and theologian, witnessed processions honouring the Mother of the Gods, Berecynthia, in the streets of Hippo during his youth. A fervent Christian, to him memories of these events were shameful and impure (Borgeaud, 2004: 120). When Augustine died, the paganism of the ancient world was rapidly declining, and the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, had become the only manifestation of the divine feminine in the emerging medieval Christian world, with churches dedicated to her being established in cities like Ephesus and Soissons, formerly devoted to goddesses such as Diana and Isis (Warner, 1990 [1976]: *passim*). Devotion to Mary and the elevated status ascribed to her, particularly within the Roman Catholic Church, departs significantly from the information available in the New Testament. As Baring and Cashford (1991: 549) perceptively note, "Mary's birth and death are not even mentioned in the Scriptures, so this picture of her cannot… [be] a factual description of a particular historical person, but must, yet again, be the continuing story of the human imagination." The prominence of Marian devotion

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in the Later Middle Ages was instrumental in the development of the Jewish mystical system of Kabbalah that accorded central importance to the figure of Shekhinah, the female hypostasis of the presence of God. The tradition of commentary on the *Song of Songs* provided the bridge between the two religions (Green, 2002: 21–22).

From the Renaissance onwards, the revival of classical learning, interest in the occult sciences (including alchemy, astrology, divination and angelic communication), and the increasingly secular attitude to knowledge, facilitated the development of modern science. This also created an intellectual space in which the academic study of non-Christian religions, pioneered by Friedrich Max Müller and C.P. Tiele, could flourish (Sharpe, 1986: 35–46). Practitioners of the *philosophia occulta* appropriated Kabbalah into esoteric Christianity, completing the circle of influence (Faivre and Voss, 1995: 48–53), and, among others, the pioneering female doctor, anti-vivisectionist, vegetarian and Hermeticist Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) identified Mary with Venus and other pagan goddesses: "is not Venus our Lady of Love?…And Love is the Woman of Heaven, Maria, Astraea, Venus, Aphrodite, by whatever name she is known and is dear to us" (Pert, 2006: 85). Nineteenth century intellectuals pioneered new theories that challenged the Christian metanarrative and basic Western social institutions; for example, the theory of evolution and Marxist economic theory (Irvine, 1967: *passim*). The nineteenth century also saw the birth of the new disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, and it was from these that much of the evidence for originary matriarchy, and the worship of the Goddess, was later sourced.

The theory itself was proposed by the German classicist Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887), who published his three-volume *Mother Right: An Investigation of the Religious and Juridical Character of Matriarchy in the Ancient World (Das Mutterrecht)* in 1861. He argued that humanity had passed through three stages of social development. These are: the hetaeric, characterised by men having sexual access to all women and named from *hetaera*, the Greek for 'prostitute'; the matriarchal, in which "women revolted against male sexual promiscuity and forced men to accept monogamous unions, which were dominated by women as mothers and in which descent of children was traced through the mother" (Ruether, 2005: 256); and finally, the patriarchal, in which men asserted authority over women and establishment of children's paternity was paramount. The evidence from which Bachofen derived this theory was the corpus of mythology surviving from ancient Greece

and Rome, in which he believed all three stages could be detected. For example, Aphrodite's sexual freedom gives insight into the hetaeric phase; powerful goddesses such as Athena and Diana, who exist without consorts or sons, give insights into the matriarchal phase; and the rule of Olympians Zeus is evidence of the final triumph of patriarchy. His theories influenced many important scholars, but particularly Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928), one of the first female scholars who taught Classics at Cambridge and published works on Greek religion, concerned with "the emergence of religion from pre-Hellenic chthonic patterns to Olympian forms and then to postclassical asceticism of the Orphic and Gnostic type" (Ruether, 2005: 260).

When Bachofen published *Mother Right* the academic study of religion, anthropology and archaeology was in its infancy, and Troy, Knossos and Babylon were yet to be discovered. It has been argued that Bachofen's reliance on mythology and unscientific scholarly methods identified him with the past and with Romanticism, but Ann Taylor Allen has countered that criticism by noting that "in many ways, Bachofen's analysis of mythology as a form of symbolic expression, though it looked backward to the Romantic movement, also anticipated much later insights of psychoanalysis and modern social science" (Allen, 1999: 1090). This view is supported by the use made of Bachofen's thesis by Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, published in 1884. Engels' materialist interpretation focused on the development of private property (including one's children and slaves), which he identified as characteristic of the patriarchy and absent from matriarchy (Ruether, 2005: 264). The importance of the Romantic strain in Bachofen's work cannot be overemphasised, however, as the triumphant return of the Goddess owes much to the Romantic rebellion against Enlightenment rationalism, and to the privileging of feeling over thought, intuition over evidence (McCrickard, 1991: 62). The contemporary Goddess movement is a revitalization movement, in that it views patriarchal culture and the monotheist God as unsatisfactory and seeks to innovate "a new cultural system" (Porterfield, 1987: 237). Jacques Barzun paints a similar picture of the Romantic movement between 1780 and 1850 as concerned with "cultural renovation… [a]live to diversity…[o]bservant and imaginative" (Barzun, 1961, 137).

What is interesting about these nineteenth century scholarly assertions that matriarchy preceded patriarchy is that they do not argue for the superiority of matriarchy, but rather accept that its replacement by patriarchy was an evolutionary process. Originary matriarchy

acquired connotations of superiority and the worship of the Goddess, the first deity, through the work of the Lithuanian archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (1921–1994), who was born in the decade when the matriarchal thesis was finally and decisively abandoned within anthropology. Gimbutas contributed to the revival of the Goddess in her last three books; *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1974), *The Language of the Goddess* (1989), and *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991). These books bore fruit among the feminist community, which had come into existence in the 1960s and gained strength in the 1970s. Initially concerned with politics, feminist writers such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Judith Plaskow challenged the patriarchal Judeo-Christian religions and aimed to revolutionize their institutions. Other key thinkers, including Mary Daly and Carol Christ, advocated abandoning the male god and reviving the worship of the Goddess (Yates, 1983: 59–73). It became important for feminists to develop adequate explanations for the patriarchy, while not endorsing its existence in any way. The development of feminist spirituality was contemporaneous with the counterculture of the 1960s and the sharp and unanticipated rise in new religious movements in America and the West (Stark, 1999: 2462–264). The secularisation thesis was thus revised: sociologists of religion realized that the real effects of the decline of institutional religion were a proliferation of smaller, new religions; the uncoupling of religion and the sacred, resulting in many apparently secular activities taking on spiritual overtones while apparently religious activities became secularized; and the shift from public religious observance to private spiritual practice (Cusack and Digance, 2008: 227–228).

In the 1980s, Gimbutas's research into Old Europe (the Neolithic period between 7000 BCE and approximately 1700 BCE, which marks the start of the Bronze Age in northern Europe) was utilized by Goddess feminists in several groundbreaking books. This essay will discuss the Goddess myth in three of these: Marilyn French's *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (1985), Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1987), and Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor's *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* (1987). Essentially, all three tell the same story; they are all eloquent expositions of the sacred history (or myth) of the Goddess movement. French's weighty volume begins with explanations of how the patriarchy may have developed, focusing on the idea of control, and contrasts this with matricentric societies. These are loosely structured: "families clustered around a mother or set of mothers (sisters), who had strong bonds with

their children, especially with daughters…Men were marginal in the matriliny; the closest bond for men was with their mates and the children of their sisters" (French, 1985: 67). French takes pains to demonstrate that patriarchy is not always the norm and that matricentric societies have existed throughout history. Her book is painstakingly referenced and refers to detailed scholarship to support her position, though it is not uncontroversial. In terms of the Goddess movement, *Beyond Power* is more a political treatise than a religious call to arms, although it treats the shift from Goddess worship to worship of the male God as an essential part of the growth of patriarchy, and a female deity as central to the woman-oriented society she advocates. French's avowed goal is "feminizing the world" (French, 1985: 545) and she views this as non-negotiable. Her powerful closing words are "[t]he choice may be between death and life. There is no choice" (French, 1985: 546).

This apocalyptic tone is much stronger, and the urgent need for the goddess to be rediscovered and returned to her central position as supreme deity more palpable, in Riane Eisler's best-selling *The Chalice and the Blade*. Eisler, too, frames her argument in terms of political necessity, invoking recent and contemporary violence and diasters (including the Holocaust) as the motivation for her researches. The book "tells a new story of our cultural origins. It shows that war and the 'war of the sexes' are neither divinely nor biologically ordained. And it provides verification that a better future *is* possible—and is in fact firmly rooted in the haunting drama of what actually happened in our past" (Eisler, 1987: xv). Eisler asserts that the Goddess is the logical primary deity; life comes from women's bodies. Eisler, however, sees both patriarchy and matriarchy as incomplete, both versions of the 'dominator' model; a positive and nurturing society is a mutual partnership between women and men. Like French, Eisler begins with archaeological matricentry, based on the work of James Mellaart (the controversial excavator of Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia, modern Turkey) and Gimbutas. The narrative of *The Chalice and the Blade* seeks to trace the inheritance of this older mode of society throughout Western history, finding vestiges in ancient Crete, medieval Christianity, and heretical groups. Like Marilyn French, she examines the shift from the chalice (feminine, nurturing) to the blade (masculine, violent) as a story of the Fall, equivalent to that of Genesis in the Judeo-Christian scriptures in that it explains the loss of a ideal world (Eisler, 1987: 42–58). Though solidly referenced, Eisler's book is less dryly academic than French's, and her crucial association

of the masculinist religion with "warfare, slavery and sacrifice" packs a considerable punch. In the final chapter, "Breakthrough in Evolution: Towards a Partnership Future," Eisler tackles the issue of "what *kinds* of symbols and myths are to fill and guide our minds: prohuman or antihuman, gylanic or androcratic" (Eisler, 1987: 184).

This is an important issue, as many critics of the Goddess movement have questioned the efficacy of deliberately creating a religion, and have (somewhat naïvely) assumed that adherents to new forms of religion must believe literally in their mythology, or their rituals and spiritual states will be 'inauthentic'. This criticism is almost always taken further, with the equation of the contemporary myth-making of Paganism (in all its multitudinous varieties) with the spiritual programme of Nazism:

> [i]f this is to be taken at face value, we are in deep water here. For while most witches emphasise the notion of . . . Goddess worship as a means for . . . female empowerment, and often go to great lengths to insist that their own intentions as not just benign but downright redemptive, a call for ancient female principles to help heal a wounded earth, this talk of genetic memory has unpleasant overtones (Rieff, 1993: 24).

A second, related criticism is the labelling of Paganism as anti-modern, a rejection of technology and progress, and a retreat into an idealized, imaginary past. These issues of the invention of myth(s) and the perceived anti-modern orientation of Paganism will be addressed later in this chaper. What is significant here is that Eisler asserts that human beings can choose the myths and symbols they live by, and that such a choice has moral implications for individual existence and for the continued existence of humanity and the earth. Her conclusions are identical to French's; humanity is at a crucial turning point and the reality is that there is no choice.

As this exposition of French and Eisler has concentrated on the tragic loss of the prehistoric Golden Age, the discussion of Sjöö and Mor's *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth* will focus on the nature and attributes of the Goddess and the qualities associated with her worship. *The Great Cosmic Mother* describes the Great Mother Goddess religion as dominant in prehistory for 300,000 years and identifies her rites as mysteries involving the moon, fecundity and agriculture. "Agriculture . . . domestication of animals, together with a more settled village life" are all female inventions, and hunting (traditionally understood as a male activity) was therefore redundant (Sjöö and Mor, 1987: 238). The Goddess was all-powerful, the mother of all,

and "[d]eath, rebirth, and ecstasy through her being, experienced in joyful, fearful, and orgiastic rites, are crucial to the psychic balance and health of men as of women" (Sjöö and Mor, 1987: 248). The Goddess was worshipped in nature; her rites were conducted in caves and groves, beside springs and on mountains. The main source of contemporary knowledge of the Goddess is the mythology of past societies; Sjöö and Mor cite Bachofen approvingly, and they assert that; "myth records the real history of the ancient preliterate world" (Sjöö and Mor, 1987: 247). The identification of the Goddess with the moon and the male with the sun results in a cosmology where "the cause of the world's ills is something called the *solar principle*, the male spiritual force. The rational faculty, or masculine way of thinking is *Sun-consciousness*, the influence of the solar principle on the human mind" (McCrickard, 1991: 63).

This foundational myth of the Goddess movement has circulated widely and is popular and meaningful for many people, not all of who are committed Goddess worshippers (Bloch, 1997: 181–190). Scholarly criticism of the evidence that is adduced to support it and the methodological lenses through which the evidence is interpreted has had little success in curbing its influence (Fleming, 1969; Binford, 1982: 541–561). Rituals have been developed which are based on the myth of the Golden Age of matriarchy, and pilgrimage tourism to the sites of ancient Goddess cults has become a popular spiritual activity. Most religious practices associated with Goddess worship are directed to "healing the wounds of the patriarchy" (Rountree, 2002: 486) and ritual is viewed as dynamic and empowering; "feminist ritual seeks to replace the patriarchal traditions not only with an image of the female as divine, but also with an image of strength and power that is internalised as part of the self" (Jacobs, 1990: 43). Rountree's research on Goddess pilgrims, who visit a range of principally European sites (including Stonehenge, Delphi, Knossos, Çatal Hüyük and the Neolithic temples of Malta), reveals that visiting sacred places provides the pilgrim with access to sacred time, where the linear time is experienced as evaporating, leaving only the timeless Golden Age of the Goddess. In this religious experience "nostalgia and healing powerfully merge." One pilgrim at the Hagar Qim temple on Malta performed a ritual "whose effect was to inscribe on her body the revelation she had experienced." (Rountree, 2002: 486–487). Rountree states that:

> [e]ntering the temple one symbolically enters the body of the Goddess. By lying down and curving her body into the curved limestone walls of

> the temple in which the "fat" statues had once stood, the woman maps the Goddess's body onto her own and further embodies her self-recognition as Goddess. She turns her body into a living souvenir of the place and her experience of it…(Rountree, 2002: 487).

This emphasis on the body and self-reflexive identity leads Goddess worshippers to advocate "organic and intuitive" methods of research and the sharing of "experience" (Livingstone, 2005: 7, 9). In conclusion, the sacred history or foundation myth of the Goddess movement offers an effective explanation of the "existence and persistence of male dominance" without condoning it (Eller, 1991: 281) and argues that women hold the key to the future. The future is intimately connected with the Golden Age of the distant past; in fact, it is the recovery of that past. Thus, the Goddess movement has apocalyptic overtones and a utopian (no-place) vision of the future, which creates meaning in the present; "the historical events that hasten this eventuality [the restoration of the Goddess and the matricentric society] are no longer simply barbarities to be endured, but events rich with portents of better things to come" (Eller, 191: 295).

Gerald Gardner and Wicca: Witchcraft and the Worship of the Goddess

The modern revival of witchcraft is a major artery of the Goddess revival, and, like the foundation myth discussed above, it has its roots in the nineteenth century and its flowering in the mid-twentieth century. In 1899, Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903), a "highly respected folklorist, linguist, and founder of Britain's Gypsy Lore Society" (Jencson, 1989: 3), published *Aradia: or the Gospel of the Witches*. This book was based on fieldwork among Gypsies and peasant communities practicing folk magic in England, Italy and Eastern Europe. His findings were that a witchcraft religion, focused on Aradia (the name is derived from Herodias, the evil wife of King Herod and mother of Salome, who brings about the death of John the Baptist in the Christian New Testament), the daughter of the goddess Diana and the first witch, who taught the magic arts to humanity, was the 'old religion' of Europe (Magliocco, 2005: 67–69). Diana, the Roman equivalent of the Greek Artemis, is usually understood as a virgin huntress, but Leland's informant, a Florentine woman called Maddalena, told him that "the moon goddess Diana" had a consort called Lucifer; "Lucifer, whose name means 'bearer of light,' is not the conventional Christian devil

in this narrative, but both the brother and lover of Diana" (Magliocco, 2005: 56). Responses to *Aradia* were mixed; Leland was suspected of having invented much of the material, and perhaps even Maddalena herself. Yet its influence was considerable, and several direct contributions to contemporary Witchcraft must be cited: "specific practices (full moon meetings; the goddess name of Aradia; the practice of naked worship…and the Charge of the Goddess), as well as the concept of witchcraft as a form of peasant resistance and cultural critique" (Magliocco, 2005: 58).

The next important contribution to the revival of witchcraft was the publication of Margaret Murray's (1863–1963) controversial *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (1921), which was also immensely influential. Murray, a professional Egyptologist, examined transcripts of the witch-trials of early modern Europe "and concluded that the inquisitors were persecuting an underground Pagan religious movement that worshipped the Horned God" (Crowley, 1996: 31). Though modern Wiccans are often keen to claim Margaret Murray as one of their own, in fact she was a thoroughgoing rationalist and sceptic (unlike Leland, who was wont to boast of his magical powers). *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* and *The God of the Witches* (1933) were both derided by scholars, who accused Murray of manipulating her sources and of methodological incompetence (Cohn, 1975: *passim*). For the purposes of this essay it is more important to ask; why did general readers find her thesis plausible? Jacqueline Simpson notes two important attractions inherent in Murray's portrayal of witchcraft: her proposal of a mediating position between the Christian assertion that witches were devil worshippers and the secularist assertion that witches were innocent victims of Christian fanaticism; and, more speculatively, "[p]erhaps this picture of a highly disciplined organization secretly permeating society suited the outlook of her times. Conspiracy theories…flourished since the nineteenth century…Her readers may have found it natural to read such ideas back into history, and to equate a coven with a revolutionary cell" (Simpson, 1994: 91). This is perceptive, because although Murray herself did not create the enduring and powerful myth of 'the Burning Times' which is central for modern Witchcraft, her focus on the trials and deaths of early modern witches laid the groundwork for later assertions that the Burning Times were the Wiccan equivalent of the Holocaust, with a figure of nine million victims frequently being cited (Starhawk, 1979: 6–7).

Murray's witches worshipped the Horned God, but modern Witchcraft is focussed on the Goddess, who is envisaged not as sole deity but in a duotheism, partnered by the Horned God. The origins of modern Witchcraft (also known as Wicca or 'The Craft') are directly traceable to an English civil servant, Gerald Brousseau Gardner (1884–1964) who retired to England in 1936 after living and working in Borneo and Malaya. Gardner was a folklorist, naturist, and Freemason, and claimed to have been initiated into a traditional coven in 1939 by a hereditary witch, Dorothy Clutterbuck (Pearson, 2007: 1–2). After the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1951, he published *Witchcraft Today* (1954) and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959). It appears undeniable that Gardnerian Wicca owes a substantial debt to Murray's writings (Hutton, 2000: 104, 110–112). In the 1940s and 1950s Margaret Murray's reputation was high and she was President of the Folklore Society, of which Gardner was a member. Further, she wrote the 'Introduction' to *Witchcraft Today*, in which she praises Gardner for showing "how much of the so-called 'witchcraft' is descended from ancient rituals, and has nothing to do with spell-casting and other evil practices" (Gardner, 1970[1954]: 16).

Wicca as established by Gardner was a form of pagan worship directed toward the Goddess and her consort the Horned God, organized in covens led by a High Priest and High Priestess, and transmitted by initiation (of which there were three levels). Male and female members of covens claim the name 'witch' proudly and 'Wicca' is said to be an Anglo-Saxon word for 'male witch,' derived either "from the root 'wit' or wisdom . . . or from the Indo-European roots 'wic' and 'weik,' meaning to bend or turn" (Adler, 1986: 11). The ancient Celtic festivals of Samhain (1 November), Imbolc (1 February), Beltane (1 May), and Lughnasa (1 August), were combined with the equinoxes and the solstices to form the 'Wheel of the Year,' the eight sabbats, or major seasonal festivals (Eason, 1996: 10, 130, 134). Additionally, ceremonies were performed at the thirteen full-moon esbats (Luhrmann, 2001: 115). Rituals were performed 'sky-clad' (naked) and Gardner as High Priest worked in partnership with High Priestesses; in the beginning with a woman known only as 'Dafo,' and later with Doreen Valiente (1922–1999), whom he initiated in 1953, and with whom he wrote certain key Wiccan rituals (Urban, 2006: 170). He was also influenced by Leland in that the version of the 'Charge of the Goddess' attributed to Valiente is based on the version Leland records in *Aradia* (Magliocco, 2005: 58). Describing these influences on Gardner, Jencson remarks

that fifty years after *Aradia* "Gardner's brand of Wicca…wed Leland's Goddess to Murray's God" (Jencson, 1989: 3).

Gerald Gardner died in 1964. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the rapid expansion of Wicca and its mutation into forms that he could not have foreseen. In Britain Alex Sanders (1926–1988) began a type of Wicca that differed somewhat from Gardner's, known as 'Alexandrian' Wicca (from his personal name, not the ancient city of Alexandria). Sanders, with his High Priestess wife Maxine, took Wicca to the European continent, especially Germany and Scandinavia (Pearson, 2007: 2, 7). Alexandrian Wicca placed greater emphasis on ceremonial magic and elaborate ritual. Gardnerian Wicca arrived in the United States in 1967, and it is in America that the radical transformation of the religion took place. In 1967 America was in the grip of multiple protest movements, constituting the 'counter-culture'. These included agitations to end the Vietnam War, the demand that women be given equal rights to men, the fight for equal rights for Black Americans, and the struggle for gay rights (Kent, 1988: 104–118). These political movements took place amidst a cultural revolution in which eastern religious teachers (Hindu gurus, Japanese Zen masters and Tibetan monks, among others) gained adherents among young Americans (Hanegraaff, 1998: 10–12, 96–97, 106–107). Wicca, which in Britain was initiatory and hierarchical, rapidly democratised and developed new and radically different forms. For the purposes of this essay, the most significant of these is Feminist Wicca, which developed in the 1970s and conflated the alternative vision of secular feminism with that of Goddess-worshipping Paganism.

Wiccans believe their religion is revival of an ancient Pagan faith. The Goddess is of central importance in Gardnerian Wicca and the majority of its multifarious offshoots. She is known by many names and is worshipped in her triple form as Maiden, Mother and Crone. Vivianne Crowley, an academic psychologist and Wiccan High Priestess, writing about the way that the Virgin Mary preserved the Goddess in Christianity, comments that:

> the Goddess is commonly seen as having three major aspects…The *Virgin Mother* aspect of the Goddess is associated with the waxing Moon and the Virgin Mary in Catholicism was often depicted as standing on the moon with seven stars above her head. The second aspect is the *Lover-Mother*, the sexual Mother. The third is the *Dark Mother*, the *Hag* or Wise One, who appears in some older Christian churches in the guise of the Black Virgin. The Goddess must contain all three aspects—Virgin, Lover-Mother

> and Hag—if she is to provide the model of psychological wholeness that must be the goal of woman and man (Crowley, 1996: 138).

The Horned God, her consort, while important, generally receives less attention and is perceived as being less powerful. This is in keeping with many of the ancient myths that Wiccans utilise: Isis searched for the dismembered corpse of her husband Osiris, and her love and power restored him to life and fertility; and Attis, Adonis and Tammuz are the son-consorts of the more powerful Cybele, Venus and Ishtar. These myths draw attention to vital dimension of Wicca as Gerald Gardner established it; it is strongly heterosexual in orientation and this is manifested in sex-magic, featuring symbolic or actual heterosexual intercourse (Urban, 2006: 172–178).

Gardner, a keen naturist, had a very positive attitude to the human body and was a strong advocate of the great power inherent in sex magic, or 'the Great Rite.' This was the centrepiece of the third and highest degree of Wiccan initiation. In the 1950s this fact was sensationalised by the press, and contributed to Gardner's scandalous reputation in mainstream society. However, Urban argues that Gardner anticipated a number of the liberating trends of the 1960s, in that the sexual revolution was central to the counter-culture. Also, the tendency to detect or to posit deep structures in religions across cultures is typically 1960s; the Wiccan "coven as a circle made up of male-female couples is very similar to the organization of the Tantric *chakra puja*" (Urban, 2006: 176). Doreen Valiente later noted the similarity between the Great Rite and Tantric ritual: "[t]hese basic ideas of the great cosmic sacred marriage and its reflection at the human level, of the use of the sexual act as a sacrament…seem to indicate that what became Tantra in the East became Witchcraft in the West" (Urban, 2006: 177). When, in America, Wicca was fused with feminism to produce Feminist or Dianic Wicca, these heterosexual rites were abandoned in favour of a celebration of the female body akin to that found in the Goddess movement generally.

Feminist Wicca may be traced to the early 1970s when Hungarian-born Zsuzsanna Budapest began teaching witchcraft in California and founded the Susan B. Anthony Coven, #1 (Griffin, 1995: 35). The 1975 publication of *The Feminist Book of Light and Shadows* (which was reissued in 1989 as *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*) by Budapest disseminated her lesbian feminist spiritual vision, and Dianic Wicca, based on the worship of the Virgin Huntress Diana (who exists entirely apart from

male deities and is thus often perceived as lesbian), became the latest instantiation of the Wiccan tradition. This form of Wicca departs from Gardnerian and Alexandrian tradition by worshipping only the Goddess, and being constituted by women-only covens. These covens utilise the sabbats and esbats of Gardnerian Wicca, but the emphasis in ritual is to 'heal the wounds of patriarchy,' much in the way that the Goddess movement sought to, and Dianic ritual focuses on Women's Mysteries:

> [t]hese are the five uterine blood mysteries: being born, menarche, giving birth/lactation, menopause, and death, which acknowledge women's ability to create life, sustain life, and return our bodies to the Goddess in death. Dianic rituals also celebrate the earth's seasonal cycles of birth, death and regeneration, as it is reflected in women's own life cycles, and not on an exclusively heterosexual fertility cycle. Dianic tradition specifically includes the creation of rituals whose intention is to help women heal from, and counter the effects of misogynist, patriarchal social institutions and religions (Barrett, 2003: 18).

This emphasis leads to a ritual concentration on embodiment and a conception of the Goddess as immanent in all women. Thus, the classic Wiccan ritual of Drawing Down the Moon, in which the High Priestess either invokes the Goddess to descent into her or rather evokes the Goddess from within (Adler, 1986: 19), becomes definitely more the latter than the former. While the powerful Hag or Crone is often invoked in Dianic Wicca, Wendy Griffin's research categorically dismisses the erroneous notion that such rituals might be unnecessarily 'serious' or lacking in humour. Her participant observance of an all-female coven, Redwood Moon, revealed cheekiness and humour, as well as deep seriousness, in the group members' manifestations of the goddess (Griffin, 1995: 42–45).

Dianic Wiccans are also politically engaged and radical feminists. They vociferously denounce the 'Burning Times' as a female Holocaust, fight against sexism and all patriarchal hostility to women, and are active in environmental causes, as they revere the earth and nature as the Goddess (Foltz, 2000: 410). This points the way to the final aspects of Wicca to be considered in this essay: eco-theology and indigenous paganism. The 1979 publication of the Witchcraft classic *The Spiral Dance* by Starhawk (also known as Miriam Simos) also has great significance for Feminist Wicca (although not the separatist Dianic strand). Starhawk's vision allows for male participation, but is included in this section because of its profound ecofeminist orientation and passionate

advocacy of Goddess worship. Starhawk is the co-founder of a movement for change called Reclaiming, which has merged Paganism, feminism, eco-theology and pro-peace protests (Urban, 2006: 183). She is the convenor of the Earth Activist Training Seminars and her understanding of Paganism is unique amongst those discussed thus far, in that it incorporates notions of indigeneity, and appropriates indigenous practices such as shamanism in drawing up a lineage of Witchcraft. Her central image, the Spiral Dance, is manifested in the dance of the shaman, and "also in the sky: in the moon, who monthly dies and is reborn; in the sun, whose waxing light brings summer's warmth and whose waning brings the chill of winter" (Starhawk, 1979: 3). Further, Starhawk understands claiming freedom for women's sexuality is profoundly political; this is the point of connection with Dianic Wicca that leads Dianics to revere Starhawk.

Starhawk herself has become increasingly involved in political issues, including the plight of women in prisons and organizing non-violent protests against economic injustice (Baring and Cashford, 1991: 284) Finally, the Ecopagan approach to the earth and to environmental issues connects Starhawk to scientist James Lovelock, whose *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979) posited that the Earth is alive, a conscious organism. The 'Gaia hypothesis' was originally launched as a scientific theory but has become theologically-freighted over the past three decades, and now enjoys widespread approval because of its apparently exemplary scientific credentials combined with indisputable spiritual authority (Connor, 1993: 22–25). What it effectively does is introduce an Eastern element into Western esoteric religion; it demands that humans review their exclusive position in relation to the rest of the physical world (Baring and Cashford, 1991: 679).

In conclusion, Wicca is one of the main revivals of the worship of the Goddess in the contemporary world. It fascinates because it manifests both as originally conceived in a duotheism (Crowley, 1996: 1), and as reformed by radical feminism as a virtual monotheism. The Goddess in Wicca is chiefly identified with the moon, which is in harmony with the mythology of the Goddess movement described above. Yet she is also the earth, and she is manifest in every woman. Wicca frequently employs the language of psychology to discuss spiritual realities, and this is a significant theme in the whole of modern Paganism. The theories of Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), which located spiritual and religious symbols within the individual human unconscious or the collective unconscious, have encouraged the notion that rather than something

outside of the Self, the deity is an archetype encompassed within the individual person (Tacey, 2001: 20). This is profoundly compatible with the picture of Goddess worship which positions the Goddess tradition in contra-distinction to the Judeo-Christian tradition: the worship of the Goddess is immanent, embodied, unstructured, anti-authoritarian, nurturing and liberating; whereas the worship of the One God is transcendent, disembodied, hierarchical, authoritarian, disciplinarian and enslaving (McCrickard, 1991: 59).

The centrality of magic and 'the Craft' to Wicca can be related to this opposition to monotheism. Judeo-Christianity categorises witchcraft as demonic and rejects magic in favour of miracle. Margot Adler describes the Wiccan attitude to magic in overtly naturalistic and psychological terms:

> [m]agic is a collection of techniques, all of which involve the mind… including the mobilization of confidence, will and emotion…the use of imaginative faculties, in order to begin to understand how other beings function in nature so we can use this knowledge to achieve necessary ends (Adler, 1986: 8).

Over the past three decades Wicca has moved further away from Gardner's original blueprint, with many witches self-initiating and practicing as solitaries, or engaging as part of internet-based communities (Cunningham, 2005: 79–82). This shift reflects the fact that de-institutionalisation and the focus on private, interiorized spirituality is a trend impacting on new religions as well as long-established religious traditions (Lyon, 2002[2000]: *passim*).

The Pagan Movement, Feminist Spirituality and Reforming the Judeo-Christian Tradition

This paper has considered the revival of the worship of the Goddess thus far in only two contexts; where the Goddess is sole deity, and where the Goddess is the dominant partner in a duotheism. The broader Pagan movement also embraces the worship of the Goddess as part of the revitalization of polytheism, and within the Judeo-Christian monotheistic tradition there have been efforts made to locate a variety of possible images of the female divine. The efforts of Pagan communities engage our attention more compellingly here, but it is important to note that male-God monotheism and Goddess Paganism have cross-fertilised each other in the last four decades:

> [f]or example, Mary Daly (1968), the premier prophet of Goddess religion, began her career as a feminist critic within the Roman Catholic church… Rosemary Radford Ruether (1985), the…prominent spokeswoman for Christian feminism… has compiled a guidebook of readings on female religious imagery for persons interested [in] nonpatriarchal images of God that includes excerpts from several texts about ancient goddesses… [H]er reader for Catholics interested in understanding images of Mary (1977) exemplifies the interest on the part of Christian feminists in finding a goddess tradition within biblical theology. Ruether's interest in Goddess imagery is a good example of the inspirational role that the countercultural movement of Goddess religion has played in the…reflections of Christian feminists (Porterfield, 1987 p. 237).

It has already been noted that Christianity kept alive the flame of the Goddess through the Virgin Mary. Feminist theologians and advocates of women's rights in the Judeo-Christian tradition have employed Mary as a contemporary Goddess that Christian women might seek empowerment through; but they have not limited themselves to Mary, retrieving other female figures from the Biblical and extra-Biblical tradition, including Mary Magdalene (Starbird, 1993) and Lilith (Yates, 1983: 64). One of the reasons feminist theologians who start out within traditional religions often become advocates of the Goddess is that they perceive that 'reform' can only go so far, and that it is better to opt for revolution (Stepaniants, 1992: 242). Rita Gross, an academic Indologist, without becoming a thoroughgoing adherent of the Goddess movement, proposed drawing upon Hinduism, the one contemporary 'world religion' that has an extensive array of powerful goddess figures that Western women could utilise as a resource in their efforts to re-image the divine (Gross, 1978: 269–291). As the Goddess in contemporary Paganism is the subject of this essay it is sufficient to note these efforts within Judeo-Christian religion, without further investigation.

While Wicca is a particularly well-known manifestation of the contemporary Pagan movement, in fact Paganism is characterised by extreme variety and difference, which in itself constitutes a challenge to the unity and normativity of Christian monotheism. In Europe and European-derived societies such as America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, revived Paganism focusing on the gods of the ancient European pantheons predominates, although indigenous traditions are represented also. These Pagan groups include Romuva, the revived traditional religion of Lithuania (Strmiska, 2005: 241–297) and the traditions of pagan Russia and the Ukraine (Matossian, 1973: 325–343; Ivakhiv, 2005: 209–239). In the Russian tradition, goddesses including

Baba Yaga (who with her two spinning companions resembles the three Fates of Greek, Roman and Norse mythology), the *rusalki* or water and grove nymphs, and Ge, or Mother Earth are worshipped (Matossian, 1973: 332, 334). Revived Greek and Roman paganism, celebrating Athena and Hera/Juno, Demeter/Ceres and Hestia/Vesta among others, and Ásatrú or Heathenry, following the Norse deities, are also important movements that worship goddesses from the European past (Flowers, 1981: 279–294).

Ásatrú ('those true to the gods'), a form of modern Germanic Heathenry, emerged in early 1970s America, when Stephen McNallen decided consciously to worship the Scandinavian gods and goddesses. He founded the Viking Brotherhood in 1972 and the Ásatrú Free Assembly in 1976 (McNallen, 2003–4: 203–206). At much the same time groups in Britain and Iceland also formed, and in the last forty years Heathenry has spread throughout the Western world. Leaders in the religion are often scholars, creating a strong emphasis within Heathenry on the careful use of sources in ritual and theology. For this reason this section will consider the Norse goddesses and their worship. The main sources for Scandinavian Paganism are two Christian thirteenth-century texts: the *Poetic Edda*, which is a collection of heroic and mythological poems; and the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, which is a commentary on and prose retelling of the poems (Turville-Petre, 1975[1964]: 1–35). The Norse gods consist of two groups or families, the Æsir and the Vanir. Major deities include Odin, ruler of the gods, his sons Thor the thunder god, and Balder the god of justice and goodness, Njörðr the sea god, the warrior-god Tyr, and Frey, god of fertility. The goddesses include Frigg the wife of Odin, Freyja the goddess of sexuality and fertility, the ski-goddess Skaði, Hel, the grim guardian of the underworld, and the three Norns (fates), Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld (Ellis Davidson, 1981[1964]: 25–32).

Certain of the Norse goddesses have roles and attributes that call to mind those of the Great Goddess. Frigg is the patron of marriage and guardian of women and children, and the primary mythical narrative in which she plays a decisive role concerns her attempts to protect her son Balder from fate and death: "Frigg exacted an oath from fire and water, iron and all kinds of metals, stones, earth, trees, ailments, beasts, birds, poison and serpents, that they would not harm Balder" (Sturluson, 1954: 80). The gods make sport by throwing weapons at Balder, all of which bounce off harmlessly. However, Balder is treacherously killed, by

the villainous god Loki. Loki made a mistletoe dart when he heard that Frigg had felt that the plant was too young and harmless to demand an oath from it. His agent in this crime was Höðr, the blind god. After Balder's death the gods seek to persuade the all creatures in the world to weep him out of Hel, but this effort fails. Though Balder is her son, not her lover or husband, there are aspects of this myth that resemble Isis's seeking and resurrecting Osiris, and Ishtar's grief over the death of Tammuz (Warner, 1990[1976]: 206–209). Freyja's unbridled sexuality and great beauty, coupled with the fact that her husband is missing and she is thus free, heightens a resemblance between her and Aphrodite or Venus, goddess of love and sex in the Classical world (Harris and Platzner, 1995: 56–57, 926–931). The powerful and mysterious Norns or Fates are especially fascinating as examples of female power in the spiritual cosmology of Germanic Pagans. The meaning of the names Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld is disputed, but they are often translated as 'Fate, Being and Necessity,' and it has been observed that there is a temporal pattern which is evident, making it possible to associate the three females with past present and future (Winterbourne, 2004: 86–88). The Norse gods are themselves bound by Fate; the Norns spin the thread of life, measure it out and cut it, as do the Fates in Greek and Roman religion.

It is interesting that modern Germanic Heathenry is often characterised as a male-oriented religion, lacking the strong goddess so apparent in Wicca and other Celtic-derived form of Paganism (Harvey, 1996: 49–64). Yet Frigg and Freyja, the Norns, and the female priestesses found in the saga literature suggest a religion in which the divine feminine is recognized and honoured. In contemporary Heathenry there are important female leaders and teachers, and the practice of *seiðr*, although associated with Odin, is a specifically female form of magic, originally taught to Odin by Freyja. The famous account from the medieval *Eirik the Red's Saga*, of a seeress's ritual which took place in Greenland, has been particularly influential:

> [a]t this time there was a great famine in Greenland…There was a woman there is in the Settlement whose name was Thorbjorg; she was a seeress and was called the Little Sibyl. She had had nine sisters, all of them seeresses but now only she was left alive. It was Thorbjorg's practice of a winter to attend feasts and those men in particular invited her to their homes who were curious to know their fate…The women now formed a circle around the platform on which Thorbjorg was seated. Gudrid recited the chant so beautifully and well…The seeress thanked her for

> the chant, adding that many spirits had been drawn there now…the chant had been so admirably delivered—spirits 'who before wished to keep their distance from us and give us no hearing. And now many things are apparent to me which earlier were hidden from me as from many others. And I can tell you, Thorkel, that this famine will not last longer than this winter…(Jones, 1980: 133–136).

Thorbjorg goes on to communicate many more messages from the spirits to members of the community. This description shows a religion in which women encircle a female mystic, and where even those with different religious beliefs and loyalties are willing to participate for the good of the community (Gudrid, who sings the chant, is a devout Christian and has to be persuaded to take part).

This type of practice, *seiðr*, is a trance ritual in which the seeress becomes a conduit for the spirit world, which in Heathenry is filled with minor spirit beings as well as the great gods and goddesses. Freya Aswynn (born Elizabeth Hooijschuur in Holland), an important Ásatrú leader and author, is a teacher and practitioner of *seiðr*, and she describes it as a magical and shamanic practice, a form or 'soul journeying' (Harvey, 1997: 62). This associates Heathenry with the discourses of indigeneity and environmentalism that have already been noted in relation to Goddess worship and Wicca. Medieval Scandinavian Pagans were in close contact with the Suomi (Finns) and Saami (Lapps), who were practitioners of shamanism and there are borrowings from this indigenous tradition in past and present-day Northern Paganism (DuBois, 1999: 122–138). Diana L. Paxson, a North American Ásatrú leader and author has also been active in reviving this form of shamanistic trance as well (Strmiska and Sigurvinson, 2005: 160).

The ritual calendar of Nordic Paganism is not as elaborate or extensive as that of Wicca, and true traditionalists only formally celebrate the three festivals that are attested in medieval Scandinavian sources; *Sigrblót* (Victory Offering), *Vetrnaeter* (Winter Nights) and *Jul* (Yule) (Flowers, 1981: 291). *Sigrblót* takes place around the spring equinox, and the other two are winter festivals. However, Heathen spirituality is intimately connected with the earth, the seasons, and all natural cycles, and individual gods and goddesses may be honoured at appropriate times. One such goddess is Eostre (or Ostara) who gives her name to the Christian festival of 'Easter,' and who is known from Anglo-Saxon and continental German sources but not from the Scandinavian corpus. She is associated with the coming of spring and the dawn, and her festival is celebrated at the spring equinox. Because she brings renewal, rebirth

from the death of winter, some Heathens associated Eostre with Idunn, keeper of the apples of youth in Scandinavian mythology. The joy of the coming of spring is vibrantly expressed in this invocation:

> Hail Ostara, eastward arising,
> Laughing goddess, Lady of light—
> To dawn, dominion over darkness
> Thy glory has granted, gone is the night!
>
> Winter's wrath by winds of warmth
> The Maiden's might has melted here;
> Everywhere green plants are growing,
> Flowers flourish, she-beasts bear.
> (home.earthlink.net/~jordsvin/Blots/Ostara%20Blot.htm)

Three commonly employed terms within Heathenry for ritual gatherings are *blót, sumbel* and *thing*; the first is a sacrifice or offering, the second a drinking rite, and the third a 'gathering,' more often used in civic than religious contexts.

The final ritual analysed here is a *Dísting* working. It was mentioned earlier that the Norse Pagan cosmos is filled with minor and mysterious divine beings. Many of these are female: these include the *fylgjur*, guardian spirits; the *hamingja*, also guardian spirits; the *valkyries*, warrior-maidens who take the slain from the battlefield to Odin in Valhalla; and the *dísir*, 'ladies,' who sometimes include major goddesses as well as minor female divine beings (Turville-Petre, 1975[1964]). Freyja is known as the 'Lady of the Vanir,' the *Vanadís*. *Dísting* is usually celebrated in late February. But the most frequently employed working at this time of year is the *Váli Blót*, a rite celebrating Odin's revenge for the death of his son Balder. To assuage Frigg's grief Odin had a son, Váli, with the giantess Rind. Váli kills Höðr in revenge, restoring cosmic balance. The goddess playing a major role in the *Váli Blót* is Freyja, who blesses Váli after his ordeal, and the meaning of her role here is esoteric rather than plainly apparent:

> we also have an indication about the feminine side of the Northern Mysteries—Freyja, like Odhinn, is pierced by the spear and undergoes a close encounter with death, the result of this encounter is rebirth into a state of magical abundance. Structurally this is the same initiatory process that Odhinn undergoes. Here we encounter an aspect of the feminine mysteries—Freyja's magical power is, in part, the result of an initiatory encounter with death. It is in this respect that the feminine aspects of the mysteries go beyond *seidh* magic and into the field of initiatory experiences and transformation (Ragnar, n.d.).

This ritual working indicates the importance of the feminine divine even in those activities that are seemingly entirely masculine; revenge and killing. The goddess in contemporary Heathenry has cosmic, social, and magical powers which profoundly affect the gods and the masculine sphere of activity.[2]

The Academic Study of Religion and the Goddess

Linda Jencson has drawn attention to the fact that at the very beginning of the revival of witchcraft, with the researches of Charles Godfrey Leland, there was an existing confusion between the roles of participant and scholar. Leland frequently referred to his own magical abilities, and in order to get informants to reveal their secrets to him, he traded "something highly valued by his informants—magical data, incantations and amulets. Thus Leland himself served as a medium for the spread and growth of the very phenomena he was studying…" (Jencson, 1989: 3). This is of great interest for two reasons. When the academic study of religion began in the first half of the nineteenth century Hindu and Buddhist texts were translated into modern European languages and the ideas they contained were enthusiastically take up by scholars. But there was, at that stage, no understanding that exposure to religious texts might act as a spur for conversion. It was assumed that their interest was purely academic. The founding of the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875 by Madame Helena Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott was a watershed in that it marked the recognition that Western people may decide to turn away from the Judeo-Christian tradition and convert to an alien religion (Sharpe, 1986: 256). Within Witchcraft and other esoteric pursuits, the rate of participant-observers among scholars of religion has tended to be high. Gerald Gardner does not qualify as a scholar by rigorous modern standards, yet he was an enthusiastic folklorist and student of the occult sciences. Jencson's interesting article accords Gardner some credit for this. She eventually reveals her own cards; a professional anthropologist, she is also a Wiccan practitioner

[2] My thanks are due to Ragnar, Sigilind and Egill of Hearth Al-Þyðja of the Assembly of the Elder Troth (AET), Sydney, Australia for making their *Dísting Information Package* available to me.

and sees no conflict between these roles, but rather a mutual cross-fertilisation (Jencson, 1989: 4).

It is obviously no accident that feminist theology is done by women, that Goddess worshippers are generally female, and that Wicca is a majority female religious movement. Considering the profound emphasis on women's bodies in both the Goddess movement and Wicca, it is fascinating to note that the higher degree of religiosity which is observed among women in traditional, patriarchal religions such as Christianity has been linked in academic research to "the vulnerability of the physical body" and women's "greater contact with birth and death" (Walter and Davie, 1998: 640). Consequently, the fact that many of these women, like Linda Jencson, have become active participants in the academic fields which investigate their religious practices and spiritual interests is unsurprising. Christian males made a substantial contribution to the formative stages of the academic study of religion; more than a century later Christian females did the same for feminist theology and the nascent Goddess movement (Morgan, 1999: 47–50). It is important to recognize that there is only a small step to be taken from participant-observation in the academic sense to activism. This is demonstrated within the broad Goddess movement, Wicca and the Pagan revival generally by the number of prominent figures who have done doctorates and achieved other scholarly credentials. Within Heathenry Stephen Flowers (Edred Thorsson) and Stephan Grundy (Kveldulfr Gundarsson) have doctorates; and Vivianne Crowley, Ronald Hutton, Graham Harvey and Jo Pearson, among others, have achieved similar distinction in the broader Pagan community.

Therefore, Pagans can and do mount sophisticated defences of their beliefs and practices when sceptics assert that the invention of myths, rituals and traditions is an inauthentic spiritual strategy, or that Paganism is to be rejected because of its perceived condemnation of modernity and progress. The issue of the invention of tradition is particularly interesting; this essay has not explored the issue of whether Goddess worship, Wicca and Paganism, and feminist theology are modern, late modern or postmodern projects, and whether these classifications would assist in 'placing' these phenomena more accurately (Raphael, 1996: 199–213). What is important is to realise that contemporary religious phenomena are increasingly subjective and personal, interiorised and emotional, and that the former structures of institutional hierarchy, doctrinal pronouncement and ritual conformity have become irrelevant

for Christianity as well as for new religious movements (Lyon, 2002 [2000]: *passim*). Its now recognized that all religions were once new; small, marginalized and believed to promote implausible doctrines and encourage anti-social behaviour. Pagans are in general pragmatic: they adhere to their myths because they work. Erik Davis has drawn attention to the literary quality of many Pagan foundation myths:

> my favourite Pagan origin story is not Gardner's New Forest initiation but the birth of the Church of All Worlds at Westminster College, Missouri in 1962. Undergrad Lance Christian and Tim Zell were obsessed with Ayn Rand and Maslow's self-actualizing philosophy. Then they read Robert Heinlein's *A Stranger in a Strange Land*, which described the communal non-monogamist Church of All Worlds founded by the Martian exile Valentine Michael Smith. Grokking their deepest desires in the SF text, the two students and some female friends performed Smith's sacred water-sharing ritual, hopped in the sack and founded a church. Later Zell renamed himself Otter, penned a prescient form of the Gaia hypothesis, and started using the word 'Pagan' to describe CAW's increasingly earthy and eclectic religion. As Zell recently put it, 'we're a sequel to a myth that hasn't even happened yet' (Davis, 1993).

This originary myth, which is at first glance quite different from the Golden Age of prehistoric matriarch and worship of the Great Goddess myth, nevertheless has certain key similarities that must be noted. The founding thinkers of Pagan movements are often great readers and, discern truths in texts which are not only not scripture, but are often self-confessed fictions or speculations. Yet, Pagans recognizes the truth in the myth. This is not a new technique: interpreters of myth in the past frequently resorted to allegory and other figurative reading. What is new is the insistence that any narrative can become a myth, and that myths must have personal, social and psychological significance for the lives of modern individuals (Csapo, 2005: 283–301). In the highly interiorised world of new religious movements that is a given; the Pagan attitude to self-appointed myth oscillates between the assertion that it is not myth but true (because it expresses certain core truths for the adherent) to a cheeky admission that it is not true but still entirely authentic (because it expresses certain core truths for the adherent). This attitude tends to diminish the value of the related criticism, that Paganism is a retrograde movement, rejecting the positive contributions of modernity and clinging to an idealised view of the past (Possamai, 2005: 99–111). The Goddess movement locates the Golden Age in the distant past; Wiccans, spiritual feminists and Pagans generally hearken to

communities in the less distant past for inspiration and models for living. But the community that participates enthusiastically in the revived worship of the Goddess/goddesses tends to be middle-class, well-educated and technologically aware. There is no evidence that the worship of the Goddess will take humanity back to a pre-technological universe. Rather, the worship of the Goddess, whether as sole deity, as part of a duotheism in Wicca, or a part of a vibrant polytheism featuring many gods and goddesses, seems to point toward the future, rather than the past, of religion in the West and perhaps the world.

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WITCHES' INITIATION—A FEMINIST CULTURAL THERAPEUTIC?*

Jone Salomonsen

In a recent essay feminist theologian Catherine Keller argues that deconstructions of foundational thinking and the critique of prevalent notions of Nature as changeless and heterosexist is not enough for eco-feminist politics to evolve and make a difference. Democratic politics needs a ground that is elemental and universally real, yet not perceived as unshakable foundation, thus suggesting earth itself and its planetary context as this ground. According to Keller, theology, feminism and democratic politics need to recognize "that vastly nonverbal matrix of creaturely existence in which we live move and have our texts".[1] She also honours the Catholic theologian Rosemary R. Ruether, for being one of the first to have named this immense project "conversion of thought to the earth", and thanks her for having constructed an elemental symbolism for a new Divine Matrix as ground: the elemental partnership of Gaia and God.

This is a nice gesture towards Ruether, although it also contributes to silence the large debt of eco-feminist politics to religious feminists of a Pagan, not only a Christian bent. For example, since her first publication in 1979, the Jewish-feminist, political activist and witch Starhawk has argued that feminist ecological politics needs a new macro-ecumenical ground, a new measure. In 1990 she suggested a rewriting of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" into a "Universal Declaration of the Four Sacred Things", including earth, air, fire and water. According to Starhawk, these four elements are already valued as sacred by most traditions in the world and as that which nothing can live without. In fact, they are nature named as ground, an inter-elemental ground that sustains all life-forms blindly. To recognise and

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* Parts of this chapter have been derived from Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism. Ritual, Gender and Divinity among the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (Chapter 8), 2002, Routledge, London.

[1] Catherine Keller, "Talking Dirty: Ground is not Foundation", *Ecospirit*, 2007: 67

protect them as a universal human and non-human right is therefore a prerequisite for love, spirit and relationship even to be possible.[2]

However, Starhawk is not only concerned with measuring the real for eco-feminist politics or with symbolizing the elementarity and practicality of the Earth and her fifth, the Atmosphere, as Goddess and God. She asks: how can new symbols ground anything if they are not embodied in people through new practices that may conjure and incarnate new forms of identity and sociability? How may a new Divine Matrix define new contexts for human becoming and permit the becoming of freeborn human subjectivities if not through ritualizing?

Although the new Pagans have contributed to a new recognition of the four elements they never invented them. The elements are part of a pre-literate, pre-historic Western cultural memory and have become foundational to contemporary Pagan thinking during the last four decennials. This cultural memory, including the image of Goddess as an imaginary ritual broomstick, enables practitioners to experience and reflect upon the elements and the spirit that "go between" as ground, as Divine Matrix. In Starhawk's own community, Reclaiming, it is common to open a ritual with this saying: "Holy Mother, in whom we move, live and have our being. From you all things proceed, and unto you all things return. Bless this circle."[3] Then the four elements, the four sacred things, may be invoked and breathed into the collective body.

This elementary circle is the performative frame for Reclaiming's ritualizing, in which and with which they try to evolve a new sociability sensitive to relations, practicing with body movements, sound and touch, what it means to be dust and spirit between starry heaven and dirty earth. In fact, the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco is known for trying to build a new sociability, a new community, which is not the same as building a new society. Society is built on legal, political and economic institutions that are dependent on a certain legitimate consensus. Sociability, however, is profoundly performative. Our sociability and entanglement with people and the world happen daily through various forms of ritualizing of which the feast may be said to be superior.

As pointed out by the Danish anthropologist and ritual studies scholar Inger Sjørslev, there can be continuity in society and at the same time

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[2] Starhawk, Reclaiming Newsletter 38, 1990.

[3] Salomonsen 2002: 195. My study is based on data from the 1990'ies. (contemporary Reclaiming practices are becoming more diversified and more stratified)

discontinuity in sociability, as is the case when people experience social and psychic isolation, lack of meaning in terms of life goals, confusion of norms and values, alienating health problems and lack of self-determination and power.[4] An example of a strong society and a restrained, undynamic sociability was the former Soviet Union. Likewise, there can be a strong, dynamic sense of sociability and a highly performative culture, including one with a large complex of religious rituals, and at the same time a weak or destabilized society, as often occurs among poor people, for example in South African townships. Society and sociability are, of course, not independent of each other. But the distinction is crucial to understand the importance of Reclaiming's mission and of the importance of ritual and ritual change for the construction of new forms of sociability and ultimately, for the building of new grounded visions for society.

In this article I shall describe a particular ritual in Reclaiming, namely the infamous rite of Initiation, and discuss how this rite essentially is perceived as "sacred work" to help remould the isolated "I" into a new becoming. The ritual process attempts at destabilizing the Western theory of subjectivity as alienation and never-successful re-connection. As such, it rehearses a performative structure of sociability that intrinsically is non-sacrificial, thus welcoming the perception of the smallest feast possible as the conscious meeting and greeting between two.

Initiation as a New Feminist Cultural Therapeutic

"Initiation" is a concept that most people tend to associate with the puberty rites and secret societies of tribal cultures, or, in the western world, with the occult brotherhoods, such as the Freemasons or the Rosicrucians. Rites of initiation and other forms of selective membership are for sure not associated with the egalitarian visions of feminism—and for many good reasons. In this article, however, I will discuss how a feminist version of contemporary, neopagan Witchcraft can add to the gendered field of religion and the environment as well as to feminist ritualizing in general precisely by reworking the concept and practice of initiation. The version to be considered was established in San Francisco in 1979 by Starhawk and her friends, and was soon

[4] Inger Sjørslev (ed.), *Scener for samvær*, Århus 2007.

to become known as the "Reclaiming" Witchcraft tradition. The word "reclaiming" refers to these women's (and men's) feelings of claiming back forgotten, forbidden or repressed knowledge from "undercover" religious traditions of the west: Goddess worship and ecstatic ritual.

Yet, neopagan Witchcraft or Wicca is not a feminist invention. This rapidly growing new religious movement[5] was crafted in post-war Britain in the 1940s and 50s and, at the time, motivated by a desire to return to spiritual and aesthetic practices that could conjure up the "good old days" of humankind.[6] This nostalgic return was amply nourished by romantic notions of the feminine divine and of the nobility, sensuality and wisdom of ancient paganism, as well as by the occult philosophy and ritual magic of the European brotherhoods. As is the case in all occult traditions, the quest for knowledge and wisdom was made synonymous with extensive ritualization and, ultimately, with participation in secret, stratified initiations. When this spirituality finally was introduced to the public in 1954, the father of modern Witchcraft, Gerald Gardner, offered the adept three degrees of initiation. After having obtained the third one, the quester was ordained a *High* priestess or *High* priest of the Witches' Craft and entitled to start a new Witches' coven. A Witches' coven is an autonomous religious assembly, ideally consisting of twelve or thirteen members under the leadership of a high priestess and her consort, the high priest. All serious seekers of Witchcraft may obtain a first degree initiation and become a priestess or priest. Therefore, neopagan Witchcraft pride itself for having abolished the schism between priesthood and lay people: all participants are considered clergy with different skills and duties.

Although Gardner & friends claimed direct historical lineage to a presumably peaceful and pre-Christian "Old Religion" and presented Witchcraft as an esoteric, initiatory religion with a magical system kindred to the Mysteries of Eleusis and Isis, it is obvious that neopagan Witchcraft is a contemporary construction, inspired—amongst others—by the rise of comparative religion and cultural anthropology in the 19th century. Extensive reading and misreading of scholars

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[5] According to sociologist Helen A. Berger there were at the time of my studies probably as many as 200,000 neopagans and Witches in the US. See *A Community of Witches. Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 9. Starhawk's major publications and the success of the Reclaiming community have contributed significantly to this flourishing.

[6] See Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon. A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 360.

belonging to the "myth and ritual" school, in particular Robertson Smith and Frazer, gave ideas to the outline of Witches' rituals in general and to the initiation rituals in particular. The famous notion that a universal "dying and rising god" theme was underlying all rituals worldwide was for example taken to heart and made manifest in the ritual system of Witchcraft.

In the early 1960s, Gardnerian Witchcraft immigrated to the US and was soon to take a radical new turn: It was adopted by feminist women who were seeking a womanly expression of spirituality. Although occult and conservative, the Gardnerian Witches seemed to represent religious ideas befitting a new age: They worshipped a goddess as well as a god, ritualized on nights when the moon was full in small, autonomous and perfectly gender-balanced covens, and stripped off their clothes to dance in natural nakedness and ecstasy around the elements of nature: fire and earth. And even more peculiar, when compared to the hegemonic position of the male priesthood in western congregations at the time: Witches were not only ministered to by a priest, but also by a priestess. In fact, she was considered superior to him, as the "Great Goddess" was said to be to the "God", alternately her consort and son.

To religious women, who had responded enthusiastically to the second wave of feminism Witchcraft offered itself as an exciting alternative to church and synagogue. Although neopagan Witchcraft also needed reform to fit with radical feminist perspectives, invented as it was in the androcentric lineage of European secret societies, it obviously promised empowerment and fulfillment of a kind that was felt to be very different from their previous experiences with Christianity and Judaism. This process of transformation and reinterpretation started with Z. Budapest and Dianic Witchcraft in Los Angeles in the early 1970s and accelerated with the birth of the Reclaiming Witchcraft Tradition in San Francisco in 1979.[7]

Many Reclaiming people will say they are Witches in order to counterbalance what they see as a deep denial of the immanentist nature of *Reality* in western culture, that is, that the universe is alive and interconnected at all levels; that the elemental power giving birth and life is female and sacred; that humans are a mode of the divine and that

[7] While Dianic Witchcraft is a purely women's religion and appeal mostly to lesbians, the Reclaiming Witchcraft Tradition is gender inclusive. Although a majority are women, the community include feminists of all genders and of all sexual preferences.

infants are "twice born"—of divinity first, of humanity second. Physical birth is not the point of no return in which divinity/goddess is revealed to be either present or absent in regard to human nature. Neither are initiations or baptism seen as authoritative, mediating acts in which "the missing part" is finally invoked into place. They merely enlarge, sanctify and rechannel what already is. Yet the initiation ritual is an option for spiritual rebirth and becoming once again, but also for finally becoming an adult, that is, responsible and at home in the universe.

In Reclaiming's reinterpretation of Gardnerian Witchcraft we may see two parallel moves: one towards politicizing ritual action and a joint, spiritual horizon; another towards a quest for empowerment of unique subjects. On one hand, feminist and anarchist politics are incorporated into the social visions and magical practices of Witchcraft. They offer classes and public rituals to large audiences, and a stated goal when ritualizing is to empower and sanctify people and revitalize their engagement in and for the world. On the other hand, the priestesshood of Reclaiming is continuously reworking notions of personal and spiritual growth. And, in regard to ritually healing and revitalizing the subject, the initiation-to-Witch ritual has been attributed with the greatest of options.

In accordance with their magical heritage lines, a substantial piece of Reclaiming's initiation rite is obviously inherited from secretive and ceremonial Witchcraft traditions. These traditions have all made the "dying-and-rising-god" theme central to the rite and ordained ritual passages through which an apprentice shall move—passages that are believed to be similar to those of the imagined god: First, the apprentice dies a symbolic death. Then she enters the kingdom of death or, better, a magical circle where the ordinary notions of day and night, life and death no longer pertains. Upon entrance to this extraordinary place, she is bounded and blindfolded like an unborn fetus, and escorted by her chosen sponsors. When finally accepted into the circle of the Wise Ones, she also enters a new kinship structure. It is not based on biological bloodlines, but on spiritual affinity. It extends beyond life and death, including the elemental forces, the apprentice herself, her initiators and the Mighty Dead within the same family group. Inside the magical circle and beyond the boundaries of ordinary time and space, the apprentice not only gains immortality. She is also taught the greatest of mysteries, formulated thus in the "Charge of the Goddess":

> And you who seek to know me, know that your seeking and yearning will avail you not unless you know the mystery: for it that which you seek you find not within yourself, you will never find it without. For behold, I have been with you from the beginning of time, and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.[8]

This ritualized scenario, which not only resembles themes taken from the Greek mysteries but also those of the baptismal rites of the first and second century Christians, has to a certain extent been reformed by Reclaiming women. The inner secret part of the ritual, in which the apprentice is taken to the thresholds and offered rebirth, is pretty much the same in all Craft traditions. But, in accordance with van Gennep's and Turner's stress on the liminal phase in initiation rites worldwide, the Reclaiming Witches have invented an extensive separation rite. It comprises time-consuming personal challenges, a meeting with the four elements and a symbolic burial ceremony—all intended to accelerate a psychological process taken to be intrinsic to the initiation rite as such and which, to a certain extent, may be described by two key psychoanalytic notions: "displacement" and "transference".

So, whereas a more traditional Gardnerian initiation rite probably will last for three or four hours and begin with meditation and a ritual bath just before entering the magical, secret circle, the initiation ritual in Reclaiming is more likely to last for 12–15 hours and will begin, not with meditation, but with a year-long process in which therapeutic challenges are expected to be met. Furthermore, a person initiated to traditional Gardnerian Witchcraft is bestowed with certain social and ritual privileges, such as being ordained a priestess or a priest and thus entitled to start a new coven. In Reclaiming, however, initiation does not lead to any sort of entitlement or new formal positions. For any Reclaiming Witch can start a new coven whenever she wants to, and anybody can call herself a priestess and Witch—initiated or not. Therefore, while Gardnerian initiation seems to conform more with a sociological approach, emphasizing the passage from one social group to another, the Reclaiming rite is more focused on the person undergoing ritual initiation, that she may actually experience a real transformation through the process. Consequently, their initiation rites are accommodated to the individual seekers. They are also more

[8] Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance. The Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 159.

akin to psychotherapy and the yearning for personal growth through bonding, transference and displacement than to the building of social circles within circles and the maintenance of power and knowledge by a chosen few.[9]

These changes and additions, which until now have been exclusive to the Reclaiming traditions, have resulted in a different focus and, therefore, also in a somewhat different meaning to the entire initiation process. The values of secrecy, esoteric knowledge and exclusive membership, often associated with men's secret societies, are moderated, whereas initiation as a path to personal growth is emphasized. A stated goal is to develop power-from-within and to become more connected and more competent, both as a priestess and as a person coping with everyday life, taking responsibility to become an agent for social and ecological justice in the world. In this process, both men and women emphasize the kind of knowledge educed from ecstatic merger, be it with nature, a higher power or other human fellows. In fact, the essence of initiation is in all Craft traditions explained as "an intentional act to give up one's will in order to surrender to Goddess and experience perfect love and perfect trust".

