

The Pomegranate

THE JOURNAL OF PAGAN STUDIES

on CDROM



Welcome to *The Pomegranate on CDROM*, a digital archive of the Journal of Pagan Studies.

Originally printed February 1997 to August 2001, *The Pomegranate* is a forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices.

Click the pomegranate to enter. Select an issue to begin your exploration of this collection.

Publisher Fritz Muntean
Project Editor Kara Cunningham
Multimedia Production Via Media Inc.

Enter





#01 Feb 1997



#02 Aug 1997



#03 Feb 1998



#04 May 1998



#05 Aug 1998



#06 Nov 1998



#07 Feb 1999



#08 May 1999



#09 Aug 1999



#10 Nov 1999



#11 Feb 2000



#12 May 2000



#13 Aug 2000



#14 Nov 2000



#15 Feb 2001



#16 May 2001



#17 Aug 2001

The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Chas S. Clifton 2
Leland's *Aradia* and the
Revival of Modern Witchcraft

Maggie Carew 28
The *Golden Ass* of Apuleius

Margarian Bridger 37
Pagan Deism: Three Views

Reviews 43
Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft
Kate Slater

Enchanté Magazine 49
John Yohalem



The Pomegranate

Editorial Staff

Maggie Carew, Stephen McManus, Fritz Muntean, Diana Tracy

Copyright

© 1997 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate

is published four times a year at the Cross-Quarter Holidays by *The Pomegranate*, 501 NE Thompson Mill Rd, Corbett, OR 97019.

Deadline:

The Solstice or Equinox preceeding each issue. See the inside back cover for our Call for Papers, and send to the above address for our Writers' Guidelines, or to our email address below.

Internet Home Page:

<http://www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/>
(email: antech@teleport.com)

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monodfield
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within the Craft. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included. In the interests of promoting lively discussion, we encourage both our writers and our readers to keep an open mind, and to be ready to explore a wide variety of outlooks.

Notes from the Underground

Welcome to the Underworld!

As you read this new journal, you will find yourself among those eaters of the Divine Pomegranate who are compelled to look beneath the daylight world, beyond the details of what we do; to the whys and hows and wherefores of the Craft of the Wise. We've danced all the dances, led all the circles, attended all the festivals; and we're now ready to delve into what moves us, what makes us persist in our divine folly.

My eager minions and I want this to be a journal of lively dialogue. We want our articles to stimulate discussion. We want to provoke more questions than we answer. And we want to hear from you. Your letters in response to our articles will be an integral part of this journal.

We'll be exploring questions like these: Does Wicca have a canon, and if so, what is it, and why do we view these books as important? What really happens during effective ritual, and why? Where do we come from, and where are we going? Are we a religion; how do we relate to other religions, and what do we have to contribute to the world of religion in general?

We're fatuously pleased with the quality and scope of the subject matter in our first print issue. The simple fact that there is so much 'good stuff' available for our fledgling publication tells us that there are more than just me and my hard-working minions out there wanting to explore these topics.

If you find this dialogue intriguing, then welcome to our table. Please subscribe; write articles; write letters ... and do have some more of this divine fruit, my dears!

Persephone (and her minions)

ARADIA and the Revival of Modern Witchcraft

by Chas S. Clifton

Writing the history of religion often means simply writing a history of texts, of holy books. Yet Neopagan Witchcraft, or Wicca, has no defined holy books: the nearest approximation, the Book of Shadows, is more a “concept than an object,”¹ Wicca is a religion without scripture—and proud of it. In fact, modern Witches employ their very lack of authoritative scripture to distinguish themselves from the scriptural traditions that surround them in Europe and North America. In their own form of quasi-tribalism, they speak like contemporary members of old tribes who scorn the written ‘Word’ so often used to destroy their cultures. Followers of ‘religions of the Book’ may react to the Neopagans as a historian of religion wrote about the Zuni Indians of New Mexico: “We find ourselves surprised that these people are making comparisons of themselves with us, that they are using us and writing, our emblem of civilization, to state their own superiority.”² Pagans see this lack of scripture as something positive, however. It reinforces the necessity of personal experience, either spontaneous or evoked through ritual. In addition, doing without scripture, like performing ritual in the nude (‘skyclad’), reinforces the cultural critique embodied in the word ‘witch.’ It turns the literate, often college-educated, modern Witch into a ‘noble savage.’ We see a parallel, no doubt, in many Witches’ expressed preference for the amorphous cultural label ‘Celtic,’ for Celtic-speaking peoples were among the original ‘noble savages’ of the Greco-Roman world.³