As may be assumed, such statements are—at first glance—annoying to feminist women. For how may submissive acts, such as giving up one's will, create prefect love and spiritual growth instead of a hierarchical set-up between adepts and initiators? By having to ask for initiation and for personal challenges, an adept obviously puts somebody in the temporary position of authority, of Mother and Father. As a result she may regress back to childish behavior. To invite challenges is to invite an other to see and name her "shadow" sides. From this "seeing" the initiator shall extract a challenge which, on one side, shall promote self-illumination by stating something essential about the apprentice today and, on the other hand, give her a direction for change. To refuse the challenge is to pretend that she did not ask for it of her own free will in the first place, although this pretension is most likely to manifest. If so, the ritual proceedings will be significantly prolonged.

Also, systematic efforts to craft the interior person by psycho-spiritual tools may easily resemble religious conversion associated with sect membership: It reenacts an idealized imitation of the parent-child relation,

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[9] Catherine Bell, *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 56ff, who here cites anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano.

a relation in which the apprentice ultimately seeks to merge with the perfect love object, the goddess, *or* her representatives.

But initiation is also radically different from conversion to a sect, first of all in terms of pedagogic. In initiations, the authority structure is a conscious and time-limited one, set up for the purpose of personal refinement to help the individual develop inner authority, love and trust. In sectarian conversion this may or may not be the case, but an often-heard version is that the convert is set in a continuous relationship with an omnipotent, male authority figure.[10] The goal of Witches' initiation is not to stay within a human parent-child relation, but exactly the opposite: to grow out of it forever by being "reborn" as a new and wiser being, as a child of the Goddess.

Reclaiming Witches are also careful not to push anybody into the process of initiation too early. A main theological platform seem to be that people need acceptance, affirmation and sanctification of "what is" before they dare encounter their own shadows, not least to open up for the crafting work of the spirit and change unto "what is not yet". This thesis structures the whole entering process into feminist Witchcraft, including the outline and progress of ritualization. When a person approaches the Craft for the first time, she is invited to affirm and celebrate a strong sense of self. In particular women are mirrored over and over again in all the powerful traits projected onto the goddess. Not until strong enough in their "ego" sense of self are they considered ready to submit to the path of initiation.

If we bracket the growth process instigated in an initiation process, Witches seem to have untwisted the burdensome Protestant succession of "justification" and "sanctification" in their own ritual cycles: the self undone by justification is not thereafter remade and sanctified according to the law of love, but the other way around. What is at stake in Witches' ritual system can thus be compared to Serene Jones' recent observations regarding the typical Protestant conversion narrative: Jones argues that if people, who have experienced nothing but fragmentation and disintegration—which is often women's felt situation—are met with a request for repentance and a call to change, their undone self will just continue to fall apart. Instead of recapitulating the abuses and losses of lived life, the narrative should be turned around: first a centering of

[10] See Chana Ullman, *The Transformed Self. The Psychology of Religious Conversion* (New York: Plenum Press).

the subject, then a call to grow and change; for only in sanctification, not in justification, is agency implied: growth, regeneration, change and new becoming.[11]

Ritualizing is Witches' primary social strategy for this centering and new becoming, and thus considered main avenues to new insight and renewed agency. This is also the reason why the rite of initiation is believed to denote more than a formal passage from one social group to another. It is seen as instrumental in itself, in a magical sense, for the development of inner authority and integrity, primarily through its capacity to process the realities of human separation, isolation and hurt, and transforming emotional separation into temporary unity. Growth is believed to take place exactly within these sublimating, dialectical movements.

In order to be initiated, the person must herself take an active step and ask for it. One is typically not offered initiation or given the suggestion by anybody that she is worthy of it. The wish to be initiated may be put forth to people already initiated after the apprentice has completed three basic introductory classes (which equals one week at Witchcamp, a summer-intensive program in Reclaiming), and after having been in the Craft for "one year and a day." Since the whole concept of initiation is alien to most modern, western people, they usually need a lot more time just to become adjusted to the idea. Having asked, she might get a yes; she might get a no. The uncertainty of the answer is explained with reference to karma. For to be an initiator is to build a "karmic bond" with the one being initiated; that is a bond of mutual influence and destiny in this life and in the lives to come.

The challenges given are mostly aimed at people's addictions. A man who was drinking beer daily, but not considered an alcoholic, was challenged to quit drinking completely for a year and a day. An overweight woman was challenged to exercise three times a week for an hour. A woman with little knowledge of, and strong prejudice against, non-pagan religions was challenged to study another religious tradition seriously. A challenge shall not be moralistic but is meant to come from the goddess via the initiator. If the initiator does not receive a challenge to pass on, she can tell the apprentice that the goddess will challenge her directly,

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[11] Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 59–68.

and that she will know when it happens. A challenge is meant to be met; "trying my best" is not sufficient. The beer-drinking man did not accept his challenge but was angry and wanted to negotiate it. This is rarely possible, and he was not initiated. Usually it takes a year before the initiators agree that the challenges are completed. Only then can the initiation process be set with the esoteric initiation ritual.

If the goals of initiation are so idealistic, why is the phenomenon such a delicate theme in Reclaiming? Because dedication, obedience and the supposed swearing of oaths are regarded as attitudes in conflict with anarchist politics. Feminism and anarchism are modernist ideologies, basically rejecting any kind of hierarchical truth holding and the making of esoteric, secret knowledge. Modernist arguments against initiation holds that all knowledge is exoteric and that everybody already has access to power, to a power-from-within. Furthermore, all available knowledge is potentially inside every person, and an exterior human teacher is really not necessary for an apprentice to learn. All women are already priestesses and initiates to the goddess by virtue of being women.

Arguments explicitly favoring initiation state that there is hidden wisdom in what is old, in what people have done before, and maintain the value of esoteric knowledge, which is only accessible to initiates. This kind of knowledge is, by the non-initiates, often believed to be instrumental (like mathematical formulas), for example, knowledge about advanced forms of magic to attain power, knowledge about the mystical invocations to call spiritual beings, and knowledge about the true naming of deities. Whatever this knowledge in fact might turn out to be, it is believed to be handed down secretly from "the ancients" through the esoteric traditions.

Yet, most Witches will soon find that initiation really is the next "class" they need to take. They will also be confirmed in this viewpoint by those who have already been initiated and told that if they really want to develop spiritually and personally, they should ask for initiation. None of the initiated Witches I interviewed during my study had ever regretted their choice; nor were they disappointed with the long initiation process or the final ritual. On the contrary, they emphasized that initiation was the most powerful, special event in their life.

But what exactly do initiation offer? Do people perform an act of piety, dedicating themselves to "the Goddess" (similar to "the God", who had to embrace her, in order to become reborn), or do they enter

a sister-brotherhood of magicians, obtaining secret, but instrumental, magical formulas?

Since initiation is steeped in secrecy, people do not know exactly what they apply to join. This situation creates a phantasmatic object "it" which is expected to mysteriously bring forth spiritual and personal fulfillment. In order to gain "it" the apprentice may be said to desire a helper who holds the authority to incorporate her into an estimated space or continuum, which in itself is believed to hold truth, power and love. The initiation ritual may thus be said to process a basic human existential, structured as an emotional and psychological triad:

The triad can be read: the person X desires the precious object (a), but believes that the person Y somehow holds the key to it. X therefore desires Y to get (a). However, in order to connect with (a), X creates a displacement in which Y becomes the object of desire instead, so that Y becomes (a) for X. Thus, Y changes position from a person holding the key to a desired object to becoming a final desirable object herself. For example, an apprentice (X) may desire a helper (Y) to be incorporated into an estimated space (a), which of itself is believed to hold truth, power or love (a). In the context of initiation, the objects of desire (a) can be plural, but still interrelated in terms of their spatiality. Thus, the primary desire is to be part of an unknown circle, a spatial continuum attributed with high expectations regarding its content, which eventually will be disclosed.

In this context initiation is to enter a "room" that cannot be known otherwise. This implies that the room is of such a character, or is made into such a character, that it is not intelligible in language alone. The quester must embody it and be embodied by it. Until then, it will continue to represent the unknown but highly desirable "it." Furthermore, the door to this room can only be opened by someone (Y) who has already "been" there, who is believed to already have "it" (a). If these observations about displacement and transference are valid to all human object desire[12] and thus also for what may be called "initiatory desire",

[12] Cf. Jacques Lacan, "God and Jouissance", in J. Mitchell and J. Rose (eds), *Feminine Sexuality. Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

we may expect the helper (Y) to slowly be projected as identical with the desirable object (a), believed to embody the expectations of the unknown circle in her persona, so that Y becomes (a) for X.

Yet, in initiation rites, transference is temporary: when the ritual is completed, the candidate is expected to have learned that Y has nothing that she didn't already have herself: Y is not (a); goddess is. And goddess is already inside X, as well as in Y. The ritual verifies for X that (a) is in fact desirable, but not as a property of Y, and with a different content than expected. Thus, the initiation process resembles a setting for personal growth in which the basic human object desire is challenged to evolve and be transformed unto a more mature level. A mature X can let go of objectifications and instead relate to Y as equal subject, a unique creation/manifestation of goddess, and nothing else. Thus, the initiation process really brings to light that the emotional structure X-Y-(a) is in fact immature; it belongs to and describes the eternal child, the non-initiated.[13]

Case: Catherine's Quest for Initiation

We shall now examine the beginning ritual quest of a typical first-degree initiation ritual in Reclaiming through an initiation story generously given to me by a woman named Catherine. To get "it," Catherine had come to Reclaiming in 1983. When she joined Reclaiming, Catherine was thirty-six years old mother, just entering a career path as an Assistant Professor in Spanish. She was brought up in a liberal, Protestant home, and in her adult life she had been a political activist and joined the congregations of both Quakers and Unitarians. When she finally left the Christian church it was because she could no longer bear up against its patriarchal language and imagery.

I will present the beginnings of Catherine's initiation process through the stories she gave during three different interviews. The first was recorded in June 1985. The second interview was conducted ten days before her initiation in the early spring of 1989, and the third we did five days after this event. Together they portray how Catherine changed her mind, from being against initiation in 1985 to favor it in 1989, as

[13] For a fuller description and analysis see Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism. Ritual, Gender and Divinity among the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 248–281.

well as her growing insight into what it means to become initiated.

My concerns are twofold. First, I want to document how the actual preparation for initiation have the power to transform—being a performative and emotional act of commitment and devotion, rather than being a question of dogmatically joining prearranged belief systems. Second, I want to demonstrate how Catherine's attitude toward the act of initiation is changed from modernist to traditional—and back again—as she gets more involved with Witchcraft and the Reclaiming community.

Catherine asked for initiation into the Reclaiming tradition in January 1987. She asked because she wanted to become a healer. At the time she had been part of the community for three years. She decided to ask for initiation because she felt that she somehow needed the particular healing techniques and esoteric knowledge of the Craft to become a *real* healer. At that point she had also started to coteach a class in Reclaiming called "Magical Healing Arts." She found that, besides being a successful scholar, she was able to learn to help people heal. The actual incident that made her consider initiation happened at Witchcamp in the summer of 1986, when she helped a teenage girl, Miel, who had great bodily pains, laying on the floor in a laundrymat.

> I instinctively used healing techniques. I held her like a midwife; I helped her to breathe. And then I called in the elements from the ocean. I was speaking to her. I ribbed a window in her third eye, and then I brought in the water from the ocean. In the meantime someone had called the fire rescue people, and all these guys came to give her oxygen. But by the time they came I already had her breathing. When they left the chiropractor turned around and looked at me and said: "She was lucky you were here. . . . Are you some kind of a social worker or something?" [laughter] And I said: "No, actually I am a Witch. It was Witchcraft." He acted very calm, and later in the conversation he said: "By the way, that Witchcraft, that is a pretty strong word." And I said: "Yes I know, and I do not usually use it with people I don't know." And then I looked him straight into the eyes and said: "But you saw it in action [laughter]."

Catherine told me this story three times in the same interview, revealing new details every time. The way she helped the girl was to sit down on the floor with the girl's head in her own lap, asking permission to help her, telling her that she would help her to breathe, and then breathing with her as a midwife, breathing in, and breathing out, for a long, long time. When the girl finally relaxed and was breathing by herself, Catherine started to work on the pain in her head. She put her into

light trance by saying, "The cement [you lie on] is cold because it is on the damp earth here on the coast by the ocean. And the ground here is very cold because it is next to the ocean, and the water and the breezes bring in the coolness." Then she made circular movements on her forehead to open a "gate" in the third eye for the coolness to enter the girl's head and release her pain. Catherine's healing technique was to activate the vital energies in her own body as well as in Miel's through breathing, "forming" this energy into a mental image of cold water and, then, imagining additional, healing water being poured into Miel's forehead. She worked with all the elements but fire in the trance induction.

Doing this work, Catherine had a basic experience: The way she was able to help the young girl was to connect with her, and not to separate from her:

> My instinct was to connect with her. It is very strange, but I felt that the way to help her was to be connected with her rather than to be separated from her. And that that somehow was a key to healing.

By acting on her instincts she found the power to heal. When she finally left the laundromat with her clean clothes and went back to Witchcamp, Catherine was amazed with herself and what had happened. There she told the story to Starhawk, who said she had done the psychic equivalent of a mother's lifting a truck off a child, something you can't normally do. Starhawk suggested that she go and lie down in the garden and "ground herself." To ground in this context means to give the vital energy that was at work in the healing process back to the earth. It would also help Catherine cleanse herself from the illness of the girl's energy. While lying on the ground, she had another significant experience:

> It is very hard to describe, but in words [this is] the way it would be: I was lying on the ground, under a tree, kind of in an unconscious state of mind. And then I kind of opened my eyes, or else in trance, I saw the trees and the bushes and everything around me bend, leaning in towards me. And the goddess or something, some power said to me: "If you will do this work, if you will do healing work, I will take care of you."

Until then, Catherine was not considered by anyone in the community to be in the possession of healing powers. Her story was, therefore, regarded as amazing by everybody. Because of this, and because it had an element of objectivity to it (it was witnessed by many

people), Catherine was urged to tell her story in front of everybody at Witchcamp. The key message to her fellow campers when telling the story was: "If I can do it, we all have the power to do it."

From this experience, Catherine says she learned that "the skills we are talking about are real. It is not a metaphor; we can heal." And she honors Witchcraft for having provided the tools she used in the healing:

> Much of what I did with this girl has to do with my own life experience and my own wisdom. But the techniques, the ability to draw out from myself what is there, that I learned from the Craft. So, that is why I am interested in the Craft in particular. I mean, it wasn't Buddhism, it wasn't Christianity; it was the knowledge of the elements, the knowledge of the way to work psychically, which is connecting instead of separating.

When back in San Francisco, she started to coteach the healing class. After doing that for a long time, she suddenly realized that, yes, teaching the magic of self-healing *was* the healing work she was supposed to do. When Catherine asked for initiation it was to confirm and respond to her revelations and chosen path and to learn more skills.

The Challenges

Lying in the garden at Witchcamp in the summer of 1986, Catherine had a revelation: She experienced being called directly by the goddess to do her work, namely, to become a healer. In return for surrender she was promised divine caretaking, that is, love and protection. However, in order to *really* become a daughter and a priestess of goddess, Catherine had to find midwives who could ordain her into this new position. Initiation is such an ordination, confirming her call, marking a new identity; and the initiators are the midwives, who for a limited time period take on the deputizing role of goddess. The question of their willingness to bond karmically with the apprentice *forever* is a sign of their extra-ordinary and representative function.

In the early winter of 1987, Catherine asked five women, to initiate her—and at first they all said yes. Later, one of these five women withdrew her commitment, and for a time Catherine felt hurt and abandoned.

In the process of choosing initiators and meeting their challenges, Catherine's emotional framework was dramatically changed from devotional self-obliteration to self-righteous struggle, from obediently accepting the grace of goddess to aggressively pushing her initiators to give her what she was obliged to have. She was taken over by the

structure of the initiatory desire as described earlier, duplicating a parent-child relation as well as displacing the object of desire into human relationships. This change in behavior might seem surprising and risky. What if the initiators had turned their backs on her? But according to Starhawk, the initiation process always "stirs up a lot of shit, both in the one being initiated, and in the initiators." This "stirring up of shit" is welcomed because it is believed to be the first—and often necessary—step in personal growth.

When I asked Catherine why she chose the particular women for her initiation, she gave three different answers during our conversation, but in this order:

> I chose women that I felt would be important for my path in the Craft and for me as a person.
>
> X takes initiation very seriously. She will see that I get the whole experience; she won't cut any corners. I respect her. But I think I mostly chose her out from what I think she can give me, without me knowing what that is.
>
> I understand absolutely that I can initiate myself. . . . and I don't think these four women really know anything that I don't. It is because they are initiated in a particular tradition; it is that knowledge. Because I am wanting the tools and techniques of the particular knowledge of this particular kind of training that it matters to me, and that I do it in that way. I don't know how, but it will turn out that I need it. . . . I just instinctively trust that it will turn out that I need whatever it is that I am gonna learn, you know [laughter]. So, maybe I am wrong.

In this phase Catherine seemed to be confused about what she really wanted and why. In the first answer she admits that she chose the women positively, for who they are qua persons. In her second answer Catherine objectifies and introduces the mysterious "it," saying, "I mostly chose her out from what I think she can give me, without me knowing what that is." But in her third answer Catherine is very clear that the women do not have anything in themselves; neither does initiation provide a mysterious "it." The women are reduced to a necessary link, almost in a technical sense, between herself and the desired tools to become a healer. Catherine's desire to be initiated was, at this stage, not motivated by religious sentiments, but by pragmatism and ambition: She needed initiation to become a healer and to gain the social position of an initiated Witch, exercising the power to say "yes" and "no." Initiation had become instrumental, resembling an entrance ticket to a workshop where tools are crafted, and had, for the moment, lost its initial aspect of devotional act.

Having chosen four initiators, Catherine was supposed to receive four challenges from four surrogate mothers. The first challenge came shortly after she asked for initiation in 1987. The last challenge she did not get until a few weeks before her actual initiation in 1989. This also made her upset. Catherine's first challenge was to participate in six Wicca rituals outside the Reclaiming tradition. The second was to be "sky clad" (nude) whenever possible in ritual and not to wear either contact lenses or a watch for one year and a day. The third was to develop rituals and ritual material for children. And the fourth—which she received just before the initiation—was to do four rituals, one for each element, and in this way explore her shadow. "Exploration" in this context means trance work, the attempt in Witchcraft to connect with Deep Self and attain true knowledge about her deepest motivations and feelings. She was somewhat disappointed with all these challenges and felt they were not challenging enough. In my interview with her ten days before her initiation she told me that, "the challenges have been interesting, but so far nothing more than that. I have lived with my shadow a lot." Catherine felt that the women perhaps, after all, did not know her so well, or maybe did not care enough.

The basic initiatory desire determining this discourse is as follows: Catherine (X) believed that initiated women (Y) had healing powers (a). Catherine, therefore, desired a special relationship with these women in terms of an initiation ritual to get healing powers herself, spelled out as Catherine (X) desired initiation (Y) from initiated women to gain healing tools (a). The positions of "women" and "initiation" are ambiguous; they can both attain the status of (Y) and be objectified for another purpose. But we shall see how Catherine, in order to gain healing powers (a), slowly undertook a time-limited displacement in which the two possible Y's (women and initiation) became the object of desire instead, so that initiated women (Y) became *the* source of healing powers (a) for Catherine (X), just as the initiation ritual (Y) became *the* source of healing powers (a) for Catherine (X).

The Initiation Ritual

Catherine's initiation took place on a Saturday night. She was told to spend the whole day in solemn silence, leave the house at 6:30 p.m., and wear warm, black clothes. She was told to walk to Lincoln Park half a mile from her home, and sit down by the statue of the Thinker

and meditate on "thinking and non-thinking, and the un-thinking of non-thoughts." She did everything as she was told. She left home with nothing but her magical will, her Book of Shadow and small gifts for her initiators in her backpack. She brought no ID card, no watch and no money. From the *Mother Peace* tarot deck she brought the "Charge of the Goddess," and memorized the lyrics on her way to the park. She was silent and dressed as if going to a funeral.

After she sat about two hours alone in the park, meditating and watching the sun set, her initiators came. They were suddenly around her, and before she could see them she was blindfolded. In this act, Catherine crossed over and started "dying." Not a word was said. The women led her to a car. They took her to a place by the ocean and told her that she would be challenged and tested by the elements directly. The process proceeded in complete silence.

Catherine was first taken to the Gates of Earth to pass its test. They removed the blindfold, gave her a tray of many different kinds and colors of beads, a string and a flashlight and said she should make a necklace expressing her relationship to the earth and the material world. When finished, she lubricated it with dirt from the ground, consecrating it to the earth. Later she is supposed to carry the necklace around her neck as a sign of her rebirth.

The blindfold was then put back on and she was taken to the Gates of Air to pass its test. She was given a skull to hold in her hands. She guessed it was a bird's skull. She was then told to make a song for her ancestors. This was a difficult task for Catherine. In the lyrics she called on her ancestors to come and dance in her heart, "*You who danced in the woods and sang with the animals/you who once looked death in the face and smiled without fear*."

As part of the test for fire, the four women lit candles very close around Catherine's body. If she moved she would be burnt. This she knew, so she stood very still. She trusted the women fully. She knew that, ultimately, it was her own distrust and fear of being burned, potentially causing her to move her body, that was being tested here.

After passing the test of earth, air and fire she was taken back into the car and driven to another place by the ocean. All her clothes, except the blindfold, were taken off, and she was sent into the cold waters of the Pacific. Two women went with her. It was freezing cold to the other women, but Catherine enjoyed it a lot and felt warm. She did not want to leave the water, and was finally asked by one of her initiators to let

them know when she had passed the test of water. Catherine describes this experience as "ecstatic," even if she says she can't describe what happened. She maintains that she was in trance during most of the initiation and that it had already started in the Park.

During the initiation, Catherine cried a lot. Her crying in the water she felt to be connected to Yemaya, the Yoruba water goddess whom she met in trance when working on the challenge to explore her shadow. She felt that her whole initiation became water dominated.

> I met her [Yemaya] there as Aphrodite, who rises on the shell and, down from the deep water, can read peoples desires. My whole initiation became water oriented. In the water I felt that I really liked this initiation. It was fun and silly and just beautiful. I completely gave my self over, I gave my will over to these people. If they said stop I stopped, if they said turn left I did. I had given it all to them, I did not decide anything. . . . We held hands [in the water] and I felt a strong tie. I felt the stupidity in going into the water in such cold, dark and rainy weather. It was just like being a child, and playing in the waves with your friend. . . . Under the whole initiation I did not feel left. I had that feeling of being cared for, and in a way all this attention, being bathed in attention from these wonderful women.

Being in the water was the beginning of Catherine's transformative process, which also included a symbolic change from adult to child, although she actually played with the Guardians of the threshold of death. The autonomy and individual freedom associated with the adult is exchanged for the purity and inner freedom of the child. She is, temporarily, removed from defiled adulthood and returned to the liminality of innocent childhood. Catherine used the word "ecstatic" about her experience of "being just like a child," while repeatedly telling me that what happened is almost impossible to talk about: "It is beyond words." Somehow it was about giving herself over to the women and feeling total trust. It was about giving herself over to the elements and being merged with them. It was about dedicating herself to the goddess and feeling the waters of Yemaya flowing down her cheeks as tears. When I asked how all this could happen when they were not even talking together and she was blindfolded most the time, she just stated, "Revelations and understanding would come all the time, thousands every second". When I pointed out that it was interesting that she merged with the elements, that they were not treated as metaphors or symbols but as real, she answered, "Yes, and that is, of course, what the Craft is about."

Having passed the test of all the elements, Catherine was put in the car again and driven to one of the initiators' houses. One room in the house had been made into a temple. They sat her down in a chair in that room and asked her to tell them about her challenges, why she wanted to be initiated and why she picked each of them to initiate her. They also asked for her magical will. Catherine was still blindfolded when giving her account.

Catherine told them that she wanted to be initiated to become a healer and that Witchcraft was the spiritual tradition she wanted to learn from. She felt connected to her ancestors and believed that they danced in the green fields with the animals and knew how not to be afraid of death. She told them that she had meditated on her anger and that she had also been confronted with her anger when doing trance work on her shadow. She had learned from this work that hurt and pain and fear are the underside of anger: "I realized then that what I was afraid of, was that they [the women] did not care about me, that they would forget about me. Ultimately it [anger] is a fear of death, of annihilation."

After this confession to "the Knights of Death" (the four women), marking her symbolic death, Catherine was taken to the bathroom for a ritual purification and rebirthing bath. The room was decorated with flowers and burning candles. Into the bathtub were put all kinds of herbs and flowers, and the room smelled of incense. She was helped into the water and lightly washed. Still blindfolded, she was left alone to search for a new name for herself. This was given to her by several goddesses, among them Yemaya. It is a secret name, connected to the elements of water and earth.

Half an hour later, her sponsor came into the room and asked if she had been given a name and if she was ready to enter the sacred circle. She also let Catherine understand that it was not too late to change her mind. Catherine was told the questions she would be asked when entering the circle and the right answers to them. She was then led by hand by her sponsor to the temple entrance. After being tested of her worthiness to enter the sacred circle of Witches, her blindfold was finally removed. From this point on she was part of a secret ceremony, with permission to see secret things and to hear secret words.

Catherine's initiators have instructed her not to tell anybody what happened in this very circle. She keeps this promise, not least by stating that she hardly remembers anything because of her trance state, although everything that happened was "beautiful and right." She was

asked questions; she made promises, but not to anything that did not feel right. While talking in one of our conversations about her feelings connected to the secret ritual, she suddenly said,

> All the oral things are exactly what you would think. It is all the forms and the substances that we already know. And it is the closest to anything I would call high magic, or ceremonial magic.... It was more solemn, more scripted in a way, more formal, less individual, probably more conforming.... But besides that it felt so intimate, so religious. It feels sacrilegious to talk about it; it feels like a violation of that holy ceremony to even talk about it.

The pledge she had made for herself to be fully her core self during the initiation was not experienced as difficult at all. Nothing happened that did not feel part of her, even though some parts came totally as a surprise:

> I feel I did something in that part of the initiation, I feel as if I dedicated myself to the goddess in a formal way. I didn't know I was going to do that. I did not know that would happen. That's a way in which I feel different. You know, all the women in my coven would say they don't join anything. I have never had that. On the contrary.... for me it is very powerful in saying, of course, I have reservations; everybody always has reservations; of course, nothing is perfect. But there comes a time when you have to do it, I mean you either are or you aren't. I really feel that way about being a Witch. I like to say "Yes, I am a Witch." I am not just studying Witchcraft; not, I am interested in feminist spirituality; not, I am a goddess worshipper; not, I am a pagan. I am a Witch. I understand what that means. It is an act of the Crone.... There is this Christian hymn used in Protestant circles "*Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide, in the fight between good and evil for the good or evil side*".... Just changing the words from "Once" to "Often," that is how I feel about a choice like this.

After completing the secret part of the ritual, Catherine's initiators gave her presents, and she gave them some small gifts as well. Then they revealed for her their secret names and closed the circle by feasting and having a good time. The ritual was done at 3:30 a.m. Sunday. At that time it was nine hours since the initiation ritual had started.

Catherine's Movements from Skepticism to Surrender

I have made a point of Catherine's changing attitudes toward initiation and the essential meaning of becoming an initiate several times. The process of change can be observed from 1983, when she first became

part of the community, to spring 1989, after being initiated. The process took several years, and in that respect she is a typical Reclaiming initiate. But to what extent was she aware of these changes herself? To my understanding, only retrospectively, and only partially. The changes she went through derived from social and ritual processes and were not deliberately chosen by Catherine. And her initial desire, when first asking for initiation, was neither to change nor grow but rather to achieve something instrumental. As we know, she very soon moved from being in need of healing tools to being in need of women. This was a crucial turning point. The beginning of her transformation started when she dared to surrender her will and well-being to the admired women, trusting that her role models did not represent an initiatory tradition alien to her values and integrity. But it was first when Catherine was able to let go completely of her object desire that we may say she was changing. To let go of desire was, for Catherine, identical to letting go of control and being satisfied to meet herself as a child and as a goddess.

When going through Catherine's statements from June 1985, November 1988 and spring 1989, before and after initiation, it is quite visible that she moves from:

1. placing initiation in the realm of group psychology and sociology: initiation as a group-defining act and key to entering the space of shared values. She does acknowledge its positive function but also finds it a little mysterious. This is a typical attitude toward initiation in Reclaiming, not too rejecting, not too affirming. Having a love affair with an initiated woman, who is active both in Reclaiming and in the pagan community, gives Catherine small glimpses into the world of initiates. She has learned to respect it. She holds the analytical view of an outsider, of one who does not yet call herself a Witch (June 1985).
2. to placing initiation in the realm of education and social status. Catherine has now become part of the discourse of initiation; she has stopped observing it from outside. Initiation is not any longer an interesting phenomenon but something she has to take a stand for or against, either in terms of its educational value or in terms of the position it can give her. Her decision to be initiated is motivated by what she needs, almost in a practical sense, to become a healer and develop herself in the Craft, as well as by the fact that initiation is a key to becoming a member of a new, although vaguely perceived, social group (November 1988).

3. to placing initiation totally in the realm of vocation and education, but still in a somewhat technical sense. She does not any longer talk about initiation as a key that will open sociologically defined doors. Catherine is now very close to the actual initiation and has completed all her challenges. At this point she is committed to being initiated because she wants fully to become a Witch. She believes she needs the tools and the knowledge a Craft initiation can give her. Not only does she want to be initiated, she is obliged to because the goddess has called her to do it. She compares her initiation to the discipline of doing art: It is when the aspiring ballet dancer has first undergone the discipline of learning ballet that she is free to make up her own dances. So also with the Witchcraft initiation. Catherine definitely looks upon the act as something that will give her instrumental knowledge in the artform of healing (spring 1989, before initiation).
4. to finally placing initiation in the realm of existential and personal transformation. Going through initiation, Catherine gives birth to a "new baby" whom she dedicates to the goddess. The unknown "it" is finally revealed as "a new Catherine, the true Catherine." She moves on in her educational path by finding her way "back home," to the religion of her ancestors. She learns the path of the "give away," meaning that in order to become a healer and a bender in the world one has to "give oneself" to the goddess. She gains wisdom and learns that the trial of initiation is fundamentally ethical: It is to take a stand "for the good" and accept the full consequence of her experience that everything is interconnected. Healing is based on the principle of interconnection, not on separation. Her dedication, then, is a pledge to manifest goddess in the world through healing work, through connecting and bonding (spring 1989, after initiation).

During these four stages, Catherine moved from a traditional outsider's point of view, in which initiation is interpreted in terms of group psychology and the making of social identity, to an insider's point of view based on a profound existential experience "beyond words." The wheel that turned and turned to bring forth this process was not the reading of books or appropriation of passed-on esoteric knowledge. In Catherine's account, the turning of the wheel was her willingness to bond and merge with the elements and with other people, a willingness to be touched and changed. Through this act Catherine relocated her

spiritual focus from speculations on the social and symbolic *exegetical meaning* of initiation, and its various occult subtexts, to a more existential and *experiential meaning*. This new meaning is not a repetition or internalization of a "correct" or "official" meaning, but the creation of a new, individualized text.

When this is said, it is also true that Catherine, in addition to her core experience of surrender, love and connection, did achieve all the social and elitist qualifications listed under 1, 2 and 3 as well. She did gain higher social prestige; she did attain membership in the group within the group. She was also educated and given new social and symbolic power: social in the sense that from now on she can initiate others, and hers is the power to say "yes" or "no"; symbolic in the sense that she is believed to possess direct access to the power source and that she is able to communicate successfully with the Mighty Dead. In other words, to be initiated is to enter a new kinship structure. It is not based on biological bloodlines, but on spiritual affinity. It extends beyond life and death, including Catherine, her initiators and the Mighty Dead within the same family group—who now can meet across time and space and gather, whenever they need to, inside a magical circle.

In Reclaiming's initiation ritual, religion is reclaimed as meaning *relinking*: making whole what was broken apart, relinking humans with their source of being, with their fellow humans, with the natural elements, with their Deep Self, relinking body and spirit. One intention with this definition is to be able to put psychological therapy back into what is regarded as its original context: magical ritual. From this angle, it is not difficult to see Catherine's initiation process as a long therapeutic drama, in which her whole life was acted out in front of her and through her, over and over again. The ritual did in fact have a strong effect upon her, equipping her with the unexpected tools of wisdom and higher consciousness, tools that presumably will help her to live a deeper and more honest life.

The pedagogic underlying Catherine's initiation process is closely linked to Witches' holy hermeneutics: It presupposes an alienating dichotomy between body and mind that can only be healed by surrender and merger, also found in the classical scheme for bringing up children. This scheme emphasizes the category of experience and takes for granted that sensory experience is primary in the learning process, whereas cognitive knowledge is secondary. Children understand acts before they understand words. They express themselves through body language before they speak. They have a bodily experience of the world

before they learn to name and interpret it. A pedagogical tradition derived from this childrearing philosophy must necessarily assume that the most transformative tool to change a human being is the breaking down of words and external, adult identities until she is like an innocent, trusting, speechless and naked newborn, who thereafter is "forced" to learn a new interpretation of life the way small children do: through bodily experiences, symbolic language, emotional turmoil, mimetic games, intuitive communication and performative arts—rather than through intellectual analysis or appropriation of dogmatic beliefs.

To give priority to embodied, emotional experiences represents a rather old educational tradition regarding human growth. We find it in initiation rituals cross culturally and in the archetypal structure analyzed forth by Victor Turner: separation, liminality, communitas, reintegration. We also find it in the subcultural teachings and ritualized traditions of western esotericism. The modern "talking cure" to heal and make a person grow represents a somewhat different tradition. Psychotherapy is commonly regarded as a derivation and secularization of the Catholic confession, which values intellectual reflection above bodily experience. But the process of transference, turning the therapist into a temporary object of desire, is also crucial in this tradition in order to heal successfully.[14]

However, if the final meaning of the initiation ritual is human growth, and not to hand over instrumental knowledge, why the secrecy? Because it triggers the initiatory desire for the unknown "it." The whole initiation process implies that without experiencing the pain of the never ending desire, *X desires Y to get (a)* and the process of displacement, *Y becomes (a) for X*, within a consciously staged setting, it is difficult to come to terms with this emotional structure and move on. The motivation for Catherine's wish to be initiated is quite representative. She desired

[14] It was Freud who discovered the process of displacement and transference as crucial in psychological healing. It is also important to stress that psychotherapy and psychoanalysis are not the same. Analysis is *not* primarily an intellectual talking cure, reflecting on personal issues, but a technique to remember what is repressed and to become more conscious of unconscious hidden drives and desires. The psychoanalyst works with body memory, silence between words, the unsaid, associations or intuitions connected to particular words, imagery and dreams, but takes no interest in conferring a predefined symbolic meaning upon the patient's memory. His/her main healing tool is transference, that is, gaining so much trust that the patient can project earlier experiences upon him/her and possibly solve them by reliving them consciously and unconsciously (Freud [1917]1980). As we see, there are many similarities between this healing tradition and the process of initiation.

"something" badly, and its names were mutually replaceable: healing tools, initiated women, to be part of a special group, trust, care, love. The initiation process was not set before Catherine's desire was turned on its head and evolved into a new one: not to get but to *give*. By asking for initiation, Catherine initially asked for the object "love, care and acceptance." Instead she learned that she already had love and that her work was to manifest it, give it out. The ritual unveils the desired "it," the holy secret, in declaring that there are no secrets, except the secrecy of *silence*: knowledge from inside, and the secrecy of *growth*: to be willing to suffer to learn. Having undergone the initiation ritual, Catherine could finally end the circle by, ironically, once again being reconciled with the egalitarian slogans in Reclaiming, those stating that "all is inside," that anybody has access to all the powers and all the knowledge within themselves, and that self-initiation is just as legitimate as the initiation she has undergone. But today she knows its truth from an experience of humility and trust, not from ideological postulates. The difference between ideologically and experientially knowing the same is crucial. Ideological knowledge is regarded as superficial, and its truth can be overruled and lost in power-over games in which the individual loses sight of life as interconnected. Experiential knowledge, though, is believed to be of a profound character, hopefully preventing Catherine from ever misusing power-over or putting herself in separation from the web of life.

By reclaiming and reforming a traditional rite of initiation and incorporating it into an otherwise elaborate expression of a newly invented feminist symbolic order, Reclaiming Witches have contributed a new notion of women as initiators and crafters of human growth. Resistance against secretive ritual acts and dislikes of hierarchical structures separating the learned from the ignorant, is, as mentioned above, normally very strong among feminist theologians and religionists. But blind resistance also risks throwing out the gold with the garbage—the gold in this case being a certain form of pedagogic, namely the mystery rite. The mark of a mystery rite is to convey knowledge and insight through bodily thinking, feeling and acting that otherwise cannot be known, and to actively stage a process of psychological displacement and transference in order to induce personal and spiritual growth in the candidate.

This esoteric method has been as controversial in the field of religion as has Freudian analysis been in the field of psychotherapy. However, just as feminists have appropriated psychoanalysis and reformed its theory

and practice to suit their own liberation schedule, time is perhaps ripe for twisting methodological knowledge about the mystery rite from the hands of western esoteric societies and other androcentric brother/sisterhoods, and use it in the service of feminist theological reflection, women's spiritual growth and maturity and deepened experiences of autonomy and interconnection.[15] Reclaiming's merit is to have managed to develop a form to the mystery rite that is both traditional and accommodated to individual needs, and that unanimously has been experienced as deeply meaningful by those who have decided to enter this time-consuming and challenging quest.

[15] Cf. Joann Wolski Conn, "Toward Spiritual Maturity", in Catherine Mowry LaCugna (ed.), *Freeing Theology. The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

VARIETIES OF PAGANISM

ANIMIST PAGANISM

Graham Harvey

Increasing numbers of Pagans are identifying themselves as animists or naming their worldview animism. Some Pagans use the term animism to refer to one strand within their Paganism, while others identify it as the most appropriate label for everything they do. This chapter explores some typical expressions of Pagan animism, and argues that various tensions and trajectories within Paganism are helpfully illuminated by paying attention to the different phenomena that may be identified as animism. For example, clarity about the diverse ways in which Pagan animism resonates with ideas about "nature" may contribute to a better understanding not only of elements of Paganism (in which nature is often said to be central) but also of other contemporary religious, social and environmental movements.

Before introducing and discussing specific details about Pagan animism, it is important to note the fluid, non-systematic nature of Pagan thought and practice. Paganism has never been dogmatic about beliefs, nor have Pagans insisted on one way of being Pagan. Paganism is almost by definition eclectic and pragmatic. When Pagans present their religion to a wider audience, they often draw on the religious (primarily Christian) language of their dominant culture. Similarly, scholarly terms from a wide range of academic disciplines frequently occur in Pagan discourse and practice having been mediated through the eclectic reading habits of Pagan authors. For example, despite the marginality of belief and believing with Paganism, and despite the multiplicity of Pagan theories about the nature of deity, many publications insist that Pagans worship immanent deities, or that they are pantheists, polytheists and animists all at the same time. Like all lived religions, Paganism is messy, and terms that might refer to discrete phenomena in systematic thinking are commonly entangled or braided in reality. Pagans often speak about single deities, especially "the Goddess", in contexts that show them to be polytheists. Their insistence that "the Earth" or "Nature" is somehow divine can sound like pantheism or at least stress an immanentalist ontology until it shades either into a version of transcendentalism or animism. Certainly not all Pagans are systematic

thinkers, or interested in propounding a theological system, some might well be confused about the terms they use. However, Paganism, like all lived religions, has its own styles and flavours that are not well represented in other people's languages. Pagan uses of the term "animism" resonate with two distinct approaches to the term, identified below as "the old animism" and "the new animism", and blend with other theoretical terms to suggest issues of importance to particular Pagan groups and individuals. Perhaps the continuing evolution of Paganism will generate or revive more appropriate terms for specifically Pagan worldviews and practices, until then it will be necessary to carefully attend to the fluid and messy uses of adopted terms.

Old and New Animisms

A brief orientation to the two major uses of "animism" in academic debates will establish the context in which an examination of specific features of animist Pagan discourses and practices will be of more than descriptive value. It will become clear later that this section, which presents material drawn from my larger discussion of animism (Harvey 2006), is not only contextual but anticipates the argument of this chapter about animism within Paganism.

Animism derives from Latin *anima*, usually translated "soul" although this term too bears a wide range of meanings in different cultures and religions. Until recently, animism has been defined as a belief in the existence of a component that distinguishes living beings from inanimate matter. Most academic theorists have postulated metaphysical rather than physical factors, but in 1708 Georg Stahl (a German physician and chemist) proposed that a physical element, *anima*, vitalizes living bodies just as another element, *phlogiston*, enables some materials to burn or rust. His theory was soon rejected, but exemplifies a widespread interest in these issues. In 1871 Edward Tylor (often considered the founder of anthropology) adopted Stahl's term "animism" to label what he saw as the central concerns and character of religion. For Tylor, animism identified a "primitive" but ubiquitous religious mistake, namely "the belief in souls or spirits" (Tylor 1913). He argued that *all* religions express the beliefs that living beings are animated by souls and that non-physical beings, "spirits" of various kinds, can be communicated with. Religious believers theorize the existence of something that enables self-consciousness, survives the experience of death and, therefore,

makes its possessors more than mere matter. Religionists are divided over whether humans alone possess souls or whether other beings also have souls or are spirits. Tylor's "souls and spirits" thus includes an expansive grouping of "entities that are beyond empirical study" (e.g. deities, angels, ancestors, ghosts). Tylor argued that such beliefs are wrong because metaphysical, non-empirical entities and components do not exist. However, he was equally clear that such beliefs are not irrational. Rather, people draw the wrong conclusions from their experiences of dreaming about meeting deceased relatives and from feverish visions of strange beings. According to Tylor, religion would die out as proper scientific knowledge ousted these mistaken beliefs and provided better understandings of the world. According to this first version of animism, the question religious believers ask is "how are living beings different from inanimate matter?".

Since the 1990s scholars (in particular: Bird-David 1993, 1999, 2006; Descola 1992, 1994, 1996; Viveiros de Castro 1992, 1998; Ingold 2000, 2006; Hornborg 2006; Scott 2006) have revisited the concept of animism and offered a different interpretation in which the key question animists ask is "how should we live with other beings?". That is, animists are people who understand the world to be a community of persons, most of whom are other-than-human, but all of whom deserve respect. This "new animism" has been particularly helpful in understanding the worldviews and cultural practices of various indigenous people globally.

Many of those who write about the new animism draw on the works of the early to mid-twentieth century American anthropologist Irving Hallowell (1960, 1992) and what he learnt from the Ojibwa of southern central Canada. In the Ojibwa language a grammatical distinction is made between animate persons and inanimate objects. While this is true too of the English language in which, for example, objects are usually called "it" whereas (human) people are either "he" or "she", the Ojibwa language has a more inclusive animate category. For example, the word for rocks, *asiniig*, carries a plural suffix, *-iig*, that indicates that rocks are animate (Nichols and Nyholm 1995: 238). Hallowell tried to ascertain whether this grammatical distinction made any difference to the way in which Ojibwa people actually treat stones. After all, the French language marks all tables as grammatically female but this does not generate any gendered treatment. Hallowell asked an old man, "are *all* the rocks that we see around us alive?". He notes that after some

reflection the old man answered, "No, but *some* are." Then Hallowell writes about the things he has been told about rocks that explain the answer. Clearly, Hallowell had asked the wrong question. The old man was not interested in a theory about whether rocks might be alive or dead, but in knowing how to relate appropriately with rocks and other beings among whom he lived. Thus, *some* rocks are known to be participants in relationship with some humans. They are perceived to act in ways that show them to be persons. Also, humans sometimes act towards some rocks in ways that demonstrate relationship. Some of these rocks are recognized by the Ojibwa as "grandfathers", respected elders who might aid younger, less experienced or less knowledgeable persons. They are said to willingly join in sacred ceremonies in which prayers are offered for the well-being of others. Rocks are not merely aspects of the technology of sweat lodges, mere matter used for construction purposes, but they offer prayers, give and receive gifts, and share their wisdom with those who have learnt to pay attention. In these and other ways, Ojibwa look for indicators of participative and respectful relationship rather than signs of life, whatever that would involve.

The new animism has been discussed in relation to people from most continents. Although the range of ways in which people claim to find relationality among particular other-than-human beings varies enormously, words for "respect" are common indicators of animism. All persons (human or otherwise) are expected to seek the well-being of those among whom they live. Far from projecting human likeness onto other beings as is sometimes alleged (Guthrie 1993), animists understand that humans are just one kind of person in a wide community dwelling in particular places.

The old and new approaches to animism are about quite different understandings of the world and result in distinct modes of discourse and practice. The phenomena they claim to examine are not what makes them "old" or "new". Rather, one theory precedes the other and is, perhaps, superseded by it. The old animism may use evidence from brand new ideas while the new animism may better explain what generations of people have inherited from their ancestors. An examination of Pagan animism will reveal more about some of the possibilities raised by both approaches or theories.

Pagans and Spirits

Most presentations of Paganism's key features refer to seasonal festivals in which human relationships with the wider-than-human world are central. While atheists and humanists can and do easily participate in the celebration of the changing seasons and of the stages of human life involved in these festivals, some may find the invocation of deities more difficult. Pagans are divided about whether deities are archetypal or metaphorical aspects of human identity or discourse, whether they are personifications of natural phenomena or ontological beings in their own right. If deities really exist, Pagans differ over how many of them there might be, and in their understandings of what a deity is: a creator, a being more powerful than humans, or a being (perhaps once human) whose physicality is of a different, metaphysical rather than material, order from everyday reality. For some Pagans all this matters considerably, others are happy to use words that are open to many interpretations rather than restricted to a single meaning and thus susceptible to use in authoritarian power struggles.

In addition to deities (whatever they are), Pagans talk and act as if their festivals and rituals concern and involve many other beings too. Wiccans and Druids in particular, but also the more generic, unaffiliated or eclectic Pagans, have inherited a ritual structure in which invocation of elements or elemental beings (especially air, fire, water, earth) is significant. Paganism has been identified as a popularisation and democratisation of the European esoteric tradition, exemplified by groups such as the Order of the Golden Dawn and various Masonic movements (Hanegraaff 1996; York 1996, 2000; Hutton 1999). Although many forms of Wicca and Druidry maintain an initiatory structure and hierarchy, their particular genius is to make these more accessible and to braid them into the more earthy context of seasonal celebrations to form a "nature religion" rather than an esoteric one. The invocation of the elements associated with the cardinal directions (east, south, west, north) took various forms among esotericists and has evolved in various ways among Pagans. Rarely if ever considered as merely the chemical constituents of matter, the elements are addressed as if they might participate in ceremonies in some way. They may be greeted as guardians of the directions, as representative figureheads of seasons (spring, summer, autumn and winter respectively), or as givers of associated gifts (e.g., inspiration, passion, feeling, security). Where esotericism has a strong influence the elements may be commanded and required to

guard and aid the invoking group or practitioner. They may be invoked or talked about as "spirits of air, fire, water and earth", implying that they are not exactly air, fire, water and earth, but a personalisation or personification of those phenomena. Such language and expectations are in tension with more "realist" understandings which lead people to think that the elements are more appropriately requested and invited to participate. Some Pagans even argue that the elements can only be thanked for their presence which must always precede the arrival of humans or the commencement of a ritual. It would be inappropriate to command or invite air, for example, to come and join in since air must already be present. Such tensions (though rarely articulated) evidence an underlying stress between ways of understanding and treating the world.

Such discursive and ritualised practices express differing notions about deities and elementals, and play out themes made visible in debates about the old and new animism. Do Pagans believe in metaphysical or even non-empirical entities ("spirits") as part of their attributing of vitality to the world as Tylor might have argued? Certainly the more esoteric Pagan rituals implicitly suggest that the old animism question ("how are living beings different from inanimate matter?") is answered in opposition to the Cartesian modernist claim that humanity transcends mere matter and "nature". The possibility that the question of the new animism ("how should we live with other beings?") is also being asked is suggested in some such rituals, but not in all.

A similar range of possibilities is revealed by references to "spirits" made in almost every book, magazine or website by and for Pagans. According to these, there are spirits of place, spirits of ancestors, spirits of seasons, tree spirits, rock spirits, corn spirits, an Earth Spirit, and many others. In answer to the question "What is a Pagan?", the Spiral Goddess Grove website replies,

> A Pagan is a person who believes that everything has a soul or spirit. This is called Animism, and all Pagan religions share this belief. Rivers, animals, rocks, trees, land are all filled with there [sic] own unique spirits for people who are Pagans. Traditionally, Christians believe that only humans have souls or spirits. Many environmentally conscious Christians today share the belief with Pagans that all forms of life have a soul. Pagans see the divine spirit in all life, as do some members of other religions.

Later they ask, "How do you become a Pagan?" and inform enquirers that,

> You look into your heart and ask if it is the right path for you. Some people are born Pagans, even though they do not even know the word, others are born into Pagan cultures, and many others become Pagan when they search their hearts for a connection with their Spirits. (Willowroot 1997–2004)

The rest of the website does not provide any definition of "spirit" or "soul", nor does it clarify why the final use of "Spirits" is capitalized. A similar assertion that "Learning about what Pagans believe and practice will help you know if this path is one that helps you to truly express your own spirit" suggests that the capital is random and that the author(s) are referring to some interior reality, what others might call a "soul" or a "self". How this relates to the "divine spirit" is also unclear, but an assertion that it is possible to "connect with the divine" in various ways suggests quite a radical immanentalism in which some aspect of individual subjectivity is somehow divine.

The UK's Pagan Federation website evidences another range of possibilities. Concluding its introductory definitions of Paganism, it says that

> Modern Pagans, not tied down either by the customs of an established religion or by the dogmas of a revealed one, are often creative, playful and individualistic, affirming the importance of the individual psyche as it interfaces with a greater power. (Jones 2006)

The "individual psyche", synonymous with "soul", refers to some part of people that makes personal choices and affiliations. The "greater power" seems to resonate with the webpage's discussion of various possible notions about deities and other beings but confusingly reduces them to a singular power. A similar ambiguity about numbers is evidenced in the same webpage's reference to "spirit(s) of place". Browsers are first told that

> The spirit of place is recognised in Pagan religion, whether as a personified natural feature such as a mountain, lake or spring, or as a fully articulated guardian divinity such as, for example, Athena, the goddess of Athens. The cycle of the natural year, with the different emphasis brought by its different seasons, is seen by most Pagans as a model of spiritual growth and renewal, and as a sequence marked by festivals which offer access to different divinities according to their affinity with different times of year. Many Pagans see the Earth itself as sacred: in ancient Greece the Earth was always offered the first libation of wine, although She had no priesthood and no temple.

(Note in passing the shift from referring to the Earth as "it" and then as "She", evidencing an ambiguity about the personhood of the Earth.) Soon, a more homely company is introduced:

> in all Pagan societies the deities of the household are venerated. These may include revered ancestors and, for a while, the newly dead, who may of [sic] may not choose to leave the world of the living for good. They may include local spirits of place, either as personified individuals such as the spirit of a spring or the house's guardian toad or snake, or as group spirits such as Elves in England, the Little People in Ireland, Kobolds in Germany, Barstuccae in Lithuania, Lares and Penates in ancient Rome, and so on. A household shrine focuses the cult of these deities, and there is usually an annual ritual to honour them. The spirit of the hearth is often venerated, sometimes with a daily offering of food and drink, sometimes with an annual ritual of extinguishing and relighting the fire. Through ancestral and domestic ritual a spirit of continuity is preserved, and by the transmission of characteristics and purposes from the past, the future is assured of meaning.

A "spirit of place" is not an atmosphere but a being. The singular "spirit of place" becomes a plural "spirits of place", also identified as "deities", whose exact nature is said to be understood differently by different Pagans. They might be actual beings or they might be personifications. Perhaps the phrase "spirit of continuity" is used playfully here but it hardly aids comprehension of whatever "spirit" might mean —it is unlikely that the other uses could be replaced with words like "mood" or "flavour". What, then, is the difference between a spring and the "spirit of a spring"? If the "spirit of the hearth" can be venerated with offerings and the lighting of a fire, how is it different from the physical hearth?

If we assume that the authors of these web pages, and those who incorporate them into the websites of Pagan organisations, have a clear idea about what they mean, we can assume that at least some Pagans believe it is not enough to venerate springs, hearths, rivers or trees. There have to be "spirits" involved. Even if this language should be understood less precisely than terms in a taxonomy of beings, and more poetically, suggesting an enchanted worldview, it is implicit that for some Pagans, at least, religious language and action requires metaphysics and some degree of transcendence over the everyday. Whether a "spirit of the hearth" is that part of the hearth that makes it alive (in some sense) or a being separate from the inanimate hearth itself but somehow attached to it and imbuing it with meaning, spirits are part of this kind of Pagan animism. It is a kind of animism that

Edward Tylor would have recognised: the belief in souls and spirits that defined a phenomena as religious because it claims to explain differences between life and death.

Pagans and the Threshold Brook

In 1818 John Keats wrote a sonnet in which he says that "Man" has autumn seasons in which he allows even "fair things [to] pass by unheeded as a threshold brook", in the background, unremarked upon, not invested in significance, but taken for granted. Whether or not the sonnet is a correct observation of the human condition, it is astute in its observation of human engagement with the world. The "threshold brook" is like "the environment", a label for a domain that is generally ignored and taken for granted. Environmentalism has only become significant because people have discovered that the pollution of "threshold brooks" in casual or deliberate, major or minor ways, has brought about a situation that demands massive effort of attention and labour. The environment is no longer background. Nature is no longer mere scenery in which cultural action takes place. The nature-culture dichotomy collapses as more holistic appreciations of the world gain in popularity. For many Pagans, the "threshold brook" is not only the location of environmental activism and confrontation but is also, and perhaps more importantly, the venue in which relationships are formed, maintained or renewed between themselves and the other-than-human persons who co-inhabit the larger-than-human world. This growing trend within Paganism fits the model of the "new animism".

In the course of research about embodied knowledge among Eco-Pagans, Adrian Harris recorded the following meditation on threshold brooks by Pagan-Buddhist environmental educator, Barry Patterson:

> [I]f you have a little threshold brook, if there's a little stream like this running through you garden, everyday you get up and you go to work, it's just there, it's the background. You're not giving it any attention. That threshold brook is life passing you by, it's a source of delight to the sensitive soul like Keats. And yet the accountant, with his head in the cloud, and the deadline and a horrid commuting journey in the car through the rush hour traffic, doesn't pay any attention to the threshold brook. And their life is impoverished as a result. […] The threshold brook is there. Now how about I actually spend some time with it? How about I actually show some appreciation to it? And how about one day, after maybe months or weeks or however long it takes, maybe how one day no matter

> how cynical or jaded or sceptical or clever, or over analytical I was, that one day this special brook actually did speak to me. And told me what I needed to hear. And then I got up from sitting by the threshold brook and walked back into my world a different person. And that blessing that comes through threshold brooks, using that as a designator for that kind of experience, [pause] then that is a very healing thing, and if everyone were doing that then we'd all have more respect, and we'd moderate our behaviour and we'd get on better.

Getting on better as members of a community of persons, co-inhabiting a place (whether this is "the world" or a defined location), is a large part of what the new animism is about. Elders in indigenous animist communities inculcate respectful behaviours (as locally defined) to encourage others in seeking a "good life" that is itself defined as responsible participation in a local community of all beings. Among the diverse ways of being Pagan, Eco-Paganism is often rooted in and celebratory of animism.

Eco-Paganism has two faces or expressions. The media have paid most attention to a confrontational face presented in actions protecting and/or protesting threatened eco-systems or habitats. Many but not all members of radical environmental activist groups or movements identify themselves as Eco-Pagans. Others resist the label either because "Eco" seems to them redundant as a prefix to "Pagan" or conversely because "Pagan" seems tainted by the failure of most Pagans to participate in activism. Since they clearly share worldviews, concerns and practices in common, many members of EarthFirst! (Taylor 1994, 1995, 2000) and many of those who protested the expansionist road building programme of successive UK governments in the 1990s (Letcher 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004) can be considered Eco-Pagan. In turn, enough of these people identify themselves as animists, or either their spirituality or activism as animist, to signal the presence of animism pervasively throughout Eco-Paganism and commonly among other environmental activists.

The second face of Eco-Paganism is a quieter but hardly quietist one, seen in more celebratory events away from the front-lines of protest camps and in more everyday and almost casual acts of relationship between human and other-than-human persons. While the more dramatic, intra-human confrontations over threatened ecosystems are a common context in which many people realise that they are environmentalists, Eco-Pagans and/or animists, it is commonplace for them to insist that such a realisation is rooted in lifelong pleasure in the company of plants and animals, or an interest in particular

"special" places. It is often narrated to oneself and others as a "coming home", as is common among all forms of Paganism (Harvey 1999), but "home" in Eco-Paganism is a "threshold brook" where someone makes themselves present in order to learn appropriate etiquette and modes of conversation to engage with others across species boundaries. The dynamic movement between this and the more activist "face" of Eco-Paganism together confront the likely causes what Rachel Carson famously evoked as a "Silent Spring" (Carson 1962): a world silenced by human ambition and consumption.

Exemplifying Pagan Animism

When Selena Fox introduced Circle Sanctuary (a land reserve in Wisconsin) to the Lancaster University conference on Religion and Nature in 1996, she showed a series of slides of seasonal festivities like a dance around a maypole, the barn and camping area, or the woods, springs and rock outcrops in the area. Several slides were of the grassland that is being reclaimed as prairie by the reintroduction or encouragement of indigenous plants. An 'altar' in the woods included a replica of a European Neolithic goddess/woman. While it would not be wrong to view these slides as representations of events and the environment in which they occur, this would not be an entirely sufficient view either. Fox was not setting the scene, showing the scenery, or sharing views of favourite or picturesque places in which the work and celebrations of the Circle community take place. She was introducing the multi-species community that is Circle Sanctuary. Indeed the most transitory members of this community are the humans, the majority visiting more or less regularly, but only a few live permanently in this increasingly bio-diverse community. Not all the humans who assemble here identify themselves as animists or even as Pagans, although most probably do. But the community of Circle Sanctuary is an animist one. Rocks, coyotes, humans, fish, frogs, grasses, flowering-plants, trees, insects, goddesses, clouds, springs and a host of others interact in various ways. Carvings and statues might also be encountered as more than symbolic objects, they too might be people with whom to engage. It is also possible that they are humorous symbolic references to powerful persons who are otherwise seen only in exceptional circumstances or by exceptional people. Their inclusion in animistic, relational activities at Circle anticipated the theorization of the importance of "things" in

human life by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (2005) or of the cyborg nature of humanity by Donna Haraway (1991).

My first introduction to Pagan animism was in the context of the celebration of seasonal festivals in a wood in Northumberland, north-east England. In preparation for all-night vigils a few of those involved regularly arrived early to gather firewood. This always began with a visit to a fresh-water spring at the heart of the wood where each person would introduce themselves and their purpose in being there, and requesting aid in finding sufficient firewood for the night. The animism of these people required no more than that, but they insisted that at times they were given "signs" that their request and purposes were positively received: a normally shy bird coming to within inches of the group around the spring, or a sudden susurrus among the alders on an otherwise windless day. More dramatically, they claimed that once as they turned from the spring they were confronted by a pile of logs that could not have been there earlier or they would have needed to climb over the pile to reach the spring. "Signs" of welcome or participation were frequent topics of conversation around the fire and equally frequently claimed as occurrences during the celebration. Birds or animals would visit and act in somewhat unusual ways. When told of the frequency with which owls or other birds would fly around the group encircling the fire, I was able to contribute a parallel story of the flight of an eagle around the central drum group of a powwow in Newfoundland that was recognised as an affirmation of the rightness of an indigenous return to traditional ways (Harvey 2006: 102–3).

Members of this group also collected holly, ivy and yew sprigs or boughs with which to decorate their homes at midwinter. Again, introductions were made to trees with appropriate looking greenery. Gifts were offered, varying from libations of whatever someone had brought to drink (wine, beer, water, fruit juice) to strands of wool tied to the tree, or even drops of blood pricked from the gift giver's finger. A cautionary tale became famous after someone attempted to cut a berry-laden sprig from a holly tree without asking permission or offering a gift. Although it was a still, breeze-free day, the momentarily forgetful person was swiped across the face by prickly holly. I noted that in subsequent visits the tree was treated with particular respect but never approached for a cutting. When I have told this to other Pagans they have offered stories of similar events.

A final batch of stories originating in that wood and group widens the circle of beings involved in these already diverse cross-species

encounters. It was not only trees, animals, birds and water-courses communicated in some way with this small Pagan group. Evidence of the presence or participation of "otherworld beings" or "the faeries" were offered in celebration of the notion that the festivals were important not only to humans but to other powerful and elusive beings. Most commonly, there were variants on the theme of hearing music that could not have been played by the humans present in the wood. Not having flutes or bagpipes, it could not have been their music making that aided late-comers to find the fire in the depths of the wood at night. Postulated identifications of the likely "otherworld" musicians led more than once to a discussion of appropriate ways of speaking about, or more commonly avoiding speaking about such beings.

Many of the Eco-Pagans who gather to celebrate festivals at Circle Sanctuary, in the Northumberland wood, and in many similar places, often participate in a remarkable range of activist movements that belie allegations that they have "single issue" obsessions. If I continue to focus here on ecological or environmentalist activism it is only because these are the most straight-forward venues in which to observe human interactions with other-than-human persons. Nonetheless, a range of alternatives to consumerist culture necessarily present a withdrawal from human domination over the world and encourage either the setting aside of domains in which the rest of life might flourish or the more careful participation of humans in bio-diverse places.

Some of the regular conversationalists around the fire in the Northumberland wood were core members of at least one of the camps established to prevent the construction of new roads in the UK in the 1990s. Many of them went to live on platforms among the branches of threatened trees in other woods. They did not abandon the relaxed or meditative engagement of the more celebratory gatherings. When not actually confronting and confronted by chainsaws and bulldozers they often sought ways to attend to various inter-species conversations. Gifts were given to trees and other other-than-human persons. Even when defeated in their efforts, their animism resulted in continuing displays of respect. Funerals could be performed for trees lost to the developers' assault. Andy Letcher records the ad hoc ritual centred on the funeral pyre of a tree named 'Melea' by the inhabitants of Skyward camp at the end of the Newbury bypass protest.

> It was decided that we would burn 'her' trunk so that no one would profit from the timber. We gathered wood and broken bits of tree house and piled it over the trunk, poured over paraffin, and set light to her. Suddenly

> the mood, the atmosphere, the meaning of our actions changed. From a final futile gesture of defiance it became a funeral pyre, a piacular rite, a spontaneous ritual that provided an outlet for our grief and our rage, whilst giving expression to our animism. As the smoke drifted across the mud, I played a lament on the bagpipes, and then slowly we left the site. (Letcher 2002: 86)

If Paganism is often non-systematic and its celebrations frequently multivalent, it is also more widely true that the importance of some actions only becomes clear as understandings erupt during their performance. Thus, even if this tree-burning began as a protest against the consumerism, materialism and short-termism of modernity, the deep relationship established between the tree and camp inhabitants asserted itself in the realisation that in fact this was a funeral for a loved one. Indeed, it was an animist farewell to a whole community destroyed by road construction.

Animism, Totemism and Shamanry

The new use of "animism" to label worldviews and lifeways which treat the world as a community of persons (human and other-than-human) also requires a reconsideration of totemism and shamanry.

Totemism is often presented as the use of animals, plants or other selected symbols to think about human social group formation and maintenance. As Claude Lévi-Strauss asserted, "We can understand, too, that natural species are chosen [as totems] not because they are 'good to eat' but because they are 'good to think'" (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 89). However, if animism is about recognising ubiquitous relationality in the world and seeking ways to act respectfully, totem is derived from an Ojibwa term translatable as "clan" but including other-than-human persons within particular kin groups. Sometimes, in short, our closet relations are with particular animals, birds or plants. Once again, Pagan literature typically follows Western rather than indigenous (let alone specifically Ojibwa) discourse. Most often, Pagans use "totem" to mean an individual animal or bird (more rarely a plant) of importance to an individual human. Some gloss the term with "power animal" and propose the existence of something similar to popular Christian notions of guardian angels: beings who are almost integral parts of the human person, present to guide and protect those aware of their presence. Those most influenced by Jungian ideas will almost certainly

consider totems to be a manifestation of the inner or true self, perhaps what others call a "soul". Pagan groups are rarely equivalent to kin groups, probably because Paganism encourages a thoroughly modern degree of individualism. However, responsibility to one's dwelling place is a common theme in Pagan literature, especially among those most focused on environmental activism and Eco-Paganism. Campaigns for ecological responsibility resonate with Debbie Rose's discussion of totemism among Aboriginal Australians:

> decades of study of totemism have brought scholars to the outlines of an understanding of where the appropriate questions are located. They concern human interactions and connectedness with, and responsibilities toward, the non-human world. Totemism posits connectedness, mutual interdependence, and the non-negotiable significance of the lives of non-human species. It organises responsibilities for species along tracks that intersect, and thus builds a structure of regional systems of relationship and responsibility. (Rose 1998: 8)

This strong sense of mutuality is embedded in a more general animism, and is particularly attractive to those who have spent time by the "threshold brook" and seek to prevent the dawn of a "silent spring".

Similarly, the activities of shamans require revisitation in the light of the "new animism". Although many Pagans follow the lead of scholarly and New Age popularisers of a universal or core "shamanism", a more indigenous sense of shamans as necessary agents of animist communities is growing. If the world is a community of persons, all deserving respect, then killing and eating require careful negotiation by skilled intermediaries between different kinds of being (especially those who may be broadly, performatively recognised as predators or prey). Even if the (psycho)therapeutic version of shamanism fits well with modernity and its spiritualities, a mode of shamanic practice, "shamanry" perhaps, becomes necessary when people discover that human lifestyles are inescapably dangerous to other-than-human persons deemed worthy of respect. In the UK, one of the foremost practitioners of a recognisably animism shamanry is Gordon MacLellan, environmental educator, activist, poet and author, who identifies his work as being a "dancing on the edge" (MacLellan 1996). The main ambition of this kind of shaman is not self-knowledge or even the therapeutic vitalisation of self-knowledge in clients, but diplomacy leading to healthier relationships between persons of whatever species.

In totemism and shamanry, animism has a ready answer for those who allege the adoption of a romantic vision of the world. Relationships across species boundaries require care as well as celebration because different beings seek different aims in their shared locations. An overarching commitment to responsible care for the whole community places constraints on the pursuit of consumption and self-gratification. Reconciliation of opposing needs and desires sometimes requires the intervention and mediation of shamans or shaman-like inter-species diplomats. In animist Paganism the ebb and flow of relationships and all that they entail are best seen and most commonly addressed in seasonal rituals in selected locations.

Pagan Animisms

At least two different kinds of animism of visible in the practices and literatures of Paganism. The "old animism", a belief in souls and spirits, is particularly evident in the more esoteric versions of Paganism. The "new animism", the practice of relational participation in a community of persons, is particularly expressed among Eco-Pagans. This can be identified as an indigenising movement (following Paul Johnson's 2005 discussion of trajectories among Caribbean religious-cultural movements). Considerable fluidity exists at the boundaries between the two phenomena. Words like "spirit" do not unambiguously mark an affirmation of Tylor's version of animism but may be used even by celebrants of a thoroughly relational worldview. Understandings of what "nature" is vary among Pagans of all kinds. More esoteric movements are likely to prioritise the inner or spiritual meaning of physical beings. Indigenizing Eco-Pagans are more likely to celebrate materiality for itself. They are less prone to treating trees as symbols than to seeking to converse with them. The more radical expressions of the new animism challenge Cartesian modernism, rejecting the denigration of "mere matter" and positively valuing emotional and sensual participation in the material world.

This introduction to Pagan animism has sought to suggest some of the important themes raised by attending to two divergent uses of a term and the issues that flow from them. At stake are questions about the nature of Paganism that are made visible by asking what it means to call Paganism a "nature religion". While not all Pagans are Eco-Pagans, and not all Eco-Pagans dwell permanently on the frontlines

of environmental activism, "nature" rarely means "everything except human culture" or "the material world" or "the world beyond the cities". The "nature" that all forms of Paganism speak of is an all-inclusive, all-embracing domain: humans dwell in nature when they are in their homes in their cities as much as when they visit wildernesses or threshold brooks. Pagans are members of a "nature religion" not only when they are radical ecological activists, but even when they dislike and resist spending nights out in cold, wet places. "Nature" can mean "this world" and Pagans can emphasise that what they celebrate is this worldly. Rather than seeking to reach heaven or enlightenment in ways that transcend the world, Pagans seek a deeper involvement and participation. However, among Pagans of a "new animism" persuasion this world is a community of persons which would be greatly improved if humans played more responsible and respectful roles.

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HEATHENRY

Jenny Blain* and Robert J. Wallis**

Introduction: Is Heathenry 'Reconstruction'

Among the forms of paganism being developed today are those which look to the mediaeval and earlier writings. These are often termed 'reconstructionist' although the term is somewhat misleading: while some practitioners attempt to copy practices and lifestyles, most are concerned to relate these to the 21st-century societies in which they live.

While we write this chapter for the most part to discuss the development of Heathenry, we do so as 'insiders' each with our own connection to the practices and people involved, and to some of the landscapes within which they practice. Heathenry, like other religions of today, is not without its tensions and indeed politics, and we explore some of these and the challenges they create towards the end of the chapter. Heathenry is developing or becoming renewed in many parts of the world; our experiences are primarily with Heathenry in the UK and in areas of North America, and these are foregrounded in this chapter. Heathenry is a rather diffuse, for the most part dogma-free, spirituality and our understandings and practices will not be shared by all followers; nevertheless we hope here to give a sense of what we see as central to Heathenry, from our academic research (e.g. Blain 2002a; Blain and Wallis 2000; Blain and Wallis 2006a; Wallis 2003) and from our own practices.

There are many ways in which people create paganisms today. A distinction, though rather blurred, arises between those who root their worldview and practices in understandings derived from Wicca, and those who tend to look elsewhere. We should stress at once that there can be no sense in which one kind of paganism is more 'authentic' than another: this is a matter of taste and what one is drawn to. Polytheist 'reconstructionist' practitioners would add, it is a matter of whom the

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gods call, and which gods call particular individuals. Heathenry, the focus of this chapter, is essentially a polytheist paganism for today, drawing on two main strands: the presentations of cosmology, deity and mythology, and cultural practices within mediaeval writings of northern Europe, together with archaeological interpretations of northern European 'pasts'; and personal experience based in part on these understandings, often described as 'UPG' or 'unusual personal gnosis', a term coined by a North American practitioner in the 1990s. This chapter will examine some understandings from the Mediaeval material, and some ways in which these generate new interpretations of practice today, within a context of 21st century re-discoveries of practice and personal involvements with cosmology, landscape, and materials.

As indicated above, the expressed aim of reconstructionist groups is not to recreate pagan society or ritual exactly as it was, but to use sources from the past to aid in the creation of religious, spiritual and ritual experiences and structures that suit the present-day: to draw on the understandings of the past for an improved understanding of the present. That is, to work from the principle that documents or artefacts from 'the past' hold clues to religious or spiritual practice and relationships with deities or spirits, and in particular to world-views or religious philosophies. These practices, worldviews and relationships can be used or adopted meaningfully within today's world. This is not to deny that there are groups who claim a 'premodern' spirituality so that there is an attempt to directly imitate or model the forms of religious practice (or rather, an interpretation of these forms from today's archaeologists or commentators), and the authors have discussed this somewhat (see the introduction in Blain and Wallis 2007). However a more usual sense of 'reconstructionism' is bounded by its adherents' location in today's world, and indeed practitioners may caution against too great a degree of involvement with 'correctness' over personal practice. A comment on a British email list was:

> One thing I do know is that you can get into the historical or archaeological correctness of this too much and miss out on the true point of being a heathen. Something I'm definitely guilty of. (Neal, writing on UKHeathenry email list 8.01.03, in Blain 2006a)

A practitioner interviewed by Blain in the 1990s commented:

> By "Reconstructionist" I mean that I try by scholarly study to put together an understanding of the ways that those who historically worshipped the Gods I worship lived and practiced their worship. I then try to live and

> practice in the same ways, so far as that is possible and/or feasible while living in the real near-21st-Century-CE world. (Nualle, e-mail interview, in Blain 2006b)

Many polytheist practitioners, including Heathens, are attempting to uncover previous rituals, philosophies and theologies, and adapt these to a present-day setting, creating religious philosophy and practice that they consider appropriate. They generally define themselves as belonging to specific faiths relating to culturally-specific goddesses and gods: in the case of the Norse Heathens described in this chapter, the Æsir and Vanir, the deities of the Germanic-speaking peoples of Europe, as shown by the rich sources of Nordic or Germanic mythologies. Arriving at these definitions is not a simple matter: it involves personal understanding and interpretation. In drawing upon evidence from archaeology and literature, practitioners will engage in lengthy debates over the interpretation of particular passages of "ancient" material, and how these shed light on their spiritual ancestors' concept of soul and spirit, or religious practice, or indeed how these inform their own responses to questions that concern present-day people. The issue of 'UPG' enters here. People interpret the material in their own ways. There is no hierarchical structure, no dogma (although it may be that attempts have been made to create these; Heathenry is not without its conflicts).

Heathenry is the term preferred by many practitioners in Britain, but others are used also including *Northern Tradition* and *Odinist* (which is often specific to the 'worship' of Odin). In North America the term Asatru has been borrowed from the Icelandic word *Ásatrú*—faith or belief in, or allegiance to, the Gods—other terms being *Heathenism*, *Heathenry* and (indicating practices and organisation based in Saxon or Anglian patterns) *Theodism*. In Iceland practitioners have adopted the name of Ásatrúarmenn, and their organisation the Ásatrúarfélagið has recognition as a religious organisation, though often their religious practice is spoken of simply as *Vor Siður*, 'our way' or 'our custom'. Forn Sid or Fyrnsidu—the old way—is a term used by some Heathens also in Britain and North America. In Scandinavia a range of names exists likewise. Practices vary widely across the different forms of Heathenry (by whatever name) and different countries, some practitioners adopting a very fluid approach to their spirituality and some a much more 'scripted' approach, with drafted rituals (blots or blotar) being published in several forms, for instance in Our Troth (1993 and

2005), a compendium published by the US-based organisation *The Troth*, and numerous suggestions for ritual forms and styles to be found on the internet.

Description of organisations, basic understandings, spiritual practices and identities forged within Heathenry can be found in Strmiska and Sigurvinsson (2006), Blain (2002a, 2006a, 2006b) Blain and Wallis (2004, 2000), Harvey (1997/2007) among others. Details of practice can be found in practitioner-oriented books, notably Our Troth (ed. Gundarsson 1993/2005 and 2006), Krasskova's *Exploring the Northern Tradition* (2005), and for Theod, Lord's *The Way of the Heathen* (2000), and Galdrbok (Johnson & Wallis 2005).

The relationship of Heathenry to other 'new' religions or spiritualities broadly termed 'Pagan' is complex. While some Heathens restrict their practices very specifically to worship of the deities of the North of Europe, others who base their spirituality more strongly in landscape may relate to various deities or wights associated with place, looking to history and mythology for inspiration. Some Heathens may also practice as Druids or Wiccans, some may be involved with more eclectic forms of paganism. It is usual, though, to separate out these strands—or (following Roman practice) to celebrate 'other' beings using the practices of heathenry, to honour deities associated with place or landscape 'in the Heathen manner' through rituals of Blot or Sumbl, rather than to use forms which derive, for instance, from Wicca. Heathens may however join with other Pagans in larger-scale celebrations following different ritual forms; and in Britain at least it is quite common for Heathens to share events with other polytheists or reconstructionists, to explore other mythologies and to discuss similarities of understanding (for instance through the Britain pagan organisation the Association of Polytheist Traditions, with which we are involved).

Cosmology and Understandings of the Nine Worlds

Heathenry is not defined strictly by either its practices or its beliefs. Rather, it can be seen as collections of beliefs and practices that centre on a shared set of cosmological concepts. These are described in Icelandic literature, particularly in the cosmogonic poems of the Poetic Edda, from which adherents derive their own understandings. Indeed all Heathenry today owes a great debt to this literature. Today's heathens engage with the Poetic Edda as a source rich in inspirational material.

The words of the seeress in the Völuspá, 'I born of Giants remember very early', might be viewed as a starting point not only cosmologically, but also for remembering and re-deploying ancient Norse myth as lore relevant to today. Larrington (1993) links the Havamal, the second and longest of the Poetic Edda, to 'Wisdom Poetry' elsewhere, pointing to specific features including complexity and progression from simple maxims for everyday like (don't get drunk, be a good guest in the mead-hall, and so on) to the training of a 'prince' to the mysteries of the rune verses. Many heathens in the UK and in the US have combed Hávamál for an idea of how a Heathen community, that is one looking to the old gods of much of the North of Europe (notably Iceland), should be constructed, and we shall return to this point later.

At the centre of Heathenry is the concept of the world tree, Yggdrasil, the 'steed of Yggr' or Odin; and the pool of Wyrd at its foot, tended by three women, the Norns who spin or otherwise craft fate or wyrd for individuals or communities. Wyrd is not a simple determinism, but could be seen more as potential for people to create their lives, together with obligations on them; people are part of the shaping of their own wyrd, as their past actions become part of who they are and part of what connects them to others. Nine worlds variously described in poetry are located on the branches of the tree, or possibly below its roots; each has its own 'people', and the human world, Midgard, is shared with many other *wights* (from the Old English word *wiht*, a sentient being). A general interpretation is of the upper world, Asgard, the abode of gods, while Midgard is 'middle-earth', inhabited by humans, and lower worlds are those of the dark-elves and of Hela, the place of ancestors. Also on the branches of the tree, however are the worlds of the Light-Elves (often seen as a further 'upper world' realm), those of the Jotnar (Etins or giants) and the Vanir, and more distant and less comprehensible, the worlds of fire and ice from which creation began. This is a complex pattern, and there are different ways to name 'worlds'; it is a conceptual rather than a physical map. The concept of the world tree or central pillar connecting many worlds allies with those of the shamanic cosmologies of northern Eurasia. Some of the deities of Heathenry likewise have parallels in Eastern European mythologies or observations.

The concept of a 'god' in Heathenry likewise needs some explanation: gods are not all-powerful, or all-knowing. Indeed one of the better known deities, Odin, is a seeker after knowledge. Again, much of the understanding of deities comes from the Icelandic literature including the Eddas, although other sources are drawn on. While the 19th

century romantic movement tended to see gods forming a hierarchy with Odin and his partner Frigg at its peak, many of today's Heathens see a much more equal situation. After all, the poem Völuspá indicates repeatedly that—

> Then all the Powers went to the thrones of fate,
> the sacrosanct gods, and considered this…
> (Völuspa 6, 9, 23, 25, Larrington 1996 trans.)

In these interpretations the gods of the Aesir meet in council to debate issues and Odin is a *lorespeaker* rather than a ruler.

The better-known gods of Heathenry are those of Norse Mythology, the Aesir (Odin, Frigg, Thor, Sif, Tyr, Baldr and various others) and Vanir (Freyja, Frey and their father Njörd). Their stories are in part told through the poems of the Poetic Edda (e.g. trans. Larrington, 1996) and the 13th century compilations by Snorri Sturluson known as the Prose Edda (e.g. 1995 trans. Faulkes). Other sources include Saxo Grammaticus's *History of the Danes* (e.g. 2008 trans. Fisher) written in the 12th century of which the first nine books deal with legendary rather than documentable events, some of them relating to characters otherwise described (e.g. by Snorri) as gods. Old English names for some deities give us the days of the week (Tuesday, Wednesday etc.) and Heathens look to academic and scholarly sources, including commentaries on place names in addition to distillations and commentaries on the older texts, for inspiration (some examples being: Herbert 1994; Ellis Davidson 1990; Orchard 1997; Simek 1993).

However, Heathenry is not always, or only, centred upon its gods. The other beings in the landscape known from folklore are important in everyday experiences of place. Heathen rituals will often begin with an offering to landwights or housewights, not invoking these (they are already present) but asking permission to use a place or space in a particular way. Ancestors are seen as important, including both one's own family members whose names are known, and those more remote in time. In an interview conducted in Iceland, Jörmundur Ingi Hansen, the then leader of the Ásatrúarfélagidh, spoke with one of us (Blain) about how death was not a sudden event, but a gradual withdrawal over long periods of time, so that becoming an ancestor is a process. He also commented on the importance of various wights in daily life: in Iceland before Christianisation, the 'High Gods' would be invoked publicly, once a year, at the opening of the Althing or parliament. What people might do in their own homes was another matter, and often

meant the dealings with the local land spirits. (Indeed when Iceland was first converted, it was the major festivals which changed—people continuing their private practices, related to the landwights, in their homes.) From Norway comes a story of the skald or poet Sigvat, recently converted to Christianity by the king, who arriving at a farm where there is feasting is told that he cannot be admitted because the Álf-blót—offering or ritual to the Elves—is taking place.[1] From Britain there are many tales of local spirits and people's associations with them. Stories of other beings, therefore, are important in the construction of today's Heathen practices.

Ritual and Community

We have said that Heathenry is not defined by its practices. There are, though, general indications of ritual practice that most Heathens follow, though every group, household or individual will work in their own way. Blot and sumbl or symbel are the most evident ritual forms observed in Heathenry: the first of these in a ritual of offering, the second a ritual of remembering, naming and praising through toasting (which some Heathens liken to toasts at a wedding or a Burns Supper). Whereas toasting has a formal aspect to it—a glass or drinking horn is filled, a deity, ancestor, or friend named and the toast drunk—a blot can be very simple indeed. Anything may be offered, and the offer can be as simple as taking part of one's food and setting it aside, or, more usually, pouring a drink of mead or ale for a particular deity. No words are needed. A blot is not necessarily a 'magical' action, but a simple offering, and the most common offerings are probably those people make to their housewights or brownies—beings associated with a house who may assist with everyday patterns or events, as in European folklore—or to landwights, as an act of recognition.

Many groups, though, use a blot as a way to construct community and so devise their own formal or semi-formal rituals. Various blots can be found online or for sale from organisations, and blot 'scripts' may be passed round. There seem to be two major attitudes, among

[1] He is told that Odin would be offended if he were present. This association between Odin and elves is interesting—usually it is Freyr who is spoken of as 'Elf-Lord', but it shows some of the variation that might exist in the past…and in the present. Possibly these were mound-elves, 'ancestors', in the realm of the death-god Odin.

practitioners, to group blots. One is that they are essentially a group-bonding ritual of praising the gods. The group establishes a calendar of blots, or finds a calendar on the internet or in practitioner books such as Our Troth, and people then either use a well-tried format, inserting a poem or a reading appropriate for the time of year or the particular deity honoured, or sometimes create a new script specific to the event. The other is that they honour a particular deity or deities, and people will ask the deities what they want to have in the blot. If a group has planned to do a blot they will therefore ask firstly which deities 'want' to have the blot made to them, and then how they should go about it. Inspiration may come in different ways, some practitioners reporting hearing the deities speak or being 'shown' a focal point of the blot, others 'becoming aware' of what they should do. Groups we have met have often worked with an approximate calendar, but created new ritual specifically to the occasion (often unscripted or spontaneous), thus fulfilling requests, as practitioners understand it, of particular gods or wights while also having a list of events around which a small community can form. A calendar may seek to have an event every month, or may parallel the 8-fold 'Wheel of the Year' (more common in other pagan religions derived from Wicca) or may focus on the three festivals mentioned in mediaeval literature: Winternights, or First Frost, at some time between early October and mid November in the Northern hemisphere, Yule, celebrated over several days around the winter solstice commencing with the Mothersnight, and the Spring Festival held at some point between March and mid-May, all these being dependent on climate. Some groups will add to these, Summer Solstice; and many other combinations are possible, celebrating various deities appropriate to place or season, particular wights or ancestors, and so on.

Scripted blots may have particular formats of words spoken by a leader (gothi or gydhja, priest or priestess) with other words to be recited by everybody or by particular individuals. The leader will hallow 'sacred space', invite local wights (spirits) to participate, and call to the Aesir and Vanir to be present. An intention is declared, an offering usually of drink is made to the particular deity who is to be honoured, members of the group may ask for a gift in return, such as inspiration, strength, courage, health or knowledge, and a sung or *galdr* spell (often chanting one or more rune names, sometime reciting a verse) used to raise or focus power to achieve the ends of the group.

Inspirational blots tend to have a keener focus of the particular deity or wight who has asked for the blot, with group members asked to

draw on their own knowledge of the being in order to take part. While the blot has an outline (or order of events) individuals are expected to contribute from their own knowledge, and may spend a considerable amount of time devising what they will do, possibly in conjunction with other members. Neither of these approaches is more 'right' than another. Heathenry takes many forms, and often people will move through a more scripted blot approach to a more inspirational focus, or merge elements of both forms in order to assist new group members. Either form of blot may involve other elements such as ritual drama, and indeed this may be the focus of the ritual, a re-telling of a story from mythology, or an enactment taking an eddic poem as 'script'. Some academic research indicates that the poems may have originally served in this way (see in particular Gunnell 1995, Haugen 1983). Further discussion of the use of mediaeval texts in ritual, including drama and prayer, is given by Blain and Wallis (2004).

A formal blot will often include a short sumbel (ritual of toasting) in which all present sip from a drinking horn passed around the group, in the deity's name. An ancestor or wight, or a friend, may be toasted similarly. A fairly typical example of how a Heathen blot differs from other pagan rituals is given by Cusak (2007), who contrasts three rituals relating to the (possible) Goddess Eostre while giving a useful account of the disputes around whether there was ever such a goddess.[2] Our understandings differ somewhat from those of Cusak in the variety of Heathen blots possible; that which she describes is more formalised, and less 'poetic', than some those in which we have participated, but in many ways this blot is (at least for North American practice) typical.

A formal sumbel is usually a separate event, where the group engages in at least three rounds of toasting, often to the Aesir and Vanir, to ancestors and heroes, and to their own deeds and intentions. More rounds may be added as required. A sumbel may involve very short, or longer, toasts, including in later rounds 'boasts' and 'brags' about what participants have themselves achieved or what they are setting out

[2] Eostre is mentioned by Bede in The Reckoning of Time. See Faith Wallis's 1999 translation. The reference, along with that to Hrethe, is brief and relates to the month of April—whether there was ever a goddess association with this month is not known, and Eosturmonath may relate simply to the coming of spring. See http://www.manygods.org.uk/articles/essays/eostre.html for an account by a Heathen practitioner. Nevertheless, some Heathens will celebrate both Hrethe and Eostre at the full moons of March and April respectively, or may honour Eostre as part of a more general celebration of spring.

to do: the point of these is that they are ways of displaying personal worth and achievement to the community, including to the gods or ancestors greeted; and that stating in sumbl that one *will* accomplish a task is binding, as a form of oath-taking. A sumbl may also be a forum in which poetry, songs and stories form part of the toast, and a sumbl to ancestors may commemorate particular ancestors, again with the potential for poetry in hailing their memory.

Blots or Blótar and Symbel provide ways for practitioners to show their relationships to wyrd and to Heathen cosmology, and engage with other beings—deities and wights—in ways that form part of the discursive practices of Heathenry already referred to. That is, in addition to sacred rituals, they are *identity practices* which demarcate the practitioner as specifically Heathen. However while they connect practitioners with otherworlds and with divinity, they are not necessarily magical practices. As identity practices, they are implicit in the construction of community.

Here, though, distinction needs to be made between communities of Heathenry. As already indicated, there is considerable variation—both in who may be a member of the 'community' and in what understandings of self, ethics and 'virtues' may form an appropriate code of conduct. Heathenry, however much derived from older literature and archaeology, has had its formation within nineteenth and twentieth century worlds. Tensions exist between broadly 'inclusive' (often mistermed 'universalist', confusingly for Religions Studies where this term has a rather different meaning) Heathenry—which many Heathens see as mainstream and which accepts as Heathen any people who feel called or drawn to the deities and worldview—and other forms which privilege physical ancestry, often termed 'folkish'. This debate has been indicated by, among others, Blain (2006b) drawing on earlier work in the US of Kaplan (e.g. 1997) and later work of Gardell (2003). It is important to point out that there are connections between US developments of 'race' and the adoption of some elements of North European mythology and practice by adherents of the extreme right, as Gardell indicates. It is equally important to emphasise that within the range of Heathen communities from inclusivist to folkish, almost all adherents would distance themselves from the extreme right. Links between ethnicity and religions, however, are not simple. In a study of pagan texts, Gallagher (1999) has drawn attention to the ways in which discourses of practitioners assume a distinct, untheorised and static 'Celtic' identity, sliding towards spirituality based in ethnicity or 'race';

we have explored this slippage somewhat in examining phenomena of 'Celtic Shamanism' (Blain and Wallis 2007; Blain 2001), and we identify some comparisons to assumptions made for Heathenry, particular among 'folkish' adherents: the problematic assumptions that distinct 'peoples' of the past could be identified, that cultures and spiritualities were clearly demarcated, and that culture, spirituality, language and 'race' mapped to each other. Such assumptions are common, and not, of course, limited to today's religious or spiritual groups. It may be (at least within some Heathen groups we know of), that external perceptions of Heathenry as associated with the ills of the mid-20th century can cause practitioners to examine practices and ideology, whether to create disclaimers or to attempt deeper analyses of relationships between ethnicity and spiritualities; some examples are given by Blain (2006b). Yet these more theorised expressions are in tension with the claim of the Odinic Rite (a UK-based organisation founded in 1973) that 'Odinism' is the 'natural religion of the Indo-European peoples', equated by this organisation with 'Northern Europeans', and as an extreme expression this group gives as one of 'Nine Charges' (moral precepts for its members):

6. To succor the friendless but to put no faith in the pledged word of a stranger people.

A 'stranger people' apparently implies any 'people' not of North European descent: problematic for multicultural relationships, at the very least.[3]

Tensions existing between inclusivist and folkish groups, however, relate not only to ethnicity of group members, but to issues of sexuality and the concept of 'ergi', indicated in the following section of this chapter.

More generally, communities are constituted through understandings of 'self' and appropriate ethics for Heathen life, how Heathens treat others (within and without their religion, and extending to other beings with whom the contexts of daily life or spiritual practice are shared). Here a range of practices and meanings is evident; from a

[3] Challenged on the source of this idea about untrustworthiness of 'a stranger people' by other Heathens present at the Pagan Federation conference in London, 2004, an OR spokeswoman (staffing a stall) claimed it was from the Eddic poem Hávamál. When asked if she had indeed read Hávamál, she admitted to having read 'bits'. While this resulted in considerable merriment (there is no such passage in Hávamál) it also caused considerable concern to the challengers, who took exception to having their religion presented in ways that they considered racist.

relational morality based in understandings of personal responsibility and obligations to kin, community and landscape, to a focus on rules applicable on an individual level. Again, Heathenry here follows concepts and understandings shared across populations of Europe and North America. And indeed Heathen groups may list 'rules' in order to demonstrate that theirs is a religion with ethical and moral commitments, possibly in order to gain state recognition, or at least to convince other faith groups that they deserve status, apparently in the understanding that a religion must have 'commandments'. So, as Christianity appears to have ten (excluding the host of community and culture-related prescriptions in Leviticus), UK or US-based Heathenry has come up with 'Nine Noble Virtues', sometimes extended by the addition of five or six 'thews', as for instance:

Boldness	Truth	Honor	Troth
Self-Rule	Hospitality	Industry	Self-Reliance
Steadfastness	Equality	Strength	Wisdom
Generosity	Family Responsibility		

(http://www.thetroth.org/)

The Troth introduces these by saying that 'Together, we seek to practice the moral principles followed by our noble predecessors, including: (the above).

The 'original' nine 'virtues' come from (once again) the Odinic Rite, where they are given as: Courage, Truth, Honour, Fidelity, Discipline, Hospitality, Industriousness, Self-reliance, and Perseverance. But while these may be applicable as basic rules for conduct in many societies, it is hard to see what is distinctly 'Heathen' about them. The lack (particularly in the original list) of relational or cultural/social dimensions has occasioned considerable criticisms, including the comment, below, from a Heathen academic in the US.

> Seeing all the "trailer park philosophies" being peddled, a horrible thought occurred to me: Maybe one of the reasons Asatru is appealing to some folk is because the ethical codex laid out in the Havamal is very "motherhood and apple pie"…. If you strip away all the mythological veneer and "far away Iceland in a different age" type mystique, all that remains from the Havamal is a behavioral codex that is about as complex as Fulghum's "All I needed to know I learned in Kindergarten" (Email comment, used with permission)

Readings of 'lore' relate to sedimented understandings of society, 'human nature' and social relationships. For at least some pagans/heathens

today, these begin with assumptions that 'pre-modern' society is inherently a 'better' or 'truer' expression of self and community, and hence is to be reclaimed through a (rather romantic Victorian) conflation of 'peoples', languages, and geography—an 'us versus them' model that relies on apparently authoritative and, paradoxically, modern (and outdated) interpretations of culture and conflict: in this case the notion of Heathenry as the religion of 'a warrior people' whose 'virtues' can be implemented by those who apparently dissent from present-day moralities. Today's Heathenry, then, is somewhat of a contested terrain. We must emphasise that while we have outlined some of these contests, those Heathens whom we have met, interviewed, and made ritual with, have demonstrated sensitivity and thought in their configuring of practices, group memberships and moral codes; on the whole adopting an inclusivist philosophy and emphasising that they are creating religion for today, rather than harking back to a romanticised and static past.

Magical Practice: Runes and Seidr

Not all Heathens engage in magical practices, although in general there is acceptance that possibilities for such do exist. Not all magic is seen as appropriate or ethical, and some areas are quite hotly disputed (see e.g. Blain 2002b; Wallis 2003). As with other areas of Heathen practice, the magical forms are drawn from the lore (the mediaeval literature) and archaeological evidence. Here academic analyses are used extensively to assist Heathen interpretations and practice. Magical practices include use of runes as taufr (charms) and for divination, galdr singing, and *seidr* or shamanic magic.

Many Heathens use the runes of the Common Germanic Futhark (24 runes), others use Anglo-Saxon Futhorcs with from five to nine 'extra' runes, up to 33 in the case of the Northumbrian Futhorc, and a few may also use the Scandinavian and Icelandic 'Younger' Futharks. (The names Futhark and Futhorc relate to the sound of the first six 'letters' and the difference in spelling addresses a difference in sound arising over time and place.) Rune magic may involve galdr singing of rune names, carving taufr (charms), or drawing runes in the air or on materials, in addition to using runes on small slips for divination. Many Heathens use runes in some of their work, drawing runes for personal guidance or engraving their own ritual objects or indeed household items. However some heathens are known as rune specialists and others

seek them out for teaching or for 'readings'. Specialists are likely to rely in part on their own intuition (or UPG—unusual personal gnosis) together with the work of rune scholars such as Elliott (1987), Page (e.g. 1995) or Halsall (1981), in addition to more explicitly Heathen-leaning works (e.g. Linsell 1994; Paxson 2005), and as with some areas of Heathenry, there are academic Heathens such as Stephen Flowers and Stephan Grundy who have worked in this area.

Galdr, already mentioned, may refer to chanted runes, but often refers to sung 'spells' of some kind. These include both 'new' poems and chants, and those from parts of the Eddas or from the Old English healing charms.

Two Old English charms, in particular, are pointed to by Heathens as a source of ritual ideas: the Acerbot (field blessing for 'unfruitful land') and Nine herbs charm, seen by practitioners as thinly-Christianised records of old Heathen practices. Some practitioners consider the field blessing may have been performed initially by a Heathen, later by a Christian, priest (though this perception may be in conflict with academic analysis today). The field blessing begins with calling upon deity to grant the power to carrying out the charm, the speaker is thereby empowered by the god, or in Heathen revisions (Blain and Wallis 2004), gods possibly including Woden, Frey, Freyja to recite the galdr correctly so that it may have its effect of helping the land and the farms.

Where the Acerbot appears to be a ritual in which the help of deity is invoked and magical practices undertaken, the Nine Herbs charm (a charm against poison—see Pollington 2000; Rodrigues 1993) may rather be an example of shamanic healing, with each of the nine references to the herbs setting up a particular set of meaning and relationships between people, land, gods and, of course, plants. This charm describes some actions of the god Woden. However it does not ask his assistance, but rather allies the speaker, the 'shaman', with this god through an implicit comparison. It directly addresses seven of the nine plants of its title, stating likewise their accomplishments.

> Remember, Mugwort, what you did reveal
> What you did arrange at Regenmeld.
> You were called Una, oldest of the herbs.
> You have might against three and against thirty
> You have might against venom and against infection
> You have might against the loathing faring though the land
>
> …

I alone know the running streams, and they enclose nine adders.
Let all weeds spring up as herbs,
Seas slide apart, all salt water
While I blow this poison from you.
(Based on translations by Rodrigues and Pollington)

Indeed some heathens may attempt to use it shamanically (Blain, 2006a; Blain and Wallis 2004; Wallis 2008).

Heathens have tended to see such material as basically heathen with some 'corruption' by christianity, which they are stripping away. However these charms originated, the are today being 'heathenised' by action and ritual use, and by constant inscription of meaning—including an engagement with commentary (e.g. Pollington 2000) and subversion and revision within politicised contexts in which the scripted 'original' (itself a translation/interpretation) is claimed as authenticating practice which is reinvented in today's contexts.

However, some Heathens are producing their own, new, sacred songs, and these may be designed with magical intent. For instance, in a ritual of land protection relating to a 'sacred site' with which one of the authors was involved in 2004, the god Frey 'asked' for a song, which was produced and designed to celebrate or confirm the 'wholeness' of the land under threat. The song combined images of the land, through a year cycle, with references to the god and stories and folklore referring to him.

The third area of magical practice is *seidr* or shamanic work, and here again today's Heathens are engaging with with original sources and with scholarly or academic analyses. Seidr is a type of magical practice referred to in the sagas and possibly reflected in some of the Eddic poems. It appeared to be a way (or set of ways) for people to connect with deities and spirits, thereby influencing events: a famous example being in *Landnamabok* where a seeress 'calls' fish into the sounds or bays so that people have food. There have been considerable arguments within Heathenry about seidr, on what the term covers, and notably on whether it is 'good' magic: in the sagas it is usually described as performed against the hero of the story. Further, inherent ambiguities of gender and sexuality appear in saga descriptions (see e.g. Blain and Wallis 2000; Meulengracht Sørensen 1983), and these are problematic for more 'folkish' Heathens, as earlier indicated. We have seen emailed comments such as 'seidr is for women and gay men', and the term 'ergi', used as an insult in the old literature (discussed in detail by

Meulengracht Sorensen) retains ambiguity in present-day communities. However growing numbers of heathens in Britain and elsewhere, women and men, straight and gay, are attempting to 'reconstruct' seidr practices, for protection, for healing (Blain 1999, 2002b), and notably for divination, which is often called 'oracular seidr' (Blain 2002a).

As indicated earlier, ancient Heathenry would seem to have connections with the shamanic religions across much of this area. There are various accounts of magic-workers, at least some of whom appear to be using 'shamanistic' techniques: the Greenland spákona (spae-woman, prophetess) in the Saga of Eirík the Red, the seeresses in Kormaks Saga, being only some examples. Detailed accounts of seidr in the sagas, and its possible relationship to Sámi shamanic practice, are found in Price (2002), Dubois (1999), and in relationship to present developments of practice Blain (2002a, Wallis 2003). Practitioners today are drawing on the saga accounts in constructing their rituals and formulae for achieving the deep trance of seidr and for doing 'work', for community or indivi-duals, within this; those who practice oracular seidr use the account of the Greenland seeress from the Saga of Eirik the Red, and the possible formulae given in some of the Eddic poems including *Vóluspá, Baldur's* dream and the *Lay of Hyndla*. In particular they make use of the concept of the central tree, Yggdrasil, to assist in 'journeying' or seeking knowledge from the nine worlds, and as a central or stabilising point when undergoing an altered consciousness or deep trance experience, so that it is in this area of practice that the cosmology of the nine worlds becomes crucial for present-day experience. The saga accounts were composed and Eddic poems transcribed post-Christianisation, but it seems likely that the practices referred to had remained part of popular awareness, that is, the possibility of their occurrence was still part of the culture. Indeed, Jórmundur Ingi, when head of the Ásatrúarfélagidh of Iceland, maintained in an interview with Blain that some practices of Icelandic folk-magic represent a continuation of seid-magic into the present day. Traces appear in other areas of Northern Europe: for instance, in Scotland, the 'spaewife' remained part of the culture, although with little evidence that her practices involved ecstatic trance, and a number of practices related to divination or spae-working have persisted until the present-day, though stripped of spiritual/ecstatic content.

The complexities of seidr and its relationship to communities of Heathenry in present-day practice are beyond the scope of this chapter, and we have described them elsewhere as indicated above. Suffice

it, here, to say that seidr represents another area in which Heathens can be seen to derive practice and understanding from a combination of literary and archaeological resources, interpreted through personal experience; as well as an area of contested practice within present-day spirituality.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to indicate some key components of Heathenry as practiced today. We must repeat the caution made at the outset: Heathen practice has a considerable range of forms and indeed meanings, and while we hope that most of the Heathens who may read this chapter will recognise at least a close relationship with what they do, some may find that our descriptions do not fit. And others may feel that we have neglected their concerns. We take responsibility for what we have said as practitioners as well as academic researchers. We have been describing what we know, those elements of Heathenry that we have witnessed or participated in.

Heathenry is a complex set of spiritual and religious practices and involvements for today. We have described this as based in worldviews drawn from past documents and other evidence, but it is constructed within present-day contexts. Today's Heathens are creating their own philosophies and evolving new understandings. We have indicated sets of controversies around Heathen communities and interpretations of 'lore'. We do not see Heathenry as defined by these. To conclude, the majority of today's Heathen are not attempting to re-enact or re-create pasts, but to produce something that works for them as spiritual practitioners today, with these central concepts of the tree Yggdrasil, the idea of wyrd that connects all levels of being, and the landscapes of Northern Europe filled with living spirits and gods.

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NEW/OLD SPIRITUALITIES IN THE WEST: NEO-SHAMANS AND NEO-SHAMANISM

Dawne Sanson

Shamanic phenomena, it seems, have always been part of the human consciousness and modern Western shamans (neo-shamans) are seeking to (re)-claim what some would see as their (lost) heritage. The literature on neo-shamans focuses primarily on core shamanism or re-constructed shamanisms as practised in parts of Britain, the United States, and Northern or Western Europe. There is a need for other perspectives, and analysis of neo-shamanism from other areas of the globe, to avoid the methodological traps of assuming all neo-shamanisms are the same (Wallis, 2003: 230). This chapter, an annotated bibliography drawn from my doctoral thesis about contemporary shamanic healing and neo-shamans in New Zealand covers many landscapes and crosses numerous boundaries, drawing on literature from various academic disciplines, popular publications and the internet.

Categorising Neo-Shamans

Robert Wallis (2003), an academic and self-identified neo-shaman, provides a sympathetic, but not uncritical account of the diversity of neo-shamanism, drawing on the shamanic practices of contemporary pagans in the United Kingdom and North America, and core shamanism as taught internationally by Michael Harner and the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies*. He discards descriptors applied by other scholars to neo-shamans—"crisis cults", "revitalisation movements", "marginal religious movements", "subculture" or "counterculture" movements, or "New Age" amongst others—on the grounds that neo-shamans are too numerous, too diffuse, and diverse in their practices and that, at least in some areas, they are becoming mainstream and even operating within the corporate world. Neo-shamans, he says, 'embody a number of socio-political locations, including counter-cultural, being socially integrated, modern and post-modern. In this diversity, neo-Shamanisms reject attempts at simplistic classification…we might rather speak less pejoratively, plurally and simply, of 'neo-Shamanisms'. (ibid.: 30)

The 1960s counter-culture movements, with their dismissal of mainstream values and politics, adoption of New Age spirituality and values, healing and personal growth, environmental concerns, drug experimentation and pop music, certainly provided fertile ground for modern shamanic movements to emerge during the 1970s (Heelas, 1996; Vitebsky, 1995). Harner (1990: xi) puts forward several reasons for the 'shamanic renaissance' in the Western world: the end of an Age of Faith and a corresponding search for an experiential spirituality, along with an increased interest in holistic health and spiritual ecology. Romantic and idealised notions about "exotic others" perceived as being in touch with a pristine nature possibly also fuel the trend (Vitbesky, 2003; von Stuckrad, 2002).[1]

In spite of Wallis' (2003: 29) and other neo-shamans' rejection, there is a tendency for some to link neo-shamanism with New Age thinking. There are overlaps between contemporary Western shamanism, paganism and New Age thinking (Greenwood, 2005; von Stuckrad, 2002), all of which have been subsumed under the heading 'nature religion' (Albanese, 1991). Susan Greenwood (2005:ix) writes that '[n]ature religion comprises a number of spiritual ontologies, all of which have different conceptions of nature, but most share the view that there is an interconnected and sacred universe'. Other writers compare and contrast the New Age and neo-pagan movements (York, 1995; Greenwood, 2000: 8–11; Pearson, 2002), noting the tendency for New Age thinking to be more transcendent and utopian than that of neo-pagans. The 'essential *lingua franca*' of New Age thinking is 'self-spirituality' (Heelas, 1996: 18) and similarly, many neo-pagans and neo-shamans aspire to create their own spiritual pathway. In some areas at least, New Age mores have made such a widespread impact that some aspects of its thinking are now mainstream (for example, holistic health and the move towards integrated medicine, or within the corporate world which has embraced team-building and prosperity consciousness, "creating your own reality"-type beliefs). This is true for many neo-shamans too,

[1] Heelas' and Woodward's (2005) Subjectivization Thesis offers the possibility of the co-existence of secularisation and sacralisation in modern Western society, correlating this with social changes within education, health, and other sectors with their trends towards being more people-focused rather than rule bound and hierarchical in structure. See also Cowan (2005: 193–194) who notes that people are becoming not 'less religious' but 'differently religious'.

as already noted above. However, to re-iterate Robert Wallis' (2003) position, just as there is no single "shamanism", the diversity of neo-shamanisms must be acknowledged; some individual neo-shamans may be more New Age influenced than others, whilst others will reject being categorised as New Age. Wallis (2003: 50) believes Danish anthropologist Jakobsen (1999), who places neo-shamanism within the New Age camp, made an 'error' in choosing to focus her research solely on Harner's core shamanism as the only example of what neo-shamans do and in failing to recognise the plurality and variety of neo-shamanism.

The term "neo-shamanism", coined by Rothenberg (1985, cited in Wallis, 2003: 30), applied primarily by academics distinguishes indigenous shamanism from Westerners who have embraced shamanism in various forms as their spiritual practice. Neo-shamans tend to be viewed by academics with scepticism, their responses derogatory and ranging from a 'biased tone' (von Stuckrad, 2002: 774), to 'cynicism' (Harvey, 2003: 12) or 'neo-shamanophobia' (Wallis, 1999: 46), frequently unwilling to consider potential positive aspects of neo-shamanic practices. As Annette Høst (n.d.[a]:1), who co-facilitates shamanic trainings with Jonathan Horwitz at the *Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies*, somewhat plaintively observes:

> I am standing with both feet in my own time and soil and society. Trying to learn things that were forgotten and forbidden for a long time. Then some people come and call me names. Or they call what I do names.

A selection of other names—"core shamanism", "Harner shamanism", "urban shamanism", "modern shamanism", "contemporary shamanism", "modern Western/European shamanism"—have all been used at different times by various writers and practitioners, and I use these inter-changeably.

Three authors in particular have contributed to the popularity of shamanism amongst Westerners (Wallis, 2003: 33), namely:

- Mircea Eliade with his book *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1972);
- Carlos Castaneda and his series of books about his training with the Yaqui Indian sorcerer don Juan, beginning with *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1970);
- Michael Harner, anthropologist and author of *The Way of the Shaman* (1990).

Von Stuckrad (2002) adds Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell to this list. I consider the influences of Eliade and Castaneda now, and address Harner and core shamanism later.

Eliade's (1972) seminal work on shamanism describes shamans as a particular category of religious practitioners, best known for their intense ecstatic experiences and special skills, particularly their ability to travel to other worlds. His description of shamanism begins with the simple premise 'shamanism = *technique of ecstasy*' (ibid.: 4, italics in original), suggesting that he privileged ecstasy and the heavenly flight, allowing his personal Christian beliefs to overly influence his interpretation of other peoples' data (Wallis, 2003: 36). Eliade's work, although written for an academic audience, has gained wide popularity amongst neo-shamans. Harner's core shamanism in particular subscribes to Eliade's views of ecstatic flight as the defining feature of a shaman, the Shamanic State of Consciousness (SSC) (Harner, 1990: 21). While Eliade's binary presentation of 'pure' shamanism versus 'decadent' variants are the result of out-dated cultural evolutionary concepts,[2] Wallis (2003) takes a rounded holistic view on Eliade. He writes that Eliade's contribution is better balanced when he is considered as 'person, Christian, novelist and scholar', as someone who 'paved the way' for popular concepts of a universal shamanism, and who 'unwittingly . . . had "great influence on Europe's Pagan revival" ' (Henry, 1999: 1, cited in Wallis, 2003: 38).

Carlos Castaneda's anthropological and writing career has been fraught with controversy. The issues can be crystallised two-fold: questions concerning academic rigour and veracity of his fieldwork and, secondly, the elusive nature of Castaneda himself. His use of 'literary devices to trick his readers' (Narby & Huxley, 2001: 148) can perhaps best be interpreted as an allegorical style, almost a game devised by him in an attempt to 'erase personal history' as he was instructed to do by don Juan, the Yaqui sorcerer he was supposedly apprenticed to (Castaneda, 1976: 11). Richard de Mille (1976) analysed Castaneda's books in detail in an attempt to verify the truth of Castaneda's claims, and to pin down the elusive "real" Castaneda. The complex mixture of truth and lies continues to confound scholars, not least the issue of whether UCLA should have granted Castaneda a Master's and then

[2] As an aside, it is worth noting that Eliade apparently told anthropologist Peter Furse, in his later years that he had 'discarded his view of the use of hallucinogenic plants as "degeneration" of the shamanic technique of ecstasy' (Narby & Huxley, 2001: 135).

a PhD based on his writings.[3] Notwithstanding the debate, there is no denying that millions of people world-wide have been influenced by his books which introduced the possibility that anyone could become a shaman: 'De Mille unmasked the bogus fieldworker but took Castaneda seriously as Trickster-Teacher, a deceptive truth-bringer who taught a new conception of "reality" to millions of readers' (de Mille, 1980: back cover). Wallis (2003: 45) suggests that Castaneda's books have led to a polarising of opinions and contributed to the 'academic-shamanophobia' on the one hand, and the popularisation of neo-shamanism ('neo-Shamania') on the other. Outside of academia, the authenticity issues are irrelevant to Castaneda followers who study Toltec shamanism spawned from the teachings of don Juan as presented by Castaneda. They seek to master the three skills of awareness, transformation and intent, believing also that the sorcerer don Juan initiated a group of three women as well as Castaneda (see Abelar, 1992; Castaneda, 1994; Feather, 2006).

Neo-Shamans Giving 'Extra Pay' to Shamanism[4]

Harvey (1997: 110) observes that many Western philosophies and individual personal experiences have correspondences with some shamanic practices, such as neo-pagan communications with devas and nature spirits, and Freudian or Jungian maps of the inner worlds of consciousness; as a result, when anthropologists provided the name "shamanism", many people adopted this word to label their experiences. Shamanism thus quickly became a convenient shorthand descriptor for previously unnamed phenomena. Many Westerners have spontaneous experiences which they later identify as "shamanic" once the word comes into their lexicon, and these experiences may have similarities to a traditional shamanic initiatory calling (Wallis, 1999: 42–43). Harner (1990: 20) asserts that the adoption of the term "shaman" into the West was useful because it doesn't have the negative connotations associated with "witchdoctor", "wizard" or "sorcerer" and so on, and this may

[3] Fikes (1993, cited in Wallis, 2003: 41) goes so far as to write of the 'methodological corruption' in the UCLA anthropology department.

[4] Harvey (1997: 107) adopts Humpty Dumpty's concept of 'extra pay' from Louis Carroll's book *Through the Looking Glass*. Shamanism is a hard-working Humpty Dumpty word and consequently deserves to be 'paid extra'.

well be accurate, given the responses feminist witches have received in some quarters.

However, I endorse Harvey's observation that 'the word "Shaman" can be short-changed and used as a new label for doing whatever it was people did before' (Harvey, 1997: 125). He argues that such terminology denies the depth and fullness of possible meanings for neo-Shamanism. Clifton (2004: 348) draws a similar conclusion when he notes that moving from ritual practices with '"shamanistic elements" to shamanism is a long jump' or, I would add, from a particular healing modality to re-packaging it as "shamanic healing". Harvey identifies three areas in which the words "shaman" and "shamanism" can and should be given 'extra pay' (1997: 111):

- through the rediscovery, revival and re-construction of ancient traditions, as exhibited with some neo-pagan and neo-shamanic practises such as seidr;
- when new traditions are revitalised and enriched by incorporation of shamanic animistic beliefs, for example when urban practitioners connect physically with the spirits of their natural surroundings;
- healing at personal, community, or deep ecological and environmental levels (see also Wallis, 2003: 75).

I address these aspects in more detail later when I discuss Celtic or Northern shamanisms, while noting here that there is sometimes a fine line between adding 'extra pay' and criticisms levelled at neo-shamans with regard to some of these characteristics; depending on the perspective of the critic, some of these points may be seen as either positive or negative features.

Expanding Harvey's concept, Wallis (2003: 67–78) identifies further ways in which neo-shamans can pay extra to the word "shamanism". These include respectful use of the honorific "shaman"[5] coupled with awareness of indigenous peoples and their often-precarious plights in ways that honour them without neo-colonial tinges. In addition, by:

> occupying a demonstrably shamanic way of being, with spirit-helpers, "supernatural" forms of healing and sometimes entheogenic assistance

[5] It has become etiquette amongst some neo-shamans not to claim the title of 'shaman'; it is a title bestowed by others (Blain, 2002: 147; Wallis, 2003: 69). Wallis mentions the modesty of neo-shamans he has personally communicated with on this matter.

> to enter trance, some neo-Shamans are radically critiquing the received wisdom of objective science all around them. (ibid.: 70)

Wallis is perhaps alluding to what Peter Reason (1993) has envisioned as 'sacred science', a science underpinned by a mystical/spiritual worldview, a sacred inquiry in which the experiential ('participatory consciousness') becomes a valid starting point with 'images, dream, story, poetry and metaphor' forming a bridge between experiential knowledge and propositional knowledge and understandings (Heron, 1992, cited in Reason, 1993). I discuss Michael Harner's 'science of spirits' shortly, but it seems to me that this is not too far removed from Reason's sacred science, and both would add extra pay to the word "shamanism".

Another area in which neo-shamans might give extra pay to shamanism is that of sexual identity. In traditional shamanism, genders may become blurred, ambiguous or androgynous in some cases, and amongst neo-shamans this may be the case too when gender stereotypes are challenged, as in crossing over of genders during spirit encounters, for example (Brown, 1997, cited in Wallis, 2003: 73). Western biological reductionism, current assumptions and perceptions of sexuality, homophobia, or social construction of gender are all areas that neo-shamans can question or challenge (Wallis, 2003). Amongst Northern European seidr workers the term "ergi" was once an insult given to men who practised what was considered "women's magic". However, some seidmen (male seidr workers) are reclaiming the name "ergi" to describe their practise (Blain & Wallis, 2000), in much the same way as some feminists have reclaimed the name "witch" as a symbol of empowerment (Rountree, 1993).

Core Shamanism

Shamanism, according to anthropologist Michael Harner, is a methodology and a way of life (1990: xii). His book *The Way of the Shaman* outlines his version of core shamanism as an ancient universal method primarily used for 'health and healing', a tool and 'strategy for personal learning' (ibid.: xxiii–xxiv). Not surprisingly, Harner has been criticised for simplifying and de-contextualising his depiction of shamanism as a safe practice freely available to anyone by choice, and I address these and other critiques shortly. It is important, however, to acknowledge Harner's positive influence and contribution in providing tools for

thousands of people world-wide to empower themselves and experientially access spiritual realms. Ecofeminist Gloria Orenstein (1994: 176) writes that Harner's work is of 'immeasurable value, and I fully agree with the importance of familiarizing contemporary Westerners with the possibilities of experiences of the "shamanic journey" or the spirit flight', although she does follow this comment with a proviso regarding naïve oversimplification of shamanism, and the dangers of not taking the spirits seriously.

Harner's fieldwork began with Jívaro Indian shamans in the Upper Amazon in 1956 and 1957. It wasn't until he returned to the Amazon to live with the Conibo Indians in 1960 and 1961 that he first took their sacred drink ayahuasca, and thereafter underwent intense and sometimes terrifying experiences during his shamanic initiation, at times fearing for his own safety. Over a period of years, he acquired *tsentsak* (magical darts or spirit helpers) (Harner, 1990). Subsequently he lived and worked with indigenous peoples in Mexico, the Canadian Arctic, Samiland and Western North America (Horrigan, 1997). From the Native Americans he learnt that shamanism could be practised without drugs, opening the way for introducing practical core shamanism to Westerners (Harner, 1990), at a time when the political climate was not sympathetic towards drug experimentation but many people were hungry for new forms of spirituality. Unlike Castaneda, I believe Harner has maintained his professional anthropological credibility, continuing to present papers at anthropological conferences and to be published academically, although Wallis (2003: 45) says that by 'going native' he may have lost his academic credibility with some anthropologists. He calls Harner a 'former anthropologist' (ibid.: xiv), seeming to imply that his activities as a shaman disqualify him from remaining an anthropologist. Nevill Drury (1989: 93) endorses Harner's credentials as both an academic and shamanic practitioner (it is true, however, that Harner resigned from formal academic anthropological tenures in 1987).

Harner established the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies* in 1985, and annually over 5000 students attend courses under the banner of the Foundation,[6] and many of them in turn go on to teach thousands of others. For example, Jonathan Horwitz (who worked for the Foundation for eight years) and Annette Høst have set up the *Scandinavian Center*

[6] See http://www.shamanism.org/fssinfo/harnerbio.html (Downloaded 8 March 2007).

for Shamanic Studies offering similar courses, covering shamanic journeying to the upper, middle or lower worlds for personal healing, earth healing, shamanic drumming and ritual, shamanic counselling, and also Northern European traditions such as seidr. Magazines such as *Shaman's Drum* (published in the USA), and *Sacred Hoop* (published in the UK) have numerous advertisements for shamanic trainings, shamanic journeying and drumming groups, soul retrieval training, workshops to connect with earth spirits, vision quests, sweatlodges and shamanic tours to Peru and other countries. Many of these facilitators have trained through the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies*.

Harner claims that the Foundation is a 'laboratory of shamanism pioneering a science of spirits'. Western science, he says, is 'truncated by a major ethnocentric and cognicentric a priori assumption of what is impossible' (Harner, 1999). According to Harner, science works from faith that spirits are not real (Horrigan, 1997: 3).[7] Central to Harner's 'science of spirits' are the following principles:

- absolute respect for the spiritual knowledge of indigenous peoples;
- 'radical participation' that allows the researcher to gain experiential knowledge;
- the understanding that humans are part of nature;
- there are two realities[8] and shamans are able to move between them depending on their state of consciousness;
- shamans interact with real spirits encountered in non-ordinary states of reality (Harner, 1999).

Criticisms of Western science by Harner are consistent with the 'epistemological crisis of the West' that began in Europe in the seventeenth century, as articulated by a number of thinkers and writers (Reason, 1993). 'Increasingly the tripartite division between magic, religion and science is breaking down', Greenwood writes (2005: xi), and subjective experiences are becoming an acceptable avenue for acquiring knowledge. Three 'dethronings' of Western egocentric thinking are generally

[7] Roger Walsh (2001: 257) writes that it is 'not at all clear that it is possible to disprove' the existence of spirits (in much the same way as it is difficult to disprove the existence of God), a case of 'ontological indeterminacy', and thus people generally adopt the position of their ambient culture without questioning its underlying assumptions.

[8] Note, however, that altered states of consciousness (ASCs) are often regarded as being on a continuum rather than being simply or only 'two realities'.

recognised: geocentric, biocentric, cognicentric[9] (Puhle & Parker, 2004: 7). A fourth, the realisation of the relativity of knowledge to history and culture, has been put forward by German philosopher Michael Landmann and, according to Puhle and Parker, taking the paranormal seriously offers a fifth challenge to human intellect (ibid.). These examples might all be ways that shamanism is paid extra, and they correlate with Michael Harner's endeavours towards a 'science of spirits' as an exploration into the ineffable.

(Re)-Constructing Shamanic Practices: Neo-Shamans in Britain and Europe

Some speculate that many European myths featuring trials endured, journeys to the underworld, death and re-birth are evidence of shamanic traces in the West (Hayden, 2003: 86). Clifton (2004) traces various threads that may have contributed to shamanism in the Western world, such as the pantheon of ancient Greece which, according to some scholars, exhibited magico-religious influences possibly derived from Eastern Europe and Hungary; or influences from Central and Northern Asian shamanism from whence came the notion of a soul that could separate from the body in dreams or during a shamanic trance. Practitioners from the Orphic or Dionysian mysteries sought ecstatic journeys, possibly fuelled by a psychoactive substance from ergot. Such speculations serve as legitimation for some neo-shamans and neo-pagans seeking to re-claim an authentic and ancient lineage. Blain and Wallis (2004: 249) note that contemporary pagans are '…avid consumers of "texts about texts" as direct authentication of practices and beliefs':

> [A] "text", written in one era, read in another for specific purposes, can bear as many interpretations as the people who read it: in a context of sound-bites and slogans…some…take slogans as truth and reject ambiguity and uncertainty, while others…construct meaning within texts, in a context that is political as well as spiritual. (ibid.: 238)

For example, they suggest that when Celtic neo-shamans interpret the semi-mythical figure Taliesin as a shaman and are inspired by the

[9] These three dethronings are the result of the revolutionary thinking of Copernicus, Darwin and Freud respectively (Puhle & Parker, 2004: 7).

stories, academic arguments about the validity of mistranslated texts become irrelevant (ibid.: 243).

In recent years a group of English researchers, who self-identify as neo-pagan or neo-shamanic practitioners, have been conducting auto-ethnographic research about neo-paganisms, including Heathens, Druids, neo-shamans, seidr, Wiccans, and Goddess followers.[10] Jenny Blain (2002), anthropologist and seidrworker, defines seidr as a shamanistic practice and religious tradition that is being re-constructed amongst practitioners in Northern Europe, Britain and North America, simultaneously a product derived from ancient Icelandic sagas and the modern "urban shaman" movement. Blain employs 'multiple, situated narratives' (ibid.: 6) that provide richly layered descriptions of one seid séance, ranging from the viewpoint of an interested observer to accounts by several fully participating people, thus building a mosaic of images in an attempt to capture the subtle and ineffable nature of the experience. She herself is walking between the worlds, negotiating her position 'within the cultural contexts of the discourse of academia and those of seidrworkers' (ibid.: 7), reminiscent of Kathryn Rountree's dilemma which she resolved by positioning herself as the *hag*, one able to 'sit on the fence' and 'inhabit and participate in both worlds' (2004: 72). In Scandinavia, seidr provides Annette Host with an opportunity to develop and enrich her shamanic practice from within her own Nordic cultural traditions, using remnants of the old stories and chants as a starting point to creatively build a genuine contemporary tradition that is not 'wanna-be Viking' (n.d.[b]: 5).

Environmental educator, Gordon MacLellan (2003: 365), in his exploration of what it is to be a shaman in modern Britain, writes that he is called a "shaman" but this title is most likely to be bestowed by those who don't know better: it is a name given by others rather than one personally claimed and, with its widely diverse meanings, it is frequently unclear what the appellation encompasses. He situates shamanism within the neo-pagan movement in modern Britain and describes contemporary shamans as those who continue to fulfil traditional roles—employing ecstatic trance states to bridge the worlds,

[10] Galina Lindquist (1997: 3) likens this situation to that of other areas such as feminist or gay studies where often the leading academic theorists are carrying out self- or auto- research. Robert Wallis (2003: 12) uses Queer Theory to explain some aspects of his theoretical stand in his ethnography.

conveying messages and communicating between the spirit world and everyday reality. While the outer appearances and trappings of shamans vary widely and have been modified in modern Western society as new traditions evolve, he suggests the role of shamans is still important:

> Modern shamans may be:
> personal healers: shamans who help people to listen to themselves
> community healers: shamans who help people listen to each other
> patterners: shamans who help the community listen to/relate to the world around them. (MacLellan, 2003: 369)

MacLellan, member of a group of shamanic practitioners called *Mad Shamans*, takes time most days to meditate or dance to communicate with his 'family of spirits' (Greenwood, 2005: 93). Greenwood was present during a Sacred Trance Dance to celebrate spring and observed that the 'participatory communication between Gordon and the spirits . . . the other-than-human[11] was coming through in human form' (ibid.: 94), a vivid example of taking the spirits seriously.

Critiques of Neo-Shamans and Neo-Shamanism

Much criticism of neo-shamanism assumes that all neo-shamanisms are the same, and does not recognise their diversity. Others compare neo-shamans with shamans and critique them on that basis. Neither approach identifies or addresses the complexities and inter-relatedness of such socio-political considerations as:

- an examination of indigeneity and the relationships between indigenous peoples and neo-shamans;
- the revival of shamanism in indigenous cultures;
- neo-colonialism and power imbalances;
- globalisation processes;
- community identity;
- relationship to nature and ecological concerns (Harvey, 2003; Wallis, 2003).

[11] Harvey (2003: 9–11) has put forward the term 'other-than-human persons' in preference to 'spirits' with it's pejorative and mystical connotations.

Critics of neo-shamans (and core shamanism in particular) generally accuse practitioners of: decontextualising and universalising shamanism; psychologising and individualising shamanism in ways which place self-healing and personal growth central to their practice rather than the good of the community; unthinking upholding of "noble savage" stereotypes and romanticisation of indigenous shamanisms (Wallis, 2003: 49). Not all neo-shamans are implicated in unaware cultural theft, as illustrated in the self-reflexive auto-ethnographic writings of academic-practitioners discussed above. Undoubtedly though, for some neo-shamans and New Agers, shamanism is part of the 'tribal lore…supermarket…They program computers…by day so that by night they can wrestle with spirit jaguars and search for power spots', thereby reducing lifetimes of discipline to a set of techniques, belittling and denying the embeddedness of indigenous knowledge (Brown, 2001: 110–113).