But the difference between Neopagan Witches and Zunis (or members of other societies that existed without writing until recently), is that the Craft as we know and practice it grew up within a highly literate civilization. The influence of earlier books on its founders was immense; and the first public Witches — people such as Gerald Gardner, Doreen Valiente, Ray Buckland,

Arnold and Patricia Crowther, Alex Sanders — either wrote books themselves or let other writers interview them. One prolific Wiccan writer, Stewart Farrar, was already a veteran journalist and novelist when he was initiated. Since the 1960s, in particular, dozens of books by practicing Witches have arrived on bookstore shelves. Writing, together with ritual design and performance, jewelry-making, blacksmithing, and other forms of creative work, is a major road to Wiccan recognition. As the anthropologist Loretta Orion observed, “Competent creativity is the very currency of prestige at gatherings and within covens.”⁴

While the Craft lacks scripture, therefore, it has plenty of written sources. And perhaps the multiplicity of written sources works against any being accepted as ‘canonical,’ although some books, such as *The Spiral Dance*, might be called demi-scriptures. *Aradia*, while not scriptural, has certainly been inspirational in the Wiccan revival. Thus arises a paradox: the same people who insist that the the Craft is beyond ‘book learning’ typically buy, own, and read lots of books. As Margot Adler observed in *Drawing Down the Moon*, “Most Pagans are avid readers ‘scholars without degrees.’”⁵

What is more, we write books. And for generations we have been dependent on books such as *Aradia* in creating our own scripture-less religion. “It’s better to get training from experienced people, but lacking that, we just stole it out of every book we could,” one Wiccan priestess told Adler during her research.⁶ (The speaker’s playful use of the verb ‘stole’ also reinforces the outlaw self-image of the Craft.) Of all these books, setting aside works of ceremonial magic with their essentially Neoplatonic outlook, *Aradia* is the oldest to have wide currency as a source for a more or less democratic folk religion. (Jules Michelet, for instance, may have in turn influenced Leland — see below — but few modern Pagans have read Michelet.) Not only did *Aradia* inspire Gerald Gardner, Doreen Valiente, and the other founders/revivers of twentieth-century Neopagan Witchcraft, it continues to serve as a reference, check point, and inspiration for others. Likewise, those who also claim to be revealing an authentic Italian Witchcraft must perforce match their alleged traditions against *Aradia*.

People who know *Aradia* respect it, at least as a ‘foremother,’ but, ironically, *Aradia* and its author get a lot of deliberate disrespect as well. Perhaps this ambivalence reflects insecurity about the modern Craft’s claims to be an authentic revival, if only in spirit, of the Pagan past. Or, as Doreen

Valiente suggests, it was “too strong meat” for many modern Witches who copied Gerald Gardner’s “rather namby-pamby sort of pacifism,” she said. “Modern witches [of the 1950s-1960s] loved the worship of the Goddess Diana; but they were not so happy about the identification of the Old Horned God with ‘Lucifer, who had fallen.’ The charges of devil-worship and Satanism were already being levelled at us, and we wanted to do all we could to avoid them.”⁷

Misreading Aradia

Especially in electronic environments, requests from newcomers for information about the Craft are usually met not with personal referrals but with suggestions to read certain authors, such as Adler, Starhawk, the Farrars, Scott Cunningham, and others who “won’t get them into trouble,” as one friend put it. Many covens require completion of reading lists that include how-to books (e.g. Cunningham’s), historical works on ancient Pagan religions, and even novels that create a Pagan or witchy atmosphere for their readers. Today, from what I have seen, *Aradia* is not likely to be on those reading lists. Ironically, for a religion that claims to be the oldest on earth, Leland’s book may be too old-fashioned. That was not always the case.

The first small group of books on modern Witchcraft were published in the 1950s, notably Gerald Gardner’s *Witchcraft Today* (1954, with its introduction by Margaret Murray). For the Wiccan historian Aidan Kelly, one early and influential book was *Witches Still Live*, by Theda Kenyon, which contained “a detailed and able summary of Leland’s *Aradia*.”

“Here were people who had believed that sex is good, as I did, and who had been oppressed by the Church for it, far worse than I had been,” Kelly wrote. “They had believed not in a god but a goddess, Diana, who had created the universe, and in a female messiah, Aradia, who had brought mankind a gospel of magic, of naked meetings under the full moon, of sexual love, of rebellion against oppressors. This was pretty heady stuff for a badly repressed 14-year-old. ... Since I felt utterly isolated from the rest of humanity — such was the typical state of bright teenagers in the 1950s

— it was a source of some moral support to know there had been others in the world who had opposed the Church, and for good reason.”⁸

During 1960s, when with only a few exceptions modern books on Witchcraft were still either rare or else lightweight mass-market paperbacks with titles like *The Naked Witch* and *Witches U.S.A.*, many future Witches first encountered *Aradia* and other important early works in their local libraries, as Doreen Valiente had done roughly fifteen years earlier. Gwyneth Cathyl-Harrow, a Canadian Witch whose family immigrated from Wales when she was in her teens, recalled, “When I first read Leland’s *Aradia*, I was fifteen years of age, a very unhappy teenager in a desperate phase of life, and *Aradia* was the only written source of advice on what Witches actually did; all other information I had was by word-of-mouth. This was 1967, and even Lady Sheba’s *Book of Shadows* was still somewhere in the future.”⁹

I myself first encountered *Aradia* in 1970 while shelving books in the Reed College library, which was my part-time student job and a great way to learn how our culture organizes knowledge. At the time, I might have called myself a Buddhist, but really I was simultaneously seeking both sensation and enlightenment and would go to hear any ‘spiritual teacher’ lecturing on campus, whether Carlos Castaneda or Shunryu Suzuki-roshi. Any knowledge of the Craft or that there might exist a Western path of transformation rather than transcendence was still ahead of me.

I checked out *Aradia* and read it on a rainy afternoon by the fireplace in my girlfriend’s room in Kerr Hall. And I did not know what to think about it, for it fit into none of my existing intellectual categories. Was *Aradia* an avatar in the Eastern sense, the physical embodiment of a deity, as Prince Krishna was an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu? Then who or what was Diana other than an ancient Roman goddess? And Lucifer — it was hard not to flinch at that name which Christians equated with Satan — and I, after all, had been raised a Christian. These questions went onto the list of Topics To Be Investigated Later.

More than twenty years later, in November 1995, I was in another library reading *Aradia*, this time Leland’s original manuscript, stored at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, where his boxed papers occupy nine

linear feet of shelf space. Old city directories gave me the sequence of his addresses, and I had walked miles through the central city looking for them. Sometimes the building was there, sometimes not, but often an adjacent block of historic buildings gave a feeling for his era. I spent even more time turning pages of Leland's letters, essays, and manuscripts, everything from rejection letters written to would-be poets to his unpublished vision of what an Elizabethan witch's Book of Shadows *ought* to have looked like: *The*

*Was Aradia an avatar
in the Eastern Sense,
the physical
embodiment of a deity,
as Prince Krishna was
an avatar of the
Hindu god Vishnu?*

Witchcraft of Dame Darrel of York. I had read his *Memoirs* and some other works in graduate school when I began to study the history of the modern Craft; now I also sought out the two-volume biography written by his adoring niece, Elizabeth Robins Pennell.

Given modern Witchcraft's bookish side, then, the modern Craft's sometime discomfort with *Aradia* seems odd. Certainly this is an 'elder,' a 'crone' among books.

Leland anticipated by a generation

Margaret Murray's theory that an 'old religion' persisted after Western Europe became nominally Christian; consequently, attacks on her work have often included a swipe at his as well. For example, when historian Elliot Rose wrote *A Razor for a Goat* to refute Margaret Murray's hypothesis of an Anglo-French Old Religion, he also damned Leland's earlier proclaimed discovery of the northern Italian *vecchia religione* as an attempt to concoct a religion from a collection of incantations.¹⁰

But some Witches themselves, with or without outside help, have been quick to condemn Leland's work, thereby showing ignorance of its influence on their own tradition. For instance, a writer for *Green Egg*, reviewing the 1974 C.W. Daniel edition of *Aradia*, asserted that because Leland also wrote satire, *Aradia*, therefore, could not be taken seriously and its author, meanwhile, was in danger of becoming a "sacred cow ... not quite the great magus he is of late coming to be considered."¹¹ Likewise, a

May 1995 electronic-mail exchange in the Pagan/Wiccan section of CompuServe's New Age Forum illustrated the range of reaction to Leland and to *Aradia* (no one mentioned any of his other books on *la vecchia religione*). Responding to a questioner who mentioned finding *Aradia* digitized somewhere on the Internet, one forum regular replied, "It's well-known....mostly fanciful writing and not to be taken seriously."¹² Another respondent declared that *Aradia* is "loaded with Satanic types of things, but that was what Leland was buying at the time, since Witchcraft = Satanism was a very Victorian idea."¹³