Paul Johnson (2003) is critical of Harner's work and his promotion of core shamanism, suggesting that there are issues pertaining to continuity of shamanic performances; in other words, he questions whether they are actually the same ritual when they are transplanted into different cultural contexts. By comparing traditional Jívaro shamanism with the core shamanism that has evolved from Harner's Foundation, Johnson concludes that they are not the same. The issues are those of Western hegemony he says: neo-shamans who are unavoidably embedded within their own 'cultural matrix' (ibid.: 335) are practicing a form of shamanism whose authority is based on imaginary nostalgic notions of what constitutes "natural" or "indigenous". He argues that there are contradictions between the stated aims of the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies*, namely respect for indigenous peoples' shamanic knowledge, and its introduction of innovative practices, which have resulted in a modernist form of shamanism consisting of a 'quasi-ritual' practice with a psychological base (ibid.: 346). However, this need not necessarily make them invalid as healing practices or negate their significance for individual practitioners, and Johnson concedes that his critique does not 'preclude' the possibility of 'genuine healing' (ibid.: 337).

Scandinavian shamanic practitioner Annette Host (n.d.[a]) observes that when the 'essence' of a particular form of traditional shamanism is supposedly distilled down to its universal residue ('core shamanism'), this residue is immediately and unavoidably imbued with the cultural values and understandings of the neo-shamanic practitioner '[a]nd then it is not core anymore (sic)'. Host writes that, while she initially

appreciated the Harner training, '…seen now with my Nordic and somewhat shamanically experienced eyes, Harner's way of shamanism seems rather, well, American. That is, it is adapted to the American Christian, spiritual-fast-food culture' (ibid.: 2). Over time Host has modified what she learnt from her training and developed her own form of shamanism, which she prefers to calls Modern Western (or European) shamanism, shaped out of her own experiences and culture.

Piers Vitbesky (2003), in his discussion about global and local knowledge, is critical of the piecemeal appropriation and transmutation of some elements of shamanism into contemporary Western societies, while other locally specific notions (such as ancestor worship) which may not so readily transplant into a Western cosmology, are discarded. As a result, he asserts that neo-shamans can 'never authentically recapture the holistic vision' of indigenous knowledge (cited in Wallis, 2003: 77). Issues of appropriation are of major concern in any analysis of neo-shamanism (Wallis, 2003), and I address this in more detail shortly. However, such a viewpoint as Vitebsky is proffering here seems to deny any possibility of sensitive exploration of new spiritual practices by (some) neo-shamans who seek to create their own meanings and traditions to produce 'a new sort of shamanic local knowledge' (Wallis, 2003: 78), as Host demonstrates in the previous paragraph. At least in some instances these new traditions are based on personal experiential (and sometimes spontaneous) encounters with the spirit world. Utilising the concept of 'magical consciousness',[12] Susan Greenwood (2005: 91) suggests that the gulf between traditional and modern Western epistemologies may not be as vast as Vitbesky and Johnson are suggesting.

Sabina Magliocco provides a further mechanism to explain how an individual's spiritual imagery might develop within a global cultural milieu:

> [P]ersonal spiritual experience has roots in the autonomous imagination, a part of the unconscious that combines individual memories and psychological material with elements from the surrounding culture. Because of globalization, transnationalism, and the explosion of information on the World Wide Web, middle-class whites now have unprecedented access to information, symbols, and practices from other cultural and religious traditions.

[12] Greenwood (2005: 91) adopts the term 'magical consciousness' as a particular form of ASC in which a 'participatory and expanded aspect of consciousness' allows reciprocal communication to occur between other-than-human and human beings, thus promoting 'an awareness of holistic interconnections and cosmologies'.

> These entities come to possess them, to inhabit their imaginations in ways that would have been impossible a century ago, and they become incorporated into the reserve of symbols from which the autonomous imagination draws in creating spiritual visions. (2004: 228–229)

As an explanation of unconscious processes this concept seems valid to me, and it explains the type of imagery and spirit helpers frequently encountered by neo-shamans during altered states of reality; the imagery correlates to the sources they have had most exposure to (American Indian, Celtic, Egyptian and so on) which have become meaningful for the individual.[13] However, I agree that it is not morally permissible that such explanations be used by neo-shamans to justify actions perceived as unethical by indigenous people: sensitivity, awareness and education about the issues become even more important.

Neo-shamans are frequently critiqued on the grounds of appropriation, the process whereby a dominant culture 'borrows' from minority peoples thereby maintaining or exacerbating power imbalances (Sered & Barnes, 2005: 21). Robert Wallis (2003: 195) broadens the discourse about appropriation by drawing on examples from Southern Africa, Peru and other countries as well as North America, but I focus here primarily on the issues as they affect Native Americans. Numerous websites posted by Native Americans seek to distance themselves from Western neo-shamans, declaring vehemently that 'We do not have shamans', and that Native American religion is not shamanism.[14] Many writers are angry and take exception with what has been termed the 'growth industry' of American Indian spiritualism by New Age consumers buying spiritual bric-a-brac and attending workshops (Aldred, 2000; Churchill, 2003; Jenkins, 2004). Fascination with the 'exotic savage' and the search for lost ideals have led to Euroamericans yearning for 'instant' spirituality while being sold a tarnished and 'deluded' version of Indian spirituality they say. New Age 'plastic medicine men' or 'wannabes' both trivialise and commercialise Native American spirituality and, although they might consider themselves to be countercultural, as a result of their uncritical appropriation New Agers are firmly embedded within their larger consumer and capitalist milieu. Nineteenth

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[13] This argument holds, I believe, whatever ontological reality one gives to the spirits encountered.

[14] See, for example, http://www.angelfire.com/electronic/awakening101/not_shamans.html or http://www.bluecorncomics.com/shaman.htm (Downloaded 13 November, 2006).

century romanticisation of Native Americans seems relatively benign and innocent in comparison with dangerous 'simulated New Age shamans' (Vizenor, 1999, cited in Aldred, 2000: 343); dangerous because they project images of an unobtainable 'romanticized Noble Savage' and, secondly, because they form part of a 'racist discourse of oppression' and thereby 'undermine indigenous peoples' struggles for survival' (Aldred, 2000: 344).

Brown's (2003) thoughtful book *Who Owns Native Culture?*, drawing on case studies from Australia and the western United States, attempts to strike a balance between the cultural rights of indigenous people and public rights to information or access to (sacred) spaces, based on mutual respect, dignity and negotiation. These are worthy aspirations but, as Brown himself points out, 'technological and social changes are making cultural boundaries ever harder to identify' (ibid.: 252), and in an internet age face-to-face negotiations are generally not an option. The issues are further complicated by the fact that some Native Americans and 'metis' or mixed blood people are willing to teach and share their traditions with Westerners, thus raising questions about what is 'traditional', how traditions are constructed, and who has the authority to sanction them (Wallis, 2003: 204)? As Wallis (ibid.: 31) writes, 'The question "is neo-shamanism authentic, or valid?" begs another question: "when does a new religious path or set of paths become traditional and authentic?", or at least, at which point are they perceived to be so?'.

Cristina Rocha (2006: 6) applies Appadurai's concept of global 'scapes' to the complex global cultural flows of people, technology, media and ideas in her case study of Zen Buddhism in Brazil. While the interfaces of Zen practitioners in Brazil and Japan are not tainted with the same power imbalances and heightened levels of anger and frustration regarding appropriation, there are some parallels between her study and that of neo-shamans' relations with indigenous people. These commonalities include such considerations as the effects of colonial history, community identity, and the interplay of 'hybrid, cosmopolitan experiences as… [well] as rooted, native ones' (Clifford, 1997, cited in Rocha, 2006: 5). I suggest that neo-shamans (the 'new-indigenes' [Blain & Wallis, 2004: 245]) and neo-shamanism can be analysed through these lenses. The global flows move in all directions and ironically, in some circumstances, it is only when indigenous people have taught white Westerners their traditions that the traditions are being kept alive (Wallis, 2003: 221). As Rocha (2006: 197) observes, traditional cultures and modernity need not necessarily be about binary opposites.

Neo-Shamans and Shamanic Healing

A major purpose of all shamanisms (traditional and contemporary) is to heal (Vitebsky 1995), be it an individual, a community or the environment. Healing is a complex multi-layered and frequently non-linear process. Janzen's (2002) book *The Social Fabric of* Health, for example provides an overview of a number of theoretical perspectives on healing, all of which have relevance to shamanic healing rituals in various contexts, and go some way in explaining why shamanic healing has such appeal for increasing numbers of Westerners. Neo-shamanic practices provide tools that empower people to search deeply within themselves and to find their own healing processes in a format that encompasses mystery and magic, symbolism and ritual all of which are widely perceived as lacking in modern industrialised societies. The following discussion draws largely on studies and writings of core shamanic practitioners.

Research evidence suggests that shamanic healing facilitates symbolic actions on 'self, psyche, and psychobiology' (Winkelman, 2000: 276), and that in addition it has beneficial effects within communities. In many indigenous societies, shamanic healing generally involves the entire community, whereas modern Western shamans tend to focus on personal healing for an individual, frequently within a psychotherapeutic framework. Western attempts to explain how shamanism works tend to psychologise shamanic processes such as soul retrieval but for some contemporary shamans the possibility of miraculous healings involve stepping outside positivist scientific perspectives:

> There is no healing possible if the person that comes for the healing has no faith. You have to come with an open heart. I don't know of any healer or shaman that can do healings on a person who is closed to it.
> (Ipupiara Makunaiman, contemporary shaman from the Ureu-eu-wau-wau tribe in Brazil, cited in Webb, 2004: 91)

Miracles are possible in shamanic work, Ipu says if there is faith.

Some view shamanism as a universal *ur* religion, the oldest form of healing that arose as an evolutionary process: 'humans are hardwired for spirit perceptions' writes Michael Winkelman (2004: 60). Humans enter altered states of consciousness, encounter spirits, and their neuro-phenomenological experiences create physiological changes in the body. James McClenon's (2002; 2004) ritual healing theory proposes that entering altered states is an evolutionary survival skill that is dependent on the extent to which an individual is hypnotisable. McClenon surveys

animal studies, archaeological evidence, historical data and folklore healing accounts to support his hypothesis that shamanic ritual healing is due to a combination of placebo and hypnosis. Over thousands of years, those people with the genotype promoting ease of 'hypnotizability' were better able to survive because they had 'thinner cognitive boundaries' between their conscious and unconscious minds, he suggests, thus manifesting physiological responses similar to that of deep relaxation (ibid., 2002: 12).[15] Moreover, such people are more likely to possess a greater capacity for experiencing anomalous events such as extrasensory perception, out-of-body experiences, psychokinesis, pre-cognitive dreams and so on, all of which have a physiological and genetic basis. Shamanic performances frequently employ hypnotic processes to heal, and as a result shamanism increased the frequency of genes related to hypnotisability (ibid., 2002: 8). McClenon imaginatively re-constructs a possible scenario in class, asking his students to 'simulate a pre-linguistic hominoid campfire ritual' (ibid.: 21) with chanting. One woman easily enters a light trance state, and he uses her experience to illustrate his ritual healing theory. Wondrous (anomalous) experiences and wondrous healings are connected, he says (ibid.: 12); such experiences are not limited to those from traditional indigenous cultures.

More than seventy years ago, anthropologist Forest Clements worked extensively with Native Americans and outlined their concepts of health and illness, describing such categories as disease-object intrusion, soul loss, spirit intrusion, sorcery or breech of taboo (Ellenberger, 1974: 5; see also Vitebsky, 1995: 98–103). The extraction of intrusions is almost universal practice amongst Native American traditions, the foreign object or disease spirits sucked, bitten, or stroked away with a wing feather (Hultkrantz, 1992: 89). Neo-shamans frequently learn variations of these techniques, as I show shortly, but the key to the healing is the shaman's absolute bedrock faith in his or her powers and their relationship with their spirit helpers. One participant in an advanced workshop facilitated under the auspices of the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies in* the United States wrote 'I now have implicit trust in my relationship with the spirits, and I no longer have any hesitancy about doing shamanic

[15] Edith Turner's well-known experience of seeing 'spirit stuff' is treated by McClenon (2002: 61–62) as an anomalous experience as a result of her 'hyponotizability'. Psychics and clairvoyants speak about the "veil between the worlds", a more evocative and romantic expression than McClenon's clinical descriptor.

healing work. This is after 5 years of practice'.[16] Edith Turner notes that her own field experiences correspond to Hultkrantz's descriptions of Native American healing rituals. Her experiential research work enables her to capture and summarise the essence of shamanic healing in a single sentence that I believe will have strong resonances for many neo-shamans:

> …a complex development of the skills of taking disease out of the body, using a consciousness of the disease as a kind of substance, that is, a "spirit substance"—a paradox for our minds; a subtle and real sense of spirits; the courage to go into trance, that wild yet controlled condition; an understanding of the nature of the human soul, which can become lost; and a strong notion of the spiritual character of the cosmos, combining what we call "nature" with an ethic of respect and of getting in step with the cosmological cycle. (Turner, 1994: 237)

There is no denying the immense influence of Michael Harner and his worldwide teachings of core shamanism under the auspices of the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies*, as already discussed. Core shamanic trainings are taking shamanic healing in new exploratory directions that, depending on the perspective of critics, comprise rich and exciting possibilities for developing an old/new healing system that has potential to be employed in conjunction with Western medicine, or they are a New Age exercise in appropriation and romanticisation of others' practices. Harner's vision is that modern Western shamans will work alongside the biomedical heath system (Harner, 1990: 138), a vision that offers a large challenge to a profession whose gold standard research tool is the double-blind placebo trial.[17] In effect, Harner is saying that neo-shamans are leading the way in terms of confronting Western biomedical and positivist scientific "realities".

Michael Harner and Sandra Harner have outlined the principles of core shamanic healing in a chapter *Shamanic Practices*, originally planned for publication in a textbook intended for medical doctors (Harner & Harner, 2000).[18] They address such topics as:

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[16] http://www.shamanism.org/workshops/calendar.php?Wkshp_ID=31 (Downloaded 1 Jan 2008).

[17] This challenge is not one confronted solely by shamanic practitioners, as appropriate research methodologies are an issue for all complementary and alternative (CAM therapies (see for example, Braud & Anderson, 1998; Cassidy, 1994, 1995; Krippner, 2002).

[18] In the event, it seems that the planned book was not published, as I have been unable to trace a citation for it.

- shamanic cosmologies and the shamanic relationship with the natural and spirit worlds;
- shamanic states of consciousness and shamanic journeying;
- shamanic perspectives on aetiology of health and illness;
- shamanic diagnosis by means of shamanic journeying or divination;
- shamanic treatment by means of soul retrieval, spirit depossession, guardian spirit retrieval or spirit intrusion extraction.

They discuss the training of shamanic practitioners, stating that once someone has learnt the basic shamanic tools of journeying while in an ASC further training is directly received over many years of working with helping (tutelary) spirits.

Hayden (2003: 82–83) asks the question 'Does shamanism work?', and notes current research that documents the effectiveness of new techniques (such as visualisation, some aspects of psychotherapy, or hypnotherapy) that goes some way to support the validity of shamanic healing. He comments that he is not aware of any studies to test the effectiveness of shamanic healing *per se*. However, I have located two studies that investigate neo-shamanic practices. In one, a group of researchers in Oregon recently conducted the first-ever clinical trial using shamanic healing to treat temporomandibular joint disorders. The trial took place over six weeks, and consisted of four experienced shamanic practitioners working with twenty patients. The practitioners carried out diagnostic journeys on the first consultation, followed by shamanic treatments such as soul retrieval, extractions, depossession, power animal retrieval and so on. Patients were evaluated for their pain levels after each visit and for several months afterwards. The results demonstrated 'an impressive efficacy' in terms of diminishment of pain, and patient acceptability of the treatment method (Vuckovic, Gullion et al., 2007).

In another interesting study, neo-shaman and transpersonal psychologist, Sharon Van Raalte (1994) collaborated with a psychiatrist (Dr. B.) to study the effects of shamanic journeying in conjunction with cognitive-behavioural therapy for four patients. The psychiatrist chose the patients whom he considered suitable and with their permission, Van Raalte journeyed for them without meeting them beforehand. A written account of her journeys was given to the patients via the psychiatrist. The study resulted in theoretical discussions between the psychiatrist and Van Raalte as they sought to find a common language to bridge the shamanic and psychiatric models: 'sometimes his "brain"

talk and my "soul" talk met in the middle and we both knew that we were understanding the same thing' (ibid.: 15). Additional complications occurred as Van Raalte moved from being a former client of Dr B. to a peer and their inter-personal dynamics, documented as part of her study create nuances that are impossible to separate from her conclusions. Nonetheless, the detailed descriptions of her journeys give depth and understanding to the process of neo-shamanic journeying, particularly in relation to the imagery and symbolism of material gathered during a series of journeys for the same person, and in terms of one neo-shaman's relationship with her spirit helpers. She concludes that the 'healing experience of the journeys went beyond the level of therapeutic intervention straight to what Angeles Arrien refers to as the realm of "psychomythology"' (ibid.: 182).

Leaving aside questions of scientific efficacy, and the desire to be colleagues with medical doctors, it seems to me that neo-shamans need to simply get on with what they know and do best, that is shamanising. Harner states that 'everything that's ever been known, everything that can be known, is available to the shaman in the Dreamtime.' (cited in Horrigan, 1997: 2). There is a 'crossover' between the worlds and, although they are separate realities, the shaman is able to return to everyday reality with powers gained from the non-ordinary reality, and that when 'this is done successfully, that's how healings occur and how we have what is called "miracles"' (ibid.: 4).

Myron Eshowsky is a neo-shaman who has worked shamanically with patients diagnosed with cancer and other aggressive illnesses. 'Each specific cancer is spiritually distinct' he writes, and he works to 'create an alliance' with the patient and the spirits. He seeks to 'empower' his patients and teaches them to journey for themselves, to find their own power animals and spiritual teachers, to ask of their spirit helpers such questions as 'What is the spirit of the illness telling you?' (2007: 3). He guides them, for example as they work with water spirits to calm the 'fire' elements of cancer, sometimes facilitating healing ceremonies in circles with several healers working together to address different aspects of the illness, perhaps as part of a purification sweatlodge ceremony or a community fire ritual, depending on instructions from spirit helpers. Eshowsky documents several remarkable healings, saying 'that the spirits work in whatever way they do and…I…long ago learnt to work from a place of non-attachment to outcome' (ibid.: 7).

I turn now to revisit some areas of neo-shamanic healing practices that attract criticism, particularly in the areas of psychotherapy and

environmentalism with their focus on the individual rather than the more traditional community role of the shaman (Vitebsky, 2003). I believe the issues are more complex than Vitebsky implies here. European neo-shamans practising in the seidr tradition hold healing séances within their community, the seidworker bringing back answers to specific questions from members of the participating audience (Blain, 2002). Robert Boyle (2007: 5) has observed that while neo-shamans may be primarily concerned with their individual process there are also broader implications for the integration of eco-cultural concerns, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Peruvian-born psychotherapist and medical anthropologist, Oscar Miro-Quesada, trained in the northern Peruvian *curanderismo* tradition, believes people come to his shamanic workshops initially for self-gain and personal healing. However, he says, they then move 'out of a narcissistic self-identity to more of a global consciousness . . . [a] sense of being a global family' (cited in Webb, 2004: 8), perhaps a new kind of twenty-first century community. For Leslie Gray (1995), clinical psychologist and Native American shamanic counsellor, her animistic shamanic practice combines with ecological interests, moving ecopsychology beyond a merely mechanistic view of the environment. 'Shaman-as-leader' is a concept Lucy Nesbeda (2004) promotes as she confronts the current political situation in the United States. Writing to her community of shamanic practitioners, she asks rhetorically 'What roles should contemporary shamans be playing within American society?' Her answer: modern Western shamans need to be prepared to bridge the non-ordinary and ordinary worlds, 'spiritual actors' willing to bring forward the learning gained from the spiritual realms, a brave and radical notion bearing in mind the relative numbers of contemporary shamans in the total population.

Nonetheless, some modern shamans are quietly moving into their communities, working in mental health programmes, with inner city delinquent youths and drug addicts. Myron Eshowsky (1993, 1998) documents some of his experiences incorporating shamanic work into his community mental health work, showing that 'core shamanism and general shamanic principles can be utilized to yield healing and spiritual justice in situations of great despair and powerlessness' (1998: 1). He identifies the potential of working with youths who come from disadvantaged, violent and abusive communities. He leads individual clients and groups to journey to find a power animal, noting that 'I can't help but think that connecting to one's own power animals and

learning from them is a crucial link in healing the human spirit' (1993: 1). A new paradigm is required, he suggests, that allows for the inclusion of a spiritual perspective to heal communities and individuals within those communities. He notes too the willingness of psychiatrists and other community workers to be open to the use of shamanic tools when positive results are apparent: 'That there has been so much openness to shamanic practice in what is essentially a conservative treatment system remains a mystery. The bottom line seems to be that people respond to what works' (ibid.: 5). Winkelman (2005) has assessed the role of community drumming and shamanic programmes as adjuncts to conventional addiction treatment programmes. The programmes allow participants to experience ASC within a community setting, enhancing recovery through a 'variety of psychological, social, and physiological mechanisms' (ibid.: 460).

Hillary Webb's (2004) collection of conversations with twenty-three contemporary shamans (a number of mestizo or mixed blood descent) includes those trained in Central and South American, African, Native American, Judaic, Druidic and Celtic, Hawaiian, and Tibetan Bön traditions, and Harner's core shamanism. The shamanic healing practices they describe all consider the psycho-spiritual aspects of an individual's life, perhaps lending veracity to Vitebsky's claim that neo-shamans are 'psychologizing the realm of the religious…to take the cosmos into oneself and use it as a tool for therapizing the psyche' (2003: 287). Thus the Sakha neo-shamans, whom Vitebsky is specifically referring to 'have moved from outer (cosmological) to inner (psychological) space as they embark on journeys which are avowedly journeys of the mind' (ibid.: 289). Vitebsky's comments are open to dispute on a number of grounds: firstly, he is denying the possibilities of 'magical consciousness' (Greenwood, 2005: 91) and access to the spirit realms for modern people, as already discussed. Secondly, an examination of many indigenous teachings reveals that they often include trainings about awareness and self-development, 'to change attitudes and assumptions', as described in Serge Kahili King's outline of traditional Hawaiian *kahuna* healing (1983, cited in Sheikh, Kunzendorf & Sheikh, 2003: 5–6; Webb, 2004: 56–65; Wesselman, 1995: 161–165), for example. Indigenous traditions do have their own psychologies. The 'progress' of Western psychiatry as outlined by Henri Ellenberger (1974), from shamanism through to Freud is really 'devolution' rather than 'evolution', Gray suggests (1995: 175). She claims that the 'primal therapeutics' of the Native American

shamans she met were more 'powerful and effective' than many of the techniques she learnt during her Western clinical psychology education (ibid.: 176).

Shamans were once considered mentally ill and deranged, suffering from psychopathology and neuroses (Vitebsky, 1995: 138–141), the 'schizophrenic model' (Krippner, 2002: 5). Such notions have largely been superseded by the concept that shamanic healing is like psychotherapy, and that shamans are in fact 'prototypical psychologists' (ibid.: 19). Numerous researchers have compared shamanic healing with psychoanalysis (Langdon, 1992: 6; Lévi-Strauss, 1963). However, anomalous behaviours of indigenous shamans continue to be categorised as psychopathological, as listed in the 'Religious and Spiritual Problems' section of the *American Psychiatric Association*'s 1994 edition of the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV* (*DSM-IV*) (Ortley, 2007). According to Ortley, this is evidence of eurocentric thinking that persists and still influences the delivery of mental health services to indigenous people, attitudes that undermine the positive and legitimate contributions of shaman-healers: 'the use of this sleight-of-hand in shape-shifting indigenous behaviour into psychopathology continues in contemporary academic and medical science' he claims (ibid.: 11). For Michael Winkelman, soul loss and other shamanic illnesses are not pathological eurocentrically-defined conditions, but universal human experiences observable throughout the history of humankind that continue to be displayed in 'contemporary religious experiences and psychological crises', best viewed as '*spiritual emergencies*', a new DSM-IV category (2000: 262, italics in original).

The notion of soul loss is central to the practice of many neo-shamans. How can someone lose his or her soul? What does this mean? According to Kocku von Stuckrad (2002: 791), ideas about a soul are not indigenous but show 'the mark of Neo-Platonism and modern ideas of "personhood"' (see also Clifton, 2004). Nonetheless, concepts of soul and soul loss have become prevalent, although "soul" has contested meanings within the neo-shamanic and transpersonal literature (Boyle, 2007: 22). Jungian analyst, John Haule speculates that the 're-emergence of shamanism in our Western consciousness is a response to the depressing cultural reality of our loss of soul…The physical body and our rational ego have displaced and marginalised our eternal souls' (2004, cited in Boyle, 2007: 22). Celtic neo-shaman, Tom Cowan asserts that 'massive soul loss' occurred when Christianity created a split between spirit and nature (1993, cited in Van Raalte, 1994: 20).

Neo-shaman and psychotherapist Sandra Ingerman has specialised in, and widely taught soul retrieval work. The sub-title of her popular book, *Soul Retrieval: Mending the Fragmented Self* (Ingerman, 1991) suggests a psychotherapeutic approach. For Ingerman, 'soul loss is a spiritual illness that causes emotional and physical disease' (ibid.: 1). 'Soul' is defined as 'vital essence' or life force, and the premise is that when someone suffers from either emotional or physical trauma or shock, part of their soul or vital essence separates from them to escape their pain. This is similar to psychological 'dissociation' (ibid.: 9–24). Psychotherapy can only help those parts of us that are still present ('home'), she writes:

> For the psychologist, the nature and typography of the place where the split-off parts go is relatively unimportant… For the shaman, the question of where the split-off parts go is essential to the cure. (ibid.: 20)

Galina Lindquist suggests, in her analysis of soul loss and soul retrieval as a neo-shamanic healing ritual that a suspension of judgment is required as the 'reality' of the 'ritual's internal discourse… seen by the participant's "inner eye"… becomes shared through shamanic performances and, most importantly, through narratives of the journeys' undertaken while in non-ordinary reality (2004: 158). After the shaman's journey, past events are re-constructed as shaman and patient explore their narratives and 'dovetail' them together so that 'in a sense, the patients are given a new past, from which their new self and a new future can be imagined' (ibid.: 164). This is a more immediate process than that of the patients who participated in Sharon Van Raalte's (1994) research, where the psychiatrist she collaborated with acted as a broker separating her from his clients; however, she did on two occasions meet clients who asked to meet her personally to teach them how to journey for themselves. A similar procedure to that described by Lindquist occurred, with discussions about the imagery that was significant for the client and that triggered childhood memories, a process of constructing their 'psychomythology' (ibid.: 182), whether this occurred directly or through the facilitation of the psychiatrist.

Lindquist (2004) reaches a surprising and somewhat controversial conclusion: because neo-shamanism is most popular in Protestant countries, neo-shamanic soul retrieval is a Protestant equivalent to Catholic confession or rituals of forgiveness, she says and for this reason, they serve a very different function to soul retrieval in other traditions. She comments that:

> [n]o matter how hard practitioners may try to emulate the perceived authentic native traditions, these ontologies distinguish neo-shamanism from other "shamanisms" practiced in other parts of the world. (ibid.: 170)

I agree with her that the function and purpose of the neo-shamanic soul retrieval ritual is likely to be very different to those practised by indigenous shamans, although it does seem to be stretching the point to compare a neo-shamanic ritual to a Catholic sacrament. I am not convinced that (all) neo-shamans are trying to emulate 'perceived authentic' traditions. My impression with the neo-shamans I have met is that they have learnt some techniques to work with and over time these morph into their own personal way of shamanising which, in the words of one of my participants is what shamans have always done.

Neo-shamanic journeying is a transformative process for many neo-shamans. The New Zealand neo-shamans Mary Hanson (2001) interviewed spoke of their existential quest that led them to explore shamanism. All claimed that their shamanic experiences healed psychological wounds, improved their general health, and that their shamanic journeying had transformational benefits. Hanson examined self-transformation from such psychological and theoretical stances as self-actualisation, spiritual emergence/emergencies, change theory, and perspective transformation. Neo-shaman John Broomfield (2001) has compared shamanism and transpersonal psychology: both connect people to spirit, and to deep sources of wisdom within themselves, their communities and the earth.

Robert Boyle's (2007) Australian-based experiential study of neo-shamanism as a journey into creativity and our Jungian shadow-self was overtly a psycho-spiritual journey for himself and his six other participants. On the first shamanic workshop Boyle attended, he had a surprising and rapturous experience that encouraged him to later attend a soul retrieval training. This second training left him 'expanded psychically and somewhat psychically permeable … [he] had spiritually emerged, and was teetering on the edge of spiritual emergency' (ibid.: 12), an illustration of some of the concerns Ruth-Inge Heinze (1991, cited in Orenstein, 1994: 177) expressed when she wrote that people 'should be taught the pitfalls of psychic openings that require closing'.[19]

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[19] This is possibly another example of someone having 'thinner cognitive boundaries' (McClenon, 2002: 12).

Born out of his own initial negative experiences with neo-shamanism, Boyle suggests that some neo-shamans are not self-reflective about their shamanic practices, and about how their personal shadow-self may influence their journeying be this in their own personal work or for clients. This is an interesting aspect of neo-shamanism, especially given the psychotherapeutic nature of their practice and that there may not be any formal avenues of supervision in place as there are for counsellors and psychotherapists.

Shamans have always been tricksters, shape-shifters moving in the shadows of their communities. Some people might think neo-shamans likewise inhabit the fringes of modern Western societies. Nonetheless, as this literature survey illustrates there are many positive potential roles for neo-shamans to fulfil in contemporary Western societies, paying extra to shamanism. In our modern or post-modern "global village", contemporary indigenous shamans are challenged to change and adapt (Hoppal, 1996). In this respect, Western shamans may not be very different as they seek to re-construct, revive and reclaim their past to develop practices that support them individually and within their communities. I fully concur with Wallis' (2003: 78) observation that '[w]hile it is essential to recognise that neo-Shamanists are different from their traditional counterparts, it is also plausible . . . to argue that their close similarity to shamanisms is beyond dispute.'

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AUSTRALIAN PAGANISMS

Douglas Ezzy

Introduction

Australian Paganisms are distinctive for a number of reasons. First, in the Southern Hemisphere, deosil (or sunwise) motion around a circle is counter clockwise (Bodsworth 1999). The sun is typically in the north sky. North winds bring hot dry weather from the huge hot expanse of deserts to the north of the majority of Australians who live in the southeast corner of Australia. Cold wet winds come from the south, were the great southern ocean and Antarctica lie. Whereas the majority Christian culture celebrates Easter (with chocolate eggs and bunnies) in Autumn, Australian Pagans have retimed the festivals of the wheel of the year to suit Australian local conditions. This is perhaps representative of a broader Australian Pagan tendency to distrust authority (most Northern Hemisphere books get the wheel of the year wrong), and rely more heavily on their own experience and intuition.

Second, Australia is a prohibitive distance from both Northern America and Europe. Intercontinental travel is rarer, more expensive, and takes significantly longer. This isolation, generated by the tyranny of distance, had a significant effect on the development of Paganisms in Australia, particularly in the 1970s and 80s. It reinforced an individualism and creativity when claims to authority and tradition were somewhat uncertain and difficult to verify.

Third, Bouma (2006: 35) points out that Australian religiosity (he is talking mostly about Christianity, but his points apply more generally) has its own distinctive nature that is quite different from that found elsewhere. Australian religiosity tends to be subdued and laid back, where occasional attendance is more acceptable, and there is a general distrust of overt authoritarianism. Australians tend to dislike exuberance, distrusting religions that demand ostentatious public display or that make intense demands. Australians tend to be more accepting of diversity, arguing for tolerance, and prepared to laugh at themselves or others who take themselves too seriously. Bouma traces these characteristics back to the way religious authority was forced on, and used

to control, Australian convicts who made up a significant proportion of early immigrants to Australia.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the early history of Paganism in Australia, including the importation and development of initiate Wicca up until the late 1980s. I then review the growth and dispersion of Witchcraft and other forms of Paganism through the 1990s, including a discussion of books, music and festivals. The final section reviews the consolidation of the Australian Pagan community in the late 1990s and 2000s through the formation of Pagan networking associations and egroups. These three phases of development, growth and consolidation correspond roughly to the three decades of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, respectively.

Early Days

Australian Paganism has a shadowy early history. Theosophists and spiritualists arrived in Australia in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) had a lodge in Sydney that lasted between 1912 and the late 1920s, that was reformed in 1982 (Hume 1997: 32). In both Melbourne and Sydney during the late 1960s and 1970s there were a variety of occult orders, influenced by Western magical traditions and British occultism, hermeticism, Qabbala, the Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley. These included the Order of the Golden Phoenix, and the Order of Isis-Ishtar (Drury and Tillett 1980). These groups were mostly very small and secretive, but are indicative of an occult subculture in Australia. However, equally significant was an artistic tradition influenced by Pagan thought.

Norman Lindsay (1879–1969) is one or Australia's great artists. His work expresses a deep appreciation of classically inspired Pagan eroticism. "Feeding his mind upon translations of Catullus, Horace, Petronius and Plautus, he re-acted with illustrations of the Roman debauch . . . with his pen he essays the same problem of massed figures, praising anew the glad fecundity of the earth, and lavishing upon the beauty of the flesh and the frenetic gaiety of the debauch, the untiring power of his imagination" (Lindsay 1974: 3). Lindsay's "profound pleasure in healthy nudity" certainly reflects, and inspired, a recurrent theme in Australian Paganisms.

In the 1950s Rosaleen Norton became famous, or notorious, as "an eccentric and bohemian practitioner of witchcraft" (Drury 1988: ix).

Norton had modelled for Norman Lindsay, and his work inspired her (Norton and Greenlees 1952). Norton's art is of a darker and more macabre tone than Lindsay's. Influenced by Jung and occult writing, her works include nude figures, some of whom are human/animal hybrids, often in erotic poses with titles such as "Homage to Pan", "Individuation", "Bohemia", "Lucifer", and "Witches' Sabbath" (Drury 1988). Unfortunately a book of her artwork published in 1952 resulted in a charge of obscenity being brought against her and many of the books were destroyed by Government officials. Both Lindsay and Norton are representative of a Pagan-inspired Australian artistic culture in the early and mid 1900s.

Exactly when Witchcraft (of the contemporary variety popularised by Gerald Gardner) arrived in Australia is a matter of debate. Hume (1997: 35) and Drury and Tillett (1980: 53), both reputable sources, suggest that initiated Alexandrians and Gardnerians from England and the US arrived in Australia in the late 1960s. As would be expected, there is little publicly available evidence to support these claims (it was only in 1971 that the Australian state of New South Wales repealed the Witchcraft Act, and it remained on the books of other states into the 1980s and 1990s). The only published evidence comes from the enigmatic "Lewis" (2003: 244) who reports that he and his partner trained with a Gardnerian coven in England in 1968 and then migrated to Australia.

Simon Goodman (also named Ian Watts) is widely identified by Alexandrians as being instrumental in the development of Alexandrian Wicca in Australia in the mid 1970s (Wayland 2007a, 2007b, Hume 1997). Goodman grew up in Australia and worked with a coven in the city of Perth in Western Australia in the early 1970s. Although, Drury and Tillett (1980: 57) report that the first Alexandrian coven was set up in 1962 in the city of Perth, it is unclear whether this early Perth coven was lead by initiates or whether it was Wiccan in the sense that members relied on early published books such as *Witchcraft Today* (Gardner 1954). Goodman travelled to the England in the early to mid 1970s, met and spent time with Alex and Maxine Sanders, and returned to Australia with an Alexandrian Book of Shadows and supplementary material with the purpose of spreading Alexandrian Craft in Australia (personal communication, anonymous source). Sometime in the mid 1970s Goodman left this first coven and started another in Perth, and then moved to the east coast of Australia shortly after this. Hume (1997: 36) notes that there was an Alexandrian Book of Shadows circulating

in Australia in 1974 and that Goodman began working with a Wiccan group in the mid 1970s in the city of Canberra on the east coast of Australia.

Alexandrian Wicca is the most numerous initiate tradition in Australia mostly deriving from individuals who trained with Simon Goodman. There are approximately 300 initiates throughout Australia, organised into approximately twenty covens. In contrast, there are approximately 20 Gardnerian Wiccan individuals in the whole of Australia. These numbers are, of course, only rough guesses informed by conversations with various anonymous sources. There are many more people who utilise Alexandrian and Gardnerian materials, and some of these also claim to be Alexandrian and Gardnerian initiates.

There is clear evidence of a substantial Witchcraft/Wiccan community in Australia in the 1980s that was both home grown and fertilised by migration and contacts with initiates from the US and the UK. Three Australian Wiccan/Occult newsletters distributed in the late 1970s and early 1980s included *The Magus, The Source*, and *The Wiccan: A newsletter of Old Religion of Wisecraft and Pagan comment* (Drury and Tillett 1980: 56), later renamed to *The Australian Wiccan*. *The Wiccan* carried information about groups such as the Fellowship of Isis and the Church of All Worlds. For Australians, these early newsletters were an important point of contact with the national and international Pagan community. Later newsletters include *Kindred Spirits Quarterly*, published by Lewis (2003) and his partner beginning in 1983 with 16 issues, the *Children of Sekhmet*, published from 1986 to 1990 by Julia Phillips (2004), and *Shadowplay*. These were often xeroxed or photocopied, and distributed by subscription and in occult bookshops. *Shadowplay's* print version flourished between 1984 and 1994 under the editorship of the Rhea Loader (aka Rhea Shemazi), Liam Cyfrin (aka Bill Beattie), and Raven Erling, all based in Sydney (Shadowplay 2007). Many of the early articles are now available at the magazine's Internet site. The print run of *Shadowplay* was initially approximately eighty copies, rising to over two hundred toward the end of the magazine's life (Cyfrin, personal communication). These publication numbers reflect the relatively small distributions of all subscription only Pagan magazines in Australia. Shadowplay's editors had links with the US published Pagan magazine *Green Egg*, and some of the magazine's articles were reprinted in *Green Egg*.

This diversity of newsletters reflects the diversity of the Australian Pagan community in the 1980s. There were various factions and traditions, some of who were more friendly and cooperative than others.

Cyfrin's (2001) history of *Shadowplay* provides a rare glimpse into the mood and atmosphere of one group of Pagans in Sydney in the 1980s and early 1990s. The 25th issue in 1989 included a forum "about Polarity Magic and Sacred Sexuality (seemingly a topic much loved by our readers since we needed two issues to let everyone have their say)." The accompanying history suggest that the culture around *Shadowplay* was one of a serious and sophisticated religious thought and practice pursued in the context of pleasure and playfulness. Cyfrin also reports that he was initiated in Sydney by a Wiccan Priestess from San Francisco in 1981 with whom he had previously had "long-distance training via snail mail" followed by "rapidly falling in love and bed, and getting me initiated in a span of thirteen days" (Horne 1998: 247).

The Popularisation of Australian Paganism

In the Australian 2001 census 24,157 people described themselves as identifying with a Pagan religion (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). This represents 0.12% of the total population of Australia (nearly 19 million people). These people include 10,632 Pagans, 8,755 identifying with Wicca/Witchcraft, 2,225 describing their religion as "nature religion", 1,085 Pantheists, 763 Animists, and 697 Druids. The Census also indicated that similar to other religions, women tend to dominate in Australian Paganisms with 63% females and 37% males (Hughes and Bond 2003). In comparative terms the number of Australian Pagans is slightly more than there are Brethren, ten times the number of Scientologists, and half the number of Seventh Day Adventists or Mormons. In other words, Paganisms have established themselves as a significant part of the landscape of minority religions in Australia.

I suspect that the Census statistics significantly underestimate the number of Pagans in Australia. The number of teenagers who identify as Pagans or Witches has grown substantially in recent years. "Witch" remains a stigmatised label and it is likely that parents filling out census forms may not have recorded the Pagan religion of their teenage children. As the Census numbers indicate, Witches dominate the Australian Pagan community (I suspect that many of the people who nominate "Pagan" on the Census would identify as "Witch" if asked in private, but choose to put "Pagan" on the Census as it is slightly less stigmatising). Next, I provide a brief discussion of some of the smaller Pagan groups, before turning to review the role of Witchcraft in Australia.

Ecopaganism has a small, although significant, profile in Australia. It occasionally features in the pages of local magazines and Pagan newsletters. Notices of environmental protests are often posted on Pagan Internet groups. The responses to these are largely supportive, although environmental activism is typically as secondary concern for most Pagans (Ezzy 2005). One exception to this is the work of Huon (2006) who is an environmental activist working to defend the old growth forests in Tasmania, and is representative of a small but significant number of committed Pagan environmental activists. Huon is influenced by the Reclaiming tradition, and both Starhawk and Thorn T. Coyle have run workshops in Tasmania and visited protest camps in threatened forests, largely in response to the encouragement and organisational work of Huon.

Paganism in Australia also has a broad appeal among various ecologically oriented people living alternative lifestyles on small farms or in rural communities. I have attended solstice festivals in rural Tasmania where members of a local alternative community join for a large party, dance, and perhaps engage in some ad hoc rituals. While there is some overlap, the communities of urban Witches tend to be quite distinct from the people deliberately choosing alternative lifestyles for whom Paganism is also an important part of their lifestyle. The importance of these alternative lifestyle Pagans is indicated by their presence at Confest. Confest is a very large alternative lifestyle festival, with nearly 10,000 participants, held in rural Victoria that usually has a large "Pagan Village" as part of its structure (St John 2000).

Australian Paganism has a strong undercurrent of connection with "nature" or the "other-than-human" world (Ezzy 2005). For example, Lewis (2003) describes how he moved from a Gardnerian Wiccan coven to a Pagan spirituality mainly oriented to sitting and listening to the Australian bush. The Australian climate is particularly conducive to outdoor rituals and the festivals and conferences described below are often located in camps and centres the provide easy access to forests, rivers, and other experiences of ecological beauty.

Goddess spirituality also has a significant profile in Australian Paganism (Gaia 2003, McPhillips 2003). Although there is some overlap, the Goddess spirituality community and the Witchcraft/Pagan community tend to be largely separate, with different Internet communities, conferences, and networks. Thea Gaia was one of the early catalysts for the development of Goddess spirituality in Australia. Originally a Congregational minister, she left the church in 1979 and began a

"Beyond God the Father" group in 1979 which she involved creating a "feminist spirituality course for ourselves" (Gaia 2003: 95). Dianic Witchcraft, with female only circles who worship the Goddess alone, have a small but significant profile in Australia.

Heathenry, Asatru, and Druidry have an equally small profile in Australia. The largest publicly listed egroup (see below) for Asatru in Australia is aetAustralia and has 63 members (aetAustralia 2007), compared to the larger Witchcraft and generic Pagan egroups with memberships close to or above 1000. I am not aware of any public egroups specifically for Australian Druids. While there are numerous books on Australian Witchcraft, I have not seen any published books specifically for Australian Asatru or Druids. There is at least one book on runes written in the "Odian" system by an Australian author (Wild 2004), but it is not distinctly Australian, or written specifically for Australian practitioners, even if Wild: "is a long time member of both the Rune Gild and the Temple of Set, and is indeed the representative of both organizations in Australia" (Plowright 2005: 1).

Satanism in Australia had a similar early profile to that of the Church of Satan in the US. Drury and Tillett (1980: 102) report that 'Satanic rituals' were performed at nightclubs in Sydney and Melbourne. They describe a typical nightclub ritual reported in a Sydney newspaper in 1972. This Satanic Black Mass involved an attractive woman playing the part of a "Virginal Sacrifice who was offered to Satan on a black altar. After her 'death' during this performance she would then return to the stage 'in spirit form' and make love to the warlock who had sacrificed her before. The performance "climaxed with a clash of thunder and the sensual moans of a woman making love" (Drury and Tillett 1980: 102). In the 1990s and 2000s I have not seen any media reports of similar events. Although both the Temple of Set and the Church of Satan have small followings, religious Satanism now has a low profile in Australia.

On the other hand, only a few people in Australia have claimed to be "white Witches". One such person is Deborah Gray (2001: 12), who was trained by "Fenris the Druid Master". Eddie Pielke (aka Fenris) was active in Sydney in the 1970s and is described as a "warlock" who claimed an initiatory succession from his German mother and grandmothers "both of whom practised 'white witchcraft' " (Drury and Tillett 1980: 54). In Drury and Tillett's book (1980: 55) is a picture of Pielke, robed and perhaps 50 years old, with his hands resting on the heads of two kneeling "disciples" who are young naked women,

perhaps in their twenties. Drury and Tillett (1980: 54) report that a "number of girls" lived with Pielke who worked in Kings Cross, Sydney, as a silversmith.

Witchcraft is by far the most significant Pagan tradition in Australia. This is reflected in the central roles that Witches play in the public organised Pagan festivals. The longest running public festival in Australia is the Mt Franklin Beltane festival held on the last weekend in October in rural Victoria. It celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2006, having begun in 1982. It is held in the crater of an extinct volcano, where up to one hundred and fifty participants (in recent years) camp for the weekend. Attending costs nothing and participants are expected to bring all camping equipment and food with them. There are no organised workshops, with the only organised events being the Beltane ritual on the Saturday night, which is typically an adapted variant of an Alexandrian sabbat, and a maypole dance on the Sunday. It is an important festival at which geographically dispersed Australian Pagans renew acquaintances. Most of the socialising occurs over numerous camp fires dotted around the crater. The ritual is performed robed, but there are plenty of rumours of typical Beltane activities that occur in the shadows beyond the fire light. I interviewed a young Wiccan who was a ritualist at Mt Franklin in the early 2000s. He said: "Mt Franklin was amazing…That was very good fun."

Another similar festival, central to Australian Paganism is The Australian Wiccan Conference that was first held in 1984 in South Australia and moves around the various states depending on who offers to organise it. Numbers vary, but there are usually between 80 and 100 participants. It is a much more formal event with well prepared workshops, a substantial registration fee, food provided and bunkhouse accommodation. The published "Australian Wiccan Conference Workshop Papers" from 1991 include articles on "The History of British Wicca" by Julia Phillips, and Chanting and Humming by Alan Moyse. The 2002 Conference Papers include "Spring Ritual" by Chris and Vivianne Crowley, "Rites of Passage and Initiation" by Gabrielle Cleary, and "Altered states of Consciousness and Trance Drumming" by Lynne Hume.

Another major festival is "Euphoria", an annual Pagan festival held over the Easter holidays in a rural location and primarily organised by the two key ritualists Hawthorn and Seline (Euphoria 2007). This festival is the closest in form to those described by Pike (2001), including

ecstatic rituals that last through the night. It is an adults only event with approximately eighty participants. The rituals performed at Euphoria involve a great deal of choreography and often last for many hours, some ending at dawn. Two main deities invoked at Euphoria are Hekate and Baphomet. Euphoria has generated some controversy among the Australian Pagan community because of its focus on ecstatic rites that are often highly sexual. The organising committee of Euphoria has been careful to develop a well thought through code of conduct and has demonstrated considerable sensitivity in its approach to these issues. Despite these debates, it is clear that the Pagans at Euphoria aim to engage in a serious religious practice that is oriented to both self-discovery and pleasure. The front page of their detailed website provides this as an invitation: "Experience the delights of Pagan revelry and reverence with ritual, workshops, magick, musick and movement" (Euphoria 2007).

Pagan festivals form the core of national face to face community events in Australia. However, Australian Paganisms remain highly dispersed and individualised practice is very common. During the 1990s information about a specifically Australian Paganism was distributed through both the developing national Pagan music scene, and Pagan books and magazines.

Pagan music in Australia has two leading exponents in Wendy Rule (2007) and Spiral Dance (2007). Both have produced several albums, are well known in Pagan circles, and often perform at Pagan events. Wendy Rule formed a three piece band (voice, cello and keyboards) in 1995 and released her first album "Zero" in 1995. Spiral Dance was formed in 1992, is based in South Australia, and draws most of its energy and inspiration from Adrienne Piggott. Their first album "Woman of the Earth" was released in 1996 and is widely played, and danced to, at Pagan parties. Based on my research as a participant observer, it is clear that Pagans know how to have good parties, and Pagan music plays an important part in this.

A number of key books have been influential in informing Australian Witchcraft and Pagan practice. Some of the more significant texts include *The Witches of Oz*, first self-published by Matthew and Julia Phillips in 1991, and then republished by Capall Bann in 1994. This was one of the first commercial books to set out a reorientation of the festivals of the wheel of the year for the southern hemisphere (contrary to what Farrar and Bone (2004: 186) observe, in the southern hemisphere

the sun does not rise in the West, it is simply that the equator is to the North, and the sun appears to travel from the East through the North sky to the West, which makes deosil counter-clockwise). Lynne Hume's (1997) *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, was the first, and remains the major, defining academic study of Australian Paganism. She provides a detailed history of various types of Paganisms in Australia, outlining their rituals and major shared beliefs and practices.

Fiona Horne is perhaps one of Australia's best known Witches. Her first book was *Fiona Horne Witch: A personal journey* (Horne 1998). Horne already had a high public profile in her role as lead singer of the popular Australian rock band Def FX. The publication of the book coincided with a variety of media interviews and magazine articles. Since then she has published a variety of other books on Witchcraft and has recently moved to the United States to develop her media career. Horne's books are widely read, and the most well known of the Australian books among young Witches. One third of Australian teenage Witches interviewed by Berger and Ezzy (2007: 42) mentioned Horne's books as a significant resource.

Witchcraft magazine was Australia's most widely distributed Pagan magazine, primarily sold in local newsagents (the other magazines rarely appeared in these outlets), with glossy covers and printed and distributed by a mainstream commercial magazine publisher. It's first edition was in 1994 and the last issue (number 46) was in November 2005. Published bi-monthly, its claimed readership was 28,000 (Witchcraft 2006), although the number of published copies was probably much less than this. *Witchcraft* contained a variety of articles including ones on spells, the wheel of the year, Pagan celebrities, and regular book reviews. It played an important role in developing national community with articles on various Pagan events, information about Pagan organizations, and a noticeboard. A leading Pagan bookshop in Melbourne usually had an advertisement on the back cover, with the inside covers of the front and back dominated by advertisements for various clairvoyant and psychic phone services.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s there was a surge of popular spell books available in mainstream bookstores (Ezzy 2003a). Following the international trend, these books tended to focus on love and money spells with little discussion of a more general Pagan mythology, practice, or worldview that might frame the instrumental magical practice

they advocated. In recent years these books seem to have become less popular.

The public profile of Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia is clearly represented in the distribution of magazines and books. Up until the 1980s, magazines and newsletters were typically subscription only, or sold in specialist occult bookshops that were also the only places to find the few published books on Witchcraft. The Internet was non-existent and most Witchcraft was disseminated through personal networks. Through the 1990s magazines and books began to be distributed in mainstream news-stores and bookshops. Witchcraft remains one of the few new religious movements for which browsers in mainstream bookstores can find an entire shelf, or more, of books devoted to positive accounts of the practice of the religion.

The publication of *Witchcraft* magazine corresponded to the height of the popular media focus on Witchcraft with films such as *The Craft* and television series such as *Buffy* and *Charmed*. Although no reason was publicly given for the cessation of publication, the demise of *Witchcraft* magazine clearly corresponds to a change in public interest in Witchcraft. At the same time, in the mid 2000s, I noticed that occult shops in Melbourne began to close, or began to change their stock away from Pagan books and paraphernalia to books on Buddhism and paraphernalia from the religions of Asia. This change in public interest in Witchcraft is further underlined by the decline in search volume on the term "Witchcraft" on the search engine Google. Google trends indicates that search volume halved between the middle of 2003 and the middle of 2006 (Google trends 2007).

The Consolidation of Community

Around Australia there are numerous working covens, several Druid groves and Heathen hearths. Many Australian Pagans will have been part of, and worked with, such a group at some stage in their past. However, most of these groups tend to be relatively ephemeral, lasting for a couple of years, or less. While individuals may move in and out of membership of these groups, most remain members of the Pagan community. Some groups, particularly the Alexandrians, are more enduring and have larger networks. However, the foci of much of the Australian Pagan community is found outside of small working groups.

In particular, the consolidation of Pagan community has formed around the activities of the networking associations such as the Pagan Alliance and PAN, various Internet egroups, and is evidenced by the growing profile of Pagan marriage celebrants.

There are two main umbrella or networking associations in Australia (that perform similar functions to the Pagan Federation in the UK). These are the Pagan Alliance, and the Pagan Awareness Network (PAN). Julia Phillips (2006), a publicly identified Gardnerian initiate, reports that the Pagan Alliance was conceived in 1991 when she became concerned about fraudulent "Satanic abuse" claims that were reported in the Australian media at that time. It was formally launched at the Australian Wiccan Conference in the Spring of 1991 (which in Australia is in September) and is currently incorporated in the state of Victoria. It has a federalist structure with a central organisational committee and state based coordinators (Australia has 6 states and 2 territories). The main work of the Alliance has been the coordination of a national "pub moot" schedule (usually once a month) in most cities and occasional media and other advocacy work. Membership fees are minimal and the Alliance occasionally organises sabbat rituals, though this varies from state to state. *Pagan Times* is the national magazine, that requires a separate subscription, and most states have local newsletters. Pagan Alliance pub moots are one of the main venues for the development of face to face relationships in Australia.

The Pagan Awareness Network (PAN) was founded in 1997, with David Garland playing a key role, and is incorporated in New South Wales (PAN 2007). Over the past 10 years PAN has run a full moon public ritual in a local park in Sydney and has a national newsletter (*The Small Tapestry*). It has been involved in encouraging positive media coverage of Witchcraft and Paganism and in advocacy for Pagan rights. The "Casey incident" is probably the most significant of PAN's recent work in which a Pagan woman, Olivia Watts, took legal action against a local elected official, Councillor Wilson, claiming religious vilification. The incident began when a local newspaper published an article with the heading "Satanic Cult Fears" (PAN 2007). The ensuing conflict was reported in the national media, and PAN played a major role in supporting Olivia Watts and achieving a negotiated outcome.

Egroups are one of the most important community building and networking mediums in Australia. An egroup is an email list. When one person sends an email to the list, all subscribers receive a copy of this email. There are at least 30 Pagan egroups in Australia with more

than 100 members. The largest egroup is Witches Workshop (2007), founded and moderated by Tim Hartridge in 1992. It has more than 1,500 members and averages 300 email posts a month. Most other groups have significantly fewer members and posts. There are a few large national egroups and numerous state based egroups. For example, the Tasmanian state based group Tas_Pagans (2007) has 135 members and averages 30 posts a month.

Egroups are important because they are often a first point of entry into the Pagan community for people seeking information about Witchcraft. Australian egroups are often linked from various web pages about Australian Paganism. With an almost monotonous regularity new members to the egroups post messages that say something like: "Hi, I'm new here. I've been researching about Witchcraft for a couple of years now and decided to join this group to meet people and learn new things". Egroup discussion often focuses around events such as pub moots, the various festivals, and workshops. They also provide an important surveillance function. If an individual of dubious character posts information about an event on an egroup, other members of the egroup will quickly post follow up emails encouraging people to be cautious. Similarly, other members will quickly question a person if he or she makes unsubstantiated claims, such as to particular types of initiatory lineages or qualifications. On the other hand, if an event or person is well regarded, then this information is also posted on egroups, and so new members of the community begin to develop an understanding of who, and which events, are, and are not, well regarded in the community.

Paganism in Australia has not been without its share of malicious individuals. Robin Fletcher (aka Tim Ryan) is perhaps the most notorious of these. His crimes are well described by Cafagna (2006: 1): "Robin Fletcher [is] considered one of Victoria's worst sex offenders. He describes himself as a witch and a pagan, and in 1996 he was sent to prison for 10 years after committing despicable crimes against two 15 year old girls. He turned them into sex slaves, using hypnotism, sadomasochism, and prostituted them." Members of the Pagan community were instrumental in Fletcher's conviction, and any hint of this sort of misconduct is clearly proscribed and taken very seriously by members of the community. For example, the Pagan Awareness Network (2006) has published, and widely distributed, a pamphlet on "Safety in the Circle" that clearly sets out what sorts of behaviours are and are not acceptable, how to identify "sexual predators and power trippers" and

where to find support, both within the community and from police and other professional support services.

Several Pagans in Australia have now become registered marriage celebrants. Anyone can apply to become a marriage celebrant (although the numbers are strictly limited and there is a long waiting list), and several Pagans have completed the required training and offer their services as a celebrant publicly identifying themselves as a Witch. For example, Seline (2007) is a widely respected Priestess in the Pagan community who has married numerous Pagans, including one ritual I witnessed at the Mt Franklin Beltane gathering in 2006. This is another indication of the transformation of Witchcraft community as it becomes more organised and consolidated.

If the popular face of Witchcraft has become less prominent in the mainstream media, there is no evidence of a decline of interest in Witchcraft among the egroups, pub moots or other indicators of community involvement. Most groups continue to grow in membership, and pub moots, conferences and festivals continue to be well attended. I would suggest that this indicates that the Pagan and Witchcraft communities are beginning to consolidate in Australia. The popularisation of Witchcraft provided a massive boost to the numbers of young people entering the movement. As the volume of information about Witchcraft in the mass media begins to subside, the consequences seems to be a slowing of the rate of growth, rather than any absolute decline in the numbers of people joining and participating in Paganism in Australia.

Paganism in Australia is an organised religious practice with strong themes of self discovery and celebration. Community tends to be focused around festivals, networking associations and egroups. Small coven like groups involving high levels of commitment are an important part of Australian Paganisms. However, Australians tend to be comfortable with more occasional involvement, distrustful of claims to overt authority, and very accepting of diversity and experimentation. Australia's geographical isolation from Northern Hemisphere centres of Paganism has nurtured an Australian culture in which Pagans are confident to be different and innovative, and are oriented to their own geographical location and ecological relationships. I open my book (Ezzy 2003b: 2) with a quote from "Olvar", an Australian Pagan informant. It is appropriate to finish this chapter with the same quote. Olvar says: "Nature, pleasure, trust and the joy of life—that for me is Witchcraft".

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CELTS, Ddruids AND THE INVENTION OF TRADITION

James R. Lewis

> For the last ten or twenty years, 'Celticity' has been increasingly promoted as an antidote both to the stresses of contemporary life and to the dominant interests of the United Kingdom's cultural establishment. It combines a romantic attachment to a perceived Celtic heritage with a fascination for mysticism and animist spirituality that are taken to form its essential adjunct. It is linked to reinvigorated nationalist movements, to the ecological movement, which shares a similar empathy for the spirits of nature, and also to the rise of 'New Age' neo-paganism. In short, it appeals to all those people who feel the strains of modern civilization, and who seek, however impractically, to recover the benefits of the world before civilization. In the [British] Isles, the world before civilization was the world of the ancient Celts (Davies 1999, 95).
>
> Celtic neo-paganism is one of numerous contemporary movements that have rushed into the vacuum left by the decline in Christian practice. It has no fixed form. Some of its adherents endeavour to follow the old 'Druid Way'. They do not seem to mind whether their supposedly druidical doings are spurious or authentic (Ibid., p. 98).

Despite the relative dearth of source material on the religion of the ancient Celts, for the past several centuries there has been a tremendous outpouring of popular publications and antiquarian scholarship on traditional Celtic spirituality. Aspects of this romantic Celticism are roughly comparable to the romantic fascination with American Indians in North America. In fact, nineteenth-century folklorists often explicitly compared Celtic cultures to Native Americans; the ancient Celts were, in a very real sense, "the 'noble savages' of Europe" (Magliocco 2004, pp. 218–19).

The lack of authoritative information on Celtic religion gave writers of various persuasions free reign to construct ancient religions out of their imaginations. Such romanticized writings, as one might anticipate, have only served to make the pre-Christian Celts more attractive. One consequence of this romantic Celticism was that, as early as the eighteenth century, people began founding "Druid orders," based, initially, on contemporaneous secret societies, and, later, on esoteric initiatory groups.

Though the present Celtic revival is in some ways comparable to prior periods of "Celtomania," the current mass appeal of Celtism and the intensive commercialization of all things Celtic (Bowman 1994) dwarfs prior phases of the revival. For example, "New Age Celtomania" has produced "Celtic tarot, Celtic shamanism, Celtic sex magic and even Celtic tea bag folding" (Haywood 2004, p. 212). Marion Bowman observes, "whereas Celts have in the past captured the imagination of antiquarians, Romantics, popular folklorists, artists, poets and minority interest groups, the present phenomenon is significantly more varied and broadly based" (Bowman 2000, p. 69). Contemporary Celtic Neopaganism is only one facet of this larger phenomenon.

An aspect of the present revival that sets it apart from its predecessors is the extent to which Celtophiles are appropriating Celtic identities and, as part of this appropriation, engaging in religious practices perceived to be Celtic. Bowman has referred to the many ethnically non-Celtic individuals who embrace Celtic or quasi-Celtic identities as "Cardiac Celts," people who "feel in their hearts that they are Celts. For cardiac Celts, spiritual nationality is a matter of elective affinity" (Bowman 1995, p. 246). As a way of squaring this embrace of Celtic identity with some sense of historical appropriateness, one neo-Druid leader interviewed by Bowman expressed the opinion that "ultimately everyone in Britain is of Celtic descent." However, even this is not necessarily relevant because, this leader went on to claim, "Celtic describes culture not ethnicity [so] anyone can 'tap into' Celticity." Though academic purists may dismiss the current popular interest in Celtic spirituality as completely inauthentic, it is nevertheless a major social and cultural phenomenon. Thus, independently of the issue of whether or not it is true to ancient Celtic culture, contemporary neo-Celtism is worthy of serious inquiry (Bowman 2000, pp. 69–70).

The fascination with all things Celtic goes a long way toward explaining why contemporary Pagans often identify themselves as Druids or as Celtic Pagans. However, when modern Paganism first emerged out of the creative activities of Gerald Gardner and his associates in mid twentieth-century Britain, "the key figure was not the Druid but the witch" (Hutton 2003, p. 242). In fact, it was not until the latter decades of the twentieth century that distinctly Neo-Pagan forms of Druidism began to emerge. What makes the choice of "Witch" over "Druid" really curious is that Gardner had been an active member of the Ancient Druid Order, "the most active and prominent group of practitioners of mystical Druidry in the country" (Hutton 1999, p. 224).

So why didn't Gardner just found his religion as a new form of Druidism rather than as the far more problematic Witchcraft? It seems there may have been multiple reasons for this.

In the first place, as is generally acknowledged, one of Gardner's chief sources of inspiration was the influential scholarship of Margaret Murray. Based on a selective examination of Inquisition records, Murray had argued that the records of Witchcraft persecution provided evidence for a pan-European, pre-Christian religion which had been mistakenly attacked by the Church as Devil worship (1921; 1931). Gardner added only one ingredient to Murray's claim, namely the claim that some witches—who were lineal descendants of prehistoric practitioners—had survived into modern times:

> The foundation myth of Wicca has grown around Gerald Gardner's claim that in the late 1930s he was initiated into one of the very last of the English covens.... The myth proposes that modern witchcraft therefore can claim continuity with the witches who were persecuted during the "Burning Times" (that is, during the witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) as well as with pre-Christian pagan religions going back to the Stone Age (Kelly 2002, p. 794).

Many of the elements of Murray's hypothetical "Witch Cult"—the horned god, terms like coven and sabbat, et cetera—were grafted onto Gardner's synthesis. Gardner's adoption of Murray's perspective on medieval Witchcraft persecution made "Witches" an attractive motif around which to organize his new religion.

Another factor might have been that the existing Druid orders in mid-twentieth century Britain were stodgy groups that had become bland, unexciting organizations. It is not unreasonable to speculate that Gardner did not want his new religion to be lumped in with them as "just another Druid group."

Perhaps a more important factor was Gardner's felt need to legitimate his creation by claiming an ancient lineage. As Eric Hobsawm observes in his Introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, "all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator" (1984, p. 12). If he had founded another Druid order, it would have been difficult to have avoided the perception that he had simply "made up" a *new* religion, and this would have made it less attractive. As Graham Harvey observes:

> Some people believe that a religion "founded" a long time ago is acceptable; one "made up" in this century is not. Roots "deep" in the ancient

> past are boasted of, whereas ones entwined with the concerns of the contemporary world are an embarrassment (Harvey 1997, p. 177).

Gardner could claim an ancient lineage for Wicca by asserting that he had been initiated into a coven of Witches who had survived from pre-Christian times. Furthermore, he could claim that his coven had sworn him to secrecy—a secrecy that had understandably been *de rigueur* in the days of the Inquisition. This secrecy had continued to be relevant up until the mid-twentieth century because of the Witchcraft Act, which punished individuals who claimed witch-like powers as con artists, subject to fines and imprisonment. The Act was not finally repealed until 1951 (Reid and Rabinovitch 2004, p. 515). This provided him with a convincing rationale for not revealing his sources. These factors, and maybe others, were why "the key figure was not the Druid but the witch" in Gardner's new "Old Religion."

This does not mean that the Celts were completely absent from Wicca. One of the items Murray had contributed to Gardner's new religion was "a vague conception of the witchcraft religion as 'Celtic,' or of having survived longest in Celtic language areas such as Scotland, from which many of Murray's trial records came" (Magliocco 2004, p. 48). So there was a Celtic connection from the beginning of Modern Paganism, but one that was not fully developed until later.

Who Were the Celts?

The proper application of the term "Celt" has been disputed. In archeology, "Celt" refers to a subdivision of the Indo-Europeans. The Indo-Europeans were a group of Bronze Age peoples who began migrating away from their homeland around the Caspian Sea between 2,000 BCE and 4,000 BCE. Some went east to India. Others went west to Europe. The chief evidence for this migration is the Indo-European family of languages, which indicates beyond reasonable doubt that there was a common ancestor for almost all European languages and almost all north Indian languages. In Europe, the only surviving non-Indo-European language is modern Basque, spoken by the Basque people who inhabit north-central Spain and the adjoining region of France.

The Celts are a later branch of the Indo-Europeans. Though this has been disputed, the tendency in recent years has been to locate their homeland in southern Germany and Austria, and to identify the Hallstatt culture—named after an important archeological site

in Austria—as Celtic (700–500 BCE). Groups of Celts subsequently migrated into France, Spain, the British Isles, northern Italy, certain parts of eastern Europe, and the highlands of Turkey. Little is known about the religion of the Celts, except that it was an indigenous polytheism roughly comparable to the polytheistic systems of ancient Greece and Rome. (The ancient Greeks and Romans were also Indo-Europeans, so many of their gods and goddesses were descended from common ancestors.)

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the early Indo-European peoples was a three-fold division of society into a clerical class, a warrior class, and a class of farmers and husbandmen. This trifunctional hypothesis of social class was the focus of much of the work of Georges Dumézil, a prominent French philologist (Dumézil 1988). When the Indo-Europeans migrated into India, the indigenous people of the subcontinent became a de facto fourth class. This emergent four-fold division developed into the four varnas, the major divisions of the Indian caste system. The Celts retained the original three-fold structure, and the clerical class that became the Brahmins in India became the Druids among the Celts.

Celtic peoples began migrating to Britain around 500 BCE. Though earlier scholars referred to this migration as an "invasion" (rather like the Indo-European "invasion" of India), there is no evidence to suggest that this was a militant migration. In contrast to the situation in India, the immigrant Celts in Britain eventually merged with the indigenous peoples rather than segregating them into a separate social class. By the time of Julius Caesar's expeditions in 55 and 54 BCE, the civilization of the British Isles was thoroughly Celtic.

Though our knowledge of the ancient Celts is fragmentary, we know even less about the pre-Celtic peoples of Britain. One thing we know with a good deal of certainty is that the indigenous Britons built Stonehenge and the other stone structures found throughout the British Isles. Stonehenge was constructed across the course of 1,500 years, from about 3,000 BCE to 1,500 BCE. (North 1996). The date of the beginning of the Celtic migration is usually given as 500 BCE. This means that the Druids could not have been involved at any stage in the construction of Stonehenge. This dating was not, however, established until the latter twentieth century. Since the time of John Aubrey in the seventeenth century (Haywood 2004, p. 182), scholars had been practically unanimous in associating Stonehenge with the Druids. The idea of this association is still widely held outside of academic circles, and

can often be found reflected in popular culture. Some current Druids also continue to claim a connection between the ancient Druids and Stonehenge (Bowman 2000, p. 75; Pike 2001, p. 62).

After the Romans finally left in 410 CE, Germanic Europeans began moving to Britain. The Norman invasion of 1066 CE brought Norse peoples (who had settled in Normandy 150 years earlier) to the islands. Culturally, the Celts were mostly pushed out of what became England, with the exception of certain areas such as Cornwall. Ireland, Wales, and Scotland remained largely Celtic.

One of the least problematic uses of the term "Celtic" is as the designation of a family of languages. Linguistically, modern English is a Germanic language. With the exception of Breton, which is spoken in Brittany in France, all but one of the six surviving Celtic languages are spoken in the British Isles—Scottish Gaelic, Irish Gaelic, Welsh, Manx Gaelic (on the Isle of Man), and Cornish. Because of their location on the Northwest edge of Europe, the areas in which these languages are spoken have corporately been referred to as the "Celt belt" or as the "Celtic fringe." These designations are sometimes regarded as derogatory; an alternative expression preferred by residents of these regions is "Celtic nations." People in certain other areas, such as the descendants of the Celtiberians in Northwest Spain, maintain a Celtic identity but do not speak Celtic languages.

Celtic self-identity is a modern phenomenon. The ancient Celts viewed themselves as members of specific tribal groups rather than as part of a larger Celtic nation. The Irish, Welsh, Scots, and so forth did not begin thinking of themselves as Celts until the eighteenth century (Haywood 2001, p. 14). Nationalist movements in the Celtic fringe—particularly in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales—promulgated Celtic self-identity as a response to Anglo-Saxon cultural and political hegemony (Ivakhiv 2001, p. 106). By the nineteenth century, the cultivation of Celtic identity led to the emergence of the Pan-Celtic movement, which was attractive as a way of enlisting allies in each group's "struggles to maintain their cultures, languages and identities" (Haywood 2004, p. 189). The nationalist interest in the Celts tended to reinforce the prior romantic interest in the Celts and Druids that had already become a significant phenomenon by the eighteenth century.

Imagining Celtic Religion

With the exception of a few tantalizing remarks penned by classical authors and the surviving names of some of the old gods and goddesses, we have no direct knowledge—and certainly no written knowledge—of Celtic religious practices. As J.A. MacCulloch wrote in 1911, "No Celt has left us a record of his faith and practice, and the unwritten poems of the Druids died with them" (2003, p. 18):

> To summon a dead religion from its forgotten grave and to make it tell its story, would require an enchanter's wand. Other old faiths, of Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome, are known to us. But in their case liturgies, myths, theogonies, theologies, and the accessories of cult, remain to yield their report of the outward form of human belief and aspiration. How scanty, on the other hand, are the records of Celtic religion! The bygone faith of a people who have inspired the world with noble dreams must be constructed painfully, and often in fear and trembling, out of fragmentary and, in many cases, transformed remains (Ibid., p. 17).

However, between the eighth and the eleventh century, Irish monks wrote down ancient legends and tales that had earlier been preserved as oral literature. The society these tales describe is clearly a Celtic world, and it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that they are, for the most part, Irish versions of legends that were at one time widespread among ancient Celts. The monks seemed keen to preserve their Irish heritage, but, at the same time, they tried to edit the sagas so as "to extinguish all heathen features" (Herm 1977, p. 246). (The Irish legends may be what MacCulloch had in mind when he mentioned "transformed remains.") They were not entirely successful, but, on the whole, they were successful enough that this ancient body of literature contains few clues about the nature of ancient Celtic religion. Similarly, by the twentieth century it had become clear that the legendary King Arthur was, in fact, based on a Celtic model (Haywood 2004, p. 106). But, once again, even if Merlin was a kind of latter-day Druid (McColman 2003, p. 9), the original Arthur story provides few insights into Celtic religion.

The paucity of literary remains led a few people to forge documents. For example, the relative lack of Gaelic Scottish tales comparable to the legends transcribed by Irish monks led the eighteenth-century Scottish poet James MacPherson (1736–1796) to publish a series of poetic works supposedly written by the ancient author Ossian, portrayed as a sort

of Scottish Homer. MacPherson claimed he had translated Ossian's works from ancient manuscripts, but these manuscripts were never forthcoming. Though influential at the time (Napoleon, for instance, was a fan), *The Works of Ossian* (MacPherson 1765) were subsequently dismissed as one of history's great forgeries.

Edward Williams (1747-1826), writing under the pen name Iolo Morganwg, forged Bardic rituals and Druid religious texts, among other documents. He also claimed that the ancient Druidic tradition had survived in Wales, despite centuries of Roman rule and Christian influence (Piggott 1985, p. 160). Some of his compositions, such as the "Druid's Prayer," were eventually adopted for use in the rituals of neo-Druid organizations. Like many of these organizations, Williams' "Druidism" was a kind of mystical Deism strongly influenced by Christianity. For instance, the version of the Druid's prayer used by such groups as the British Druid Order is clearly Christian in tone:

> Grant, God, thy refuge;
> and in refuge, strength;
> and in strength, understanding;
> and in understanding, knowledge;
> and from knowledge, knowledge of what is right;and from knowledge of what is right, the love of it;
> and from loving, the love of God.
> God and all goodness.

Lacking direct knowledge of the ancient inhabitants of the British Isles, many sixteenth and seventeenth century views of these peoples were derived from accounts of contemporaneous indigenous groups, particularly accounts of Native Americans (Piggott 1989). The notion that traditional Celtic religion was similar to the beliefs and practices of indigenous tribal groups is, in fact, a key element in current attempts to reconstruct Celtic spirituality. As Bowman observes,

> There is an assumption in some circles that whatever is present among contemporary native peoples must have been part of Celtic spirituality. Thus Celtic shamanism enjoys great popularity, with related books (e.g., Matthews 1997), workshops and training sessions, and there are Druidic sweat lodges (Bowman 2000, p. 76).

The synopsis of *Celtic Shamanism*, the Matthews book to which Bowman refers, states that it is "An introduction to the techniques and methods of Celtic shamanism, a wholly Western system which, while sharing common elements with North American, Australian and Siberian teachings, derives entirely from Celtic sources." However, *Celtic Shamanism* is

anything but. In the customer review section of amazon.com, one disappointed customer voiced an evaluation that can be applied to many of the attempts to reconstruct Celtic spirituality:

> I bought this book with high hopes about learning genuine Celtic shamanism. However, I quickly realized that the Celtic connection was tenuous at best. The author pulls out bits of Celtic myth and draws parallels with what we know of different types of shamanism or shamanistic experience, but for actual practice the author pulls from other sources such as Michael Harner and then gives the practices a Celtic gloss to create "Celtic shamanism" (Customer Review by "Natureboy," 26 September 2007).

Too much of what passes for reconstructed Celtic religion is based, more or less completely, on religious forms taken from other traditions and given a "Celtic gloss." Matthews also draws significantly from Germanic mythology. The integration of German materials into his mix prompted Leslie Ellen Jones to comment, in her study of Druidism and Celtic Paganism that, "This is characteristic of the monism of most New Age thought, which sees all religions as different versions of the same basic faith" (Jones 1998, p. 199). Thus, in addition to adopting ideas and practices from contemporary indigenous groups, attempts to reconstruct ancient Celtic spirituality also sometimes draw on materials from other ancient Pagan religions.

A more serious issue with contemporary Celtic reconstructionism is that making Celtic identity a matter of "elective affinity" is ethically problematic because of the existence of contemporary Celtic peoples. As Ann-Marie Gallagher argues:

> Might not the construction of our ideas about, for instance, Celticity actually be culture-u-like with knotwork, and undermine those voices struggling to be heard below the surface of that lumpenmasse identity: fighting for land-rights in Scotland, against racism and poverty in Wales, against war in Ireland, absentee landlords in Cornwall and against the demise of the Manx language in Vannin? To what extent . . . are we essentializing racial characteristics, positing an inside track on spirituality in place of recognizing human rights issues and lack of power? (Gallagher 1999, p. 21).

Gallagher then goes on to compare the appropriation and commodification of Celtic spirituality to the Euro-American appropriation of Native American spirituality. Contemporary Pagans, she writes, "have a responsibility to act ethically in relation to oppressed peoples" (Ibid., p. 21), though she does not spell out exactly what this kind of ethical action should look like. One possible inference that could be drawn from

her analysis is that the project of reconstructing Celtic Paganism should be abandoned, though she does not explicitly state this conclusion.

Contemporary Pagans as a group tend to be more sensitive to the issue of cultural borrowing than people who participate in what has been referred to as the "New Age" subculture. However, Pagans also generally privilege European folklore "because they consider it to preserve in encoded form some of the pre-Christian culture of their ancestors" (Magliocco 2008), which means they tend to be less sensitive to the issues of cultural appropriation when it comes to the appropriation of Celtic elements (Pike 2001, p. 139).

Imagining Druidism

Another assumption that figured heavily in attempts to reconstruct ancient Celtic religion, and, particularly, in attempts to reconstruct Druidism, was provided by Theosophy. A significant number of the leaders of the Celtic revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were involved in Theosophy. The Theosophical movement posited an universal, esoteric wisdom tradition that manifested in particular, exoteric religions throughout time and across the planet (Tingay 1998). It was thus easy to assume that the Druids embodied this tradition, and to project Theosophical notions into ancient Celtic spirituality.

Though reconstructing the Druids should be an integral part of reconstructing Celtic religion, there are unique aspects of the Druid revival that merit separate attention. In particular, there were Neo-Druid orders as early as the eighteenth century, whereas a distinct Celtic Neo-Paganism did not emerge until the late twentieth century.

Perhaps the key factor in the emergence of new Druid orders was the work of William Stukeley (1687-1765), a doctor turned clergyman who, in the latter part of his life, focused his energies on the ancient Druids. He was seized by the idea that "the Druids had first proclaimed in Britain the very same principles of true, patriarchal religion as were now upheld by the Church of England" (Michell 1982, p. 12), and proceeded to construct an imaginative Druid religion in the model of Protestant Christianity. Stukeley linked the Druids with the biblical Abraham and claimed that they had came to Britain with the Phoenicians. Thus it was no surprise that their religion was "so extremely like Christianity, that in effect it differ'd from it only in this;

they believed in a Messiah who was to come, as we believe in him that is come" (in Piggott 1985, p. 151).

Characterizing the Druids as crypto-Christians had the effect of making them safe for public consumption. One result of Stukeley's "Druid propaganda" was that the first neo-Druid order, the Ancient Order of Druids (AOD), was founded in 1781 by "one Henry Hurle in accordance with Stukeley's ideas" (Michell 1982, p. 12). As indicated earlier, the earliest neo-Druid orders like the AOD and its immediate spin-offs (e.g., the United Ancient Order of Druids and the Sheffield Equalised Order of Druids), developed out of "the eighteenth-century taste for secret societies." Later orders were esoteric initiatory groups, "devoted to the recovery of hidden magical and philosophical wisdom from the world's old civilisations" (Hutton 2003, p. 240).

Within the contemporary Pagan subculture, the "older neo-Druid" orders arising out of Stukeley et al.'s work are regarded as "traditional Druids" (Greer 2001)—in contrast to the "new neo-Druids" arising out of Neopaganism. In the 2001 UK census, 1657 individuals self-identified as Druids out of a total of 42,336 Neopagans (Lewis 2007, p. 15)—a bit less than 4% of the total. This is roughly comparable to the percentage of self-identified Druids relative to all Neopagans in the 2001 New Zealand census—150 out of 5,862 (Ibid., p. 16), or a bit more than 2.5%. In contrast, the American Religious Identification Survey conducted in the same year estimated 33,000 Druids out of 307,000 total Pagans—about 11% of the total (Lewis 2005, p. 251).

The extent to which contemporary Druids acknowledge the lack of information about the original Druids varies widely. Often neo-Druid authors note that we really do not know very much about the original Druidism, but then proceed to discuss current neo-Druid practices and beliefs as if they were directly descended from the ancient Celts, making modern Druidry a revival—if not a direct continuation—of "the ancestral faith of Britain and Europe" (Shallcrass 2002, p. 83). A more balanced expression of the dual attitude toward the past—as articulated by a member of Ar nDraicht Fein (ADF)—is cited by Sarah Pike in her study of Pagan festivals:

> We're trying to do something of a recreation based on archaeological information, but also combine it with our modern vision in ADF, of how we believe Celtic cosmology works (Pike 2001, p. 63).

Additionally, many contemporary Druids are inspired by the writings of Iolo Morganwg. Though many overtly acknowledge that he

forged documents, or that he was *accused* of forgery, they simultaneously make statements that support his authenticity—e.g., "Iolo Marganwg…studied with one of the last traditional Welsh bards and later tried to assemble the remaining fragments of bardic lore into a coherent whole" (Greer 2001). The unspoken assumption here seems to be that, although Morganwg forged some or all of his documents, he was also somehow in touch with the real "spirit" of the original Druids. I have elsewhere referred to this pattern as the "true lies syndrome" (Lewis 2003, p. 87).

In contrast, some neo-Druids like Isaac Bonewits are refreshingly blunt. In his outline of the principles of Ar nDraiocht Fein he asserts that:

> there are some definite "nonfacts" about the ancient druids that need to be mentioned: There are no real indications that they used stone alters (at Stonehenge or anywhere else); that they were better philosophers than the classical Greeks or Egyptians; that they had anything to do with the mythical continents of Atlantis or Mu; or that they wore gold Masonic regalia or used Rosicrucian passwords. They were not the architects of (a) Stonehenge, (b) the megalithic circles and lines of Northwestern Europe, (c) the Pyramids of Egypt, (d) the Pyramids of the Americas, (e) the statues of Easter Island, or (f) anything other than wooden barns and stone houses. There is no proof that any of them were monotheists, or "Prechristian Christians," that they understood or invented either Pythagorean or Gnostic or Cabalistic mysticism; or that they all had long white beards and golden sickles (1984; cited in Jones 1998, p. 196).

Conclusion: The Invention of Tradition

Advocates of Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism tend to embrace the same kind of paradoxical attitude we noted among contemporary neo-Druids. On the one hand, most are careful not to claim that they are direct, linear descendants of any intact, ancient Celtic religion (Laurie 2003). At the same time they tend to imply, or even to assert, that reconstructed European Paganisms are "the latest manifestation of a continuous native tradition," and that there are "continuous threads of outlook, of practice, and of place" (Jones 2002, pp. 221–222).

Though it is easy to criticize the "invention" of modern Celtic Paganism and the waffling of the continuity issue, we should not ignore comparable patterns in other religious traditions. As Olav Hammer and I observe in *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, "inventing historical

lineages seems particularly prevalent in the world of religion" (Lewis and Hammer 2007, p. 2). A few pages later we ask, "Why does nearly every religion have spurious traditions and misattributed texts?" The motive for inventing a tradition is because it "confers legitimacy to religious claims and practices." And, as we go on to say, "Some invented traditions obtain their legitimacy by recreating an ideal past" (Ibid., p. 4). Clearly, contemporary Celtic Paganism legitimates itself in terms of its links—real or imagined—to an idealized past. These kinds of legitimation strategies can be found in all major religious traditions (Lewis 2003, p. 78), which means that dismissing Celtic Neopaganism's fabrications as inauthentic while ignoring comparable fabrications in other religions is a blatant double standard. Of all the world's religions, modern Paganism is perhaps the most conscious of—and the least uncomfortable with—its own invented nature (Harvey 2007). Thus the fact that Celtic Neopaganism is more of a contemporary fabrication than a direct descendant of ancient Celtism is not problematic to most reflective Pagans.

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FAMILY, YOUTH AND POPULAR CULTURE

MAGICAL CHILDREN AND MEDDLING ELDERS: PARADOXICAL PATTERNS IN CONTEMPORARY PAGAN CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

Murphy Pizza

In the introduction to *A Community of Witches*, Helen Berger's qualitative analysis of the Pagan community along the U.S. Eastern Seaboard, the author describes a ritual where, during the course of worship, a squirrelly baby is passed around to different participants in the Circle in an attempt to calm the child and not interrupt the proceedings. After describing the incident, Berger predicts that the single most important factor that will affect the look and makeup of contemporary Paganism in the US will be the birth and raising of children within the community. Subsequent chapters present interviews and case studies with Pagan parents and children, where they discuss family life and issues of inclusivity and exclusivity in ritual, as well as difficult decisions about whether or not to be "out of the broom closet" about their identities as Witches or public with their affiliations for the protection of their children (Berger 1999).

In many ways, Berger was accurate in her prediction; simply reading the descriptions of the shift in cultural norms and values in contemporary North American Paganism from the first edition of Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon* (Adler 1979) to the third (2007) demonstrates a refocusing from young baby boomers in the throes of cultivating personal spiritual identities, innovating practices, and unraveling apocrypha about their traditions to middle and retirement aged boomers now determining the values and legacy they hope to pass on to their children and future community members. A presentation by Cherry Hill Seminary dean Laura Wildman-Hanlon at the National American Academy of Religion conference in 2006 confirmed that trend; she shared case studies of young Eastern Seaboard Pagans who were raised by Pagan parents and the complexities of that process. Despite these complexities, one significant factor emerged: children raised by Pagan parents overwhelmingly remained within the community and identified themselves as Pagan (Wildman-Hanlon 2006).

This chapter presents a contrast to Berger's prediction based on observation and data collected from ethnographic fieldwork done among the Pagan community in Minnesota's Twin Cities, otherwise known by members as "Paganistan". The focus on the transmission of values and culture from one generation to the next in contemporary Paganism is an issue that I have been documenting carefully, and Berger's prediction is one pattern I have kept in mind since engaging in fieldwork. The Twin Cities community is a flourishing and long-lived one, and is now made up of a range of elders, parents, teenagers, and children, and of overlapping family patterns, traditional, unconventional, and chosen. It is clear that the idea of the Pagan family and its cultivation within the community is of profound importance, but not entirely in the way Berger predicts.

She also states that as the community she observes becomes more solidified—most notably by the inclusion of children and families, and the influential surrounding dominant cultural attitudes about what is appropriate for children infusing ritual and practice—that Pagan practice and belief will, over time, become more homogeneous (Berger 1999). While allowing for a more solid sense of shared identity, many Pagans' ambivalence toward "watering down" rituals for the perceived benefit of children is evident, and not just in Berger's account (Adler 1986; Davies and Lynch 2001; Hardman 2004; Magliocco 2004; Orion 1995; Pike 2001; Wildman-Hanlon 2006).

My research in the Twin Cities has revealed that this part of Berger's prediction is not necessarily playing out; if anything, Paganistan may be defying it. While absolutely determined to include, raise, and encourage children in the community, Paganistan's elders are demonstrating that making room for the young as well as an increasingly diversifying base of adult roles and practices is not just possible, but desirable. The process has also shown that an exploration of conscious elderhood, and elders' responsibility to the young has emerged alongside other innovative cultural adaptations.

"Paganistan" is the nickname, and now moniker of self-identification, of the uniquely innovative, eclectic, and feisty Neopagan community of the Twin Cities Metro area of Minnesota. Filled with many different groups—Druid orders, Witch covens, legal Pagan churches, Ethnic Reconstructionist groups, and many more solitaries, interlopers, and poly-affiliated Pagans, the community gained its name from priest Steven Posch, and has proudly adopted it. In a sense, the name appropriately expresses the community's sense of being a "Pagan Nation" of tribes

(Posch 2005); as an incredibly active, diverse, and often overlapping alliance of traditions, it is common to encounter Twin Cities Pagans who possess multiple identities and represent various traditions, such as "Heathen Witches", Italian Druids, shamanic Slavic Reconstructionists, or those who tie everything together and give it a new name—and no one bats an eye.

In the midst of all this diversity, there is the tempering influence of a discernible Midwestern and Minnesotan cultural overlay—a self-deprecating humor and a famously detached "niceness" permeates many encounters—as well as the influence of Minnesota's distinctive and dramatic climate and seasonality. Amidst the formidable creativity, Minnesotans are eminently practical—living room rituals make perfect sense during Yule, and the festival campsites beckon with a vengeance during the summer.

But it is also its feistyness and cultural tradition of "bootstrapping" and innovation that has led to Paganistan's refusal to homogenize; if anything, the community is diversifying, innovating, and syncretizing as much as it ever has. But an equal amount of passion for the instilling of values and cultivation of community for Pagan youth in the Cities—which, my informants shared with me, did not exist when they were young and in need of mentorship—has led to some remarkable adaptations and solutions that have allowed and encouraged the contemplation and transmission of *shared Pagan values*. It is this that, by doing the work of Pagan culture, the Twin Cities community is helping to create and pass on.

Many researchers of contemporary Paganism have commented on how difficult it is to document what the diverse and multi-affiliative movement can have in common, largely due to Pagans' insistence on their pluralism and refusal to be simply categorized (Adler 1986; Berger 2003; Blain 2002; Block 1998; Clifton 2006; Greenwood 2000; Jorgensen and Russell 1999; Magliocco 2004; Rabinovitch 1996; V. Vale and John Sulak 2001; York 2003). This is true when engaging with issues such as religious experience, identity, and personal theologies within Paganism. But time—and the doing and being of culture, the cultivation of a habitus within this religious subcommunity—is revealing that there is indeed a core of shared values that all people in Paganistan, regardless of affiliations, believe are important to live by as elders and to transmit to the young. It is not often conscious to the members of the community—cultural values are often "common sense", as the ethnographic record demonstrates—but my position

as an occasional observing outsider has provided me with data that allows for some conclusions about what those shared Pagan values are shaping up to be, and more definitively, what ways the community has inventively come up with to address the meanings and responsibilities of Pagan elders, adults, families, and children.

Magical Children

At the second campout hosted by the pan-Pagan organization Gathering of the Clans (GOTC), the Pagan tradition of lighting a campfire and starting the drum circle was in full swing. One of the organizers, Bress, danced near the campfire to the drumming of the other attendants while holding his four-month-old son, Odin.

The scene called to mind, for me, a similar event two years before at the Sacred Harvest Festival (SHF), a gathering put on annually by another poly-affiliated Pagan organization, Harmony Tribe. At that event, one of the evening drum and dancing circles was attended by Jay, a young mother, who brought her three-month-old son, JD, and similarly cradled him in her arms while dancing to Harmony Tribes famous drumming. After some time, when Jay wearied, she stepped away from the fire to sit and rest on a hay bale. JD immediately began to whimper and fuss; sensing what he wanted, his mother passed him into the arms of another dancer, and when the baby got closer to the drumming and the dancing again, he calmed down. For a good hour JD was passed from dancer to dancer. I commented to his mother that JD was quite the magical child; she turned to me and said, "Well, yeah! He was conceived here last year! He should be!"

Sarah Pike discusses at length the power and tradition of the ritual fire dance at festivals for Pagans (Pike 2001), especially with regard to using and experiencing the body as a catalyst for religious experience. This experience and the trust of the process, as well as the trust in the festival community, is evident by the presence of babies and children dancing with their parents by the ritual fires. While neither of the parents in the aforementioned examples sat and deliberately determined that dancing with their infants to the drums by the light of the fire was their chosen method of cultural transmission—they simply did what came naturally—the effect of being held, danced and drummed to is a powerful cultural pattern that young children learn early. The practices of dance, rhythm, darkness and fire, and of trust

and community are some of the things ingrained almost to a visceral level by dancing the baby to the drumming; a familiarity with that sort of cultural patterning, a contemporary Pagan one, is not completely consciously passed on.

The presence of babies, children, and teenagers at Pagan festivals in the Midwest is growing steadily; festivals like Harmony Tribe's Sacred Harvest Festival in Minnesota have had a family-friendly policy since their first event some ten years ago. This was a deliberate decision; members of Harmony Tribe, many of whom are parents themselves, shared with me experiences of being excluded from Pagan events and rituals in the past because the presence of their children was not considered appropriate. Consequently, SHF is filled with children and teens of all ages, and many families camp together in unofficial family sites in order to keep an eye on each others' children and to let them play together.

But rather than turn the festival into a strictly "family-oriented" event, Harmony Tribe acknowledges that there is a true need for adult-only campsites, spaces, and rituals as well. So, while an all-ages evening ritual winds down at sunset at the fest, starting up simultaneously are rite-of-passage rituals for children becoming teens and for teens becoming adults, bonding rituals based on gender, Pagan-style bachelor and bachelorette parties, and elderhood/croning rituals. All of this occurs with the rhythm of the evening drum circle pulsing in the background.

The issue of whether children are welcome at rituals, or whether rituals are appropriate for the young, has been negotiated with gusto in Paganistan. These sorts of innovations are a demonstration of how the Twin Cities community has determined how incredibly important the presence and education of children in the Pagan worldview is for the community. But equally as important to the community is the genuine need for adult members of the community to make ritual and to honor their own lives in the presence of other adults; the sort of ecstatic, cathartic magical work that Pagans are known for is still a necessary enough component of being Pagan that those sorts of practices are maintained, and parents are informed so they can make the decision themselves regarding the attendance of their children.

The giving of agency to Pagan parents—of letting them make the decision whether or not to bring their children to rituals or events—has been very successful in Paganistan. Combining this approach with the conscious effort by various Pagan organizations to design and perform

various age-appropriate rituals, the Twin Cities community has created a large marketplace of practices where somewhere, anyone can participate in the kind of ritual they need.

Some organizations have implemented the equivalent of movie ratings for their public rituals—a ritual can be G, PG, PG-13, or R, with regard to its adult appropriate content or the level of emotional engagement. The Wiccan Church of Minnesota (WicCoM), for example, announces in its newsletter whether a ritual is going to be "children involved", "children welcome but not involved", or adults only. In this case, WicCom has acknowledged that while content or practices may not be the issue, some things, like duration and attention span are issues with parents and children as well.

Several of these adaptive strategies that are present in many organizations and festivals are demonstrative of the agreed-upon Pagan value of the inclusion of young people and their importance to the community. Also made clear by these practices is an acknowledgement that not all members of the community want or are interested in the same kinds of religious experiences or expressions; the continued upholding of community diversity is also a shared Pagan value still considered too important to dispense with.

Many scholars researching Pagan communities have noted the interest that Pagan adults have in reclaiming and recreating adulthood rites-of-passage for their children (Berger 1999; Hopman and Bond 1996; Magliocco 1996; Hardman 2004; Orion 1995). Observing and believing that the dominant culture within which the Pagan subcommunity is situated is becoming increasingly more neotonized—adults are less and less encouraged to grow up, so to speak, by the dominant culture—markers of transition from childhood to adulthood have been researched and re-embraced by Pagans in response to what they believe is missing in contemporary society. Often, adulthood rites of non-industrial cultures are researched for examples and inspiration for the types of ordeal-laden practices they can utilize in their own rituals. That said, modern Pagan adulthood rites do not contain the sort of dramatic ordeals—body mutilation, sexual initiations, deprivations, violence—that are considered undeniably necessarily in many cultures for adulthood to be acknowledged.

This phenomenon does show that, when it comes to raising children and transmitting culture, the Pagan community is not completely outside of the influence of the surrounding dominant culture. Pagan parents want their children to experience the transformation into adulthood, but

are unwilling to reappropriate and pass on the more violent and painful components of the traditional rites of passage that inspire them. Despite the agreements, disagreements, and theorizing about these issues, the practices instead demonstrate the agreed-upon unwillingness to utilize pain or violence as a marker of Pagan adulthood. In much the same manner as the dominant culture and mainstream religions, Pagans do not want their children's transition to adulthood to hurt.

Meddling Elders

These issues, along with others pertaining to what it means to be an adult in a Pagan community, are regularly engaged with by elders in Paganistan. Admittedly, many informants have shared with me that they have taken on the role reluctantly, or "by default"; being older and having many decades of magical and ritual experience under their respective belts compared to the rest of the community makes that the case. But many a Paganistan elder has shared with me that, decades ago, they were shoved into the role by others simply because of those reasons, and that they felt unprepared to be the kind of mentors that they are more suited to being now.

That experience led to the formation of groups like the Mentoring Elders Forum, a discussion group presented through the School of Sacred Paths in Saint Paul. Asking questions about what it means to be an adult, and what it subsequently means to be an elder, Mentoring Elders Forum engages in reading, discussion, and informal study about the definitions and responsibilities of adults and elders toward a community.

The founder of Mentoring Elders, Volkhvy, shared that he was inspired to start the group when he woke up one morning and realized that he had been practicing Wicca longer than Gerald Gardner had by a number of years. The contemporary Pagan community was so new, that even though elders and adult mentors were needed, they simply did not exist yet; the roles had to be conceived of and created.

Noting that their generation of Paganism came of age in a time when apocryphal stories of Witchcraft tradition founders were discovered rapidly to be fabrications, resulting in a lot of Pagans growing disillusioned and "sick of being lied to", the members of Mentoring Elders determined something had to be done to ensure that Paganism's important values were passed on to younger members, and that the

members newest to the community get the support and mentorship they needed.

Admittedly, what makes a person an adult and elder in any community, and worthy of that status and respect, is time, experience, and the *a priori* established existence of the role of an elder. It was this latter component that Volkhvy believed was missing, so he and the Forum studied other cultures' definitions of elderhood roles. In a sense, the creation of elderhood in Paganistan is another one of the innovations given to the community; it has resulted in a generation of Pagans in the Twin Cities realizing that they have a responsibility to the community to provide the guidance and be the advisors that they themselves were lacking when they were new to the religion years ago.

In the time that I have been doing fieldwork, the focus of Mentoring Elders has shifted, and members are taking on more activist roles in various organizations; an out-of-Minnesota visitor to the Forum advised them to stop being reluctant and to take on ownership of their elderhood, and Mentoring Elders members are doing so by being an elder member of as many organizations as they can. Members nicknamed themselves "Meddling Elders" as a result, and the shift has led many in the group to realize that they are seen by Paganistan as having the time invested, experience, and status as respected elders simply by making a decision to keep Paganism active, relevant, and by continuing to teach and serve the community.

Interestingly, in the interest of maintaining community and cultural transmission, questions are being asked by Mentoring Elders and other Twin Cities Pagan organizations about not only what can and should be preserved, but also what needs to be dispensed with. An open-forum style discussion at the Ninth Annual Twin Cities Pagan Pride Day hosted by the Mentoring Elders Forum was the venue in which a participant suggested that Paganism will truly be a living culture and established institution when the community starts producing secular Pagans. In the same way that holiday, ritual, and cultural traditions are maintained in families and communities even though many people involved with such are not themselves religious, the concept of contemporary Paganism and its practices as a cultural pattern to be maintained without theologies or religious relationships being the core focus is being considered as a potential success rather than a failure in Paganistan. The filtering process of what is important to the community is evident in this consideration; while contemporary Paganism as a movement is still too new for the emergence of secular Pagans to occur, the fact that some of the

more overtly religious or magical elements, and the inevitable competing theologies and identity politics that occur in Pagan communities, are not perceived as of utmost importance is a sign of what sorts of compromises are being considered in the community in order to allow a more agreed-upon shared Pagan set of values to emerge.

It is a discussion that the young in Paganistan are involved in as well. During the same Pagan Pride Day forum, Harmony Tribe member Nels Linde shared that it was often the children raised in the community who are giving the advice that adults and elders need to listen to. Sharing a story that when he occasionally starts to complain that going to a particular Pagan group meeting is going to be a hassle, and that interpersonal issues between people involved become stressful enough to discourage staying engaged with it, it was frequently his children who said to him, "Dad, get over it! This is too important!"

Circle Round: Conclusions

The advising, mentoring, establishing of roles, and transmission of shared Pagan values and Pagan culture are actually part of a cyclical process of community building in Paganistan. Berger's description of the influence of children on contemporary Paganism evokes the image of a new growth in the garden that eventually takes over and chokes the rest of the greenery; homogeneity appears to be inevitable, and the community is preparing itself to be awash in a more mainstream expression.

This depiction, I argue, is incomplete. While the involvement of children and youth are unquestionably an influence on contemporary Paganism's changing character, the influence of active adults and conscious elders—at least in the Twin Cities—are a factor as well. Having accepted, and wanting very much, for the Pagan community in the Metro Area to thrive long after they are gone, the elders and parents of Paganistan are encouraging the young and raising them with the sorts of values that they wish to see maintained, and fully expect that eventually the young will carry on the community.

The shared Pagan value that this cyclical process of young-advising-elder and elder-mentoring-young has perpetuated in Paganistan is not homogeneity, but an increasing diversification and patience with Pagan poly-affiliations. The consistent exposure to and insistence on Paganism being syncretic, innovative, and individualistic has impressed on the

community an appreciation for heterogeneity and a desire to maintain it; thus, the young growing to adulthood in the Twin Cities community will be an influence on the maintenance of the community's diversity and cross-affiliation, rather than an inevitable force that encourages homogeneity. Simply put, if the elders want it, they mentor the young through it; the young who are raised with it as a cultural norm will internalize it more naturally, transmit it, and perpetuate it.

It is important to stress, however, that these agreed upon values were not determined and consciously agreed upon to inculcate the next generation by the adults and elders of the Twin Cities community. The values and important ways to be and live are *done* by the elders in the course of living as Pagans. While many Pagan organizations go to great lengths to create by-laws, mission statements, and institutional structures to keep themselves going, this is not the same process nor the same goal as the transmission of values and community. When a religious community is ambivalent about institutionalization and opposed to homogeneity of identity, expression, and belief, as Paganism is, mechanisms emerge by "doing culture" that, rather than being a hindrance to the formation of community, actually become the most important values a community embraces. Paradoxically, a culture embracing diversity and a critical approach to institutionalization is what is created and passed on. Force and patterns typically viewed as keeping a community from forming and allying are actually those which maintain it; it is simply a matter of a shift in focus and perspective that can aid an innovative and polymorphic religious community like Paganistan in considering itself a vital cultural force and community.

Further longitudinal research on Paganistan, and the shared Pagan values it is cultivating and transmitting, is underway; the continued observation, documentation and analysis of this process will undoubtedly reveal what makes a Pagan community and Pagan practices more solidly bounded and agreed upon. It can be expected that what is desired to be instilled in Pagan youth will shift and flow, depending on the decisions of the community and the influence of the surrounding cultural climate; it is safe to predict that there will be shared Pagan values that remain consistent. Time and involvement on the part of the community, and patience on the part of researchers and ethnographers, will undoubtedly bear this out.

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OF TEENS AND TOMES: THE DYNAMICS OF TEENAGE WITCHCRAFT AND TEEN WITCH LITERATURE

Hannah E. Johnston

It is oft said that 'the teenager' entered the Western cultural imagination in the 1950s, due in large part to the emergence of popular music and media that spoke to the growing population of youth eager for a shift in ideology and political climate. Since its emergence, the description has carried a burdensome set of connotations. Labelled as rebellious, disenfranchised and unpredictable, adolescent and teen identity, with its rage of hormones and angst, its effervescent optimism and passion has found expression in many of the most transgressive, spectacular and revolutionary cultural transformations. It is perhaps unsurprising that from its 'inception' the space of teenage-hood has been associated with the occult and spiritual marginalization. Historically, prior to the modern definition of teenage-hood, puberty (particularly in girls) was attributed a magical and somewhat dangerous quality that needed to be contained or controlled for the wellbeing of the family, village and community. If the birth of modernity heralded a less 'uncanny' view of adolescent identity and emergent sexuality, the capacity of youth to challenge the status quo was understood as a consequence of their essentially 'in-between' nature, both corporeally and socially. Historian Marion Gibson suggests that the popular account of the Salem Witch trials penned by Marion Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts* (1949), 'related the Essex County Witchcraft trials directly to the modern American phenomenon of the teenager—dissatisfied, oppositional, and threatening to traditional American norms' (2007: 120). Socially teenagers have held an identity between spaces, the place of liminality. Psychologists and cultural commentators alike have observed that teenagers and the 'darker' side of spiritual exploration have a mutual magnetism. Within psychology and psychoanalysis, it is well documented that teenage-hood is a period associated with religious crisis, which can be expressed as an 'occult phase.' As R.E. Muuss states in his seminal *Theories of Adolescence*:

> Adolescents are in a period of life during which they may experience existential or religious crisis and may begin to evaluate their religious

> upbringing, religious ideas and the role and function of religion in their personal lives. In other words, it is more or less characteristic for adolescents to move from "received faith" (received from parents, religious teachers, the church, a cult, or a group of believers) to a personal, existential commitment to a belief system, to challenge, to replace or abandon their "received faith". (1996: 262)

Yet, teenage engagement with the occult in general and with Pagan faith more specifically in the 1990s and 2000s is unique in its visibility and its viability in consumer culture. What surfaced across Europe, North America and Australia in the mid 1990s was a singular cultural trend that emerged as teenagers collectively began to actively construct identities as Witches. Through an engagement with, and consumption of, mainstream media texts and forms, teen Witch identity, understood as an expression of spiritual or religious longing, surfaced as distinct from the established adult Neo-Pagan Witchcraft communities.

The picture of Western adolescent cultures at the turn of the millennium is one that paints a generation of teenagers, the Y Generation if you will, fighting a range of pressures that proliferate due in part to the increasing conglomeration of media forms and the emergence of the Internet. This same generation is seen claiming solace in popular culture's refashioning of historical icons of magic, power and rebellion. As Lynne Schofield Clarke observes,

> [T]his is a generation that some claim is defined by its interest in spirituality. Yet this is also a generation defined by alienation and high school shootings, increases in sexually transmitted diseases, heightened awareness of terrorist activities, and prominent hate crimes based on prejudices of racial/ethnic identity and sexual orientation. (2003: 14)

Popular culture in the mid 1990s had become a place of spiritual meaning, offering texts as scripture and therapy; and as Gordon Lynch describes in his examination of 'Generation X's' search for religious identity, 'popular culture is an important medium and resource for the contemporary search for meaning for many individuals' (Lynch 2002: 53). As Lynch (ibid.) and various theorists of both popular culture and contemporary religion have argued (Beaudoin 2000; Carrette & King 2005; Heelas 1996), popular culture has facilitated a new engagement with the realm of the spiritual, which signals a significant departure from traditional forms of religio-spiritual inspiration and practice. In an era which has seen the decline of traditional religious institutions and practices, the proliferation of what has been nebulously and ubiquitously

described as 'New Age', and the upsurge of religious evangelism and fundamentalism, teenage Witchcraft offers a brief glimpse into the powers of popular culture at work and the creation and eventual hegemonic inclusion of a religious subculture.

There are a number of factors that provided fertile soil for teenage Witchcraft in the 1990s. As stated, the cultural milieu of the 1990s saw a re-emergence of non-dogmatic approaches to spirituality. Understood as a backlash against the vivid economic commercialism (and its relative conservatism, in both Britain and America with the Reagan/Thatcher alliance) of the 1980s, the 1990s saw the explosion of commercialized yet sanitized spiritual ideas that embodied do-it-yourself post-modern ideologies in relation to faith and religion. These so-called capitalist spiritualities, as defined by Carrette and King (ibid.)—which come to light in the 1980s in relation to both the workplace and the public sphere—are then branded in the 1990s:

> [T]he slow process of privatising spirituality in the twentieth century through the influence of the "psy disciplines" [Rose, 1998] has paved the way for a second privatisation, the corporate take over of spirituality. In this instance, spirituality is turned into a product or a kind of brand name for the meaning of life. (ibid.: 53)

Part of the branding project of 1990s spirituality is the fascination within the media of 'old' images associated with power and enchantment. Within this frame we can understand the formation of the teen Witch as a media icon of 1990s. As dominant global media giants, both American and British television and cinema exemplify the media's fascination with magical and New Age practices, often conflating the two in specific texts. The treatment given to magic, Witchcraft and the occult in such media forms comes packaged with the glamour and rebellion of postfeminist girl power. This fictionalized visibility enabled the concepts of Neo-Paganism to enter mainstream culture, where once it had lingered on the fringes of occultism. Thus the 1990s saw Neo-Paganism finding both cultural cache and a level of respectability it had not enjoyed since the 1970s. Yet this visibility is skewed in the media fashioning of a magical identity. Just as the historical and fictional images of Witches are female, contemporary teenage Witchcraft in the media (and in practise) is predominantly imagined as a feminine and female pursuit and identity (see Sanders 2004; Johnston in Johnston & Aloi 2007: 97–112; Berger & Ezzy 2007). In Britain and America the 1990s were marked by the emergence of 'girl power' that epitomized a

re-branding of feminist empowerment in a sexy and youthful package. Whilst the political commitment and alternative culture of Riot Grrrls grew to its peak in the 1990s, mainstream pop culture bombarded us with images of fashionable young women who were (we were led to believe) the final product of second wave feminism's successes: confident, seemingly unencumbered with husbands and children, and strutting their stuff to an equally empowered audience. Whether on the fringe or in the mainstream, young women were everywhere proud, feisty and embodying an attitude of confident energetic femininity. The 1990s British girl band The Spice Girls offered such a vision for many teen girls, commercially marketed to show that empowerment comes with a pre-packaged individualism (Sporty Spice, Ginger Spice etc.) and liberation both from the male economy and from the shackles of second wave feminism. The discourse perpetuated in 1990s popular culture was that postfeminism had finally arrived, and that young women could freely reap the rewards of a culture abundant with choices and responsive to the needs of young women. Of course, these needs, much like the images themselves, were part of huge profit-driven marketing projects. As Anita Harris argues in her analysis of young women in late twentieth century culture,

> The profit potential of girl power is thus undoubtable. Of course, young, attractive women have always been used to sell products, and marketing to girls has always been a matter of constructing the latest, coolest kind of femininity. Now however, a particular kind of young, assertive, and sassy woman selling particular kinds of girlpower-inflected products or services has become enormously important in constructing and then tapping the (presumed to be universal) consumer power of young women. (Harris 2004: 21)

Yet, despite the rather suspect undertones of 1990s pop feminism, girls were certainly understood as active participants in cultural discourse, whether as consumers or producers of media products. The emergence of girl power as a cultural discourse and the focus on youthful femininity in the 1990s media paved the way for the emergence of teenage Witchcraft, a subgroup of Neo-Paganism and a subculture dominated by young women.

To return briefly to a point made earlier, many scholars of teen paganism (myself included) have commented that the Western media culture is the single most important influence in the development of teen Paganism across the world. Thanks in part to the global network of

Hollywood film and American television distribution,[1] by the late 1990s, as media scholar Peg Aloi states, '[…] Witches had become entrenched as media darlings who could not only be benevolent but sexy, comical and in some cases role models for the young women who watched them' (Aloi in Johnston & Aloi 2007: 119). The influence of the teen movie *The Craft* (1996) and shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed*, cannot be understated when understanding the emergence of teenage Witchcraft in both the US and the UK. Yet, although these shows are significant points of inspiration and identity formation (see Johnston & Aloi 2007; Berger & Ezzy 2007), more established forms of mass communication and spiritual education are equally significant in the shaping and distinction of teen Witch identity and communities. Most specifically through the 1990s the publishing industry capitalized on the growth of a spiritually and magically 'hungry' adolescent market. Books have always been central to the construction of adolescent magical identity (see Vayne in Johnston and Aloi 2007: 57–72) and are central to the iconography of Witchcraft in both ancient and modern times. However, the popularization of the magical book within television and film texts (the Halliwell's familial repository in *Charmed* and the occult library Giles stewards in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are prime examples), gave publishers the opportunity to tap into the growing teen market and offer them 'real' books of magic. Unlike the array of books aimed at the adult Neo-Pagan and Wiccan bibliophiles these new books were catered specifically for teens. As Doug Ezzy describes, '[T]hese books were aimed at individuals and were less "demanding" in the sense that they presented a simplified more accessible description of Witchcraft practise' (Ezzy 2003: 48).

From the array of popular images and literature marketed towards adolescents, teenage Witches are in the process of production, creating an identity and lifestyle from a range of cultural products and icons. The rest of this chapter will consider the range of literary texts interpellating this market demonstrating the cultural gateways though which teen Witch identity is enabled. As my own research with British teen Witches showed (Sanders 2004), despite the vast array of interactive interfaces offered by the Internet, and the glitzy pseudo-educational content of

[1] In the UK for example, during the late 1990s both the BBC (particularly BBC2) and Channel Four made executive choices to buy in American shows that hail a teen audience including the occult fantasies *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Roswell High* and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* to name but a few.

certain television texts, books are still the prime educator of would-be Witches, and their currency moves beyond the individual seeker.[2] My research with British teen Witches in (Sanders 2004) suggested that books aimed at teens wanting to practise magic (as distinguished from the plethora of teen spell book which have little discussion of any spiritual/religious framework within which magic or spells can be practised) can have a circulation of up to eight individuals, and are often used as key texts in the establishment of teen Witch groups and practices. As I will show, the teen Witch how-to books disseminate discourses of power and knowledge through their discussion of fashioning an identity as a Witch, and practicing Witchcraft/Wicca.

The film, television and literary texts depicting teenage Witches have a mutual, interconnected relationship, establishing discourses regarding the female body as a source of power, the centrality of speech acts, and the appropriate (frequently moralised) use of this power, expressing the relationship between author as expert and reader as 'acolyte' into new modes of frequently feminine teenage identity formation. To what extent we can describe the teen Witch culture as a phenomenon is limited due to the difficult task of accounting for the numbers involved in teenage Witchcraft. From my own research with British teen Witches online (ibid.) and that carried out by James Lewis (in Johnston & Aloi 2007: 13–24) we can trace teenagers through their consumption practices, and through their presence in new media forums. In the aforementioned research, online forums provide a significant space for the development of teenage Witchcraft, yet again this is plagued with difficulties for the researcher. By looking to the literary market, to those 'how to books' that seek to educate the would-be teen Witch, we find a significant indication of intent and involvement. The booming of these publishing subcategories of both teen and 'mind body spirit' literature from the late 1990s and into the early 2000s is testament to their commercial viability and thus to an audience engaged in constructing an identity as Neo-Pagan Witches in part through these texts. The rest of this chapter will discuss the construction and significance of these

[2] In both on-site polls conducted on my research website www.witchwords.net and in questionnaires with British teen Witches, teen Witchcraft/Wiccan textbooks featured prominently. When asked 'What is the best way to learn about Witchcraft?' 56% of respondents answered books. Again, when asked 'What inspired interest in Witchcraft?' the response saw a clear tie between friends and family (26%) and books (28%). For a more detailed discussion see Sanders 2004: 349 & 358.

how-to texts and the teen Witch identity they facilitate. I have focused this analysis on the most popular texts and those describing Witchcraft as a spiritual and religious practise rather than simply describing spells. These books, according to sales figures, and comments from the teenage Witches in my own study (Sanders 2004: 339–340) are clearly esteemed by the teen community. These are: Silver RavenWolf's *Teen Witch: Wicca for a New Generation* (1998), Fiona Horne's *Witchin': A Handbook for Teens* (2000) and Teresa Moorey's *Spellbound!* (2002). Where appropriate I also make reference to those books authored by teens, or adults who identify as teen Witches, Gwinevere Rain's *Confessions of a Teenage Witch: Celebrating the Wiccan Life* (2005) and Samantha Hardie's *Samantha's Witchery: A Magical Guide for Teenage Witches* (2002).

Contexts: History Reconfigured

> I realise that you might have purchased this book just to get to the spells, and I know that some of you have skipped to this part of the book and ignored the first few chapters. If you have done this, then go back, *please*, and read the chapters before this one. If you don't then your spellcasting probably won't work. For those of you who have plugged faithfully along, I'm very proud of you! Now we get to do the fun stuff! (RavenWolf 1998: 133)

This quotation is from Silver RavenWolf's best-selling publication, *Teen Witch: Wicca for a New Generation* having sold over 200,000 copies worldwide according to its new front cover. From its initial American publication in 1998, this title has helped establish a new branch of the developing teenage literary market and a unique teenage demographic, promising the re-enchantment of their lives through the practice of Witchcraft or Wicca. Unlike the plethora of 'kidlit' which filled the shelves in the early 1990s, and continues with the success of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series or *Philip Pullman's 'Dark Materials'* trilogy amongst others, this new genre of 'tween' and teen literatures posits a non fictional content. This is a blossoming market in Britain, America and Europe, and accordingly, a vast range of literary products from year diaries, calendars, Witchcraft and spell books and almanacs are developed and marketed specifically at teenagers. The New Age publishing house Llewellyn presently (Spring 2008) boasts 89 titles specifically targeted at a tween and teen audience. The Penguin Group, Random House, HarperCollins Publishers LTD and an array of smaller publishers have published teen Witch manuals, written by well-known

adult writers in the field of Neo-Pagan Witchcraft (Silver RavenWolf, Teresa Moorey, and Fiona Horne for example) or authored by teens: Hardie's *Samantha's Witchery* (2002) or Rain's *Confessions of a Teenage Witch* (2005).

To trace the precursors of this literature we have to briefly consider the evolution of the adult Wicca/Witchcraft and occult 'how-to' texts.[3] From the mid 1970s, on both sides of the Atlantic there was an explosion of adult Neo-Pagan and Witchcraft literature. This literature produced seminal texts outlining how to become a Witch. This in many ways reflects a dynamic found in adult Neo-Pagan Witchcraft identity construction, where reading is essential to the establishment of a new identity, or the continuance and growth of interest. Graham Harvey has noted:

> Paganism, like many other religions, has generated a growing literature. While Pagans have not (yet) elevated any work to the status of scripture and while no single text is read by all Pagans, the construction and narration of Pagan identity commonly entails reading. (2000: 01)

The various strands of adult Witchcraft literature can be traced along political and ideological lines. There are two key strands in the development of this literature. The books published in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s are often anecdotal and educational in tone, basing their teachings in a history of Witchcraft as an earth honouring folkloric tradition of Europe, espousing a view of the Old Religion as a survivalist pre-Christian philosophy. The seminal and extensive writings of Doreen Valiente and Janet and Stewart Farrar (following in the footsteps of the Wiccan luminaries Gerald Gardner and Alex Sanders) describe Wicca/Witchcraft as a lost art and a ritual practise celebrating the rural cycles of the year and all natural phenomena. The American literature from the same period is arguably more innovative and politicized:

> What seems beyond doubt is that all the main English branches of pagan Witchcraft arrived in the United States during the 1960s and early 1970s, and that the books of Murray, Graves and Gardner found a wide readership there during the same period. Among the readers were people versed in a range of traditions of European popular magic, imported into the country from the whole span of peoples who had supplied immigrants

[3] For a considerably more expansive and nuanced account see Ronald Hutton's seminal *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (1999), particularly Chapters 14–20.

> to it. The result was a very rich variety of strains of modern Witchcraft. America's most distinctive single contribution to that Witchcraft, however, arose from a different phenomenon: its assimilation to the women's spirituality movement. (Hutton 1999: 341)

The work of Starhawk (1979) and Margot Adler (1979) describing the practise and culture of Neo-Pagan Witchcraft respectively, developed and detailed the political and spiritual connections between Neo-Paganism, second wave feminist consciousness-raising and historical revisions of early matriarchal religious structures, most famously surmised in Mary Daly's influential 1979 book *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*.[4]

Most significantly for my argument, continuing the tradition of historical poaching, as both the British and American Wiccan literature makes use of 'history' for differing political agendas, historical revisioning is one of the fundamental connections found between the adult Witchcraft/Wiccan literature and contemporary teen Witch literature. The 'imagined' trajectory of Witchcraft practice incorporates these revisions as folkloric and historical tropes, making these histories a source of inspiration, validation and legitimacy for Wicca as a contemporary faith practice. Discourses of historical legitimacy are found throughout teen Witch literature. Jamie Wood's introduction to *The Teen Spell Book* discusses the developments of Witchcraft from prehistory, noting, 'one of the last times the majority of people lived closely with the land occurred during the Middle Ages (approximately 400–1475 AD)… Everyone believed Witches existed and had a certain amount of power over the supernatural world' (2001: 06). In Anne Franklin and Sue Phillips' *Real Wicca for Teens* (2002), the notion of a 'Golden Age', when Witchcraft was accepted and understood, is central to introducing contemporary Witchcraft to the teenage reader: 'Because our religion almost died out as a result of centuries of persecution, torture and death, modern Pagans have to look to the past to rediscover our Old Gods and our

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[4] The Women's Spirituality movement in America, which for many American feminists in the late 1970s was a development of their political ideals, drew heavily upon the images and practices of Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft. As Cynthia Eller argues, 'feminist spirituality's contact with neo-paganism has left its mark on every aspect of feminist spirituality: its thealogy, ritual, and social organisation' (in Griffin, Ed., 2000: 31). Although it is erroneous to suggest that feminist spirituality, with its roots in the women's consciousness raising movement, is one and the same as feminist Witchcraft, the political inspirations for both draw upon the figure of the Witch as a symbol representative of female knowledge, power and resistance. As such this figure, whether a political icon or a religious symbol became associated with the second wave feminist movement's political and spiritual action.

Old Religion, our pre-Christian heritage' (2002: 06). The simplified (and occasionally conjectured) historical accounts of Witchcraft in several of these titles frequently precede discussions of the rise of Christianity and the subsequent loss of religious and political status for European women. The specific details of women's role in this pre-Christian culture are described in nebulous and idealised terms. These historical re-fashionings of women's status operate as a 'display of origins'. The use of story telling devices creates a sense of narrative; sensuous, visual, metaphorical descriptions of women's historical power, conjure an image of the continuity of women focused 'power' which has been lost through persecution, which can be reformulated and reclaimed for the female teenager seeking spiritual and emotional fulfilment:

> Imagine . . . a small village in medieval England. [. . .] A young couple sit huddled by the little fire, while in the corner an older woman works. In front of her on the table lies a disk on which is engraved a five-pointed star. Fiery serpents seem to writhe on its bronze surface, which the fire-glow catches The woman is mixing herbs, crushing them with a pestle and mortar, placing them in a small, chipped bottle. She stops the neck with a piece of rag and hands it to the young woman. 'There my dear,' she says. 'That should help you to conceive by Yuletide. But tell no one.' She peers fearfully through the window as hoof-beats approach . . . (Moorey 2002: 11)

Within these discussions, certain contradictory positions regarding historical narrative and legitimacy are found. Such narratives detail the desire to create, through reference to a historical continuity, some sense of authenticity regarding the current Witchcraft practice and philosophy. In these books the history of women's oppression and the dissolution of Witchcraft as a source of supposed social status is established in relation to a community of meanings and a collective consciousness, drawn from the cultural reservoir of symbols and reflections: the lonely midwife on the edge of the village, picking herbs in the moonlight; the oracle, isolated due to her ability to 'see beyond the veil; the priestess, trained in the mysteries of the Goddess, conducting rites within sacred stone circles. These images of women as magical are presented in the literature of teenage Witchcraft as a validating continuity in relation to contemporary Witchcraft practices and philosophies for the teenage reader:

> When you reach puberty or age 15, as a young woman you become the enchantress. You are captivating, charming, and delightful, full of light and magick. As a boy you are the lad and embody a curious nature. When you reach puberty or age 15, as a young man you become the adventurer or warrior. (Wood 2001: 03)

The historicization of Witchcraft practices, the subsequent linkages made between female procreative power, magical ability and social status attempts to authenticate the contemporary practice of Witchcraft, reconfiguring the discourse of historical value onto a current subcultural activity. The authors of this literature confirm regimes of knowledge / power that exist in mainstream culture. Primary in these books are essentialist epistemes which link women's power to their ability to give birth and their generative prowess as the basis for women's social status: woman as primal, uncivilised, on the boundaries of culture. This is a familiar trope in teen Witch iconography in visual media—consider the representation of teen girls in the film *The Craft* (1996) for example.

In her reading of adult Witchcraft literature Diane Purkiss suggests, 'spells and rituals emphasise the self-help aspects of Witchcraft and in the case of feminist Witchcraft they most often offer a magical way to act out women's receptive and nurturing 'nature' (1996: 46). Such essentialist readings of Witchcraft practices are presented within the teenage literature as the source of feminine empowerment; Witchcraft gives the practitioner the ability to find love and beauty, heal and protect the self and others, and care for the planet. The authors of these books are invariably female and, given the emphasis on 'Goddess power' and the maternal body, discourses salvaged from history and the philosophical eclecticism of contemporary Wicca and Neo-Paganisms, these books presuppose a primarily (although not exclusively) female readership. However, although the historical vision of such a female body in teen Witch books combines discourses of historical continuity with a radical fictionalised account, this vision places women's power within their biological experience and function, particularly the notion that women act as gatekeepers between life transitions: they bear children, practise midwifery, bury the dead, divine the future. Women's bodies are, according to these accounts, intimately involved with other bodies at all stages of maturation and in seasonal contexts based on historical and anthropological narratives. The female body in communion with other bodies is valorised within these texts as a source of mystical power. These descriptions ascribe a position of subaltern power to women who acted as repositories of an instinctual wisdom and subsequently to certain social positions: 'Giving birth was something that was regarded as very valuable, magical even. Women would have helped each other, and probably had power. It isn't hard to see that in such a society more 'feminine' instinctual things would have been respected' (Moorey 2002: 08).

This essentialised, nostalgic vision of women's magical status as a historical fact/fiction questions the authoritative discourse of the historical Academy, yet it reinvents an account of female agency which valorises the maternal body as its primary source and places 'history' rather than fiction as the validating source of inspiration and practice. This is a problematic discourse which could be considered as a return to notions of women's power as performed only though their ability to 'mother'. However, these books are written for an audience entering into adult female subjectivity and corporeality, a developmental and cultural stage which has been characterised specifically with regimes of the body: 'That being 'grown up' necessitates being massively identified with the body, is the change that most girls undertake which has inherent difficulties, such as alienation and objectification of parts of the self' (Frost 2001: 71). Using Sociologist Liz Frost's observation regarding girls' body image (ibid.), the positivist essentialism presented in these teen Witch texts locates the emerging female body as a source of strength and self-esteem, using historical narratives regarding female aptitude as an authenticating vision of this bio-power. Perhaps the intention of this theme is to enable the reader to counteract objectifying discourses regarding the entrance into adult identity, replacing it with a vision of the female body as powerful and unified. However, with the reconstruction of a historical fantasy of women's magical ability and social position, the source of this power is once again allied with the mysterious, a body aligned with the natural world rather than the structures of civilisation.

The chronology developed in this literature for teenagers, from Stone Age to contemporary Witchcraft, is presented by means of a historical thread, but this thread is not one acceptable to academically legitimised discourses of women's history and power. Instead it is more explicitly linked to the second wave feminist rejection of academic histories (determined as a patriarchal authority and academy), attempting to interrupt the coherence of historical voices though interjecting 'women's' voices into such readings. In this vein, teen Witchcraft literature can be described as a modern development of feminist historiography, reformulating the myth of origins developed in feminist 'herstories'.[5]

[5] Feminist writers, whether thealogians such as Carol Christ and Mary Daly, or feminist historians and cultural theorists such as Sheila Rowbowtham, Joan Scott, Natalie Zeman-Davis and Denise Riley, have questioned the occupation of 'History', arguing that the place allocated to women and the very nature of 'woman' and 'women' ascribed through historical analyses denies the inclusion of a female voice. If it does

Although the methods and political motivations of such feminist historiographical accounts vary, they seek to undermine the patriarchal and unified sense of historical legitimacy purported to be 'truth' by the academy. In a similar way, modern Witches seek to reclaim that historically pejorative-term, historiographic revisions offer new contexts for validating women's contribution to society.

Traces of the desire to write women into history can be seen in the historical accounts of Witchcraft found in the teen Witch titles. These books appropriate a feminist epistemology, if a rather 'un-theorised' version, in an attempt to legitimise the history of Witchcraft and women's magical power, and to 'speak to' an assumed female readership. The historical origins of teenage Witchcraft are presented in a way which deliberately tries to extol that which has remained 'silent', giving voice to what Michel Foucault describes as an 'incorporeal discourse' (Foucault 1972: 27), a discourse which exists in the collective consciousness, yet which resides outside the dominant notions of female identity. These texts promise to uncover a secret that has been hidden from young women; the secret of their heritage and their own 'power'. As one introduction states, 'the honour of keeping the lore of these ancient wise teachings alive, while balancing and harmonising male and female energy, rests on your capable shoulders. You have the power. You *are* power' (Wood 2001: 03). Such an account of 'history' combines a notion of history whilst giving credibility to a fictionalised re-reading, deconstructing the unity of historical truth. In Andrew Blake's analysis of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon in Britain, he argues that the image of a young boy as magician is 'retrolutionary', 'a symbolic figure of the past-in-future England which is in desperate need of such symbols' (2002: 15–16). Similarly, the adult authors of Witchcraft present their own system of symbols to a teenage audience in order to offer a feminine version of this 'retrolutionary' icon—the Witch. Just as this revisioning of the teenage Witch is nostalgic, retrolutionary and questioning of the authenticating knowledges of history, it presents the teenage audience with the perfect post-modern (and postfeminist) simulacrum; the Witch has been refashioned to create a sense of women's history from the modern, presented as a new face of an old form of feminine identity.

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not deny it, then, as Denise Riley suggests (in Kemp and Squires 1997: 241–246), women's history has been homogenised, 'women', although a changeable category of meanings is always seen as a unified collective whole.

Authorial Power and Notions of Authenticity

The constructed history of Witchcraft is not the only means through which this literature acts as an intervention into ideas of historical truth. 'History' is also presented through the author's autobiographical account of their involvement with Witchcraft. The macrocosm of mythical cultural history and the microcosm of the authors' history are both presented within the texts as sources of validation and authority, reassuring the reader that the author is an 'expert' passing on 'wisdom' recovered by modern day adult Witches. The introduction to these books often presents the author. The importance of explaining personal history and a level of expertise within Witchcraft is present in all texts, whether explicitly detailed throughout the book, in the introduction or in less obvious places such as the dedication or the book jacket:

> They call me Mama because of the way I write. I'm a lineage Witch and author. Lineage means I've gone through years of private training, made mistakes, rolled with the punches of life, and elevated through ceremony to the position of elder in my group. Currently I am responsible for eleven covens in eight states. I have four children of my own, ranging from twelve years old to nineteen years old, so I have a pretty good idea of what happens in the exciting voyage though the teen years. (RavenWolf 1998: XV)

> I had a very magical vibe early in my life, which saw me communing with nature spirits in my bushland home in Australia, casting spells with my intuition as my only guide, and tapping into some innate inherited Witchy wisdom (my blood is German/Hungarian after all!!) I also played mad Witchy games with my girlfriends. (Horne 2002: XI)

Several of the titles include this information on the book's back cover, informing the potential buyer of the author's status:

> Author Gwinevere Rain, who has been a practitioner since she was fourteen, shares her witchy insights and experience as she illuminates the true practice of Wicca. (Rain 2005: Back Cover)

> Kate West has been a practising Witch for over thirty years. She is vice-president and media Co-Ordinator of The Pagan Federation and High Priestess of the Hearth of Hecate. (West 2001: Back Cover)

The expertise of the author is presented in a way that reflects the length of time they have 'practiced Witchcraft', suggesting the level of knowledge the author has accrued. The author's status as mother, whether literally or to a spiritual community or group, or her status as a celebrity, as in the case of Fiona Horne who was a glamour model and singer

prior to becoming a celebrity Witch, are also presented as authenticating qualifiers. The notion of the 'Witch expert' whose authority is drawn from life experience and spiritual (professional) knowledge is a structure of adult power already familiar to the female teenage reader:

> When Marina Baker decided it was time to write a book she cast a spell to make it happen. Days later she was asked to write this one. Better known as a newspaper journalist, she is the daughter of a white Witch and has been involved in Witchcraft all her life. She is delighted to have this opportunity to share her knowledge. (Baker 2000: Back Cover)

The discourses of power operating through the author's self-fashioned authority as a Witch reinflect those found in the rhetoric of women's self-help literature and feminist consciousness-raising. Although Witchcraft in the majority of these books is presented as a religion, or at least a spiritual path, the use of therapeutic discourse drawn from self-help literature is widespread. This reinforces the author's position as facilitator and expert, offering anecdotes, advice and exercises to enable the teenager to become a Witch and overcome personal problems. Deborah Cameron defines the self-help genre as, 'a genre which takes gender, selfhood and interaction with others as its overt subject matter' (in Andrews & Talbot 2000: 211). Women are considered to be the primary market for this genre as it posits the means to empowerment and liberation as the central thematic trajectory. Self-help deals overtly with issues of power: who has it, who does not and how to get it. The self-help genre is one of the largest and most lucrative literary fields, and a variety of disempowered groups are interpellated from this literature.

The role of advice is the crux of the texts' construction. The practice of Witchcraft is offered to an audience described as powerless, voiceless and marginalised (whether explicitly or by inferring what practicing Witchcraft can do for the reader), suggesting that through the practice of Witchcraft this status can be fundamentally transformed; 'The great thing about Teen Witchcraft is that it's empowering and positive, encourages confidence and boosts self esteem' (Horne 2002: VIII). The use of the words *empowering, confidence* and *self-esteem* are drawn directly from the therapeutic language of self-help, yet here given a magical context; 'This book, designed for you teens, adds to the cauldron of my continuing efforts to fight against discrimination and to teach people that Witchcraft can help them in improving their lives and making them better people, if they so desire' (RavenWolf 1998: 03). Power and empowerment become products that one can 'consume', and that

discussing one's subjectivity in terms of empowerment changes the way in which individuals experience and understand power relations: 'When Witches go through the training process they immediately learn two things: one, the theology and practices of the Craft; and two, how to raise their self esteem. You can't work great magick if you don't believe in Spirit, or yourself' (RavenWolf 1998: 102).

The majority of these books are written from an intimate, first person perspective, the author recounting personal stories of success or tribulation: 'Some books will tell you that you need lots of expensive tools in order for your spells to work. Rubbish! I find that some of the most powerful tools I use are the ones found in nature' (Bruce 2002: 19). Where the author's voice is not directly in the first person, the tone is of a warm and informal advisor: 'Your body is a gift, and like all gifts it needs to be treasured. So make sure that caring for your body is one of your top priorities' (Moorey 2002: 28).

The reader is frequently given intimate details about the author's life and thoughts on various aspects of practicing Witchcraft and being a Witch, using anecdotes to explain or advise on certain areas or problems. The inclusion of an autobiographical voice in the teen Witch literature combines elements of self-writing and confessionalism—a voice often attributed to 'women's literature' and also found in popular psychology and self-help. In the attempt to reach the reader, confession is used alongside self-writing. The confessional aspects of the text are presented ironically, demonstrating the process of transformation available in confessing when one is reflective. More frequently however, these books use the form of self-writing to allow the reader to become intimate with various aspects of the author's practice or ideas. Margaret McLaren (2002) who discusses women's autobiographies and self-writing in relation to feminist politics, states that,

> [w]omen's autobiographies give voice to subjugated knowledge because women's perspective and experiences have until recently been excluded from mainstream history and literature. Autobiographical narratives usually construct identity as multifaceted and complex, and as dynamic, not static. (2002: 152)

Autobiographical accounts enable teen Witch authors to discuss and reflect on their range of experiences and knowledge. The instigation of various hierarchies of power become obvious where the author as expert disseminates knowledge drawn from experience in an autobiographical manner in order to draw a wider commercial audience. The author presents herself in these texts as an empowered, knowledgeable yet

fallible subject: practicing Witchcraft has given her an authoritative position from which to speak confessionally and autobiographically. For the teenage reader this provides a role model of feminine power that can be emulated through practicing Witchcraft.

Whilst these descriptions of the author's expertise, demonstrated by the autobiographical vignettes, are prominent within these texts, they are not presented as the ultimate expert voice, but one voice amongst many. The fragmentation of authorities and truths is frequently established through a binary distinction between the 'good literature' of authentic Witches, of which there are a variety, and the 'bad knowledge' gleaned from television, film and sensationalist journalism. Silver RavenWolf's position in this debate is interesting, as she is often considered to be the doyenne of teen which literature by teens (see Berger & Ezzy 2007: 41–42) but was initially criticized by many in the adult Neo-Pagan community for her stance on teen Witchcraft.[6]

Often teen Witch books deride the array of inauthentic literature or media representations regarding the subject of Witchcraft:

> There are plenty of books available that cover the various aspects of paganism and Witchcraft for adults, but for younger people a lot of this information is irrelevant or unsuitable. When we looked around we discovered that there is very little information written especially for young people who want to work real Wicca, rather than the Sabrina the Teenage Witch playacting kind. (Franklin & Phillips 2002: 02)

These books distinguish between the make-believe magic presented on television or film and the 'real magic' of Wicca/Witchcraft, although they acknowledge that the inspiration for owning or reading the book and developing an interest in becoming a Witch may initially have been prompted by these texts:

> This interest is also being encouraged by fictional portrayals in books, films and TV. However, these come complete with many misconceptions and elaborations and it can be difficult for those new to the Craft to determine what is accurate and what is myth, especially if they have no one to guide them. (West 2001: VIII)

The blurring of definitions between the author's presentation of 'truth' and the mass media's representations of contemporary Witchcraft is used

[6] See Stephanie Martin's chapter, 'Teen Witchcraft and Silver RavenWolf: The Internet and its impact on community opinion' in Johnston & Aloi (2007: 129–138) for an in-depth discussion of this debate.

to establish the author's genuine interest and knowledge of Witchcraft, and to discuss the reality of Witchcraft: 'But please remember that real Witchcraft isn't like the films *The Craft* or *Practical Magic*. It isn't that easy or dramatic' (Moorey 2002: 21). As Doug Ezzy and Helen A. Berger state in their analysis of teenage Witchcraft and the role of media representations, '[A]s most of our respondents note, television shows and movies provide inaccurate information about the religion, often focusing on magical practices that are beyond what any practitioner has experienced' (Ezzy & Berger in Johnston & Aloi 2007: 50). The central distinguishing component is that real Witchcraft takes work; like the Witch-work of the Halliwell sisters in *Charmed*, it is complicated and demanding. The TV/film versus real Witchcraft dynamic entails a warning; if procedures are not followed correctly and the student is rash then magic can be dangerous, 'it's got to be taken slowly, but once you can do it, you never lose it. And like driving a car, it can be dangerous unless it's done properly' (Moorley 2002: 21). Witchcraft as work acts as a legitimising aspect of this expression of feminine culture.[7] The author states her authority by distinguishing the real from the illusory and the morally guided from the dangerous. For those teenage readers familiar with the closure of *The Craft* and the Season six finale of *Buffy*…, the outcome of such dangers will be all too familiar.

Although the books persistently establish oppositions between the 'fiction' of such visual texts and the 'facts' of real Witchcraft, the authors are aware that the reader's interest may have been generated by these visual fictions: 'If you've picked up this book then you are obviously interested in Witchcraft. Maybe your interest began after seeing a film or TV series such as *Charmed, Practical Magic, The Craft*, or *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*. Maybe you've developed an interest and would like to learn more' (Bruce 2002: 07). Thus teenage Witchcraft offers an escape from normalising modes of subjectivity and power, promising an alternative sense of self, empowerment and philosophy through modes of consumption. This it does this, whether positively or derogatorily, in relation the media texts that display fictionalised accounts of adolescent girls' magical powers.

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[7] For a more detailed analysis of Witchcraft as work see my Chapter: Hannah E. Sanders "Living a Charmed Life" in Negra & Tasker 2007.

Mainstream Magic: Commercial Modes of Presentation

Witchcraft is described in these books as a means to achieve an empowered state of selfhood, in the process of development and betterment. This is ultimately what teenage seekers desire in approaching Witchcraft and what they perceive the effects of Witchcraft practise to be. As my own research has shown, and that conducted by Helen A. Berger and Doug Ezzy (2007), teenage Witches are drawn to the individualist approach to self-empowerment. As hollyivy, a teenage respondent in my own study eloquently suggests, 'I like it that you don't have to believe in everything that you could believe in, in Wicca things aren't forced and you can go as slow or as fast as you'd like in discovering beliefs and expressing opinions!!' (cited in Sanders 2004: 273). As Wiccan author Kate West states, 'as a Witch, you are responsible for your own personal development, for fulfilling your own potential' (2001: 19). Self-improvement and self-awareness are key components to the act of becoming a teenage Witch and practicing Witchcraft. These discourses are presented to the reader in a variety of ways through the texts: the role of the authorial voice and the description of magic as a form of self-development. The former distinction, the voice of the author, draws heavily in style and presentation from that of the problem page in girls' and women's magazines, demonstrating again that these texts are integrally connected to well established commercial forms interpellating a teen girl audience.

These texts have a stylistic and discursive connection to magazine culture and the self-help narratives found within them. Angela McRobbie's 1991 analysis of teen girl magazine *Jackie* explores the role of the problem page. In the case of *Jackie* at the time of McRobbie's writing, the problem page was written by 'Cathy and Claire', described as, 'neither anonymous editors nor professional problem-solvers' (McRobbie 1991: 93). The problem page or advice column was, and is, a staple of magazine culture and personal details of the expert are offered to validate their ability to answer readers' questions as argued above in relation to the teen Witch author. McRobbie describes the voice of the problem page's facilitators as akin to an elder sister (ibid.). The tonality of the writing in the teen Witch books reflects this device. The authorial voice is sometimes presented as wisely maternal, often wistfully reflecting on their own teenage years: 'As I enter the mother phase of the Goddess, I hope to reach and help you. Or I can simply be here for you on your path- present, non-judgemental, with acceptance of your

unique expression and journey' (Wood 2001: 03). Conversely, the author utilises the 'teen speak' found in current popular culture; 'Whether you receive a grunt, a nod, or even a 'great, thanks!" you've got the O.K., so cast away! I know what you're thinking: *What's up with this permission thing?* If she doesn't want you to do a healing spell for her, then it's her loss!' (Rain 2002: 37). The use of particular idioms demonstrates an expectation that the reader will identify with and respond to these voices. In both RavenWolf's *Teen Witch*…, and Horne's *Witchin*'…, the authorial voice directly addresses the reader, as in magazine problem page dialogues. Horne does this exhaustively by actively trying to recreate the teen voice through including e-mails received from teenagers interested in her and Witchcraft. In her introduction she states that she integrates these voices, 'while preparing for this book, I invited Teen Witches to write in to my web site with any queries they might like to have published and answered' (Horne 2002: 01). The inclusion of a teenage voice, however ambiguous its origin, enables the reader to place herself in the position of the enquirer. The use of questionnaires, tasks and memory aids, and posing questions are familiar to an audience conversant with the design layout and content of teen/women's magazines. McRobbie argues that, 'the problem page itself depends on the dialogue between readers for its impact. They are invited to participate in a personal correspondence with each other as well as with Cathy and Claire' (1991: 93). The teen voice within the text validates the content and helps negotiate the author's relationship with the reader. Further, the books' frequent use of posed questions as if spoken by the reader, whether in chapter headings or within the chapters, constructs an illusory dialogue between author and reader, potentially enabling the reader quick access to what has been described as F.A.Q's. This inclusion of the 'reader as author' gives the appearance of attributing a voice to the reader but actually wrests the voice away from the reader by presupposing the questions that need answering. In the decision-making process the author's voice, her expertise directs and guides all other voices in the texts. Similarly, the use of certain colloquialisms, jokes and asides are included to create a language of intimacy and privacy between the author and reader, especially when describing the more culturally challenging aspects of Witchcraft: 'Keep well away from anyone who links sexual favours into training you as a Witch or who tries to impress you with their knowledge in order to get inside your knickers. Don't be dazzled!' (Moorey 2002: 31). Although the content of these manuals purport occult knowledge and

practice, the use of mainstream linguistic and aesthetic modes reflects more commercial texts. Several of the book jackets use graphic imagery connoting TV series, such as *Bewitched* as in the case of Moorey's *Spellbound!*…, or American high school dramas, as seen on the cover of *Teen Witch*. This design and layout of these books suggests that the reader can jump about from various mini chapters. Additionally, in both *Witchin*'…and *Spellbound!*…different fonts are used and practical exercises ('things to do' sections) are placed in grey boxes, designed to indicate important points or questions to answer, or practical exercises in a manner similar to magazine design. This informality, reminiscent of both self-help titles and girls'/women's magazines, also uses one other literary genre: the cookery book. In the description of performing spells, rituals or other exercises the layout of the text draws upon the rubric found in cookery books. The spiritual necessities, whether tangible or otherwise (for example, in all titles are lists of correspondences, drawn from Greek and Hermetic philosophy, magical and medicinal texts of antiquity and early astrology) are listed, detailing what ingredients may be necessary for what function. For example, RavenWolf's book includes a 'Grocery Store Magick List' (1998: 118) giving herbs, flowers, and spices their alternative uses for spells. For the description of spells the instructions often open with a detailed list 'You will need' stating all necessary items. Thus, the teenage practitioner is actively encouraged to consume items usually deemed mundane by their domestic usage. The books describe how to use these ingredients in the appropriate fashion, often adding some form of spoken rhyme to direct or focus the spell. In RavenWolf's 'Happy Home Spell' (1998: 152) she suggests the teen Witch, finding their home life difficult, performs a spell by gathering the necessary ingredients, 'cleansing consecrating and empowering all supplies and, taking an onion, closes her eyes and says: "I empower you to collect all negativity in this house"' (ibid.). The use of spoken rhymes are structured in similar fashion to self-help affirmations:

> This affirmation is great for when you are in the middle of an argument with your parents and you want it to stop. To do this, you have to stop fuelling it. Say to yourself: *I let go of anger, I let go of sadness. I am perfect and sacred. I can stop this madness*. (Horne 2002: 107)

Reminiscent of the spoken display of effective magic represented in the television and film texts featuring teen Witches (and drawn from this same practise of rhyming couplets used in many texts of modern Witchcraft texts aimed at adults) words are a crucial ingredient to the

effective application of spell casting according to all the teen Witch titles. They are described as spoken as opposed to thought, the power being in the utterance, as shown on television and film texts when the characters are performing magic. Often the spoken aspect of a spell includes some form of prayer to a deity and the use of elevated language, whether referencing Latin, or King James' biblical English. In a spell entitled 'See the Future', the teen Witch calls upon the divine mother:

> I now invoke thee, O Mother of mine, To tell my tale with this crystal of thine, help me to see with your pure Divine light Whether my future is dark or bright. (Wood 2001: 133)

Rhyme features prominently as a form of elevated speech: 'I cast a spell for prosperity. Money, money come to me!' (RavenWolf 1998: 192). All of these directions reflect the construction of a magical operation found in television texts featuring teen Witchcraft. The construction of these spells is discussed not to undermine the spiritual, religious or magical efficacy of such operations for the teenage practitioner, but to suggest that through the presentation of this information, the authors frame this knowledge in a familiar package to an adolescent audience. As Tanya Krzywinska suggests, in her analysis of the representation of magic in *Buffy*…, 'there is reference to new-age magic and spiritual ideas: yet Willow's spells are "ingredient" spells—herbs, objects, and incantations—and are located within the economy of the "magic shop" rather than religious rites' (in Wilcox & Lavery 2002: 188). Although the vast majority of literature aimed at the teen Witch market specifically discusses the importance of deity, and specifically the divine feminine in relation to the concept of spell working, the ingredient nature of the work, and the linguistic formulation seems less to do with enacting a deep spiritual and philosophical change than enabling therapeutic transformation.

Certain 'types' of spells and certain focuses for these spells can be found in all titles examined. The systematisation of these spells reflects the dilemmas considered an everyday part of teenage life: for romance, for attracting and repelling friends, spells to stop bullying, spells to heal oneself or another from illness, spells to rid one's self of anger, spells for protection from 'negative energy' and gossip, spells for money, help with exams and to deter a crabby teacher. The variations of the spells given in the texts are seemingly endless, yet certain themes repetitiously occur. The notion that the teen Witch can change an unwanted situation through the practice of magic (which as all texts warn must be

accompanied by shifts in behaviour, attitude and deeds) is consistent. Potentially any emotionally or physically painful situation can be transformed positively through the enactment of these spells and rituals. Further, certain spells attract positive qualities, new friends, lovers, a better body image, self-confidence, higher school grades. Through the combination of being able to attract positive enhancements and being able to deflect unwanted energies, the teen Witch can transform her attitude to herself and her environment. Although the practice of Witchcraft prescribed by these manuals draws explicitly upon mainstream media forms for presentation and style, they actively seek to teach teenage girls how to resist a state of powerless subjection and come to a position of self-knowledge through magic.

Despite the claim that these books teach a new empowered way of being a teenager in contemporary society, some topics are remarkably absent. Of all the twelve books researched for this chapter, only two explicitly deal with issues of sexuality and body image (Horne's *Witchin'*…being one of them). None of these titles explicitly discuss feminism or feminist politics. In a process akin to McRobbie's (1991) discussion of magazine problem page authors, what the teen Witch authors share is intimate knowledge of feminine anguish and desire, with a sense of intimacy, friendship and understanding whilst recontextualising the dominant arenas of feminine identity performance in a postfeminist frame: find romance (implied as heterosexual romance), help/heal others and yourself and work hard. The rhetoric of feminism, presented as female centred power, and the use of therapeutic self-help discourses are combined to regulate teenage identity whilst offering creative avenues of freedom and resistance. The normative discourses included could be interpreted as a protective device to ensure the American Christian moral majority do not find these texts overtly challenging to social order and to minimise the possibility of 'moral panics'. Also, this expresses a general attitude towards protecting teens from 'sexual predators' in the age of the Internet; this may affect the author's choices and the publishers' avoidance of issues of teen sexuality in the face of potential protests.

These books act as postfeminist texts, texts that detail feminism's call to empowerment whilst restraining the remit of such empowerment. To paraphrase media scholar Jane Shattuc (1997), these texts trace the tensions between dominant culture's discourses of teenage subjectivity and insurgent culture's descriptions of freedom, without forgetting that such tensions cannot adequately account for the multitudinous

symbolic ways a reader will experience or value these often conflicting points. The practices of the self promoted in these texts advertise modes of behaviour McRobbie described in girls' magazine culture twenty five years ago as, 'conventional individualism and conformist independence' (1991: 99). However, rather than resort to the feminine passivity McRobbie suggests, these readers are channelled towards 'having a mind of [her] own' (ibid.), and *actively* working on the self to effect change. The discussion of magic and Witchcraft practice in these books is detailed in a way that understands the reader as a member of women's collective disempowerment, potentially transformed through the appropriation of magic. Thus, spells encode a form of agency to those 'victimised' by a lack of cultural power due to age, economic resources, history and gender. A unity of an assumed female teenage experience is expressed through these texts in terms of the dialectic of feminism they offer and the types of self-transformation they prescribe. There is little room in these texts for the faintly interested, and, much like the dedication shown from Willow's attitude towards magic in *Buffy*…, and the Halliwells' inability to escape their identity, the essential element of successful magic is practice and commitment. As teen author Samantha Hardie explains, 'there is no easy way to do this and Witchcraft is not something you can pick up and put down' (2002: 06).

Anti Teen Witch Literature

Since the beginning of the teen Witch literature subgenre, many interesting developments have taken place. Authors of these texts finally acknowledged a young male readership but also works of explicit fiction have been targeted at this audience, Silver RavenWolf's 'Witches Night Out' mini series is a notable case in point. Yet the proliferation of spell books interpellating a wider teen audience is not the only development seen of late. An interesting response can be found in the form of evangelical Christian teen books. A range of titles, most of which are written by evangelist, radio host and rock drummer Steve Russo, have been published to directly counteract the influence and predominance of teen Witch books.[8] These titles visually look like their

[8] There are currently around half a dozen titles that are directly targeting the same teen audience demonstrated through marketing strategies and design. These are

teen Witch counter-parts, complete with gothic pseudo-archaic covers, but they are 'darker' in design and tone. At a cursory glance, one could mistake them for teen Witch books, but on closer examination these books attempt to detail the ways in which teenage Witchcraft is a corrupting personal and social influence. These books are aimed at the same market as the teen Witch books and where they differ in attitude and content, they find common ground in authorial address, layout and the understanding of Witchcraft as a powerful personal practice. These books however, posit that teen Witchcraft is a dangerous anti-religious occult practise that will cause untold harm on the individual rather than self-empowerment. A full assessment of this literature cannot be conducted here, but initial analysis would suggest that such texts are a backlash against the perceived cultural acceptance of teenage Witchcraft in contemporary pop culture. As Steve Russo states in the Chapter entitled 'Wicca goes Mainstream' in his book *What's the Deal with Wicca? A Deeper Look into the Dark Side of Today's Witchcraft*:

> So what's being spelled out in the Wiccan sales pitch that teens today are buying? There are lots of things that kids find appealing, starting with power. The promise of power over one's circumstances is huge. Everything from cones of power to magick is at your disposal, according to Wicca. (2005a: 45)

What the numerous titles penned by Steve Russo discuss, is the ways in which teens are misguided in their path to Witchcraft and Wicca: 'Many unsuspecting people are getting sucked into the deception of Wicca. Don't be fooled by outside appearances. Ask yourself, "Does what they're teaching line up with the Bible? Do they confirm that Jesus is the only way to God?" (2005a: 65). Interestingly Russo and other Christian authors writing for would-be Witches such as Tim Baker (2004), agree with the discourse of power suggested in teen Witch books; they concur that contemporary Witchcraft offers a lifestyle and identity that expresses popular postmodern and postfeminist discourse of the self and articulates a powerful form of personal agency for teens:

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authored primarily by Steve Russo, but see also Baker (2004) and Anderson & Russo (1991). Where these books are not directly interpellating teens as in Anderson & Russo (1991) and Russo 2005a, they are aimed at parents and concerned caregivers of teens. All of these texts acknowledge the distinctions the Neo-Pagan community makes between Satanism and Neo-Paganism but all of them go on to conflate Satanism, Wicca and Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism.

> For others, becoming involved with Witchcraft comes from a sincere search for power to change their life or deal with the pain of a broken home, rejection, or hopelessness. While Witchcraft may appear to offer immediate power for change, it's temporary and limited at best. It also leaves God totally out of the picture and relies on power from the forces of darkness. The power that we need to handle the pressures of life is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Russo 2007: 124)

In 2006 the conservative Christian polling organization The Barna Group stated that teenagers involvement with Witchcraft was one of the twelve most significant religious developments in North America:

> Teenagers relish experiences and the supernatural world provides fertile ground for their explorations. In fact, three-quarters of America's youth (73%) have engaged in at least one type of psychic or Witchcraft-related activity, beyond mere media exposure or horoscope usage. The most common types of Witchcraft behaviors were using a Ouija board and reading a book about Witchcraft or Wicca, each of which had been done by more than one-third of teenagers. (http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=216, January 23, 2006, accessed 3/22/08)

It is clear from the Barna Group research and the growth of anti-teen Witch literature that the conservative evangelical Christian community believe that teenage interest and involvement in Witchcraft is a socio-religious force to be reckoned with, and understand that literature is a key way to reach and teach this audience about the 'power of Witchcraft'.[9] The impact of this anti-teen Witch literature is yet to be fully researched but from initial consideration what this literature tells us is that the popularization of teenage Witchcraft, its inclusion into mainstream models of teen identity is not deemed a lighthearted or dubious commercial fad by all of the adult community.

Conclusion

Through working on themselves, the 'wanna-be' teen Witch readers are offered a vision of a powerful identity. However, descriptions of shared oppression and victimisation, of lost history, also subscribe to the notion that female experience is unified, without cultural, racial

[9] For an interesting outline of this research alongside other articles on teen paganism and Witchcraft see Jason Pitzl-Waters' pagan blog, 'The Wild Hunt: A Modern Pagan Perspective' http://www.wildhunt.org/labels/teens.htmlJason.

(read predominantly white), sexual or individual difference. Difference within the literature of teenage Witchcraft is either suppressed or subsumed. As contemporary self-help titles privilege the heterosexual human relationship, spells discussing romantic fulfilment are implicitly (and often explicitly) centred on heteronormativity.

The forms of embodiment and empowerment described through these texts relies on the reader's relationship with the author and discourses that discuss teenage identity in terms of self-improvement through an engagement with forms of economic and cultural consumption. Teenage Witchcraft offers one means for the teenager to achieve this state of selfhood, but from within mainstream culture, operative through multi-faceted points of media and economic consumption. As teenagers increasingly have a growing, expendable income, the teenage Witchcraft 'phenomenon' could be described as one means to both reinforce and counteract the state of young women's' relationship with their bodies, and with modes of power available to them within Western culture, negotiated through financial exchange. As Frost argues:

> Stated very simply, Western consumer capitalism needs women to feel their bodies are inadequate, so that they spend large amounts of money on products to alleviate this sense. This is not in itself a gendered phenomenon, but the extent to which it is experienced is; women are the usual targets. (2001: 29)

The teen Witch literature relies to some extent on the vulnerability of this cultural group, to create a market where individuals are searching for products and practices that 'alleviate' a sense of low self-esteem and powerlessness. Through consuming at multiple levels, these magical handbooks predominantly posit a knowledge that is uniquely historical, female, and privileges an embodied female wisdom. Although the powers prescribed in these texts acknowledge teenagers' sense of powerlessness and lack of agency it rarely demonstrates a way out of these problems without reverting to traditional tropes of feminine behaviour and embodiment. This offers the reader a provocative, if limited model of entering adult identity; a vision of the self as powerful and unified.

These texts can be understood as powerful pieces of postfeminism, a 'folksey feminism' promoting the reader's desire for power and transformation. As my own research with teen Witches suggested (Sanders 2004), readers engage with these texts on multiple levels, roaming, scavenging as textual poachers and reflecting their relationship to the television and film texts, many teen Witches are critical of these books.

As one www.witchwords.net poll suggested, books are central commodities in the construction of a teen Witch identity as a source of knowledge and power (Sanders 2004: 349–350). Despite acknowledging that these books reflect a more 'authentic' vision of teen Witchcraft than the television series, teen Witches utilise these texts alongside their engagement with the visual media and the Internet in their constitution of an 'alternative' identity.

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ROOTED IN THE OCCULT REVIVAL: NEO-PAGANISM'S EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP WITH POPULAR MEDIA

Peg Aloi

> A wide variety of indicators shows that we are in the midst of a widespread boom of things occult.
> (Marcello Truzzi, scholar, 1971)

> The cultic milieu can be regarded as the cultural underground of society…it includes all deviant belief systems and their associated practices. Unorthodox science, alien and heretical religion, deviant medicine, all compromise elements of such an underground.
> (Colin Campbell, scholar, 1972)

> William Friedkin doesn't give a shit about the occult—it's just a hot commodity as far as he's concerned.
> (Jack Nitzsche, composer, 1974)[1]

> Popular culture is socially, psychologically and spiritually consequential.
> (Christopher Partridge, scholar, 2004)

If the period of intensified interest in the occult that occurred from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s can be labeled an Occult Revival, then the current era could easily be called an occult obsession. As Christopher Partridge has noted, the increased presence of occult topics and narratives found in media have engendered an entire cultural milieu, not to be confused with Campbell's "cultic milieu" but encompassing a fuller engagement with the occult, an "occulture" (Partridge 2001: 139). The greatest evidence for an obsession with the occult is to be found in popular media, which is suffused with music, films, television, literature, computer games and ephemera (both print and internet-based) dealing with occult topics in both fictional and authentic forms. How-to literature and expert opinions on the occult frequently find their way into fictional narratives, and vice-versa, and both varieties of media are popular, demonstrating not only the presence of an audience

[1] http://www.spectropop.com/JackNitzsche/crawdaddy.htm.

eager to consume these texts, but a propensity on the part of critics and pundits to comment upon them as well. But as we shall see, the tendency of non-fictional media (including news, journalism, editorial commentary, and radio or TV talk shows) to show an amplified interest in occult-based stories is nearly always in response to the popularity of fictional occult texts among consumers. Sometimes this response is almost immediate, and at other times it evolves over a period of months or even years (generating, appropriately enough, "cult status"), often weaving a number of topical threads together. This is certainly the case with the Satanic Ritual Abuse scare of the 1980s, which began with the publication and rapid rise in popularity of the memoir *Michelle Remembers* in 1980, and peaked in the late 1980s after the 1987 film *The Believers* was cited as an influence in the Matamoros Cult murder case in Mexico in 1989.

Today's news media revel in outrageous stories and anything even remotely connected to the occult (whether it actually is or not)[2] makes for high ratings and multiple webpage hits; this is all in a day's news, alongside stories of mass murder, suicide bombings, and steroid scandals. But television news was not always awash in blood. Various events of the Occult Revival period (including the Vietnam War, the Kennedy assassination, the 1968 Democratic National Convention, the Manson Family murders, and the Patty Hearst kidnapping) led to graphic, prolonged and intensive news coverage that many viewers found shocking. It was perhaps this straightforward, documentary approach to journalism that inured the public to stories about socially-offensive behaviors and trends, and yet also convinced them that such coverage was important for their awareness and safety. Many news stories of the troubles of the day involved youth culture, since they were at the forefront of the war protest movement, and their involvement with drugs and changing modes of sexuality prompted widespread concern. With the rise of interest in the occult spreading across the U.S. in the 1960s, it was perhaps inevitable that news stories involving occultism would begin to proliferate as well.

In 1969, the Manson Family's killing spree was a horrific, almost surreal narrative that engendered a very pervasive cultural fear of

[2] It is a not infrequent occurrence for a news story to begin with suggestions of occult overtones and later be revealed to be benign, as with a recent story about the discovery of dead goats on a farm which initially suggested that rites of sacrifice were being enacted by witches or Satan worshippers.

"murdering cults." Their association with the lyrics of various Beatles songs[3] helped convince the public that their aberrant behavior was somehow the result of the socio-cultural climate. This is also an example of the negative impact of the concept of the "cult" and the public's belief in the vulnerability of America's youth (even teens from well-to-do families like Manson's one-time devotee, Abigail Folger, heiress to the coffee company's fortune) to charismatic leaders. When one considers Manson's slavish devotion to the Beatles, and John Lennon's famous claim that they were "more popular than Jesus", as well as the band members' much-publicized forays into Eastern Mysticism, the public attitude towards "alternative" religions or New Religious Movements (NRMs) and their connection (spurious or not) to criminal acts and evil becomes somewhat understandable, if not justified. What we now call "satanic panic" has its roots in the fear of the public that any sort of interest in the occult could potentially lead people (especially young people) to involvement with murdering cults: the proof lay within the lurid news headlines. This belief has continued to be reflected in numerous instances in which an interest in occult media is blamed in part for the commission of crimes, including the 1989 murder of Mark Kilroy, a college student who was murdered while on spring break in Brownsville, Texas. His body was discovered in a mass grave a short distance away in Matamoros, Mexico, and the men convicted of the murders (members of a marijuana smuggling ring) claimed to be Satan worshippers who watched the 1987 film *The Believers* as a sort of instructional primer.[4] In 1994, three teenage boys were convicted of the brutal slayings of three younger boys in West Memphis, Arkansas. One of the accused (the so-called "West Memphis Three"), Damien Echols, the purported "ringleader" of the crime, is on Death Row. As revealed in a 1996 documentary film about the murders, a self-described "expert" on cult crime who testified at the trial declared that Echols' propensity for black clothing and heavy metal music, not to mention his interest in Wicca, were evidence of occult involvement, and, the reasoning went, contributed to his depravity and murderous inclinations.[5]

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[3] Manson claimed he thought the Beatles spoke directly to him through their songs, and lyric fragments from the White Album like "Healter (sic) Skelter" or "Piggies" were scrawled on the walls at crime scenes.

[4] This fact is mentioned in the Geraldo episode cited within this essay, as well as Brottman 1999.

[5] For more information, see the documentary film *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills* (1997, J. Berlinger and B. Sinofsky).

Despite a lack of evidence that linked the murders to any sort of occult activity, the local news media and law enforcement focused repeatedly on the alleged "satanic cult" aspects of the crime. It is also true that the video games, music and comic books known to be favorites of the two young men who perpetrated the Columbine High School shootings in 1999 (Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris) had occult overtones, and their infamous black trench coats branded them as members of the Goth subculture, which has frequently been said to have links with occultism (see Hume & McPhillips 2006 or Young 1999). Of course, one reason why occultism becomes a topic of conversation in the wake of such horrific crimes is an attempt to discover why such crimes are committed, particularly when the perpetrators commit suicide (as Harris and Klebold did) and are no longer available for comment. News coverage of this tragedy went on for months, despite the fact that no criminal trial would ever take place, instilling frequent cues for viewers and readers to consider the motivating factors for the shootings, including discussion of occult and Goth youth subcultures.

As demonstrated by these examples, there is a great deal of interest in news stories dealing with the occult which also contain (or suggest the potential for) criminal undertones, underscoring the mainstream public's often negative attitudes towards occult activities, while acknowledging a corresponding fascination with them. The growing popularity of occult belief and practices in the late 1960s (and the subculture it generated) galvanized a corresponding movement characterized by paranoia and suspicion: one which would, in due time, become its own subculture, associated with the Religious Right's ongoing battle against immorality in America, in which the "enemies" would include abortion, homosexuality and a continuum of influences described as "occult." But perhaps more interesting than the (admittedly predictable) obsession with occult narratives on the part of news media, is the impact of fictional occult texts upon actual practice and belief, suggesting that the growth of participation and authentic interest in the occult has been nourished by the growth of fictional occult texts, a form of give and take that at its core is responsible for the current occult obsession and its attendant cultural backlash. It may not be possible to determine a final "chicken or egg" thesis, but this essay is intended as an inquiry into the origins, influences, and evolution of what may be one of the most significant trends of popular culture in recent years.

This symbiotic phenomenon has been happening since the first large-scale popular occult media event in 1968 (with the release of

the film *Rosemary's Baby*) and has more or less continued until the present, apart from a period in the 1980s when occult film and television narratives experienced a comparatively fallow period. Perhaps the peak of occult media-related activity (in terms of a direct correlation between fictional texts and real-life beliefs and practices) occurred in the late 1990s, when a rapid and dramatic increase in female teenage practitioners of modern pagan witchcraft followed the release of the 1996 film *The Craft* (see Johnston and Aloi in Johnston & Aloi 2007). This was followed within a few months by the founding of an international information and networking website for witches and pagans, The Witches' Voice, which featured a section devoted to teens (the first of its kind) that became hugely popular, and this also marked the beginning of a burgeoning pagan presence on the World Wide Web. The methodologies for measuring cultural impact of media texts are, of course, vastly different today than they were in the 1970s, and this is primarily due to the influence of the internet. It is also true that the number of people involved in alternative religions and earth-based spirituality (including neo-paganism and modern witchcraft) has increased dramatically in the last three decades; again, this is partially due to the impact of the internet, which has made it easy for seekers in rural or socially-conservative areas to obtain books and materials, as well as to network with other individuals or groups. However, it is important to assert that the influence of media upon neo-pagan belief and practice, and the influence of neo-pagan culture upon media, were in place long before the proliferation of the internet. In turn, the internet has offered a venue for discussion, distribution and discovery of media texts. It has also led to a tendency on the part of seekers to eschew traditional modes of research and learning; would-be practitioners new to exploring witchcraft, for example, can easily find information on the web about spells, rituals and magic, whereas in the 1980s the main source for such knowledge was found in books, and as interest in witchcraft spread, a corresponding boom in "how-to" occult books followed.[6] If the current occult obsession can be traced in part to an increased amount of occult material on the internet, it is also true that the level of depth and sincerity of seekers may be inversely proportional

[6] Previously, interested seekers tended to gravitate towards a small number of what are now considered "classic" formative texts, including Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Graves' *The White Goddess*, Leland's *Aradia*, Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, and other books published well before the 1960s.

to their increased numbers. As the popularity of Wikipedia shows, the internet is the place for easy-to-find, "quick fix" sources of information. As well, a great deal of discussion about occult media texts can be found online, especially within pagan forums and mailing lists, and it has become obvious that some of these texts have had a direct and considerable influence upon belief and practice among modern pagan witches. Along with the aforementioned film *The Craft*, the television shows *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed* have particularly impacted teenage girls interested in witchcraft (Johnston in Johnston & Aloi 2007). Online discussions among teen witchcraft seekers tend to revolve around the accuracy or authenticity of depictions of witchcraft or magic as practiced by characters in these narratives, or the relative plausibility of occult-based storylines, as well as interest in costumes or magical objects (Aloi in Johnston & Aloi 2007).

Just as contemporary fictional occult texts base details of authenticity upon real-life practice or instructional literature (in addition, some contemporary witchcraft-themed films often employ the services of consultants who are themselves practitioners),[7] it is likewise true that earlier examples of fictional texts were similarly influential upon the development of contemporary practices, media texts and literature, such as the aforementioned *Rosemary's Baby* in 1968, *The Devil Rides Out* in 1968, *The Wicker Man* in 1973, or the novel *Harvest Home* published in 1971. *The Wicker Man* apparently inspired author Whitley Streiber to include a number of its story elements in his novel *Cat Magic*.[8] Thomas Tryon's *Harvest Home* inspired a Boston-based coven to construct an entire ritual cycle based on its modern agrarian themes of propitiation and sacrifice, and to appropriate the festival names that serve as titles for the book's chapters, as well as several prose passages.[9] This relationship between fictional portrayals of witchcraft, instructional or performative texts, and practitioner input, has a history that spans several decades and includes many different forms of media. The link-

[7] *The Craft* (1997) employed Gardnerian priestess Pat Devin as a consultant, the director of *Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2* (2001) solicited help with ritual language from yours truly, and Australian author and media doyenne Fiona Horne was consulted on Neil LaBute's 2007 remake of *The Wicker Man*. Some viewers have observed that these expert opinions did little to add authenticity to the films.

[8] Streiber's book *Communion: A True Story*, a fictionalized memoir detailing extra-terrestrial contact and alien abduction, became a best seller upon its release in 1987, and is credited in part with inspiring some of the imagery associated with Satanic Ritual Abuse narratives, which share a number of similarities with alien abduction narratives. Streiber clearly had his finger on the pulse of contemporary occulture.

[9] I explore this topic in detail in Aloi 2004.

ing of texts, media and cultural trends, which are then melded and re-contextualized to produce new texts, media and trends which then become cultural artifacts, exposes a process that is permeable and often, although not necessarily, self-referential. It is tempting to refer to this process in postmodern fashion as bricolage, but given the social agendas behind some of this re-contextualization, I would prefer to think of it as willful reinvention. It would be interesting to explore to what extent contemporary practitioners unknowingly utilize instructional texts or ritual literature which has been derived from fictional occult media sources.

In Marcello Truzzi's seminal 1971 essay "The Occult Revival as Popular Culture: Some Random Observations of the Old and the Nouveau Witch", the author focuses on what he considers the two main permutations of popular interest in the occult: astrology, and witchcraft/Satanism. Truzzi proves his assertions of occultism's popularity in part by examining the publication and sales totals of relevant books and the content of popular magazines such as *Time, Redbook* and *Esquire* (Truzzi 1971: 19). The current occult deluge is also partially expressed in book publishing and magazine content, but the primary difference between 1971's array of occult media and today's is the much larger selection of television programs related to the occult (due in part to a larger number of television networks, some of which specialize in supernatural narrative shows, such as the Sci-Fi channel or Chiller), and the crucial role of websites as examples of occult ephemera. It is beyond the scope of this essay to study the proliferation of media that attempt to demonize modern pagan witchcraft and the occult (although such a study would be invaluable to current scholarship). It is also not feasible to closely or comprehensively study the modes of representation of paganism and the occult within traditional news media outlets, although, again, such a study would prove valuable. Studying both of these areas is crucially important to understanding the relationship of media portrayals to media commentary, and the resultant impact upon the culture of pagan and occult belief and practice. This essay will be looking at broadly-discernible trends borne of popular media texts, and widespread media coverage of and public response to those texts, as they are directly related to trends in belief and practice among practitioners. One key aspect of this inquiry is the frequent tendency for many aspects of popular occultism to be equated with one another by the general public, and the ways in which such confusion has led to a widespread demonization of occult practice and practitioners, including proponents of modern pagan witchcraft (as that term is defined in

Hutton 1999). The definition of a particular practice or belief system (sometimes referred to in practitioner parlance as a "tradition") will differ greatly in accounts given by laypersons or engaged practitioners. Therefore it should be assumed that the discussion of, for example, a negative public opinion of "witchcraft" may encompass a number of definitions of what "witchcraft" is.[10] I will attempt to trace the evolution of three phenomena: the mediated "give and take" that has come to define and characterize the expression of modern pagan witchcraft within media narratives, beginning with the period of the late 1960s Occult Revival; the influence of fictional texts upon actual belief and practice; and, to a lesser extent, the impact of non-narrative media commentary upon the popular reception of these narrative texts. But first, I will explore the origins of the Occult Revival in media and its connection to earlier cultural movements.

Roots of the Revival

The period of the late 1960s to the mid-1970s is still regarded as the most potent decade of social turmoil and transformation of the twentieth century. It would have been enough if the nature of the turmoil had been confined to politics and social issues, but religion also became a prominent topic. In particular, the declining participation of Americans in church-related activities (this phenomenon and its corollary in the UK is discussed in Partridge 2004) and the rising interest in less-popular religions and the occult served to create palpable tension over spiritual matters that, thanks to mass media, affected the entire nation. The first example of occult cinema that had widespread and culture-changing impact was Roman Polanski's 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby*. In addition to its being a popular, artful and entertaining film, based on an equally popular novel by Ira Levin, there were some real-life occurrences that added to its aura of evil, fuelling a widespread spirit of protest against all things occult, even as the film ushered in a palpable fascination with the occult. The story should be familiar to most readers, but the basic plot can be summarized here. Rosemary (Mia Farrow) and Guy

[10] For more detailed explanations of the various permutations of modern pagan witchcraft or other earth-based spiritual paths, see Adler 1979 (and subsequent revised editions through 2005) and Hutton 2000. For a brief discussion of the problems incurred by practitioner/scholars addressing these distinctions and definitions, see the introduction in Johnston and Aloi 2007.

Woodhouse (John Cassavettes) are newlyweds who move into a large and atmospheric apartment on Central Park West. Guy is an actor whose career is still in its early stages. Soon after moving in, following the tragic apparent suicide of Terry, a young woman who lives in their building, the couple meet Minnie and Roman Castevet, the neighboring elderly couple with whom Terry had been staying. At first worried the older couple will be meddling and annoying, Guy soon forms a friendship with them which becomes even closer when Rosemary discovers she is pregnant. The night of conception is notable for a bizarre dream Rosemary has of being raped by an inhuman creature, and the fact that Guy admits to having intercourse with her while she was unconscious (ostensibly from too much wine). She experiences intense pain during the first few months of her pregnancy, and Guy is unsympathetic. Gradually, Rosemary becomes convinced the Castevets are witches who plan to kidnap and murder her baby, but Guy and her doctor don't take her seriously. The film is largely told from Rosemary's point of view, which allows Polanski to play with notions of paranoia and delusion, calling the narrative's occult content into question. But by the film's conclusion, with the Castevets and their friends toasting the baby and crying "Hail Satan!", we the audience have little doubt where the truth lies. Audiences and critics alike responded enthusiastically to this film and it remains one of the most popular American horror films of all time.[11]

The idea that one might have Satan-worshipping witches living right next door was clearly a very potent and titillating idea. This was the first mainstream American film to portray contemporary occultism, and despite its seemingly fantastic ending the narrative itself unfolds in a very straightforward manner. It cannot properly be called a horror film until its last ten minutes, and it contains no explicit violence or visible manifestation of the monstrous. But its power to terrify exists on a deeply psychological level, owing to the universality of its heroine and her situation: a pregnant woman in an alienating city whose husband becomes distant and whose body becomes foreign to her. The meta-cinematic events surrounding the film further amplified the public's already-unprecedented reaction to the film. The occurrence

[11] The film was voted in the top ten of the American Film Institute's 100 Most Thrilling American Films, along with *The Exorcist*, *Psycho*, *Jaws*, *The French Connection* and *Silence of the Lambs*, among others.

that spawned the most-virulent rumors of the film being "cursed" was the murder of Polanski's wife, actress Sharon Tate, by members of the Manson Family, which occurred in August of 1969, barely three months after the film was released (on June 12, 1968). Several people were murdered in Polanski's house that night, and the following night the Manson Family murdered a married couple in a nearby neighborhood (the so-called "Tate-LaBianca Murders"). Since Tate was eight months pregnant, the murder included their child, and this underscored the eerie similarities to Polanski's film, in addition to the fact that Mrs. LaBianca's first name was Rosemary, and, once Charles Manson and his accomplices were apprehended a few weeks later, the rumors that Manson was himself a Satan-worshipper. Not long after his wife's death, the grief-stricken Polanski was accused of sexually assaulting a 13-year old girl after plying her with Quaaludes at a party. Reportedly Polanski was offered a lenient sentence if he would allow his trial to be televised (something that was without precedent at that time), but he chose European exile instead (because if he ever enters the U.S. again he will be indicted on that crime). As well, the film's composer Krzysztof Komeda died from injuries sustained in a fall, and producer William Castle was hospitalized for months with severe gall bladder problems. Castle, a director of popular horror movies like *House on Haunted Hill* and *The Tingler* who originally wanted to direct the film, dramatized these events in his biography *Step Right Up! I'm Gonna Scare the Pants Off America* by stating "The story of *Rosemary's Baby* was happening in real life. Witches, all of them, were casting their spell, and I was becoming one of the principal players".[12] His turn of phrase "witches, all of them" is a (perhaps unintentional) inversion of the title of a book featured in the film entitled *All of Them Witches*, given to Rosemary by her friend Hutch as a clue to help her discover the true identity of Roman Castevet. The "fake" occult text (*All of Them Witches*) within the fictional occult narrative (*Rosemary's Baby*) prompted a comment found in Castle's dramatized account (in his autobiography) of the "real" behind-the-scenes narrative of the film, creating its own additional meta-narrative. With closely-involved professionals like Castle doing their best to promulgate rumors of occult goings-on, it was not a difficult task to convince the public of the film's evil pedigree. Interestingly, the Manson killings were called "cult" crimes not necessarily because Manson was

[12] http://www.tcm.com/thismonth/article/?cid=89031&rss=mrqe.

involved in Satan worship, but because of Manson's charismatic personality and his ability to get his followers to do his bidding. Truzzi mentions Manson's group "epitomized" the obscure satanic drug cults which grew out of "acid culture", and which, he emphasizes, "make up their brand of Satanism as they go along" and "their central focus is not occultism at all" (Truzzi 1971: 26). The word "occult" was also being bandied about in the media due to the subject matter of this film and general popular interest. It may or may not be at this point that the American public began to more or less ignore the difference between the two similar-looking and sounding words "cult" and "occult." But more importantly, the runaway popularity of this film and the horrific (if unconnected) events that followed its release were to be indelibly etched in the popular imagination as being causally-related.

Rosemary's Children: How Fictional Occultism Became Real

If Charles Manson and his followers called their drug-addled rag-tag beliefs "satanism" it stands to reason that their understanding of the occult must have derived at least in part from popular culture texts, including *Rosemary's Baby*. Witchcraft became an extremely popular topic in the years following the release of this film, and a number of films were released whose plots contained similar story elements, including *The Mephisto Waltz, The Omen*, and *The Stranger Within*.[13] Cinematic innovation exploded in the late 1960s, with new emphasis upon authentic performance and verité-style cinematography, and the 1970s is considered by many critics to be the most important era of American cinema. The new model for horror films was stories that were subtle, psychological and, thus, plausible. Gone were the Hammer Studios' classy vampire tales, gone were the campy gore-fests of Herschell Gordon Lewis: the 1970s were about the intimate horrors of the real, in which genres could be called into question: how to differentiate among thriller, horror, terror? It became easy to experience cinematic stories that were set in the natural, contemporary present as being realistic permutations of the

[13] *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971) stars Alan Alda as a concert pianist who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for increased talent and fame, similarly to Guy Woodhouse's bargain with the Castevets; *The Omen* (1976) stars Gregory Peck and Lee Remick as the parents of a child purported to be a human incarnation of the devil; and *The Stranger Within* (1977) stars Barbara Eden as a woman impregnated by an alien presence whose pregnancy causes her to act irrationally.

present zeitgeist, and the emotions elicited could convince audiences that the horrific fictional events were not far removed from current events. Occult headlines or photos of key occult figures appeared on magazine covers, as when *LOOK* magazine featured Anton LaVey (a self-styled occultist and founder of the Church of Satan who fancied himself a modern-day Aleister Crowley) on its cover in 1970, and many mainstream magazines featured stories on occult topics between the late 1960s and mid-1970s.[14] The cover of the April 8, 1966 issue of *Time* features a cover story entitled "Is God Dead?" and is shown in the doctor's waiting room in *Rosemary's Baby*. The film within a film that actress Chris Macneil (Ellen Burstyn) is making in 1973's *The Exorcist* features a student protest that parallels the widespread occurrence of protests on college campuses. The Black Mass-style desecration discovered in the church is based on similar phenomena noted at the time.[15] Audiences might well ask: if these topical details were real and recognizable, why was it not plausible that a Middle Eastern demon could possess the body of a 12 year old girl? If film texts that utilized realistic cultural details took liberty with portrayals of occult belief and/or practices, audiences were none the wiser. This would explain why popular layman's notions of witchcraft, Satanism and other occult-based practices are often sensational or implausible, being based in part on fictional narrative portrayals; although the growing tendency to portray more realistic aspects of New Religious Movements in media in recent years has mitigated this somewhat.

While Truzzi's 1971 article does make a distinction between so-called "black" and "white" witches (the former using malevolent magic intended to harm others, the latter being involved in beneficent workings related to healing, etc.), and also explains that the majority of Satanists are decent, law-abiding citizens who become involved in Satan worship for its shock value (Truzzi 1971: 27–28), the popular news media often relied upon the public's propensity for relishing darker possibilities. Even as Truzzi saw the popularization of the occult as a form of demystification and normalizing of cultural elements previously seen as frightening or anti-social, the reality of the popular view of the occult then and now

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[14] Truzzi also mentions *The Wall Street Journal*, *McCall's*, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Playboy* (Truzzi 1971: 18).

[15] Generally speaking, it is difficult to prove the motivation behind anonymous acts of vandalism, and, as is the case today with acts supposed by some to be evidence of "Satanic cult activity", the church desecrations of the 1960s and 1970s may or may not have been perpetrated by people with occult beliefs.

is that a great many people saw in popular occult texts a confirmation of their fears and a dramatic portrayal of mysterious subcultures that threatened the status quo. In another classic sociological exploration of the period, Truzzi's contemporary Edward Tiryakian suggests the Occult Revival is "a secularization of the demonic" (Tiryakian 1972: 492). It is interesting to note that contemporary, concurrent academic or critical discussions of the Occult Revival (i.e. those written prior to 1980) and trends in occult belief and practice often discount the seriousness or authenticity of these beliefs and practices.[16] Truzzi went so far as to refer to the "mass version of occultism" as "pop religion"; although he stressed that he did differentiate this from the "small but significant minority of serious advocates" (Truzzi 1971: 29–30). But the pervasiveness of articles in newspapers and mainstream magazines and the ubiquity of television news programs that mentioned the occult suggests that the lay population may well have taken these subjects more seriously. As we have also seen, fictional occult narratives inform news media accounts, and vice-versa. And yet, it is difficult to overestimate the impact of the perception of "real-life" connections between occult narratives in popular cinema and actual crimes perpetrated by human beings. To see the evils of the occult writ large both on the silver screen and in daily news headlines during the Occult Revival heyday fostered widespread belief in an occult subculture, the growth and pervasiveness of which would eventually come to have horrifying implications. In other words, the more inclined one was to believe in the "dangers" of occult involvement, the more likely they would also be to believe in the seriousness and dedication of its growing body of followers.

Because the "witches" in *Rosemary's Baby* were clearly involved with Satan worship, the movie-going public made this connection, too, even as scholars like Truzzi or more mainstream authors like Hans Holzer or Colin Wilson[17] tried to clarify the differences between witchcraft and Satanism for their readers. Indeed, many news articles at the time tended to draw a close relationship between the two. *Time* magazine for example, featured a cover story "The Occult: A Substitute Faith" in June of 1972, with a bright red cover with yellow letters reading

[16] This may in part be due to a shortage of sympathetic scholars at the time; today, the increasing number of scholar-practitioners researching and analyzing topics in the cross-curricular field of "Paganism Studies" tend to assume sympathetic viewpoints which can also be problematic.

[17] Holzer and Wilson were prolific authors who specialized in books exploring occult trends, including Holzer's *The New Pagans* and Wilson's *A History of the Occult*.

"The Occult Revival" and "Satan Returns" superimposed over a black hooded figure that resembled a goat's head. The article (which has no attributed author) begins with a description of a man being initiated into a satanic group which includes terms and images that could as easily describe a meeting of "white" witches:

> The hour is midnight. On the front door of the house is an orange emblem showing black pitchforks. Downstairs, the party is gathered solemnly before a black-draped altar. Facing them, on the wall, is a chartreuse goat-image superimposed on a purple pentagram (1972: 1).

It is in the use of specialized imagery and lexicons, perhaps, that we find the rhetorical backbone of the persuasive literature and media of the occult backlash/Satanic Panic scare of recent years, beginning in the early 1980s and reaching its peak in the early 1990s. In much the same way that fictional occult texts draw upon factual material, the "confessional" literature purveyed by "cult survivors" utilizes authentic language drawn directly from occult texts. In this literature, so-called "former members" of witchcraft covens or Satanic cults describe their involvement and activities, often as a prelude to revealing their "escape" or "cure" and a new-found or rejuvenated belief in Christianity. Put another way, the confessional literature of the occult backlash movement is another form of fictional occult-themed media: texts which layer their narratives with authentic details in order to prompt a more intense response. In addition to print-based testimonials, these narratives also find expression within the television talk-show circuit, with "cult survivors" appearing as guests on episodes dedicated to exposing the dangers of the occult. The fact that many such "experts" are eventually discredited does not seem to lessen their credibility with television audiences.

Satanic Panic: Accusations and Paranoia

In episodes of the daytime talk shows *Geraldo* and *Oprah* following the discovery of the Matamoros Cult murders in Mexico in 1989, some of the invited guests included alleged survivors of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) and alleged former members of Satanic cults. Details of the Matamoros killings were sensationalized and manipulated to heighten their occult connections. A young white college student named Mark Kilroy was murdered by members of a marijuana-smuggling ring in Matamoros, just over the border from Brownsville, Texas, during

a spring break trip with his college fraternity brothers. His body was discovered along with fourteen others in a mass grave, but both *Geraldo* and *Oprah* continually repeated that *thirteen* bodies were found. The members of the drug ring practiced ritual magic loosely based on Santeria, and claimed they wanted to kill a young American male because he symbolized authority and martial power, and Kilroy's death would give them protection from American police. The *Geraldo* epsiode mentions that group members also claimed they were "required" as part of their membership in the cult to view the film *The Believers* numerous times. This film starred Martin Sheen as a Manhattan-based psychologist whose son is kidnapped by an unnamed cult that practices voodoo-tinged rituals and human sacrifice; members of the cult include high-powered city officials and local celebrities (echoing the climate of collusion and paranoia in that other New York story of devil worship, *Rosemary's Baby*). The *Geraldo* special begins with a clip of footage from the film. By establishing the connection between the fictional media text and the real crimes, three provocative points were established: first, that fictional films could influence real behaviors; second, that such films merely confirmed the existence of the Satanic cult conspiracy, and third: audiences were encouraged to associate the film's imagery with the crime scene photos displayed during the program.

Of course, some readers may recall that Geraldo Rivera had already established his interest and vaunted expertise in this topic with his prime-time special that aired several months earlier: *Satan's Underground: Devil Worship in America*, whose title comes from a book by Lauren Stratford (one of Rivera's guests on the Matamoros episode) entitled *Satan's Underground*.[18] Even though the Matamoros murders took place in Mexico, the proximity of the crimes to the Texas border and the high profile search for Kilroy that was widely reported across American media outlets insured this would be seen as an American issue. But Kilroy was the only American victim; the other fourteen victims discovered in the grave were Mexican, and involved on various levels with the drug cartel's activities. Both Rivera and Winfrey, as well as two friends of Kilroy's who appeared on both shows, commented on the fact that it was "casual marijuana users" (i.e., Americans who bought drugs grown

[18] Stratford's book, according to Siano 2007, was one of "three seminal documents that shaped the modern Christian folklore on Satanism," along with Mike Warnke's *The Satan Seller*, and Lawrence Pazder and Michelle Smith's *Michelle Remembers*; all three texts have since been widely discredited, even within the Christian community.

in Mexico) who were "really" at fault for his murder; Rivera famously intoned: "Marijuana is not a victimless crime." If it sounds as though the shows' producers were advancing an agenda in reporting the story, it is worth mentioning that both episodes featured an unusually large number of special guests, most of whom had no actual connection to the Matamoros murders. One of Winfrey's guests spoke of being a survivor of SRA, and being part of a family that engaged in Satanic rituals and child sacrifice for years, with members of the family being upstanding members of the community who worked as doctors, lawyers and educators. Another guest claimed to have been part of a Satanic cult for years and was now working to help spread awareness about them; another guest, Lauren Stratford, who wrote the book *Satan's Underground* from which Rivera drew the title for his primetime special, claimed to have been involved in Satanic rituals and that her infant son had been sacrificed (she claimed not to know where his body was and that she could not report the crime to police because they were "in on it"). Still another guest claimed her teenage son was murdered in a "satanic ritual" although her description merely involved her son being beaten with a baseball bat by a fellow student, and the only remotely "occult" detail of the crime had to do with the boys' interest in heavy metal music.[19]

Despite the seeming lack of relevance of these histories to the topic at hand, the shows' producers apparently saw an opportunity to prove that crimes resembling the ones at Matamoros were already occurring throughout the United States; both Rivera and Winfrey made comments about how such crimes were happening "everywhere." The lurid descriptions of alleged "occult" crimes, coupled with assertions that there was a virtual epidemic of such crimes sweeping America, went a long way towards convincing the programs' viewers (who numbered in the millions) that there was indeed a serious problem. In the absence of actual physical evidence of such crimes, the public could easily fill in details from, for example, *The Believers*, since it was widely known that the Matamoros killers, referred to repeatedly as a "Satanic cult" (though they practiced a form of Santeria with undertones of "black magic" according to one guest on *Oprah*), used the film as a learning

[19] It may be that the numerous references to heavy metal music as a signifier of occult activity in these shows was a factor in the West Memphis Three convictions, as Damien Echols and Jason Baldwin were both devoted fans of the band Metallica.

aid. Fictional occult media texts have provided imagery and terminology to audiences eager to make sense of the occult's real life impact, and these images and words have collectively become a kind of occult meta-text. This meta-text has taken on a life of its own, and includes stereotypical notions about the occult drawn directly from the film narratives already discussed. The behavioral imagery that derives from this meta-text ranges from slightly eccentric to lurid and shocking: for example, the belief that witches practice rituals in the nude, or that occult practitioners permeate every level of society, or that Satanists sacrifice children in their rituals.

The ubiquity of these beliefs may be illustrated with the following example, which utilizes this occult meta-text within a fictional occult text. A controversial episode of the popular television show *The X-Files* that aired in 1995 portrayed a Satanic cult whose members also comprised a Massachusetts high school's Parent-Teacher Association. The opening prologue sequence featured a seemingly-routine PTA meeting which ended with the lighting of candles and an invocation to Satan, including the words "Die Hand Die Verletzt" (German for "the hand that wounds"), the title of the episode. After the meeting, a group of high school students meets in a wooded area known to be the location of occult rites. One student winds up dead, and FBI agents Mulder and Scully arrive to investigate. After a female student experiences a traumatic reaction when asked to dissect a pig in biology class, she tearfully confesses to the agents: her stepfather is a Satanist who has repeatedly raped her since childhood, and she has borne three children who were sacrificed to the devil. The agents are dubious, but affected by her emotional account. They confront the stepfather (one of the PTA Satanists), who admits his involvement in the group, but insists he has never harmed his daughter or anyone else, and that she must have remembered childhood memories of attending rituals and then confused it with "all that crap on *Geraldo* and in the tabloids."[20] An additional episode of *The X-Files* also dealt with the occult, but more specifically with Wicca and what appeared to be a more Satanic form of witchcraft, in the episode "Sanguinarium" which aired nearly two years after "Die Hand Die Verletzt".[21] In both episodes, a number of

[20] Morgan & Wong, 1994. "Die Hand Die Verletzt", *The X-Files* (original airdate January 27, 1995).

[21] Vivian Mayhew & Valerie Mayhew, 1996. "Sanguinarium", The X-Files (original airdate November 10, 1996).

details appeared to be playful references meant to test audiences' occult familiarity. For example, one location indicated by on-screen text in "Die Hand Die Verletzt" read "Crowley High School", clearly a reference to Aleister Crowley, the infamous English occultist, and within the episode Mulder says "Do What Thou Wilt" which is Crowley's well-known catchphrase and has been adapted into the "Wiccan Rede", an ethical guideline which states "An it harm none, do what thou wilt." In "Sanguinarium", the character who practiced Wicca was a nurse named Rebecca; Rebecca Nurse was one of the twenty people executed for witchcraft following the Salem Witch Trials. One of the text locations was "1953 Gardner Street": a possible reference to Gerald Gardner and the year his book *Witchcraft Today* was published. Because the first occult-themed episode ("Die Hand Die Verletzt") prompted widespread criticism and discussion in online forums, it was believed by some pagan commentators that the show's producers wished to go even further with its use of obscure occult terminology and references within the second occult episode's ("Sanguinarium") content. But this time, the target was not the oft-demonized and controversial realm of Satanism, but the oft-misunderstood world of Wicca (practitioners of which, at the time, were fairly vocal in their complaints about negative media portrayals in online forums such as The Witches' Voice). It was at this point that audience scrutiny of television portrayals of modern witchcraft, which had for years been discussed on internet forums and newgroups, were beginning to be augmented with campaigns of protest involving letters and emails addressed to networks and producers. Similar discussions and protests occurred in response to other occult media texts including *The Craft*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Charmed*, as well as individual episodes of more mainstream narrative television shows such as *Judging Amy*, *JAG*, and news shows such as *48 Hours*.[22] Some pagan commentators (including Jason Pitzl-Waters who maintains a popular website exploring international news media stories related to paganism, The Wild Hunt Blog) have commented that fictional media

[22] A chronological index of media-related articles from 1996 to the present (most of them written by me in my capacity of Media Coordinator), and the accompanying pages of reader comments, appears at http://www.witchvox.com/_x.html?c=media. The time period being discussed in these last several pages (1989 to 1997), characterized by a proliferation of media texts dealing with modern witchcraft, followed a relatively fallow period in the 1980s during which there were comparatively few occult-themed films and television shows. It also followed closely upon and overlapped with the height of the Satanic Panic (1980 through 1995).

portrayals of paganism have become less sensationalistic and negative in recent years, and that positive and well-informed reporting on pagan events or business-owners are now more common. But judging from the proliferation of items reported on websites like Wren's Nest (the news blog of the Witches' Voice website), Letters from Hardscrabble Creek (the news blog of author and academic Chas Clifton), The Wild Hunt Blog and others, there are still many news stories that play up alleged occult elements of crimes, or that emphasize seemingly-irrelevant details related to paganism, such as the fact that a teacher who is suspected of giving alcohol to underage students in her home is also a practicing Wiccan. Clearly there is still a tendency for the news media to view pagan belief and practice as unusual and, in some cases, dangerous.

In a provocative 2001 article, David Frankfurter discusses the misappropriation of the word "ritual" in SRA case studies and literature. According to Frankfurter, the word "ritual" has been irrevocably recontextualized in a negative manner due to its ubiquitous use in texts (both fictional and non-fiction) related to SRA, and the tendency of anti-occult authors or groups, or, more disturbingly, biased news media (including talk shows like *Geraldo* and *Oprah*), to implicate groups or individuals involved in non-Satanic occult activities by drawing comparisons between the activities of both types of groups. Frankfurter claims that the perception of rituals as "Bacchantic…procedures that lead to erotic or homicidal ecstasy" is "ingrained in Anglo-American culture, appearing most prominently in horror films," to which he adds that *Rosemary's Baby* and 1975's *The Devil's Rain* are prime examples (Frankfurter 2001: 359). In fact, much of the imagery described in numerous accounts of SRA can be directly or indirectly attributed to fictional occult texts. In an online article debunking many claims of SRA "survivors" and the counselors who treat them, the reason given for why more physical evidence of infanticide is not discovered is that "there are doctors who do not record the fact that babies are born because they're being killed," and doctors "do not record the hospital work that they do" (Siano 2007). This echoes the remarks of the talk show guest who claimed that some of the "cult" members of her family worked as doctors, or the guest who could not trust the police to investigate her son's alleged murder because of the officers' own occult involvement. All of this rhetoric directly references the frightening discovery of Rosemary Woodhouse that her obstetrician, Dr. Sapirstein, is in collusion with the cadre of witches who want her baby. The only difference here is that Rosemary's suspicions turn out to be correct, and the others are in all

likelihood false; the irony being that the former is a fictional narrative and the latter narratives purport to be true. But *Rosemary's Baby* was released in 1968, a full twenty years before the Matamoros murders and the peak of the SRA panic. The movie-going public's belief in a secret underground of witches who would stop at nothing to procure babies festered for two decades following the film's release, eventually leading to a widespread rumor-driven obsession that tied up state and federal law enforcement agencies for years, as they attempted to find evidence that supported the claims that thousands of babies had been murdered in the name of Satan.[23]

At the height of the SRA scare, in the early 1990s, there existed a remarkable tendency for Satanic panic to prevail in response to crimes with rumored occult overtones, as evidenced by the now famous West Memphis Three case. The murders of three eight year-old boys in West Memphis, Arkansas were labeled a "satanic cult" killing owing mainly to the activities of one suspect. The primary suspect, Damien Echols, was a smart, rebellious high school student who practiced Wicca, and who had changed his name to "Damien" after a priest who was canonized after he worked at a leper colony (the name is also that of the young boy believed to be Satan reborn in the film *The Omen*, and this was mentioned repeatedly in the media coverage of the case). He also enjoyed wearing black and listening to heavy metal music. Dale Griffis, a self-professed "expert" in cult crime (who was revealed to have obtained his PhD through a mail-order correspondence course) testified at Damien's trial that one signifier of Satanic cult involvement was black fingernails and black-dyed hair. During the trial, much was made of Damien's writing the name "Aleister Crowley" on the back of a notebook. Clearly, this disaffected teenager's casual interest in the occult helped to demonize him within the community and before the jury. But a major factor influencing this case's outcome was its geographic location, in a poor, conservative Christian community. The community, including potential jury members, law enforcement,

[23] Kenneth Lannning, Special Agent for the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit at the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, authored a definitive report that essentially dismissed the widespread rumors of a satanic cult murder conspiracy. In his concluding segment he states "Until hard evidence is obtained and corroborated, the public should not be frightened into believing that babies are being bred and eaten, that 50,000 missing children are being murdered in human sacrifices, or that satanists are taking over America's day care centers or institutions." (Lanning 1992)

and the district attorney's office, were all inclined to take the accusations of "Satanic killing" seriously. The bumbling of the investigation, including inadequate forensic testing, failure to investigate key suspects, and mishandling of evidence, as well as accusations of an unlawful, coerced confession, might have resulted in a mistrial or acquittal in a more liberal or sophisticated community, or if the accused had been able to afford better legal representation.

After the release of the 1996 documentary *Paradise Lost*, the pagan community at large rallied to protest what many perceived as unjust convictions, after the local West Memphis pagan community essentially refused to support Damien after his arrest and during his trial three years earlier. A follow-up documentary in 1999, *Revelations*, featured a pagan group holding a benefit to raise money and awareness of the case. Despite a lengthy appeals process and the dedication of a number of prominent attorneys who have donated their services *pro bono*, recent attempts to admit DNA evidence for testing have been denied. The case has attracted thousands of supporters, including celebrity spokespersons like Eddie Vedder, Margaret Cho and Henry Rollins, and the pagan community in general continues to refer to Damien as an example of discrimination against paganism (although Mr. Echols has since converted to Buddhism). What makes this case an intriguing example for the purposes of this essay (and indeed for anyone researching contemporary paganism) is that a real life criminal investigation was influenced by attitudes derived from fictional occult media texts; and public opinion at large was later affected by a non-fictional (documentary) narrative text about the case.[24] In addition, fictional texts inspired by the case have served as powerful allegorical illustrations of extreme religious discrimination. The West Memphis Three case is a significant and complex example of the mediated "give and take" of fictional

[24] In addition, the case has been referenced in more than one fictional occult text, including a short story by Cary Holladay, "Merry-Go-Sorry", which was included in the 1999 O. Henry Awards anthology of short fiction, as well as indirect references in the film *Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2*, and episodes of crime shows like *Cold Case*. A "benefit anthology" to help raise money for the convicted young men's defense fund included fictional works by various contemporary horror writers, and at least one CD anthology of music has been released with the same purpose in mind. A fictionalized feature film was in development for a while, but never got made; however, a film based on journalist Mara Leveritt's book *Devil's Knot* is currently in production; Leveritt reported on the case during the initial investigation and trial, and appears in *Revelations*. (www.wm3.org)

occult texts and real-life media coverage of actual occult-related events, with the media texts in turn inspiring fictional texts that exemplify the worst-case scenario for Satanic panic extremism.

The West Memphis Three case also illustrates the danger of a superficial engagement with the language of occultism. If Damien Echols was only a "dabbler" it would also be fair to say that the so-called "experts" dictating the extent of his occult involvement were themselves only dabbling in an academic understanding of the occult. Despite the ridiculous notion that a teenager's black fingernails and dyed black hair could be considered evidence of his Satan-worshipping activities, it is nevertheless fascinating to consider the willingness of the public to contextualize ostensibly-irrelevant elements as occult or demonic. In this case, it was not only language but heightened emotions that lent a kind of credence to the unorthodox proceedings, wherein much of the investigation and trial were filmed by a documentary crew.[25] Grief, outrage, horror, indignation and a desire for revenge became a colored shade through which many onlookers viewed the case. In such an atmosphere, which itself resembled a horror film at times, it is not surprising that the players should become vulnerable to suggestion, rumor, innuendo and panic. Those who believed the "satanic ritual killing" explanation that implicated the three young men took part in an active construction of an occult text, delusional though it may have been. As previously noted, when the documentary was first aired on HBO and shown at film festivals to audiences from across the country and in Europe, the initial reaction was one of disbelief and, according to the filmmakers, intellectual superiority in response to the "trailer trash" elements in the West Memphis community.[26] This radical re-contextualization of the West Memphis narrative was undoubtedly responsible for the enormous groundswell of public support the incarcerated young men have experienced. In addition, the certainty that the wrong men are in prison for the murders emphasizes the disturbing fact that the actual killer or killers have yet to be apprehended. But the failure of

[25] Berlinger and Sinofsky were asked by HBO to shoot footage following the crimes and had expected a clear-cut case of murder and swift delivery of justice, but as events progressed it became clear that there were a number of inconsistencies in the evidence and lapses of protocol in the proceedings. See Aloi 1997 for a more thorough discussion.

[26] Filmmakers Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky conducted question and answer sessions following a number of theatrical screenings of *Paradise Lost*; I attended one at the Kendall Square Cinema in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1996.

the state of Arkansas to agree to re-examine the evidence in the case despite numerous appeals has allowed for some degree of continued tacit belief in the "occult" motivation of the crimes as detailed in the trial. To many, the West Memphis Three are still Satanic cult killers.

Terminology and Trappings: Occultism as "Pop Religion"

The preceding example of the re-contextualization of an occult media narrative is one that depends upon changing locales, demographics and audience assumptions. Terminology experienced as confusing or threatening becomes, in another context, naïve or ingenuous. It is interesting to note that the re-contextualization of occult terminology can also be effected merely through changes in tone within a fictional narrative; we see this in *Rosemary's Baby* with the frequent use of the word "witches" as it is uttered with academic fascination by Hutch, or accompanied by a giddy giggle from Rosemary, or colored by Dr. Hill's condescending disbelief. Texts seeking to discredit or demonize occult practices from an antagonistic perspective (as opposed to texts that are decisively skeptical or dismissive) are particularly likely to invoke such terminology as an exotic, malevolent expression of perversity or evil. In addition to the re-contextualization of the word "ritual" discussed by Frankfurter, benign words such as "chanting" or "ceremony" or "priestess" might take on negative meanings based on the attitude of the speaker or author; this was seen clearly throughout the 1980s in prime-time television documentaries or day-time talk shows dealing with the occult, including *Geraldo* and *Oprah*, in which carefully-chosen language or a dramatic affect of voice and posture could go a long way towards influencing audiences and boosting ratings. Rivera in particular was a master of florid, histrionic language, as when he refers to Satanism as "a force that exalts evil and darkness" and suggests "this is probably happening in a town near you".[27]

But it is an unfortunate irony that the very language of occultism that is misunderstood or misappropriated has itself been re-contextualized from its own textual origins for popular usage. Consider Gerald Gardner's misspelled appropriation of "Wica" as the name for the

[27] Rivera's prime-time special "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground" aired a few months before his daytime talk show's episode on the Matamoros cult murders.

ancient tradition of witchcraft he claims to have discovered in obscure texts; "wicca" is an Indo-European word that translates as "a female practitioner of magic."[28] Gardner's pretentious use of language to legitimize his own creations inspired his followers and future practitioners of Wicca to value authenticity and a sense of historical authority over absolute truth or accuracy; Hutton discusses the fact that Gardner was simply one more in a long line of occultists who claimed legitimacy they did not actually possess (Hutton 2001: 207). This same attitude would seem to be the basis for the late twentieth century proliferation of pseudo-experts in the occult, like the afore-mentioned Dale Griffis. The association of occultism with intellectual elitism and an elevated social position (whether real or assumed) was a common theme in a number of popular occult film texts, most notably Jacques Tourneur's *Night of the Demon* (1957), or Terence Fisher's *The Devil Rides Out* (1968), both set during the 1920s and featuring characters who are experts in the occult arts. In one particularly interesting example, 1973's *The Wicker Man* features Christopher Lee as Lord Summerisle, a feudal landowner whose ancestor resurrected the "old gods" in his rural village during the Victorian era, and who presides over pagan rites performed in a contemporary setting. The current residents of the village do not seem aware that their agrarian way of life is a relatively recent re-introduction. In this way, Summerisle has foisted a tradition upon them that is in actuality a fabricated occult text. Despite Summerisle's matter-of-fact description of his ancestor's calculated revival, the rituals and festivals of the "old gods" resonate deeply with the current residents of Summerisle, and their unquestioning acceptance of this fabrication suggests its plausibility as an actual history. Tiryakian observes that "exoteric language glosses over the esoteric source" of terms such as "third degree", "*magnum opus*" or "*sub rosa*" which have origins in Freemasonry, alchemy and Rosicrucianism, respectively (Tiryakian 1972: 502). Despite what may occasionally be potentially-muddled origins, the beauty and power of an occult tradition, steeped in the language and imagery of antiquity, may confer a sense of social superiority upon its practitioners. But in *The Wicker Man*, the players who control the implementation of these rites are the social elite of their community: schoolteachers, business owners, and, in Summerisle's case, the landed

[28] For more information on modern pagan witchcraft and its historical origins, see Hutton 2001.

gentry whose ancestors established the community's agrarian livelihood. We also see the ideas of social elitism and ancestral legacy reflected in the 1970 film *The Dunwich Horror*, based on a novel by H.P. Lovecraft, which featured Dean Stockwell as Wilbur Whately, a hippie occultist who lives in a grand English mansion, whose ancestors have a scandalous history among the village locals. Whately is obsessed with occult books, in particular a rare copy of the *Necronomicon*, and he finally gains access to it through a local scholar. As with *The Devil Rides Out*, the utterance of obscure magical incantations from ancient texts is a key plot element. Here again we see that authenticity and access to specialized knowledge or texts characterizes media portrayals of occult beliefs and practices. Specialized knowledge is important to contemporary occult practitioners as well, especially modern pagan witches, who derive the basis of their practices from Gardner (himself an elitist who nevertheless initiated virtually anyone who asked). Correct pronunciation of words like "athame" or "Samhain" can separate the novice from the initiate. The possession of rare texts or special tools may also signify wealth or access via ancestral lineage, just as it does in the aforementioned film texts. It is this vaunted aura of mystery and exclusivity that is part of the occult's enduring fascination, and perhaps also the source of distasteful populist attitudes towards it. As Tiryakian states:

> …insofar as the subject of occult activity is not just any actor, but one who has acquired specialized knowledge and skills necessary for the practices in question, and insofar as these skills are learned and transmitted in socially (but not publicly available) organized, routinized and ritualized fashion, we can speak of these practices as occult sciences or occult arts. (Tiryakian 1972: 499)

But the popularization of occultism in the late 1960s quickly led to watered down versions of study and practice, as observed by Truzzi, who refers to the revival as an example of "pop religion" and makes the point that "most of those involved in supporting the current Occult Revival have a relatively superficial connection with it, a connection that is usually more one of play than of seriousness" (Truzzi 1971: 29). Cocktail party conversation was liberally sprinkled with references to astrology, witchcraft, Satanism and other occult topics, because these topics permeated the media. Television talk shows like *The Merv Griffin Show* and *What's My Line?* featured guests versed in the occult, and narrative programs embraced it as an audience-winning subject. *Bewitched* was consistently one of the top ten shows reported by the

Nielsen ratings throughout the 1960s.[29] Perhaps an inevitable outcome of the mainstreaming of occultism was its presence in comic narratives, or its being targeted for ridicule. In an episode of the television show *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* from 1974 ("The Trevi Collection"), the intrepid reporter's usual malapropisms included pronouncing "coven" with a long "o." The episode also featured a modern witch coven that advertised its meetings on the bulletin board of a bookstore where a best-selling occult author was signing his books, and the thinly-veiled demand for cash donations at their "open" meeting.[30] But despite the occasional satirical treatment of occult topics in media, the overall attitude towards the Occult Revival (apart from those genuinely involved or interested in it) generally ranged from skepticism to uneasiness to horror. This is perhaps not surprising, given the heightened emotional intensity of the times.

Added to the many dramatic social and political events of the day (the Tate-Labianca killings happened within a few days of the famous rock concert at Woodstock, for example, and several months later three murders occurred at the Rolling Stones concert at Altamont), the public's expectation of violence and turmoil linked with countercultural, and particularly occult, activities was amplified. Given this, one can understand why the public would assume that anyone dealing with the occult or other counterculture activities[31] could reasonably be led into depraved and illegal behavior, and that included modern pagans and witches. By the end of 1969 the catchphrase and headline "Death of the Sixties" was a pervasive and suggestive reminder of all that had been wrought by trends of the preceding decade. Since Woodstock was linked to the Manson killings, and the Altamont violence was linked to the Hell's Angels, rock music's association with diabolical activity (not to mention drugs and sexuality) became another prevalent cultural fear. In her essay "Cults and Cosmic Consciousness: Religious Vision in the American 1960s" Camille Paglia compares the live rock concert experience to Dionysian ritual, an experience of group consciousness that evokes ancient memories of Bacchanalian ecstasy: "Flower power,"

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[29] http://www.fiftiesweb.com/tv-ratings-60s.htm.

[30] *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*, "The Trevi Collection," first aired January 24, 1975

[31] Polanski used his and Tate's experiences with LSD as inspiration for the infamous ritual/dream sequence in which Rosemary is impregnated by Satan (*Hollywood Hex*, Mikita Brottman). It is also well-documented that Charlie Manson lured the young women in his coterie with copious amounts of LSD.

the pacifist sixties credo, was a sentimentalized, neo-Romantic version of earth cult, which underlay the ancient worship of Dionysus."[32] Political unrest, sexual permissiveness, drug use, psychedelic music, and the exploration of Eastern mysticism and the occult were all part of a wave of culture-wide transformation. There was no way of returning to the innocence of eras past, although a revival of interest in the music and fashions of the 1950s would follow upon the popularity of the Steven Spielberg film *American Graffiti* (1973) and the television show based on it, *Happy Days* (1974–1984), ushered in the Reagan years (who was elected President in 1980 and re-elected in 1984), a time which many Americans saw as a return to the societal values instilled during the 1950s. It is no coincidence that this shift in values accompanied a time when occult media texts became few and far between, and would not see a popular resurgence until well into the 1990s with the television phenomenon *The X-Files* (1993–2002). This period also witnessed a dramatic growth of media-driven occult belief systems (including modern pagan witchcraft) in America, especially in 1996 following the aforementioned film *The Craft* and its measurable impact upon the spread of teenage witchcraft. Nearly thirty years, then, passed between these two distinct periods of media-based occult interest. We'll now return to the early years of that three-decade period in an attempt to trace its trajectory into the present day.

Laudanum and Patchouli: Occultism's Romantic Nature

Tiryakian, Partridge and other scholars have applied the term "neo-Romanticism" to describe the artistic and aesthetic influences of the late 1960s Occult Revival.[33] Historian Ronald Hutton has similarly examined the influence of the Romantic movement upon the revival of paganism in England. The Romantics, as poets and idealogues, were engaged with reviving the past, and valorizing the imagery of classical mythology, as well as preserving the memory of pastoral England, an Arcadian world that was slipping away as the Industrial Revolution progressed. It may well be that, without the imaginative revolt of the Romantics, the neo-pagan revivals of later years may never have happened.[34] Certainly the

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[32] Accessed via http://www.bu.edu/arion/paglia_cults00.htm.
[33] Partridge, op. cit. Also, Tiryakian 1972 and Paglia 2003.
[34] Interestingly, the music and fashion movement known as New Romanticism

American Occult Revival of the 1960s was accompanied by a similar urge to sacralize nature, a neo-pagan awakening which became a significant part of the beliefs and practices of modern witches. As occult scholar Mircea Eliade observed in the 1970s, "one cannot go back to a romantic or bucolic approach to nature. But the nostalgia for a lost mystical solidarity with nature still haunts western Man" (Eliade 1976: 13). Nostalgia for a mystical past clearly galvanized the Romantics to write poetry, and nostalgia was also at the root of the neo-pagan revival, and to some extent permeated many forms of creative expression of the period, particularly music. Partridge suggests that fantasy literature is also an important influence upon popular occulture, and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (rife with nostalgic expressions of eras past) became popular in the late 1960s across the entire population, but especially among college-age readers (Partridge 2004: 140).

Tiryakian notes that "the occult as a source of inspiration abounds" in the writings of the Romantics, with ritual magic and "forces of darkness" acting as revolutionary forces, rallying points of countercultural efforts to defy modernism (Tiryakian 1972: 504). While it is true that subsequent literary and artistic movements also demonstrated an interest in the occult, notably Surrealism and Symbolism, none have been invoked as Occult Revival influences to the same extent as the Romantic visionaries. The Romantics were voluptuaries who indulged in intoxicants and sexual excess; they valued sensual experience above intellectual pursuit, intuition above logic. The youth culture of the late '60s Occult Revival period embraced new and visionary philosophies, and indulged in a myriad tactile delights, often touted as being part of a quest for self-transformation or consciousness raising. And like the Romantics before them, the trappings of their experimentation became emblems of fashion, and their interest in mysticism and magic forged a fashionable youth cult. Changing tastes in music, clothing, and books, as well as increased interest in the use of perfumes and incenses, fuelled by curiosity about Eastern mysticism and culture and the prescribed use of herbal materials in the rites of neo-pagan witchcraft, not to mention experimentation with mind-altering substances, provided a colorful palette for portraying and describing this movement within the media of

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(roughly 1979 through 1982) bridged the gap between the occult-laden musical and media landscape of the 1970s and the dearth of occultism in the 1980s.

the day. Indeed, many of the mass culture signifiers of the late 1960s through the mid-1970s have remained constant and have been recycled within contemporary culture numerous times in the last four decades: bellbottom trousers, platform shoes, peace signs, psychedelic drugs, *Rolling Stone* magazine, tie-dyed fabrics, the workmen's eyeglasses worn by John Lennon, "afros", organic gardening, patchouli, love beads, etc. As well, the trappings of occultism became iconic fashion statements within culture and media; astrological signs, tarot card imagery, ankhs, pentagrams, and other occult symbols abounded throughout media and advertising during the height of the Occult Revival. Even a whisper of the occult could imbue otherwise innocuous texts with a hip, topical edge. It is this sense of immediacy that draws an effective parallel to the volatile attitudes and artistic innovations of the Romantic era's firebrands. Everything in the immediate cultural landscape became part of their impassioned journey and process, and we see this in the modern occult revival as well.

For example, James Leo Herlihy's 1971 novel *The Season of the Witch* was a first-person account of a teenage girl's travels with hippies, and despite having nothing overtly to do with witchcraft, its title possessed not only occult overtones but was synonymous with a popular song by folk rock musician Donovan. The major television networks featured a number of occult-based made-for-TV movies with sensational titles, many of them starring popular actresses like Morgan Fairchild, Linda Blair, Kay Lenz and others. So "cool" was it to be involved in occult media portrayals that some actresses played against type in these roles: Kate Jackson was the "smart angel" on *Charlie's Angels* but ends up being ringleader of a satanic coven in 1973's *Satan's School for Girls*; Marion Ross was the mother on *Happy Days* and a matriarch schooled in the occult in 1981's *Midnight Offerings*, which also starred Mary Beth McDonough from *The Waltons* as a teenager descended from a witch. *The Exorcist*'s Linda Blair starred in a number of controversial made-for-TV films, but the only one with an occult-themed story was 1978's *Stranger in Our House* (later released theatrically as *Summer of Fear*), directed by Wes Craven. Blair stars as Rachel, a teenage equestrienne whose mysterious cousin comes for an extended visit after her parents are killed in a car crash. The shy cousin undergoes a dramatic transformation, and the discovery of strange clumps of paper covered in molten wax and human hair cause Rachel to suspect her of using witchcraft, a theory that is supported by the local occult specialist who lives in the

neighborhood. Numerous made-for-television films featured storylines focused on young women involved, whether unwittingly or intentionally, with occult activities.

Of course, made-for-television films did not have nearly the cultural impact of theatrically-released films, mainly because there was very little preliminary publicity and no appreciable critical literature devoted to them. Apparently attempting to capitalize on the occult's appeal to youth audiences, some theatrical films included music, costumes or other elements seemingly designed as tongue-in-cheek nods to occult trends among youth. Roger Corman's opulent 1964 production *The Masque of the Red Death* cleverly grafted an occult overlay onto the famous Poe story. Prince Prospero, played by Vincent Price, is transformed into a passionate devotee of Satan whose mistress sacrifices her soul in a dramatic ritual of self-mutilation. In *The Dunwich Horror*, the opening credits take the form of contemporary animation graphics, and the hip young occultist played by Dean Stockwell sports a fashionable curly hairstyle and moustache emblematic of the period. The film also features then It-Girl Sandra Dee as an easily seduced ingénue. Ken Russell's 1970 film *The Devils*, based on popular author Aldous Huxley's 1952 book *The Devils of Loudon* (the true story of the execution of Father Urbain Grandier on charges of witchcraft and heresy in medieval France), was an eclectic and anachronistic production in which the main "witchfinder" was portrayed as a long-haired, bespectacled hippie archetype. All of these portrayals paralleled the contemporary presence of occult impresarios; even Anton LaVey, the modern-day Crowley, fed the rumor that he played the devil in *Rosemary's Baby*.[35] Perhaps most notably, *The Wicker Man* contained a number of anachronistic elements and characters, and portrayed the fictional community of Summerisle as equal parts Victorian feudal estate, quiet Scottish village and neo-pagan enclave. With emphasis upon young people in contemporary dress engaging in public behavior involving nudity and lustful acts, as well as traditional community roles functioning within the revival of pagan custom, *The Wicker Man* portrayed a "new world" wherein the "old gods" still lived and the folk magic of the ages was revered as the path to fertility and prosperity. The casting of fashion model Britt Eklund and popular cinema icon Christopher

[35] Actor Clay Tanner actually played the role, as discussed in Paglia 2003 and Shreck 2001.

Lee, as well as vibrant versions of traditional Scottish music by Paul Giovanni and the musicians of Lodestone, rounded out the film's fresh, unorthodox appeal. As evidenced by its cult status among modern pagans, and the inclusion of many of its details of setting and story in Streiber's novel *Cat Magic*, *The Wicker Man* became a model for modern pagan living, even as it portrayed pagans as bloodthirsty and cruelly pragmatic.

Just as nostalgia for a pre-industrial England inspired the Romantics, nostalgia for a pre-modern America haunted its youth during the post-war years and into the1960s; they were disenchanted by America's involvement in the Vietnam war and caught up in the volatile climate of change and unrest. This wave of dissatisfaction with the status quo and yearning for simpler times was the basis for a nationwide obsession with ecology and nature. The popularity of communes where residents grew and harvested their own food attests to the desire for independence from the prevailing economic stucture, and a refusal to eat food grown in conventional ways. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, which offered a straightforward yet terrifying explication of the dangers of pesticide use, was but one example of popular literature that inflamed the passionate "back to the earth" movement,[36] and the call to environmental stewardship which, along with becoming a significant cultural movement, became one of the primary ideological keystones of the neo-pagan movement. As Joni Mitchell's popular song "Woodstock" invoked, "We are stardust, we are golden, we are caught in the devil's bargain, and we've got to get ourselves back to the garden."[37]

This nature-based ideology was expressed in many ways in the cultural mainstream, but occupied a unique place within occult practices. Modern witches may have used herbs for their nutritive or healing properties, but in addition also used them for their magical properties, as indicated in texts on folk magic that proliferated alongside other occult texts.[38] The *Time* article mentions the sale of "special incense made from herbs" being sold alongside other occult paraphernalia in a San Francisco shop (Time 1966: 2). One media example of the

[36] This lifestyle was personified by folk singer Peter Seeger who moved his family to a cabin in the woods with no running water or electricity in the early 1960s.

[37] From "Woodstock" (1969).

[38] Author Paul Huson's *Mastering Herbalism* (London: Phoenix House, 1974) included a prominent chapter on the herbs of witchcraft; similar books published between 1966 and 1968 include: *The Black Arts* by Richard Cavendish (NY: G.P. Putnam's & Sons, 1967), *A Herbal of All Sorts* by Geoffrey Grigson (London: Phoenix House: 1959).

association of herbalism and witchcraft occurred prominently within the plot of *Rosemary's Baby*. Before Guy and Rosemary move into their new apartment, they view it complete with the furnishings and belongings of its previous occupant, an elderly woman who Minnie Castevet claims was "a dear friend." An indoor herb garden fills an entire section of one room. Later, Minnie makes herbal drinks for Rosemary to take as a nutritional supplement during her pregnancy, and Dr. Sapirstein urges Rosemary not to take pills from bottles, but urges her to let Minnie make her the fresh herbal concoction. Rosemary later says she "likes the idea of everything being fresh and natural." We also see evidence of Minnie's skill with pharmacopeia when she makes a chocolate mousse dessert for the Woodhouses, on the night they prepare a special dinner in honor of "baby night" when they plan to try and conceive. Rosemary complains the dessert has a "chalky undertaste" and refuses to finish it, but is still rendered unconscious within a few minutes. In addition, Minnie Castevet gives Rosemary a pendant made of silver that contains a mysterious, foul-smelling substance referred to as "tannis root" (a fungus also known as Devil's Pepper). It had been worn previously by Terry, who called it her "good luck charm," and when Minnie gives it to her after Terry's death, Rosemary looks stunned but says "It's lovely." Later, learning from Dr. Sapirstein's secretary that he also occasionally smells of tannis root, she is convinced this is evidence of his involvement in the Satanic plot against her child.

Herbal magic is one of a number of folk practices associated with modern witchcraft which derives from historical and folkloric narratives, and the use of various forms of "low magic" has been associated with witchcraft since antiquity. These physical expressions of magic form the basis for the practice and in some cases the livelihoods of modern witches. Folk magic customs also include many forms of divination, or ways of telling the future. The *Time* article details examples of people using so-called "voodoo dolls" for magic, as well as divination tools such as crystal balls, I Ching coins and tarot cards. Rosemary's use of the wooden letters of her Scrabble game to decipher the anagram of Roman Castevet's name functions as a form of divination within the film. Similarly, the Ouija Board featured in *The Exorcist* is used as a divination tool. Truzzi's 1971 article mentions that, in 1967, sales of Ouija Boards outdistanced sales of the board game Monopoly for the first time in history. In the years following the release of *The Exorcist* and the continued rising concern over the occult involvement of America's

youth, some church groups called for Ouija Boards to be confiscated or, in my own experience, burned.[39]

Because the portrayal of "magic" (of the occult or neo-pagan variety) in film and television narratives is sometimes accompanied by special effects and atmospheric visuals (colored smoke, flashes of light, explosions, lightning bolts, etc.), thereby rendering it somewhat ridiculous, the presence of the physical trappings of magical activity are important for providing a tactile and authentic rendering of modern witchcraft. Beginning with the colorful, sensual settings and objects found in Kenneth Anger's occult-themed experimental films of the late 1950s through the 1980s (*Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, *Scorpio Rising*, *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, and *Lucifer Rising*), audiences have associated such richness of sensory detail with the magical world of neo-pagan witchcraft and the occult. This focus on the physical trappings of magic (the use of special tools and ritual objects, incantations and gestures) is found throughout the aforementioned films that equate the occult with intellectual and social elitism: *Night of the Demon*, *Masque of the Red Death*, *The Devil Rides Out*, *The Dunwich Horror*, and *The Wicker Man*. It is also a feature of some of the made-for-television films discussed earlier, in particular *Stranger in Our House* (Rachel finds physical evidence of spells in the room she shares with her cousin, and confirms their occult significance with her neighbor the professor, after doing her own research with several "coffee-table" style books on the occult), and *The Initiation of Sarah* (the sorority house-mother played by Shelley Winters performs an initiation ritual in which she uses candles, knives, goblets and a large brass pentacle). This emphasis upon physical tools and trappings is also found in the aforementioned popular occult texts of the 1990s, including *The Craft*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (BTVS) and *Charmed*, with many of the details of witchcraft practice being emulated by teen seekers and practitioners as discussed in numerous online forums.[40] In *The Craft* and *BTVS*, the use of magical objects is further enhanced by the presence of occult shops which the characters

[39] The catechism class I attended urged students to bring their Ouija Boards into the classroom so they could be burned behind the building in a small bonfire. I opted to miss class that night.

[40] Details of the portrayal of magical tools and their use in *The Craft*, *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are detailed in Aloi in Johnston & Aloi 2007, and Johnston in Johnston & Aloi 2007, with focus on *Buffy* exclusively in Krzywinska 2002, and Winslade 2001.

visit (or, in the case of *BTVS*, own and operate) to purchase supplies and make inquiries into magical practice. Both shops (the unnamed *botanica* in *The Craft* and *The Magic Box* in *BTVS*) also become loci of transformation wherein witchcraft practitioners are confronted with the ethical implications of their magical workings. The appearance of authentic tools, books and language in realistic narratives of occult activity asserts a sort of equilibrium, establishing an effective balance of topical truth and accuracy (recognizable to audiences familiar with the popular culture of occultism) against the creative license and special effects frequently found in popular entertainment.

Conclusion

Despite the increasing presence of fictional texts with occult and supernatural themes within mainstream media, it is still possible to observe portrayals that are reminiscent of the era of "Satanic Panic" of the 1980s and 1990s, or the controversial occult obsession of the Occult Revival of the 1960s and 1970s. It seems crucial for contemporary scholars of the modern pagan movement to study these fictional portrayals of the occult from these earlier eras, and in particular the response of mainstream news media to them, to document the evolution of media and public attitudes towards occultism and occult-related practice and belief. Even as the excellent academic commentaries from the Occult Revival period (including Tiryakian and Truzzi) shed a great deal of illumination upon this pervasive social movement, the shift in culture-wide engagement with media over the last several decades has made it necessary to re-evaluate the relationship of occultism to media. From an era when access to television was limited, and newspapers and magazines ubiquitous, to the present time defined by lessened consumption of print media and the near-constant availability of televised and internet-based news commentary, as well as an enormous increase in cinematic releases, it is plain to see that changing modes of media engagement are a major influence upon the production and distribution of fictional and non-fictional texts related to occult belief and practice. Added to the enormous growth of interest in, and involvement with, modern pagan witchcraft and similar modes of occult belief, the changing face of occult media will continue to be a pervasive influence upon believers and non-believers alike.

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RACIAL-ETHNIC ISSUES

'SACRED' SITES, ARTEFACTS AND MUSEUM COLLECTIONS: PAGAN ENGAGEMENTS WITH ARCHAEOLOGY IN BRITAIN

Robert J. Wallis* and Jenny Blain**

Introduction

Pagans[1] take their interest in the past, and the past in the present, seriously. Heritage, both tangible and intangible, is important to a wide and ever-broadening range of interest groups, and of these pagans are significant stakeholders. While focus on such honey-pot prehistoric sites as Stonehenge and Avebury stone circles and their associated monuments in Wiltshire, is inevitable, pagans engage with a great variety of archaeological monuments and other remains, from the burial site of the Anglo-Saxon 'prince' at Prittlewell in Essex threatened by road building, and rock art sites on Ilkley Moor in Yorkshire and the Kilmartin Valley in Argyll, Scotland, to small, local bronze age burial mounds in both highly accessible and remote locations visited by few others than specialist archaeologists—and pagans. Pagans tend not to see themselves as simply 'visitors' to these sites, but as religious pilgrims of sorts, often returning again and again to 'sacred' places in which they feel 'at home'. Access to sites may be straightforward when, for instance, Castlerigg

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[1] We choose to capitalise the various pagan paths and their practitioners (e.g. Druidry and Druid, Heathenry and Heathen) since this is nomenclature that pagans use to identify themselves (much as a Christian or Muslim would do). In turn, this aids distinction between, for example, contemporary Druids and ancient 'druids'. We use 'pagan' and 'paganism' in lower case, indicating a generic term, the meaning of which is contested by different pagans, but also capitalise 'Pagan' and 'Paganism' in instances where the pagans in question identify their path as specifically 'Pagan' rather than Druid, Wiccan, etc. Where we discuss ancient paganism, we qualify the distinction in the text (e.g. using 'ancient paganism' rather than 'paganism'), but avoid the term 'neo-pagan' (mostly a US usage) in order to avoid devaluing contemporary practice: the ancient and contemporary forms are not the same but the latter is not inauthentic as 'neo-' might imply.

stone circle in Cumbria is accessible at any hour of the day; entrance to other sites on the other hand, Stonehenge most obviously, is controlled. Calls for wider freedom of access and the logistics of access involving ritual and celebration, bring pagans into negotiation with heritage managers. The excavated remains from such sites are also significant to pagans, who make 'pilgrimages' to museum collection displays in order to make connections with 'ancestral remains'; for example, the Anglo-Saxon Sutton Hoo ship burial finds held at the British Museum in London, Neolithic artefacts in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, and the skeletal remains of 'Charlie' displayed at the Alexander Keiller Museum in Avebury. Pagan interests in archaeological sites and material culture provide connections with 'ancestors' and ancestor 'welfare' is a burgeoning issue, with calls for the 'return to the earth' of certain human remains being taken seriously by museum professionals. Issues raised by these pagan interactions with archaeology, and the representation of the past, provide the focus for our research: the 'Sacred Sites, Contested Rites/Rights' project (www.sacredsites.org.uk) has examined these engagements and evaluated the implications for interest groups ranging from heritage managers and the tourist industry to local communities and, of course, pagans themselves.

As the variety of examples we cited above indicate, the study of paganism must engage with pagans at 'sacred sites' as a matter of course; and, vice versa, heritage studies cannot ignore pagans. Yet despite the formulation of pagan studies (or the scholarly study of paganisms [Harvey 2004]) (e.g. Blain 2002; Blain et al. 2004a; Blain & Wallis 2006a; Greenwood 2000, 2005; Harvey 1997; Harvey & Hardman 1995; Hutton 1999; Pearson 2003; Wallis 2003, 2004) as a sub-discipline (with attention from anthropologists and religious studies most notably) academic examination of this topic is relatively new. Key works by the archaeologist Chris Chippindale (et al. 1990) and anthropologist Barbara Bender (1998) focus on the iconic Stonehenge, but attention to this site eclipses an extensive range of pagan engagements elsewhere. Our own work (e.g. Blain & Wallis 2002, 2004a, 2006b, 2007, 2008; Blain et al. 2004b; Letcher, Blain & Wallis forthcoming; Wallis & Blain 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005; Wallis & Lymer 2001) redresses this imbalance, examining a range of sites and pagan perspectives, across Britain. Our interests are academic, as an archaeologist (Wallis) and an anthropologist (Blain), and we are also pagan (Heathen): as such, this is autoethnographic, 'insider' research (e.g. Reed-Danahay 1997; Blain 2002; Blain et al. 2004a; Wallis 2000, 2001, 2004). We do not

claim authority on the subject because we are pagan; for some, such an admission presents a liability; rather, we offer a particular academic-practitioner viewpoint which comes with its own partiality and specificity, as well as valid contribution and nuance. In this paper we introduce key issues raised by pagan engagements with sites, beginning with Stonehenge and Avebury, including recent updates to the circumstances there, moving on to recent work on the significance of museum collection displays to pagans, and concluding with developments on the politics of respect for human remains and calls for their reburial.

Stonehenge

Ancient druids likely never worshipped at Stonehenge but many pagan Druids today, inspired by this enchanting myth, see Stonehenge as Britain's pre-eminent sacred site and 'temple of the nation' (see e.g. Sebastion 2001). Pagans represent only one alternative interest group interested in the site, however, as travellers, new agers, free festivallers, party people, and others all hold a stake in negotiations over access to the site (e.g. Hetherington 1992, 2000; Worthington 2004). 'The stones' of Stonehenge are not accessible to the public but 'special access' can be arranged for a fee. During daylight hours the Stonehenge environs are open to the public with access limited to a perimeter path. English Heritage and the National Trust hold stewardship of the site. During the 1970s a free festival ran near the stones around summer solstice (21 June) attracting tens of thousands of people at its height, but this did not last: in 1985 an exclusion zone was established which effectively ended the free festival, and a 'convoy' of travellers on their way to the site was brutally halted by police at the 'battle of the beanfield' (Craig 1986; NCCL 1986; Worthington 2005). From 1985 to 1999 (and since then) pagans became increasingly prominent as campaigners for access to the stones at summer solstice; access for all people, not just pagans. The Stonehenge 'Round Table' meetings brought together alternative interest groups including pagans, the site custodians and the police, in an effort to find resolution. A key, much-publicised figure in this process is King Arthur Pendragon, held by his supporters, 'The Loyal Arthurian Warband' to be the reincarnation of the ancient King Arthur risen again to, in this case, defend Stonehenge for the 'people of Britain' (Pendragon & Stone 2003). Arthur camped out near Stonehenge for long periods and crossed the exclusion zone resulting in immediate

arrest, in protest to the exclusion of celebrants. Eventually, after some false starts (a ticket-only event in 1999, for example, which resulted in much bad-feeling among those without tickets), agreeable success was reached in the form of 'managed open access' at the summer solstice since 2000. Arguably, some form of managed access was inevitable once the exclusion zone was lifted (ruled illegal by the House of Lords under the Criminal Justice act, after an appeal by two individuals arrested for 'trespassory assembly') and pressure of numbers from those gathering to celebrate on the day presented a health and safety issue. None the less, the site custodians clearly worked hard to establish some form of agreed access that would facilitate entry to the stones without compromising the site or the its usual opening hours: managed open access at the summer solstice runs for around twelve hours on the evening of solstice to the following morning when celebrants are ushered out of the site before the first paying tourists arrive (although the car park then stays open until around midday while people are leaving). This form of access must be contextualised within the wider context of the management of Stonehenge and its future.

Stonehenge has seen a series of conservation efforts, the most concentrated of which have been during the twentieth century. What we see today is largely the results of excavations in the 1950s which concluded with the building of a small visitor centre and car park. This was accompanied, during an intensive phase of road building in Britain, by a triangle of major roads around Stonehenge (the main A303 highway to the West Country on one side, the A344 on the other separating the henge from the visitor centre and car park so that visitors park on one side of the road and cross to the monument via a tunnel under the road). With the benefit of hindsight, the size of the visitor centre and its facilities as originally conceived are woefully inadequate, and the roads, once historic trackways that took in a view of the monument, cannot handle the heavy traffic all-too-evident to the eyes and ears of visitors today. Two public inquiries and many years of research at the site have resulted in a range of options for improvement, and the site custodians have welcomed the views of pagans, among all the interest groups, on how to proceed. Key issues for some pagans are how access will be facilitated (it is not clear in the proposals whether the stones will be accessible or how pagan celebrations might be accommodated) and how site improvement might affect archaeological deposits including human remains (an issue we return to below). Arts minister Margaret Hodge announced at the end of 2007 that the government will not

support the £501 million Stonehenge roads and visitor project which would have taken the A303 into a tunnel past Stonehenge, closed the A344 and opened a state-of-the-art visitor centre (see The Stonehenge Project n.d.). The future of this 'icon of Britishness' is once again uncertain and UNESCO has threatened to put Stonehenge on its list of endangered sites.

Avebury

With our discussion of Stonehenge inevitably expanding beyond pagan views, towards the long-term future of the site, we next consider why it is that pagans engage with sites in the first instance, using Avebury as a case example. The 'complex' of monuments constituting the World Heritage Site of Avebury ranges from the stone circles and henge surrounding the small village of Avebury, to the burial chambers of West Kennet Long Barrow, the largest human-made monument in Europe called Silbury Hill, and the Windmill Hill causewayed enclosure. Pagans visit these sites, as they do other archaeological sites in Britain, because they are perceived to be 'sacred' in some way; places where ancient pagan 'ancestors' dwelled and performed their religions, where 'the great goddess' may be felt strongly, invoked and celebrated, where local 'spirits' and land wights can be honoured, and where the community (pagan, alternative, or simply whoever turns up) joins together in a celebration of nature and the pagan past (ancient and modern). Public Druid rituals are perhaps the most visible expression of these engagements, particularly around Beltane (the first day of Summer, 1 May) and Summer Solstice when handfastings (pagan marriage), child naming or blessing ceremonies and other rituals are performed. Other pagans may choose to enact their rituals less publicly, at night, in the dark of the year, and away from the camera lenses of tourists and reporters. When the rites are over, votive offerings often attest to an earlier pagan presence: flowers, foliage, food, tea lights, incense sticks, enigmatic items of spellcraft—all of these are commonly offered up to deities, ancestors, spirits and wights, in sustenance, petition and thanks. Many people (pagan and otherwise) view this material culture, some more permanent than others, as ritual litter. Pagans have joined with the site custodians at Avebury, the National Trust (which became the landowner in 1942), to assist with 'site welfare' at various times (Oakley 1997), encouraging people to take their litter home and educating against causing damage

(sometimes intentional, usually not). In 1997, Chris Gingell, the site manager, wrote a letter to 'Pagan Dawn' magazine pointing out that the National Trust simply did not have the resources to respond to the overwhelming pagan interest in volunteered assistance (Gingell 1998). This formal relationship fell into abeyance, but individual pagans have continued to do 'site clearing'—with some referring to spiritual energies as well as ritual and other litter. The 'Avebury Sacred Sites Forum' (ASSF) of 2005 offers its own guidelines for visiting which are clearly aimed at pagans (available online: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-vh/w-visits/w-findaplace/w-avebury/w-avebury-guardians/w-avebury-guardians-guidelines.htm). Under the ASSF, an 'Avebury Guardian' scheme was again instituted, though information on the National Trust website may tend to suggest that one must be formally involved and that the concepts involved are new.

Despite this positive historical trajectory, there is tension: an ongoing relationship of distrust between the National Trust and local people (principally derived from the relocation of some residents as part of the then conservation and restoration of the prehistoric monument)[2] has been exacerbated by increasing pagan interest in the sites which, during peak periods such as festivals (Beltane and Summer Solstice most notably), impacts on daily life in the village—parking congestion, unauthorised camping, fires and litter are highlighted as particular problems. In the past, unofficial ad hoc camping in and around the monument had only been discouraged the morning after the event; indeed a small field next to the main National Trust car park was regularly used for overnight camping in the later 1990s.[3] The current situation might be viewed as a result of the 'success' of managed open access at Stonehenge, wherein many celebrants make their way from Stonehenge to Avebury in order to continue the festivities once Stonehenge had 'closed'. Between 2003 and 2005, the influx of people was so pronounced that there was significant traffic congestion and the

[2] This policy was enforced first by amateur millionaire archaeologist and entrepreneur Alexander Keiller whose excavations and restoration of the monument in the 1930s involved buying and demolishing houses, with their occupants moved to Avebury Trusloe. The National Trust continued this policy formally until 1976. Paradoxically, some of the demolished dwellings were medieval cottages.

[3] Culminating in the National Trust's eviction of a small new traveller community known as the 'hedglings' of Green Street, in March of 2002.

police towed 'illegally parked' vehicles away. In efforts to remedy this, and under pressure from the local council, the National Trust has made parking on any road in the village and approach to it illegal (indicated by visually intrusive double yellow 'no parking' lines), and closed its car park to vehicles over a standard height in order to dissuade overnight camping in traveller vehicles (Cork 2006). Trust relations with some pagans and alternative visitors, then, can be fraught as well as sanguine. Locals, some of whom are pagan, find themselves caught between a range of competing interests. The 'Avebury Forum' (National Trust n.d.), established in 2005, is attempting to resolve some of these issues and includes representatives of some pagan groups as well as two recently-local pagans. Pagans with a rather longer period of attachment to the place do not seem to have a voice, however, and the forum itself has its critics. The Sacred Sites project is monitoring the developments at Avebury with interest.

Museum Collections

With their serious interest in the ancient pagan religions associated with British prehistoric monuments, many of today's pagans are also keen museum visitors. The manner of their 'visit' may differ, however, from that of the 'average' or 'ideal' museum visitor. Lindauer (2006) argues that the 'average' or 'ideal' museum visitor aimed at by museums passively consumes the interpretations on display with little or no questioning of their discursive construction. She outlines an approach for the 'critical' museum visitor who actively questions what is represented and the manner of its representation. Pagan engagements tend to assimilate but then look beyond factual and scientific displays, taking account of, for want of a better term, 'spiritual' elements. As such, some may romanticise the ancient pagan past, reifying the 'ideal' discourse of mystery perpetuated by museum advertising. Other pagans, though, are indeed 'critical'—of displays which neglect religious components or of displays which use 'ritual' as an interpretative dumping bag without offering contextual information. Artefacts excavated from archaeological sites and on display in museums are counted as 'sacred', just as the sites themselves are; human remains, for many, are a particularly special category. Prehistoric remains from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages are of special interest because of their original context in the monuments visited as sacred sites.

Key 'sacred' artefacts are on display at the British Museum in London and the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, for instance. At the former, enigmatic items presented in the displays as ritualistic, such as the Folkton 'drums', highly decorated chalk objects buried with a child in the Late Neolithic, found in East Yorkshire (Longworth 1999), and the carved stone balls (context insecure) from Aberdeenshire (Edmonds 1992), also dated to the Late Neolithic, may receive particular attention from pagans. These sorts of artefacts offer tangible links to the rituals performed by ancient pagan ancestors at the time of such monuments as Stonehenge and Avebury. The Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, Alexander Keiller Museum at Avebury and Wiltshire Heritage Museum at Devizes mark examples of smaller museums with a wealth of material from sites around Stonehenge and Avebury. Later in prehistory, finds from the Iron Age associated with the Celts, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings are of interest to Druids and Heathens. The Sutton Hoo display at the British Museum is popular with Heathens who may have visited the Sutton Hoo ship-burial in Suffolk as a sacred site, keen to view the richly decorated purse-lid, gold belt buckle and shoulder clasps as well as reconstructed helmet and shield (Blain 2006; Blain & Wallis 2006c). And also at the British Museum, the bog body of Lindow Man, who apparently died in ritual circumstances, perhaps as part of a Druid ceremony, is a key attraction. One incentive for pagan visiting is education, to learn more about ancient pagan pasts; another is 'religious', to engage as directly as possible with the original artefacts from ancient pagan contexts—and to offer respect to pagan ancestors by way of this tangible link. More than inanimate objects or dead artefacts, as known by archaeologists and displayed as such in museums, these are living things, perceived by pagans as alive with the agency of ancient pagan ancestors. Pagan visitors may appear to an observer to be simply 'looking' at a display case, like any other visitor. But a quiet ritual may be in process, with a silent song, whispered prayer or subtle hand gesture forging a link with the artefact. And the link may be perceived as two-way, with the 'object' speaking in some psychic way. This is 'pilgrimage' more than it is 'visiting'.

Many visitors to museums and archaeological sites like to leave with a memento purchased from the shop; at Avebury consumers may choose to visit either the National Trust shop or privately owned Henge Shop (some items are also for sale in the Alexander Keiller Museum owned by the National Trust). At the former, the ubiquitous National Trust oven

gloves, tea towels and garden trowels can be found alongside guides to Avebury and postcards of the Avebury stones saturated in mysterious fog. At the latter, a wider range of items are available, particularly those targeted at pagans and new agers, including alternative archaeology books and magazines, pagan calendars, crystals, horse brasses (depicting the Avebury stones) and figurines of the Silbury 'goddess'. Top of the British Museum's list of items sold to visitors is postcards (Beard 1992). Pagan visitors are as likely to leave with a memento of their visit as any other visitor, but as they are rather more pilgrims than visitors, the act of purchase has specific intention. An apparently humble postcard of the Sutton Hoo helmet might become a much-treasured bookmark in a key historic pagan text, such as Beowulf or the Poetic Edda. Objects inspired by the archaeology, such as the aforementioned Silbury 'goddess', as well as replicas of specific artefacts, such as the possible representation of the god Freyr (11thC, Rällinge, Lunda parish, Södermanland, Sweden; the original at Historiska Museet, Stockholm), might become sacred altar pieces. Archaeological finds of rune rings, the hammer of Thor (e.g. that found at Rømersdal, Denmark, 10thC), brooches with mythological associations (e.g. the two identical bird-shaped ornaments from Bejsebakken near Ålborg in Denmark, identified as the ravens of Odin), and so on, become items for reproduction for personal adornment and the display of spiritual identity (Blain & Wallis 2006c). Pagans are committed consumers of these artefacts and certainly the myriad of shops at the sacred site of Glastonbury, but also in museum shops, high street shops, at re-enactment fairs and at online stores, evince the selling power of such material.

It would be simplistic, though, to term pagans 'spiritual consumers' and that be seen as an end to it. The replicated material culture at issue is mediated and subject to interpretation. The way in which certain artefacts are selected and visually presented shapes perceptions, expectations and ideas of the past. Artefacts as 'materialized ideology' (DeMarrais et al. 1996) or embodied discourse convey not only the political processes of their first making (including accommodation and resistance to dominant discourses) but the tensions inherent in the contemporary cultural and political embedding of the (situated performance) of today's pagan 'reconstructions'. Practitioners may find themselves subject to the charge of 'getting it wrong' when academic critics insist on 'authenticity', resulting in pressure on some practitioners to insist on documentation and cross-referencing of 'fact' about cultural artefacts and landscapes. Some however, may handle it differently:

in response to the suggestion that the small artefact variously identified as an image of the god Thor, or a gaming piece (c. 1000 CE, Iceland, in the National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavík), was actually a representation of Christ, Jörmundar Ingi Hansen, then leader of the Ásatrúarmenn, the largest Heathen group in Iceland, proposed that whatever the statue had been in the past, it was 'now, for us today, Thor' (pers. com.). These replica 'objects' become tangible links to the ancient pagan past and more specifically to spiritual ancestors, the deities represented or associated with the object, in effect presencing these pasts, ancestors and deities. Whether they are ancient artefacts in museums or modern replicas worn to perform pagan identity, the 'objects' in question are often perceived as alive, with agency, animate—as what might be termed 'living treasures'.[4]

Reburial

Pagan engagements with the past are diverse: for some, there is little direct or sustained connection made beyond such labels as, for instance, 'Celtic Magic'; for others, Margaret Murray's erroneous claims for a witch cult in Western Europe persisting from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Middle Ages is evidence enough of the 'tradition' of 'Wicca'. Some Druids, by contrast, can be well-read in Iron Age archaeology, sometimes as archaeologists themselves, and other Druids happily combine reliable academic sources with imaginative speculation (see Hutton 2007). Still other pagans, reconstructionist Heathens, for instance, pay close attention to archaeological, literary and historic sources, keep in touch with current academic thought, and recognise that their religion is in the present and for the present, inspired by the past but not the same as in the past (e.g. Blain 2006; Blain & Wallis 2000, 2004b). A Druid ritual at Avebury may seem anachronistic to today's archaeologists (though ironically first imagined by William Stukeley, one of the

[4] The term 'living treasures' is a translation of the Maori *taonga*. Our comparison of pagan 'objects' with *taonga* is not straightforward or without problems and, aware of the risk, we do not intend to make it so. In its sophistication, *taonga* disrupts the western dualism of animate/inanimate in a way which speaks to pagan perceptions of their 'jewellery', 'tools' and 'ritual' items. We intend our use of 'living treasures' here, then, to be respectful; indeed, dialogue between some pagans and the Maori diaspora in Britain indicates that respectful exchanges are already in effect. For further theorisation of animism see Harvey 2005, also Harvey & Wallis 2007.

forefathers of modern archaeology), but to Druids that have been performing such rituals at the henge for twenty years or more, the 'tradition' is well established.

There are other pagans whose performance of their paganism on the stage of Britain's heritage requires more than visits to sacred sites and making ritual there, or engaging with museum exhibits as living artefacts. For these pagans, direct action and protest offers a more active performance of their pagan identity and their honouring of ancient pagan (and other) ancestors (Letcher 2001). At Prittlewell in Essex, a Saxon cemetery including the burial site of the so-called 'Prittlewell Prince' nicknamed 'King of Bling' is threatened by road building and pagans are among those activists campaigning against the site's destruction. The cemetery, at Priory Crescent, Southend-on-Sea, was first excavated in 1923 and 1930, and more recent excavations in 2003 revealed a 'princely burial' on the highest ground of the cemetery. The man, laid in a coffin within a timber-lined chamber (4 metres square by 1.5 metres deep), was accompanied by such high-status objects as bronze feasting bowls and cauldrons, drinking horns and glass vessels, a gaming set, a sword, a lyre—and a gold buckle, two gold coins and two small gold-foil crosses. The coins (dated to 600–650 CE) may have been placed in each hand of the 'king', while the crosses are thought to have been placed over his eyes. The site's importance has been likened to that of Sutton Hoo, offering crucial evidence in furthering our understanding of the conversion from paganism to Christianity. It is not unreasonable to expect that further barrow burials may yet be excavated on the site directly related to the 'prince'.

An urban tree camp, 'Camp Bling', has been established above the burial site, campaigning against the F5 dual carriageway planned for the A127/A1159 Priory Crescent despite near-unanimous local public opposition. An 870 metre stretch of new carriageway estimated to cost over £11 million (three times the initial estimates) would have a major impact on the surviving archaeology across the site. Vibration and compaction during the construction of the road and subsequent road use would likely damage the fragile remains. The community of pagans, local people and veteran road protestors at Camp Bling has a visitor centre about the cemetery, the protest site, and the campaign to stop the expansion of the road. For eco-pagans such as Adrian Harris, who has been protesting at various sites for some years, the difficult living conditions and unsettled protester lifestyle is part and parcel of performing his paganism, and as such his commitment to the land and

to the ancestors (pagan or otherwise) is part of the performance of what we term new-indigeneity (see Blain & Wallis 2007).

In instances such as this, the site welfare evident in litter clearance and on-site patrolling at festival dates extends to ancestor welfare: concern over the 'ancestral remains' threatened by road building. Indeed ancestor welfare is a burgeoning issue for many pagans.[5] Perceived connections to the land and ancestors instils in these pagans a responsibility (real or imagined) to speak and act for the spirits of the ancestors whose material remains lie in the landscape, are kept in museum and university archives, or are on display to the public in museums. The display of a female child nicknamed 'Charlie' (excavated by Harold Grey in the early twentieth century) from the southern ditch of Avebury henge is on display at the Alexander Keiller Museum, and the bog body of Lindow Man is a key attraction in the prehistory gallery of the British Museum. A growing call from pagans is for the 'return to the earth' or reburial of these prehistoric human remains. During discussion of the proposals for implementing the management plan for Stonehenge, the Druid Philip Shallcrass ('Greywolf'), wrote a letter to English Heritage and the National Trust:

> I expressed my concern that any burials found might simply end up in boxes in a museum basement. I asked for access to burials on site when they were uncovered, for permission to make ritual before burials were removed, and also whether it would be possible to re-bury the ancestral remains after a suitable period of study, preferably within the Stonehenge area . . . Both English Heritage and the National Trust replied very promptly and favourably (pers. com.)

It will be interesting to see how this sort of dialogue translates into the next round of discussion of Stonehenge's future in 2008. More challenging and more difficult to engage with, however, are pagan voices which make authoritative claims, demanding the immediate reburial of high-profile remains. Such views are often expressed in terms reminiscent of Native American and Aboriginal Australian indigenous discourse pertaining to reburial. Paul Davies, a Druid, states:

> Every day in Britain, sacred Druid sites are surveyed and excavated, with associated finds being catalogued and stored for the archaeological record. Many of these sites include the sacred burials of our ancestors. Their

[5] This concern extends beyond paganism, with recent government legislation dealing with human remains in various respects; see e.g. DCMS 2003, 2005.

> places of rest are opened during the excavation, their bones removed and placed in museums for the voyeur to gaze upon, or stored in cardboard boxes in archaeological archives…I believe we, as Druids, should be saying 'Stop this now. These actions are disrespectful to our ancestors.' When archaeologists desecrate a site through excavation and steal our ancestors and their guardians…It is a theft…We should assert our authority as the physical guardians of esoteric lore. We should reclaim our past. (Davies 1997: 12–13; see also Davies 1998/9)

In the summer of 2006, acting as 'Reburial Officer' for the Council of British Druid Orders (COBDO),[6] Davies made direct contact with the National Trust at Avebury and Devizes Museum in Wiltshire which hold much of the excavated material from the site.

A small protest at the museum in January 2007 (see www.cobdow-est.org/reburial1.html), caught the attention of the local press (Kerton 2007) and Davies has also gathered names from visitors for a petition; all of this with the aim of effecting the reburial of 'our sister' (pc) on display in the Alexander Keiller Museum. COBDO has also submitted a document to heritage organisations entitled 'Guidance and Request for the Reburial of Druid Ancestral Remains at Avebury'. Such a concerted effort is difficult to ignore and COBDO is now in dialogue with these respective museums.

Elsewhere, a Swansea Druid group naming themselves 'Dead to Rights' have asked for the reburial of the 'Red Lady of Paviland'. The remains were discovered on the Gower peninsula by the palaeontologist and clergyman the Reverend William Buckland, who incorrectly thought the red ochre indicated the skeleton was female and dated the find as Roman; it is now known to be a young man buried approximately 26 thousand years ago. Chris Warwick, the Druid behind 'Dead to Rights', protested at the site over a weekend in September 2006, calling for the return of the remains from Oxford University, receiving publicity from regional BBC News (see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/south_west/5372598.stm>). The call for reburial or at least permission to perform pagan ceremonies over human remains as they are excavated, has lead to the formation of HAD, an organization (though not exclusively pagan) committed to 'Honouring the Ancient

[6] It should be noted, as a good example of the complexities of Druid politics, that a second COBDO group claims that it is the real COBDO, based in London not the west of England, and that it does not support the calls for reburial: see http://www.gazetteandherald.co.uk/mostpopular.var.1164290.mostviewed.druids_call_for_burial.php

Dead' (www.honour.org.uk/index.html). HAD aims to 'ensure respect for ancient pagan remains' with 'clear interactions between archaeologists, historians, landowners, site caretakers, museums and collectors . . . and the pagan community':

> The purpose of this interaction is clear and positive communication that will inspire a broader and deeper understanding of the sanctity of all artefacts (notably those connected with ritual, sacrifice, burial and human remains) sourced from the Pagan eras of the British Isles. HAD will be seeking assurances that there will be communication and consultation on matters relating to such artefacts and remains (Restall Orr, pers. com.)

Emma Restall Orr, founder of HAD and the Druid Network, manages a pagan cemetery where remains can be reburied, indicating that some of the logistics of reburial could be managed effectively. HAD is not calling for mandatory reburial but is more concerned with furthering dialogue between the interest groups and in particular establishing consultation between these groups during excavations as well as the opportunity for pagans to 'make ritual in appropriate ways, honouring the spirits involved'. There are issues here of how 'appropriate ritual' is constituted, since, of course, we do not know what sorts of rituals, if any, were associated with these remains. As such, HAD proposes a 'rite of committal of human remains' (www.honour.org.uk/articles/reburial_rite.html) for potential use by museum personnel or others, which takes care to specify how much is 'not known' of either the persons committed or their theology and ritual. The aims of HAD to promote dialogue and respect resulted in November 2006 in collaboration with The Manchester Museum (linked to the University of Manchester) and the Museums Association in a conference entitled 'Respect for Ancient British Human Remains: Philosophy and Practice' (November 2006), which brought archaeologists, museum professionals and pagans into dialogue. This evinces the ways in which heritage managers and museum professionals are reflexively addressing a timely issue. There are challenges to this sort of dialogue, though: the British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology (BABAO) sent a letter to the Museums Association requesting that it withdraw its support from the conference. Archaeologists do not, of course, speak with one voice. In turn, pagan politics, Druid politics particularly, are complex, and how these voices are negotiated presents a challenging problem for heritage managers.

An example of effective dialogue concerns negotiations over the display of the aforementioned Lindow Man. Originally found at Lindow Moss near Manchester, Lindow Man is on permanent display at the British Museum. On two occasions in the past, in 1997 and 1991, Lindow Man returned to the nothwest of England for exhibitions at The Manchester Museum. Preparation for a third exhibition between April 2008 and March 2009 has involved ongoing consultation with various interest groups, including pagans. The 'Consultation Report' (Sitch 2007) of a meeting held on 10 February 2007 includes a section (3.2) entitled 'Spirituality':

> There was broad agreement that the approach taken to Lindow Man needed to reflect that he had been a living human being and that he was most definitely a 'he' and not an 'it', that he was an ancestor and that he must be treated with sensitivity… People felt that there is a spiritual dimension to Lindow Man and how he is treated on display, which also extends to allowing visitors to demonstrate their respect for him as an ancestor.
>
> - The Museum should explore the option to create a shrine near the Lindow Man exhibition where people could make offerings to the ancestors, of which Lindow Man is a representative but not make offerings *to* Lindow Man.
> - A Pagan perspective on Lindow Man is very important. We want to emphasize his humanity. He certainly is not a museum object.
> - Lindow Man's discovery and excavation was an intersection of then and now, of us and him, that is still on-going, evolving and certainly not over.

As a result, the exhibition will include the display of objects from local residents and other stakeholders in order to demonstrate that interest in Lindow Man since his discovery has its own history. These objects include one woman's 'Care Bear' and, from a pagan, some crow feathers (see the Lindow Man blog at http://lindowmanchester.wordpress.com/2007/12/14/hello-world/#comments). Furthermore, in a collaboration between Bryan Sitch, Head of Humanities and curator of the exhibition, and pagans, an opening event at the Manchester Museum will involve ceremonies conducted by pagans, and there will be an area set aside for people (particularly pagans, though not exclusively so), to make offerings. Here, we see current, inclusive and sensitive museum pedagogy (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill 2000) in action; the success of the exhibition remains to be seen and we will follow the situation closely.

Conclusion

Pagan engagements with archaeology, sacred sites in particular, increased over the last decade of the twentieth century to the extent that how best to respond to them was a part of key heritage management documents of the late 1990s and early 2000s, including those published for Stonehenge and Avebury (e.g. National Trust 1997; Pomeroy 1998; English Heritage 2000; Pomeroy-Kellinger 2005). Since then, pagans have become ever-more active in requesting dialogue with heritage managers, and more recently museum professionals, so that their perspectives on archaeological sites, excavated finds and museum displays may stand alongside those of other stakeholders as equally valid. While it is impossible to generalise, arguably the most liberal response is from museum professionals, evinced in this paper by the Manchester Museum, whose theorising of museum practice involves the promotion of inclusivity and multiple perspectives on the past rather than the 'objective' authoritative and unnamed voice of 'the curator'. Site managers also engage with inclusivity, as demonstrated by the history of managed open access at Stonehenge for the summer solstice (and other festival dates). The extent to which these sorts of engagements are successful needs to be judged on a case-by-case basis, with ongoing monitoring over extended periods. As our 'Sacred Sites' project, now in its eighth year, moves forward, we anticipate interesting developments in how sites are managed, how excavated remains—including human remains—are curated, and how museum collection displays are represented.

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WEAVING A TANGLED WEB? PAGAN ETHICS AND ISSUES OF HISTORY, 'RACE' AND ETHNICITY IN PAGAN IDENTITY

Ann-Marie Gallagher

Introduction

On the 25th of March 1997 a witch, Kevin Carleon, got into Stonehenge and at dawn unfurled and flew the Union Flag. This was in protest at a theory published in the Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine that Stonehenge and Avebury may have been built by insurgent peoples originating from the West of what is now France around 4,500 years ago. Carleon explained his protest by declaring; 'It is my theory that those living in this country invaded Europe—and not vice versa'.[1] The deployment of a Union Flag in the circumstances seems somewhat anachronistic, given that it did not exist in its present form until 1801 and the idea of 'nation' in its contemporary sense did not exist before the eighteenth-century (Robbins 1989, Hobsbawm 1990). But this is just one example of a whole range of misconceptions, and arguably misappropriations, of concepts of history, nation, 'race' and ethnicity which seem to exist within popular pagan lore. It is the purpose of this article to hold up to the light, from an academic and pagan participant perspective, a number of issues arising from the continuing evolution of pagan identities in Britain at the end of the twentieth century. Some of these are named in the title of this short piece; all, it will be suggested, arise from a number of as yet unaddressed assumptions about the place that pagans occupy in our current historical, social and political situation(s). These assumptions are articulated in a number of ways: in the opinions, philosophies, texts and vernacular expressions of pagan culture and they occur with a regularity and variety which is almost dizzying when one seeks to catch at their sources and their boundaries. In order that the varying emanations of ideas around history, gender,

[1] Psychic News, 12 April 1997. Fortean Times. August 1997. Reports of the findings published in the Wiltshire Archaeological News can be found in The Guardian, The Independent, The Times and the Daily Telegraph on 1st March 1997.

'race', identity and ethnicity and other issues do not slip the net, I will be seeking to identify the nodes each presently occupies on the web of pagan culture and to name the points at which this web is becoming entangled with that of the more dominant social structures in which pagans also participate. This piece will argue that current pagan praxis has the power to transform both, and to point the way towards a pagan ethics which would support this mutual transformation; but this first requires acknowledging the links between the two identities and meanings being allotted and ascribed to an ongoing construction of current pagan identity that may make that identity appear more fragile and contingent.

'History' and Popular Pagan Texts

> 'The dead are not always quiet, and the past will never be a safe subject for contemplation' Ronald Hutton (1996).

A survey of popular pagan texts published by Aquarian Press, Thorsons, Element and Arkana turned up an arrestingly unproblematised relationship with ethnic, historical, national, social and political boundaries. Amongst the very popular titles surveyed, there was a markedly lackadaisical attitude towards historical periodicity. This was particularly the case in titles which invoked historical precedent as the foundation of both the authority of the information contained in the book about contemporary pagan practices and, significantly, the basis for present-day pagan identity. The examples I analysed were peppered with invocations of 'Ancient times…' and began seemingly authoritative pieces of information with 'In the past…' invariably failing to identify era let alone dates, cultural context or cite provenance. Admittedly, none of the books I looked at claimed to be an academic text, although one of the worst offenders did, somewhat ironically, deplore the 'flimsy scholarship' on which many books detailing various magical traditions are based (Green 1995).

I would argue, however, that neither the lack of claims to scholarship nor the disclaimers about it that some texts occasionally carry exonerate them from blatant inaccuracy or unaccountability. The influence of popular pagan texts should not be underestimated; most self-identifying pagans in Britain, Northern Europe and North America are first-generation pagans (in the contemporary sense at least!) and the majority

either have first contact with paganism via these texts or consult them for follow-up information after initial person-to-person contact with paganism. Moreover, in my experience and from the evidence of other similar sources cited in the texts themselves, the information and ideas generated by these books is often enthusiastically picked up on and quoted, taken as given and often, as I will go on to argue, reapplied somewhat problematically.

Pagan 'Ethnicities', Celticism and Cross-Cultural Comparisons

A concept which appears to span some particularly woolly ideas around some of the issues mentioned is the often uncritical and unproblematised application of the term 'Celtic' (cf. Bowman 1993). What has effectively been a salvage job around previously suppressed, silenced and overlooked aspects of past and present cultures of the British Isles has been a positive consequence of the so-called 'Celtic revival' and has gone some way to challenging the myth of Anglo-Saxonism first imposed within ideologies of racial hierarchies in nineteenth-century England. However, the current wave of popular 'Celticism' stands in danger of propagating myths with similarly denigrating effects. Courtenay Davis, in the introduction to his book Celtic Design, uses the term 'the Celtic nation' (Rutherford 1993)—one of the problems related to which I have already pointed out. But the frequency with which the rhetoric of Celticism abounds, for example 'the Celtic civilization', 'the Celtic people' places it in favour of an homogenous 'Celtic' history and identity. Only one of the samples of books on the Grail Mysteries that I looked at, for example, contained any element of differentiation in terminology. John and Caitlin Matthews do pause at the beginning of Ladies of the Lake to deplore what they term a 'growing tendency to confuse "Celtic", "British", "Welsh" and "Gaelic"'. However, they go on to say that when they are talking about 'Celtic' they are 'speaking broadly about the traditions of Britain and Ireland combined, since both countries share many common themes and stories' (Matthews 1992). Notably, both authors employ the term 'Celtic' unproblematically and without even as much differentiation as this in a number of their other works. So what we have, effectively, is a large number of popular texts invoking a cultural specification without ever specifying whose culture, or when or where it is or was.

What does this Fine Disregard for Cultural and Historical Specificity Signify?

Perhaps we could paraphrase the historian Renan by applying his assessment of the tendencies of forming nations to present-day pagan identity. He claimed that 'Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation' (Hobsbawm 1990). Perhaps getting our history and occasionally our geography wrong is part of constructing a pagan identity. But what might the consequences of such myth-building be? Might not the construction of our ideas about, for example, Celticity actually be 'culture-u-like' with knotwork, and undermine those voices struggling to be heard below the surface of that lumpenmasse identity; fighting for land-rights in Scotland, against racism and poverty in Wales, against war in Ireland, absentee landlords in Cornwall and against the demise of the Manx language in Vannin? To what extent, when an author claims and a reader believes that building a mound in your garden is a 'very Celtic thing', are we essentializing racial characteristics, positing an 'inside track' on spirituality in place of recognizing human rights issues and lack of power? Stereotyping, even when it appears to be awe-struck and benevolent, actually denies and 'disappears' self-autonomy. Claims towards 'Celticity' or any other identity which ignore the real history and material conditions of those with whom we are declaring affinity becomes another form of abuse; whether this takes the form of ripping off identities which are not ours, or the strip-mining of the spirituality which may be the last dignity some peoples have remaining. All pagans have a responsibility to act ethically in relation to oppressed peoples—that means respecting their history and present struggles, not constructing a 'Stage Oirish' spirituality.

Romanticizing minority-ethnic cultures is a concurrent issue occurring within the recent interest in Native American spirituality. This has had a devastating effect on Native Americans, as Andy Smith, a Cherokee woman points out in her essay 'For All Those Who Were Indian in a Former Life' (Smith 1993). She points out that Native Americans are told they are greedy if they do not choose to share their spirituality, and gives the example of white women in search of spiritual enlightenment appealing to female solidarity in order to glean some 'secret' knowledge from Native American Women. She notes that she can hardly attend a feminist conference in the United States without the only Native American presenter being the woman who opens the conference with a ceremony. Because of this romanticization of indigenous peoples' spirituality, the real oppression of Indians is overlooked, even trivialized;

> Indian women are suddenly no longer the women who are forcibly sterilized and are tested with unsafe drugs such as Depo provera; we are no longer the women who have a life expectancy of 47 years; and we are no longer the women who generally live below the poverty level and face a 75 per cent unemployment rate. No, we're too busy being cool and spiritual.

An analogy between what has happened to Native American spirituality and the situation with the new Celticity in Britain is drawn, albeit unwittingly, in a book on 'Celtic Lore'. In a section where 'past' 'Celtic' oral culture is discussed in relation to story-telling traditions, the author inserts an amazed footnote:

> There are still peoples who retain an oral tradition and possess memories which are, to us, startling. An example of this is the Navajo Indians. A writer in the Independent Magazine in August 1990 records a visit to a restaurant in Navajo country. The waitress went from packed table to packed table taking orders without the benefit of written notes, then returned with laden trays bearing the correct dishes (Rutherford 1993).

Since all that can be said with any certainty, given the evidence, is that this woman has an extremely good memory, it is difficult to conclude whether the author really believes this woman lives wholly outside the rest of American culture in spite of the fact that she is found waiting in a restaurant, or that she somehow embodies an essence possessed by all Navajo. It is clear, however, that in his enthusiasm to point out the difference of oral cultures from literary ones, the author is keener to attribute the ensuing abilities of the former to groups of peoples than he is to engage with the social contexts of their lived realities.

Essentializing, romanticizing and imbuing with mysticism is, in fact, racist. John H.T. Davies, a Welshman writes, 'I do not want to see what has happened to the native Americans, happen to the heritage of my own people. I do not wish to see us marginalized as the 'Dreamtime People' of Europe… To value us only for our dreams is extremely patronizing'. He goes on, 'I do not wish to encounter your expensive workshop leader who can't even pronounce, let alone speak, any Welsh; whose only qualifications are a set of distinctly cranky ideas, assembled from fragments torn loose from our heritage' (Davies 1995).

Whilst it is possible for me to agree heartily with the sentiments and warnings expressed in this plea, the linkage made between land, heritage and spirituality provokes another important question. The pagan movement is a predominantly white movement. Are we passively or even actively excluding black and Asian participants because of the

store we are setting by indigenous British traditions? And what are we defining as 'British', or even as Cornish, English, Irish, Manx, Scottish and Welsh? One finds, for example, the rare text which appears at least to acknowledge that Britain is multicultural, by declaring appreciation of the cultural 'gifts' successive 'visitors', have brought to British culture. Needless to say, caveats of this type are clearly defining 'British' culture as something core and pre-existing those 'visitors' and defining the 'gifts' as added extras (Matthews 1988). This seems to situate 'British' pagan antecedents as part of an historical identity which actually excludes all those communities and ethnicities arriving after a given date. At one level this indicates a measure of social unawareness around, for example, black and Asian Britons, whose 'own' culture is black and Asian British. At another it connotes an inadvertent racism, the message of which is the spiritual equivalent of 'these roots are not yours'.

Contemporary Pagan 'Ethnicities'

Given the expressed importance of historical precedence and provenance to contemporary pagan identity, one is not surprised, then, to find that contemporary paganism in Britain is a predominantly white movement, particularly given the additional tendency to essentialize certain spiritual attributes as the gift of given peoples. However unintending, and for whatever reasons, there do seem to be a number of exclusionary definitions operating around the construction of pagan identity in the British context. Oppressions often work multiply and are rarely without complexity, but it seems that there is a good deal of difference between a person of colour resisting what Davies identifies as 'spiritual strip mining', and a predominantly white movement in a racist culture steering clear of black or Asian participation. It is perhaps the case that white ethnicities (and I would include amongst these British pagan ethnicity) are selective in which inequalities they seek to redress. As one Manxman wryly put it when I began to enumerate the loss of many Manx traditions, 'and don't forget the alarming demise of bigotry, including sexism, racism, homophobia'.[2]

[2] This particular Manxman has asked not to be identified; so I send my thanks to him in his anonymized form!

Aspects of Paganisms and Universality

At the very least, there is currently a good deal of ambivalence expressed within the pagan community regarding certain forms of oppression and here some of the more troubling aspects of these tendencies open up in relation to ideas regarding, for want of a better description, issues of 'fate' and personal responsibility. There is a tendency, which expresses itself in a variety of ways, to place responsibility for the conditions of one's life at the feet of the individual. This is often taken up and applied uncritically and regardless of the specific context of the individual's life and the extent to which they may control events governing their situation. This conviction comes across quite strongly in a number of popular pagan texts, although the strength of this underpinning credo is perhaps felt more in its accumulative effect, both within an individual text and in seeing it reiterated in a range of similar texts. Consequently the examples below, which have been selected from two of the more popular texts analysed for this study and which are based in the Western Mystery Tradition, appear on the face of it to be relatively harmless: 'If you have lost a lover you must ask yourself; "In what way did I fail to meet her needs/passion?" The fault lies with you'(Green 1995). 'If you have no love in your life, magic will not supply it, until you learn why you are not loveable' (Green 1990).

If this philosophy stays where it is put, it may be regarded as little more than a rather callous homily for broken-hearted ex-lovers. However, the basis of this rather uncomplex theory of unconditional personal responsibility is often reapplied and extended to both global problems and both natural, and often unnatural disasters. The suffering of the people affected by starvation and disease following the war in Rwanda was theorised by one pagan as: '…the earth getting rid of her surplus. There must be a life lesson in it for them, mustn't there? We all have to take responsibility for what happens to us'.[3] And so presumably the same applies to a raped woman, a tortured man, an abused child, a beaten pensioner and so on. It seems quite significant, moreover that the philosophy is so readily applied to people of colour who live 'over there'. But the crucial thing here is that a self-motivating philosophy applied to an individual living in the West, who to a certain

[3] Here, perhaps is evidence that paganism currently experiences overspill from what some commentators would term 'New Age' philosophies.

extent enjoys the type of autonomy not experienced in other cultural contexts, is not appropriate for projection onto what is the result of political interventions, often by the Western powers, whose freedoms that individual enjoys.

Another typical, if troubling pagan response to suffering is to attribute it to a mysterious spiritual malaise that is felt globally: 'The Wasteland is growing, both on the face of the planet and in the minds of the people. Many have sunk so low through poverty, homelessness, sickness, deprivation or disaster that they have lost hope of things getting better. They have even become so hopeless that they are not able to take advantage of any good which may come their way' (Green 1995). One of the corollaries of this type of stream-of-consciousness universalism is that it substitutes blanket explanation for any attempt to focus on the particular causes of specific sufferings. It also raises the question of how appropriate a response to privation it is to map onto the events of one geographical and historical location the symbols and metaphors of the historically and geographically located tradition of another. At this particular node of the web the tension between the universal and the specific mirrors that which snags where a philosophy which motivates the individual is applied to the general to produce a theory of inaction. At these points, the two webs, that of pagan identity and that of the wider social web against which it occasionally strains, become entangled. This may, in part, be due to the internal entanglement that some paganisms have with philosophies which could more accurately be defined as New Age. However, the distance often placed between the political and the spiritual in both mainstream and pagan culture is a predisposition both to this type of entanglement occurring and, significantly, the catching of something nasty in the web.

Paganism, Racism and Neo-nazism

The occult-fascist axis often posited by historians of the German Nazi movement of the 1930s and 40s is perhaps the better known of the interludes where paganism has proved a rich hunting ground for fascist groups looking for symbols of volkisch unification. This specific connection in fact had a much longer history, but I am more concerned here with present connections being made.[4] Initial analyses of alleged con-

[4] Searchlight. August 1997: 17–18.

nections between pagan groups and neo-nazis being made from within the anti-nazi movement led me to regard some of the claims with a measure of scepticism, partly because some of the rhetoric tended to be either anti-pagan or rather confused in conflating all occult interests of known neo-nazis into 'paganism'. However, a close examination of neo-nazi literature available in Britain makes it quite clear that paganism is being pressed to the cause of spiritual Aryanism in Europe, through groups such as ANSE (Arbheitsgemeinschaft Naturreligioser Stammesverbade Europas or European Racial Association of Natural Religious Groups) and the Thule Seminar and others currently operating on the internet.[5] Indeed, there are a number of neo-fascist initiatives operative in most parts of Britain and some of these appeal to what they perceive as pagan 'values' within the extreme right. These values are those mobilized around notions of history, race and nationhood. The edges of some pagan philosophies blur dangerously with those that support racism and warn against what they see as racial and spiritual 'miscegenation'. The links made between fascist aspirations and paganism appear to come from the provision, within the formations of pagan identity in Britain, of the racial specificity of what some pagans perceive to be their past and their cultural antecedents.

An example of the way in which pagan discourses of history, 'race' and nationalism can be diverted and appropriated is found in the (undated) desktop-published newsletter, Valkyrie, which advertises itself as the 'voice of the Patriotic Women's League'. The League is based in the northwest of England. Valkyrie is replete with Celtic knotwork and symbols and contains advertisements for the 'Church of Thor-Would' and for the neo-nazi band 'Celtic Warrior'. It also carries a list of publications, organizations and bands which have links with the League, including titles such as; 'Renewal of Identity', 'Aryan Sisters' and 'Blood and Honour'. As well as featuring strong imagery referring to a pagan past, including a blonde-plaited child regarding a stone dolmen, it posits a warrior goddess dubbed "Mother Europe'. This figure is juxtaposed with a diatribe against non-racist and non-sexist educational materials which reiterates the theme of preservation and a mythical all-white heritage found elsewhere in the magazine. The message of a photograph of a white mother teaching her white child on the page opposite that of the goddess-figure 'Mother Europe'

[5] Ibid.

emphasizes the role of both mother and goddess, whose fiercer intentions are focussed upon 'defending' Europe from multi-culturalism by invoking a veritable confusion of Celtic and Nordic knotwork. At the same time, this sacralizes the task being set here for all white mothers, exhorting them to play this role within the home.

Other neo-nazi magazines and newsletters indicate that several more pagan organizations are actively supportive of neo-nazi aspirations. The latter are entirely commensurate with those of ANSE and the Thule Seminar, both pagan fascist organizations with the philosophies of hatred and denial which appear on the agendas of fascism globally. The blurring of pagan affinities and neo-nazism to the point where neo-nazis are as at home in the former as they are in the latter is a cause for grave concern. At which point does a badge declaring 'Albion for Pagans' or 'the Pagan State of Albion' (found on stalls at a Pagan Northwest Region conference and in a number of shops selling New Age and pagan paraphernalia) become 'England for the English' or 'Keep Britain White?'

The nature of the highly particularised standpoints which fund ideas of pagan identity, historical rights and future aspirations is that they emanate from a new, minority perspective which is fundamentally in flux around issues of identity. Accordingly, notions of history, authenticity and provenance are often seen as paramount in the task of constructing an 'authentic' identity; to such an extent that where these are contested, any newly-forming ideas around identity are considered under threat (cf. Bowman 1995). Similarly, ideas which are seen to smack of 'political correctness' are given short shrift, partly because of the challenge to the pagan love-affair with 'Nature' and the organic, both of which are seen as ontologically integral to the past(s) to which we refer, distinctive aspects of our spiritually-led identities. In this context, what appear to be challenges to the exclusionary nature of what are actually reconstructions of past ways of life and socio-cultural constructs of 'nature' are seen as joltingly modern (if not post-modern), interventionist, and as wishful thinking. The search for authenticity in the formation of contemporary Pagan identities does tend to lead to quite reactionary stances on issues of social concern; the will to change social inequalities is seen as being out of step with the 'realities' of past societies and out of step with the organic, with the 'nature' from which past pagan societies emerged. That our ideas about the past and about nature are largely social constructs doesn't seem to bother anyone overmuch,

judging by the survey of popular pagan literature and participation in pagan communities.

The predisposition towards misappropriation by fascist and neo-Nazi groups is in fact coming from the very bases ('history' and 'nature') upon which the anxious construction of Pagan identity appear to be resting, and is further adumbrated by notions of the collective 'fate' of people who, paradoxically are deemed responsible for their own troubles. 'Destiny', it should be remembered, was a very good friend of British imperialism. It could be argued that pagansare not responsible for symbols and identities hijacked from our movement. After all, we can't actually stop anybody doing this. But unless we are to be associated with these agendas calling themselves 'pagan', we have to examine what they are finding so attractive and make a positive statement which irrevocably dissociates us from them; whoever 'we' turn out to be. And this brings us back to disposing with the idea that spirituality has nothing to do with the political, with power.

Pagan Praxis and Challenges to Racism

Given that paganisms often abhor dualistic separations, our embodied spiritualities, our notions of immanence and our sense of the interconnectedness of things are particularly fitted to provide models of interrelationship, gradation and flow. Within the structures of our practices and symbols, our acknowledgement of tides, cycles and seasons, lies the potential to challenge political hierarchies and provide an agency for positive change in our society and on our planet. This means acknowledging diversity-of needs, of experience, of the cultural, social historical and geographical contexts of peoples lives. One of the most compelling and powerful symbols we have is that of the web. It is a symbol which has been deployed with amazing success both metaphorically and physically at Greenham; it provides a model via which we might see varied forms of oppression, different spiritualities, economic means, and different identities as contingent upon each other and touching at various nodes of the web. But perhaps we may see it as many webs, each touching and interconnecting but varying with location, experience, political agenda and worldview.

As a spiritually-led identity we may occasionally see ourselves as an oppressed group; for example, our spiritualities provoke fear and

hatred amongst other groupings (both religious and non-religious) to the point that the fear of child-kidnap by misinformed social workers is still real. But the acknowledgement of our own oppressions carry the responsibility of acknowledging both our own privileges and the oppressions of others. Fighting for our own rights need not mean that we privilege our community's needs by ignoring or trivializing the day to day prejudice that other oppressed groups experience. The principle of interconnectedness, signified within this article as a web, lies at the heart of pagan spirituality. It is not a philosophy which espouses sameness as oneness. By definition, it inter-connects and coalesces by recognizing diversity.[6] Given what I have had to say about the inappropriateness of projecting specified and located symbology as universals, this may be a surprising proposition. But the point about interconnectedness as a touchstone is that it recognizes and situates 'me' and 'us' and 'others' as contingent and located.[7]

Conclusion: Towards a Pagan Ethics of Diversity

A pagan ethic which acknowledged the proximity of the wider social web to that of its own communities would go some way to disentangle the prejudices of the one from the spiritual declarations of the other. But as I have indicated, there are other pressing and compelling reasons why such an ethic would need to be developed. This brings us full circle to the issue of identity which began with the Union Jack being flown in Stonehenge at the beginning of this paper. Who are 'we'? Where and when are 'we'? Who and what do 'we' embrace; who and what do 'we', should 'we', exclude?

On the issue of exclusivity in term of heritage, history, tradition, some words from Caitlin Matthews:

> …there are no rightful bearers of tradition, only bearers of tradition. However we are welcomed into our tradition—whether it be by formal training, ritual initiation or long personal meditation—we become bearers of that tradition by desire, aptitude and dedication (Matthews 1990)

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[6] It has this in common with some ecofeminist perspectives, see for example, Lori Gruen's essay 'Toward an Ecofeminist Moral Epistemology' in Warren 1994; and Karen Warren's essay 'Ecofeminism and the Spiritual' in Adams, 1993.

[7] A good example of thinking around difference in this way is found in Keya Ganguly's essay 'Accounting for Others: Feminism and Representation' in Rakow (1992).

To this I would add the quality of committed understanding, and that would include the criteria that we are prepared to accept and find out why it is more useful to some oppressed groups that we respect their traditions from the sidelines rather than attempt to enter them from certain given positions of social privilege.[8]

As for the issue of legitimate exclusion and dissociation, this depends upon the will to develop an ethic which would positively undermine those predispositions which make our philosophies so tempting to some of the more malevolent tendencies currently misappropriating pagan symbols and philosophies. What such an ethic might eventually look like depends to a certain extent on the passage of time, on the growth of the movement and its ideas. Given the very real threat of the misappropriation by the New Right of both, however, it is critical that it is not left entirely to time. More than the future of the pagan movement is at stake here. If we acknowledge that the web of our culture connects with that of a larger, dominant social web, we do not simply disentangle ourselves from its worst tendencies, but have a position of agency, a potential for transformation which can spread from our web to others. Change is a multi-directional process; enchanting the web with a commitment to ending oppression means not only holding up a mirror to ourselves, but becoming, in turn, a reflection in which others may see something worth emulating. If we believe in a web of life; one in which everything is interconnected, then we must believe in the reverberating effects of a conscious disentanglement, a conscious awareness of privilege and oppression, and the outflowing change the ownership of that awareness can bring to wider contexts than ours.

The question that a pagan ethic might address could be something close to the thought on which I would like to close the discussion here and open it up elsewhere and the question which the poet-philosopher June Jordan suggests we constantly ask of ourselves, 'How is my own life- work helping to end these tyrannies, the corrosions of sacred possibility?'[9]

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[8] See Elizabeth Brookes' (1993) section on 'Ethics' in A Woman's Book of Shadows; and Andy Smith (1993).

[9] June Jordan has published a collection of her essays in a volume (1989) entitled, Moving Towards Home; Political Essays.

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WOLF AGE PAGANS

Mattias Gardell

The late 1990's saw the rise of racist paganism to become one of the most dynamic religious expressions of the white power culture. This fact should not mislead the reader to assume that racism is inherent in paganism or that all pagans are racists. The invention of the classificatory categories "race" and "nation" are products of modernity and were, probably, unknown to the pagan cultures of pre-Christian Europe. Pagans of today, however, live in social realities long governed by these classificatory categories as organizing principles and hence impossible to avoid. In fact, a perennial conflict among today's pagans involves different understandings of what paganism is and for whom a certain tradition is appropriate. Is it necessary to be an American Indian to practice Native American religion or could anybody become a shaman? May an African American be part of an Asatrú guild or is Norse religion only for those claiming a Northern European ancestry? On this issue, today's paganism has taken three distinct positions: a non-, or even anti-racist position, an explicitly racist and an ethnic position.

To illustrate with Asatrú or Odinism, the pagan milieus involved with reviving the pre-Christian traditions of northern Europe. Nonracist Asatrú is a polytheist spiritual path that welcomes any genuinely interested person irrespective of race or ethnicity. Dismissing nonracist Asatrú as an effeminate new age corruption, the racist position defines Asatrú/Odinism as an expression of the Aryan racial soul and hence an exclusive creed open to whites only. In fact, many, but not all, adhering to the racist position prefer terming their warpath of spiritual politics "Odinism" or the Germanic "Wotanism" rather than risk being lumped together with nonracist Asatrúers. Attempting to get beyond the issue of race, the third position defines Asatrú as an ethnic religion, native to northern Europe and therefore "natural" to Americans of northern European ancestry. The notion of an "organic" link between ethnicity and religion obviously implies an assumption that genetics somehow determine the spiritual disposition of man. Accordingly, although most take exception to racism, adherents of the ethnic position share certain presuppositions with racist paganism. This unresolved element of

philosophical ambiguity has left ethnocentric Asatrú open to criticism from both nonracist and racist pagans. Simultaneously being denounced as racists and race-traitors, ethnic Asatrúers argue that they are neither, insisting that partisans should leave their politics out of pagan activities. Numerically, the nonracist position seems to be the strongest, although there are no reliable statistics available. The reader is encouraged to keep this in mind during the following presentation of racist paganism. As much as the activities of Christian Ku Klux Klan activists do not make all Christians racists, the existence of racist pagans should not taint all pagans.

The surge of racist paganism is related to a process of radicalization of the white power culture. As such, it is a continuation of the refutation of Christianity that took hold in the Aryan underground in the 1980s. Similar to the iconoclastic rhetoric of Creativity, many racist pagans single out Christianity as a key to the perceived demise of white power and Western civilization. Racist pagans tend, however, to be dissatisfied with the basically atheist outlook of the Church of the Creator.[1] Opting to replace Christianity with an alternative native to

[1] Creativity is the brainchild of Ukrainan born Florida realtor Ben Klassen (1918–1993), self-appointed Pontifex Maximus of the Church of the Creator (COTC), founded in 1973. Though basically an atheist, Klassen observed that religion has been a constant feature of all known cultures of man and concluded that the only feasible choice was between "bad" and "good" religion, defined according to their role in promoting racial loyalty and survival in a hostile world. "What is good for the White Race is the highest virtue, what is bad for the White Race is the highest sin". The white man, Klassen taught, needs to realize that "(a) We are embroiled in a racial war for survival on this Planet Earth. (b) All mud races are our enemies in this fight for survival. (c) The Jews are leading and orchestrating this war against us; and (d) The Christian Churches are their most ardent ally and most potent weapon". Christianity was to Klassen a "Jewish creation", "designed to unhinge and derange White Gentile intellect" by promoting suicidal advices to 'love your enemy', 'turn the other cheek' and 'compassion' for the weak; a "theology of mass insanity" based on superstitious beliefs in "spooks in the sky" and unsubstantiated theories about life beyond death. Klassen outlined the basic creed of Creativity in the three "holy books", *Nature's Eternal Religion* (1973), the *White Man's Bible* (1981) and *Salubrious Living* (1982) and a rich production of secondary writings. In line with the general heath fad of the 1980's, Klassen issued a "salubrious living" program. To secure a wholesome life free from cancer and other diseases, Klassen prescribed fasting, physical exercise, sufficient resting and a fruitarian diet of organically grown uncooked and unprocessed fruits, vegetables, grains and nuts. Issuing the battle cry *RaHoWa* (Racial Holy War), Klassen hoped that his healthy racist elite would ignite a world wide white revolution to "expand the White Race, shrink the colored races, until the White Race is the supreme inhabitant of the earth". The realities of the Church of the Creator stand in sharp contrast to the grandiose visions of its Pontifex Maximus. Investing a substantial part of his personal fortune, Klassen in 1982 established a "World Creativity Center" at Otto in the Blue Ridge Mountains

white people, racist pagans see the future in the past, aiming at reconstructing some pre-Christian tradition of ancient Europe as the white man's "true" religion. This project may take many different, though not necessarily exclusive, forms, and the white power culture abounds with symbols, divinities, and mythologies found among the archeological remnants of the ancient cultures of Europe (e.g., the Greek, Slav, Roman, Etruscan, Celtic, Saxon, Manx, or Scandinavian). As the efforts to revive pre-Christian traditions of northern Europe have so far been proven to be the most viable, we will here focus on this project.

With important predecessors among the racist mystics and philosophers in the pan-Germanic völkisch milieu vibrant in continental Europe at the turn of the former century, racist paganism has since come in two waves; one in the late sixties and early seventies, and one in the late eighties and nineties. During the flower power era, racist Americans were still very much Christian and mainly caught up with the Klan project of hundred percent Americanism, and most counterculture pagans tended to be left-leaning hippies. Comparatively more racist pagans came with the second wave when flower power had given way to the more reactionary winds of the Reagan/Bush era and many white racists had made the transition to the underground white power scene.[2] The milieu of racist paganism is populated by numerous groups, kindreds, one-man bands, and networks, the majority of which are as short-lived as daylight on northern winter skies. Instead of presenting a comprehensive catalog of racist pagan organizations that would be

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of North Carolina, founded the *Racial Loyalty* tabloid and distributing his books (often free of charge). A mail order seminar offered members to become Reverends for a small fee. Continuing education and military training in the paramilitary White Berets was offered at headquarters. By the late 1980's and early 1990's, COTC began attracting the new generation Aryan activists. Spread by acts involved with the white power music scene, its membership increasingly became dominated by youth, skinheads and prisoners. Abroad, COTC missionary activities produced chapters in Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Yet, the COTC remained miniscule with a worldwide membership of less than five thousand, out of which a couple of hundreds were ordained Ministers. Organizationally, the effort was hampered not least by financial difficulties and Klassen's stubborn reluctance to delegate power and responsibilities. By 1993, Klassen concluded that he had done his chore. The White Man's Bible recommends suicide as a dignified way to die, much preferable to prolonging a life that no longer is worth living. Following the death of its founder, COTC split in several competing factions. In July1996, a less-than successful rebuilding process commenced with law student Matt Hale of the World Church of the Creator as the new Pontifex Maximus.

[2] For a detailed history of this process, see Gardell 2003; Devi 1958; Serrano 1978; 1984; 1991; Goodwin 1996 and Goodrick-Clarke 1998.

dated before it goes to print, we will facilitate an understanding of racist paganism by focusing on one significant racist pagan vehicle of each wave: the Odinist Fellowship and Wotansvolk.

Established in 1969, the Odinist Fellowship is the oldest existing organization on the Norse pagan scene. Primarily a ministry by mail, it was long based in founder Else Christensen's mobile home at Crystal River, Florida, and is now relocated to her small trailer in Parksville at Vancouver Island, British Columbia. As the Grand Mother of racist Odinism, Christensen introduced significant elements later adopted by many racist pagans, including her identification of Norse paganism as the "racial soul" of the Aryan Folk, her Jungian view on the heathen gods and goddesses as race-specific, genetically engraved archetypes, her politics of "tribal socialism," and her focus on prison outreach ministries as a prime recruitment avenue. Through Christensen, many of the current Asatrú and Odinist ideologues first became acquainted with Norse traditions, although many of them would later embark on independent routes. While some express impatience with her insistence on a low political profile, others would explore in more depth the ritual and magical paths Christensen was less inclined to tread.

Born in Denmark in 1913, Christensen began as an anarchist before converting to the national-bolshevist (Strasserite) wing of the Nazi movement. Her husband Aage Alex Christensen was top lieutenant in the miniscule Danish National Socialist Workers' Party. Ousted along with the Strasserite faction, he was later arrested when Germany occupied Denmark, serving six months in a detention camp. Following the war, Christensen moved to Toronto, Canada, and developed contacts with the emerging white power scene across the border. Among her closer associates was the seminal populist anti-Semite Willis Carto and American Nazi Party organizer James K. Warner. Later an influential Identity Christian minister and Klan leader, Warner had made an aborted attempt to launch Odinism as the religious dimension of revolutionary National Socialism. Disappointed by the failure of his (Sons of Liberty) Odinist Religion, Inc., Warner gave Christensen all his left over Norse material, including a pamphlet by the Australian lawyer and Church of Odin founder Alexander Rud Mills, the *Call of Our Ancient Nordic Religion*.

At the time, Christensen was greatly influenced by Spengler and his national socialist interpreter, Francis Parker Yockey, whose *Imperium* became a white power culture staple. Following Yockey, Christensen concluded that the Aryan civilization had reached its "senility phase,"

deranged by the combined effects of Christianity, capitalism, and communism. Christianity promotes the "unnatural" idea "that all people are equal" and "universal brotherhood"; capitalism favors individual enrichment over folk solidarity and exploits nature for short-term profit; and communism destroys the organic unity of a race by its call for class struggle and international solidarity. Following Mills, Christensen (interview 1998) argued for a spiritual remedy: a revival of Norse paganism; identifying Odinism as a primordial expression of the Aryan "folk soul," understood in Jungian terms as a genetically transmitted collective unconscious. To Christensen (1984), the "primary source" of Odinism is biological: "its genesis is in our race, its principles encoded in our genes."

Convinced that any overt racist agenda would attract unwanted attention, Christensen (interview 1998) claims the advantage of a pagan approach: "You have to go in the back door! You have to sway with the wind . . . I don't think that anybody mistook my opinions from what we wrote in *The Odinist*, but nobody could put a finger on what we said, because we said it in such a way that it couldn't be clamped down at. We still have to do that." A carefully veiled racialist pagan message will, Christensen argues, prevail where others fail: "Metzger thought he could twist the noses of the Jews, but you can't do that, so he collapsed. He just disintegrated. It was the same with Klassen . . . You cannot repeat the mistake that Hitler made . . . Everybody knows that the Jews rule the whole damned world, so you cannot fight their combined power. You need to watch your step."

Exactly how carefully "veiled" the message really was might be doubted. A couple of nonracist Odinists charged the editors of Christensen's tabloid, the *Odinist*, with "doing a disservice to paganism by promoting religious zealousness in the form of politics, especially 'Nazi politics' and [printing articles with] offensive racial overtones." In a 1985 rebuttal, the *Odinist* editor claimed that the "Nazi charge was the cheapest of all cheap shots that can be aimed against anyone who finds something positive to say about National Socialism." "If any Odinist is ashamed of the 'racial overtones' of being Aryan, of standing up for Aryan rights, then we wonder why such a skittish a person ever want to be an Odinist," the editorial stated. "We, as Odinists, shall continue our struggle for Aryan religion, Aryan freedom, Aryan culture, Aryan consciousness and Aryan self-determination" ("Odinism" 1985).

Christensen urges American racists to learn from the history of fascism. Saluting the early left oriented ultra nationalist ideology of

Mussolini's *Fasci*, Christensen claims that Mussolini betrayed the cause by "collaborating with the capitalist element." Similarly, she regrets that the "true, socialist and folkish, potential" of National Socialism never became realized as Hitler purged the movement of the national bolshevist faction and aligned with the far right. Key to the historical failure of fascism was to Christensen its centralized totalitarianism. In this argument, the anarchist leanings of her youth shine forth. Anarchism seeks the dissolution of authoritarian government, the decentralization of responsibility and the replacement of states and similar monolithic forms of political administration with a radically decentralized federalist organization of society. This will "return" sovereignty to the individual and the local community in a society governed by direct democracy. Christensen departs from the mainstream of anarchist philosophies by her insistence on the primacy of race. Whereas the contemporary anarchist scene generally is antifascist and antiracist, Christensen describes anarchism as a fundamentally *Aryan* ideology. She believes that anarchism originated in the "nature" of Aryan man and wants a decentralized society based on the voluntary cooperation of free *Aryan* individuals. Christensen upholds as ideal a decentralized folkish communalism, modeled on self-sufficient communes such as the Amish or the early National Syndicalists in Spain, described as an effort "to unite Anarcho-Syndicalist ideals with the nationalist spirit," that was later suppressed by "reactionary Francoite authoritarianism" ("Aryan" 1983; Christensen interview 1998).

Projecting her ideals back into legendary times, Christensen claims that pre-Christian Norse society practiced "tribal socialism," a system supposedly combining "freedom of self-expression," "private enterprise" and "encouragement for every member of the tribe to reach his fullest potential" with socialist concerns of sharing resources, responsibilities and caring for the young, the elderly and the disabled of the tribe. A "race conscious" free society will put the "interest of the racial community before those of any individual" as "individuals will die [while] the Race has the potential for immortality" ("Neo-Tribalism 1979; "Racial Consciousness" 1984). Christensen (interview 1998) argues that this has "nothing to do with fantasies of white supremacy." The doctrine of supremacy, the argument runs, leads invariably to ambitions of world dominion and thus to racial coexistence and race-mixing. Better then to keep the races apart to develop according to their unique racial souls in relation to their various ecological habitats.

Christensen connects the imperative of racial consciousness with the necessity of environmental awareness. Materialism, consumerism and the capitalist exploitation of nature have brought on an ecological crisis of global magnitude she believes could only be reversed by implementing a pagan back-to-earth program of retribalization and ecologically sustainable production. Through Christensen's philosophy runs a streak of pre-occupation with purity, peculiar to the national socialist version of environmental concern. A chain of idealized pure entities links macro and micro cosmos, emphasizing the postulated interdependence of the purity of mind-body-race-environment. Thus, a pure individual nurtures a pure mind in a pure body and lives in purity with an equally pure partner in a pure, i.e., heterosexual and monoracial, relationship. This pure family provides a wholesome environment for bringing up pure and healthy children and is the primary building block of a pure racial organism living in harmony with a pure, unpolluted ecological system.

Compatible with the all-American longing for the simple life-style of the free yeoman in the "good old days," Christensen envisions a future return to "small-town America" without monstrous cities and industrial pollution. Small-scale family farms would replace agribusiness and, freed from federal tyranny, white Americans would secure individual happiness through their natural industriousness in a Jeffersonian—though folkish pagan—utopia. To get there, Christensen outlines a long-term strategy of establishing small intentional communities of racist pagans that should avoid federal attention by keeping a low political profile. Regional networks of independent folk communities could then serve as springboards to meaningful activism. Self-sufficient, ecological sustainable monoracial tribes would, Christensen suggests, be a practical avenue to redefine American federalism aiming at establishing an Odinist union of Aryan republics.

In the early 1980's, Christensen began a prison outreach ministry. Within a few years, she got Odinism to be officially accepted as a legitimate religion in the state of Florida, which enabled her to send in literature and hold services. Serving at seven Florida prisons with Odinist congregations ranging from 5 to 50 members, Christensen was a forerunner whose example has been emulated by other racist pagans. In 1993, Christensen was sentenced to five years in prison for drug trafficking—a sentence widely believed to be political in the racist pagan community—and was then deported to Canada. Upon

her release, Christensen adopted an even lower politically low profile. Members of the revived Odinist Fellowship now have to sign a statement, affirming that they intend to stay "within the legal laws of the country" of residence, and OF avoids the word "Aryan" in public communications. Thus distancing herself from the racist pagan milieu she was part of establishing, Christensen would probably rather be a revered icon than make a comeback at the fore front; the banner of radical racist paganism will be carried further by more outspoken ideologues, including the Wotansvolk.

A prominent voice of racially based Odinism is Wotansvolk, established in early 1995 by David and Katja Lane and Ron McVan. With headquarters at a mountain outside St. Maries, a small lumber town southeast of Coeur d'Alene in northern Idaho, Wotansvolk evolved into a dynamic propaganda center spreading its message throughout the United States and abroad and ran a quite successful prison outreach program catering to several thousand heathen prisoners in US penitentiaries. A number of pagan white power bands have put Wotansvolk lyrics to music, including Darken's *Creed of Iron* album or Dissident's song "Roots of Being" on the album *A Cog in the Wheel*. In line with the white power pattern of fragmentation and infighting, Wotansvolk split in 2002 when administration was transferred to John Post in Napa, California. Based on fieldwork in the late 1990's and early 2000's, the presentation herein is confined to its first phase.

Wotansvolk combines an Aryan call to arms with an esoteric teaching, based in part on Jungian psychology, völkisch philosophy, and occult national socialism. An early proponent of the ZOG theory, Lane believes that the US administration is controlled by racial enemies, using its military might to establish a global Jewish dictatorship. Convinced that Aryan man is an endangered species, Lane coined the "14 words" as a rallying point for a pan-Aryan uprising: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children." The motto has taken hold in the global white power scene, as evidenced by the almost universal reference to the 14 words in poems, lyrics, articles and books and to the common racist habit of signing a letter *14/88* (meaning the 14 words and Heil Hitler).

Aiming at a white revolution, Wotansvolk endorsed the "leaderless resistance" strategy originally developed by Klan veteran Louis Beam, a longtime friend of the Lane family. In its Wotansvolk version, it involves the tactical separation between an open propaganda arm and a paramilitary underground. The function of the overt part is to

"counter system sponsored propaganda, to educate the Folk, to provide a man pool from which the covert or military arm can be [recruited]." Since the open racial propagandist "will be under scrutiny," Lane (1994: 26f) emphasizes that cadres involved need to "operate within the [legal] parameters" and keep "rigidly separated" from the military underground. The paramilitary "must operate in small, autonomous cells, the smaller the better, even one man alone." Revolutionary activity means utilizing "fire, bombs, guns, terror, disruption and destruction. Weak points in the infrastructure of an industrialized society are primary targets. Whatever and whoever perform valuable service for the system are targets, human or otherwise. Special attention and merciless terror are visited upon those White men who commit race treason." Lane (interview 1996) is indifferent that his message might inspire the likes of Timothy McVeigh (who was convicted for the Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 persons, including 15 children). "In the coming revolution there will be no innocents. There are only those who are for our cause and those who are our enemies. [The masses] will either follow us or follow them. They are now following their terrorism. When the time comes that our terrorism is superior to theirs, they will follow us. They will worship and adore whoever is the greater tyrant. That's the nature of the masses." The current weakness of Aryan man is attributed to Christianity, a creed "diametrically opposed the natural order" (Lane interview 1996). "God is not love. God the Creator made lions to eat lambs; he made hawks to eat sparrows. Compassion between species is against the law of nature. Life is struggle and the absence of struggle is death." If Aryans are to survive, the otherworldly and self-denying Christianity must be abandoned in favor of Odinism; a religion based on nature's order; "a natural religion" that "preaches war, plunder and sex."

This uncompromising rhetoric designed by Lane to reach the lowbrow warrior cast of the white power scene is combined with an esoteric teaching that at its core is race mysticism. Developed by Ron McVan, an artist and former associate of Ben Klassen, Wotansvolk ariosophy is outlined in *Creed of Iron* (1997) and *Temple of Wotan* (2000). Dissatisfied with the multiracial reworking of the American nation, Wotansvolk aims at "reaching deep into the ancestral past" to reconnect with the "roots of the Aryan race" in order to redevelop a lost "folk consciousness" (McVan interview 1996). Wotanism is presented as "the inner voice of the Aryan soul, which links the infinite past with the infinite future" (McVan 1997: 2). Accordingly, McVan (1997: 29) believes that

"all Aryans today retain an element of Wotan consciousness," a revival of which would liberate the white man. To Wotansvolk, Wotan (the Germanic name for Odin) symbolizes "the essential soul and spirit of the Aryan folk made manifest" (McVan interview 1999). As an iron willed warrior God, Wotan is said to instill in the white race the determination and heroic qualities necessary to arise victoriously in the ongoing race war. Wotansvolk cast their work as a continuation of the efforts of turn of the century Ariosophist Guido von List, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, aiming at returning Aryan man to his perceived true nature.

Wotansvolk teaches that each race is by nature unique and given distinct qualities truly their own. To survive and evolve along the desired path of racial greatness, a race must be animated by its "racial soul," a genetically transmitted spiritual heritage, understood as a race-specific Jungian collective unconscious. "Every race has its soul and every soul its race" (McVan n.d.). Engraved in each racial member are powerful archetypes that may be reached through performing the rituals and ceremonies developed by the ancestors in times immemorial. These archetypes are the *Gods of the Blood*, who will exist as long as there are living members of the race. To the individual Aryan, the meeting with these archetypical forces recharges divine energy that man may evolve into the realization of the Nietzschean superman. Odinism here equals the rope over the abyss, connecting man the Beast with the Superman. "Through Wotanism one may experience the infinitude of life mysteries and the divine completion of [Aryan] man," McVan (1998) asserts. There is no ontological distinction separating Aryan man and Aryan gods. They are conceived of as kin, differing in power rather than nature. Personifying the divine essence of Aryan man, the significance of Wotan expands beyond his warrior aspect. He is the master of gnosis who invites man to pursue the upward ariosophic path of perfection. In the occult NS tradition of Serrano and Rosenberg, McVan cultivates the "mystery of the blood," believing that unmixed Aryan blood carries genetic memories of the racial lineage with all its gods, demi-gods and heroes of the aboriginal Golden Age. Reconnected with the archetypical gods of the blood and developing his mental powers, "man is able to awaken to a divinity which flows within him" (McVan n.d. b.). To the race, the rapport with its collective unconscious is a necessary prerequisite for keeping its identity and mission as a unique spiritual being. "A race without its mythos and religion of the blood shifts aimlessly through history." (McVan 1997: 16).

Operating with a less complex concept of cyclical time than Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Miguel Serrano and Savatri Devi,[3] McVan's ideas still reflect the basic structure of an aboriginal Aryan golden age, fall, cleansing and renewal, universal to the world of racist paganism. Although a believer in the pre-historic Aryan civilizations of Hyperborea and Atlantis, the primary focus of McVan's historiography is closer to our present age, detailing how the once glorious Aryan high culture was cast down into the present Wolf Age following the demise of the Norse gods in the previous Ragnarök. In the tradition of Yockey and Christensen, McVan argues that the primary cause of the fall was spiritual. With the advent of Jewish Christianity, there began a dramatic process of degeneration. "If ever there were a birth of tragedy, it was when Aryan man turned his back on the indigenous Gods of his race," McVan writes (1999). "On that day he sacrificed the very roots of his being, ushering in the labyrinth of his own descent." The level of folk consciousness gradually diminished and the metaphysical race lost knowledge of itself as race. Following a selective reading of Jung, Wotansvolk asserts that the Aryan gods never died but remained dormant through the centuries of Christian dominion, deeply embedded in the Aryan psyche. With the völkisch revival of the late 19th Century and the rise of the national socialist movement, the archetypical forces again began to manifest. Paraphrasing Jung, Wotansvolk likens Wotan to a long quiescent volcano that at any moment may forcibly resume its activity. With overwhelming power, the suppressed Gods of the Blood will return with a vengeance, Wotansvolk says confidently ("Wotan" n.d.), pointing to the ascendancy of Hitler as an historical example: "Nowhere since Viking times has the direct, singular effect of Wotan consciousness been more evident than in the folkish unity of National Socialist Germany."

Wotansvolk recommends its followers to practice daily meditation as the technique by which "the highest spiritual knowledge is acquired and union with the great gods of our folk is eventually gained." In this field we encounter noticeable Hindu and Buddhist influences, although in the watered down version prolific in the Western milieu of alternative spirituality. Much like Serrano, McVan envisions Aryan man as a universe with all its worlds, as a microcosmic reflection of Yggdrasil,

[3] Miguel Serrano and Savatri Devi are two proponents of occult National Socialism. See Gardell 2003.

evolving towards perfection. Along the spine are found seven energy centers, "wheels" or "gateways," each associated with a specific rune. The spiritual ascendancy of individual man begins with meditation using these chakras of the Runic Tree of Man as contemplative focuses. In addition to individual practice, adherents to Wotansvolk philosophy are encouraged to connect with the archetypical gods through communal pagan ceremonies. "The practice of Wotanism ritual and ceremony of the annual festivals is recognized as the most effective way of impressing on our Aryan folk the wisdom, ethics and customs of our ancestors. Celebrating our indigenous traditions is as ancient as our race and is essential to our identity, unity, and survival as a people" (McVan 1997: 142). Wotansvolk performs the generic heathen "blot" ceremonies that celebrate the cycles of nature, but differs from other Norse pagans in the explicit racial dimension. During a 1998 Midsummer blot conducted at Wotansvolk headquarters, participants hailed the coming "day of resurrection" of Balder, which will "usher in the new age of light for Aryan man after Ragnarök." "The wheel of life keeps turning," a participant recited loudly, his voice quavering dramatically as a kerosene soaked swastika was set ablaze. "And in nature's cycle spins creation. Blazing like the sun's great disk, emanations of the high god Balder, a time of sanctification, [highlighting] the mystical nature of race and blood, carriers of primordial substances. The wheel of life keeps turning—the wheel of life keeps turning. I greet the summer solstice and the promise of a Golden Age."

Another significant ritual is the initiation ritual by which a prospect is accepted into the *einherjar* fraternity (McVan 2000). *Einherjar* is a Norse term for the brave warriors who died in battle and was brought to Valhalla, the abode of Odin. In Wotansvolk terminology, it denotes the community of racial warriors who are willing to die in the revolutionary war to establish an Aryan homeland. In the outdoors initiation ceremony, participants should preferably dress in Viking inspired clothing and carry their swords. After setting up the sacred circle, the ritual leader (gothi) invites the gods to "open the mighty gates of Valhalla, Hall of Wotan's chosen warriors, Fearless fighting elite, Pride of the Valkyries," and then bring before them those who have died in battle the name of the initiate. Asking the einherjar to accept the initiate into their ranks, the gothi places a sword flat on top of the initiate's head as he kneels down on one knee. The gothi turns to the initiate. "Before our gods and chosen warriors, do you pledge by your solemn word that you shall always uphold with honor, dignity and courage the lifelong

commitment to Wotan's Einherjar?" Confirming his pledge, the initiate then stands, and the gothi places the sword point at the nape of the initiate's neck to symbolize that death is better than dishonoring his commitment. The initiate is then blindfolded and brought before the lords of Valhalla among which he now enters. Removing the blindfold, the gothi with his thumb presses oil on the initiate's head and gives him the blessings of Odin. Proclaiming that the initiate now is a member of Wotan's Einherjar, the gothi then places a sword in the outstretched arms of the initiate. "Through this sword, ancestors of a thousand ages fill thy being" the gothi says and concludes with all participants repeating in chorus: "Hail Wotan! Victory or Valhalla!"

Wotansvolk runs a prison outreach ministry recognized as an official vendor by the Federal Bureau of Prisons and by a majority of state prison authorities, and will remain a top priority to the new Wotansvolk administration of John Post. There are Wotansvolk congregations—"kindreds"—in every state, including the dozen states where Wotanism/Asatrú/Odinism has not yet been permitted full religious recognition. Prisoners incarcerated in those states are encouraged by Wotansvolk to challenge state regulations in court. In Utah, Ohio, and Wisconsin, legal battles are currently being waged for religious rights and the full recognition of Asatrú as a legitimate religion. As of January 30, 2001, Wotansvolk catered to more than 5,000 prisoners. The states with the strongest presence of Wotansvolk prison kindreds were Arizona, California, Texas, Michigan, Florida, Indiana, Missouri, and Pennsylvania, where three to five hundred Wotansvolk prisoners are found in each state.[4] The Wotansvolk prison outreach ministry has grown with remarkable speed. When I first visited Wotansvolk headquarters in the fall of 1996, there were less than a hundred prison kindreds. By the year 2000, it was more than three hundred.

Judging from reviewing correspondence between hundreds of individual prisoners and the Wotansvolk headquarters, there seems to be a pagan revival among the white prison population, including the conversion of whole prison gangs to the ancestral religion. To some extent, prison authorities have unwittingly facilitated the Wotansvolk effort by breaking up prison kindreds and transferring leading heathens to other prisons previously without an organized pagan presence. The determined Wotansvolk prison outreach program has earned them

[4] Records provided by Katja Lane, 2001.

a reputation in the world of folkish paganism as being primarily a prison organization. According to Katja Lane (interview 1999), this is far from accurate, as prisoners constitute only an estimated twenty percent of Wotansvolkers in the United States. Yet, the observation has some validity in the sense that Wotansvolk seems comparatively more successful in its outreach efforts than other Asatrú/Odinist programs, which partly may be explained with the reputation of David Lane and the legendary Brüders Schweigen, in the white power culture. Wotansvolk donate literature, videos and ceremonial artifacts to assist prison kindreds in holding regular religious service, study circles, and seasonal ceremonies. In addition, Katja Lane corresponds with prison chaplains, and sends them complimentary material on request, and assists inmates legally challenge prison authorities if denied full recognition of Asatrú/Odinism as a legitimate religion. In numerous cases, inmates who have been denied receiving Wotansvolk literature, books on runes, or wearing heathen symbols have been advised how to proceed legally, as have prisoners whose heathen material has been confiscated by prison guards. Her campaigning has contributed to the fact that all states now permit the wearing of a Thór's hammer as a religious medallion.

In March 2002, the new Wotansvolk administrator John Post announced the formation of the National Prison Kindred Alliance, a joint effort of Wotansvolk and a number of independent Asatrú/Odinist tribal networks aiming at proving a more efficient prison outreach ministry and concerting the efforts of gaining increased religious rights and freedoms for the pagan community behind bars. Imprisoned Order member Richard Scutari (2000) provides an illustration from the inside; describing the kindred activities at the federal penitentiary in Lompoc, California, after authorities approved Odinism as a legitimate religion in 1997: "What was presented to the men spoke to their soul and we averaged from 50 to 55 prisoners at each weekly meeting. We were not only teaching the religion of our ancestors, but were also teaching White culture and White history. We even did a periodic segment we called 'Heroes of the Ages' in which we told the stories of different White heroes of the past, such as Horatius, Leonidas, Hermann, Vercingetorix, Adolf Hitler [and] Bob Mathews." Reflecting on the success of the Wotansvolk prison out reach program, Katja Lane (interview 1997) elaborates: "Most of the males who still have their instinct as warriors, protectors, defenders or their nation, their womenfolk and their

children; these men are the ones who find themselves in prison. They're virtually on the front-line of the battle for the preservation or our race and they are the first casualties. And there you'll find some of the most fervent interest in Odinism. Men in prison, not having to take time to make a living for their families, take time to love their wives and deal with daily problems, turn inward and look for their spiritual soul, and, so those two factors have created a very strong Wotanist presence in the prisons. Prisons, as you know, are very racially tense…and usually violent. The men need a sense of their own identity and having an expression for it. So, nearly every prison now, both state and federal, has a kindred, and in nearly every case…Odinism or Wotanism, are now officially recognized" by the prison authorities.

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