Other forum members chimed in. One labeled *Aradia* "a mixture of paganism and Catholicism and shysterism the 'shysterism' came about when he paid a 'witch' for a copy of a book he had no way of verifying. She promptly made it up for him and collected her money."¹⁴ Another quoted Ronald Hutton, author of *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, for Hutton included a section on modern Pagan traditions in his history. Hutton had hypothesized that Maddalena, Leland's chief informant, did not exist: "To suggest that [Leland] was duped in turn by the mysterious 'Maddalena' and her pals is to do him an injustice: a man of Leland's energy, enterprise, fluency, and barefaced cheek [sic] was quite capable of producing such a work upon his own."¹⁵

Both the message-writers and Hutton appeared not to realize that Maddalena was only one of Leland's informants, albeit the one whom Leland called his "chief authority," and that *Aradia* was not his only book dealing with the survival of pre-Christian religion in northern Italy. To suggest that Leland's references to Maddalena in *two* books plus the publication of her photograph were all fictitious is to accuse him not merely of "barefaced cheek but of serious literary fraud. Yet there is no evidence for such fraud beyond Hutton's "argument from absence."

Contrary to the Pagan/Wiccan Forum member's statement implying that all Victorians equated witchcraft with Satanism, Leland repeatedly wrote in *Aradia* and elsewhere that *la vecchia religione* was emphatically not to be equated with Satanism: "The real *stregoneria* [witchcraft] of Italy, and especially of Tuscany, is *in se* absolutely heathen. It has nothing to do with pacts with Satan, or hell, or heaven. When the devil, or devils, are

mentioned in it, they are under false colours, for they are simply spirits, perhaps evil, but not being solely intent on destroying souls.”¹⁶

As for the financial payments to Maddalena and others, if ‘informants’ had not been compensated in some way, much less anthropological fieldwork would have gotten done over the past century. Anthropologists today still repay their hosts’ hospitality in various ways, including money, medicines, manufactured items, and help in negotiating the anthropologist’s own society.¹⁷ I even know of one case in Denver during the 1980s in which an anthropology graduate student regularly purchased groceries for the Wiccan coven she was observing. To assume that paid-for information is automatically tainted is naive. As for Leland, he assumed the persona of the open-handed gentleman when it helped his researches, jocularly describing himself as “a man worthy of confidence—none the less so since he was not ungenerous of pounds of coffee, small bottles of rum, cigars, and other minor requisites which greatly promote conviviality and mutual understanding in wisdom.”¹⁸ One cryptic statement he made about his field work suggests that he at least once paid a court fine to keep an informant (possibly Maddalena) out of jail, listing it in his personal expense journal as “Expenses in collecting Folk-Lore.”¹⁹

Hutton’s posthumous libel of Leland as a forger derives from his reading of Leland as a political radical. Leland indeed knew the work of the French historian Jules Michelet (1798-1874), who popularized the notion of “witch as social rebel.” But I believe Hutton is wrong to conclude then that *Aradia* was fabricated “to mirror Leland’s own [radical] political beliefs.”²⁰ (Margot Adler also misreads Leland as a “radical.”) For if we say that a political “radical” is someone who questions his or her society’s basic attitudes, Leland does not qualify. Based on extensive reading of his books and letters, I would characterize him as a moderate Republican in American terms. Not only did he work strenuously in support of President Lincoln’s Republican Party policies (which were not at all completely accepted by the Northern population at the beginning of the Civil War), but I see no evidence of his actively questioning the economic and social assumptions of the ‘Gilded Age,’ the late nineteenth century, when his own personal fortunes and reputation were at their peak. True, he enjoyed his associations with Gypsies, Tuscan witches, Algonquin Indians, and Voodooists, but I

doubt that he would have wanted his darling niece, Elizabeth Robins, to marry one. He exploited his political connections and literary connections as anyone might, asking a favor of General Grant during wartime to further Leland’s own oil exploration, dining with duchesses, staying in comfortable hotels when he traveled with his wife, Belle. While he was aware of reform movements as that for Women’s Rights — his lifespan almost exactly paralleled feminist leader Susan B. Anthony’s — he also commented in

Aradia that the “Woman’s Rights Woman” was “too enthusiastic.”

*His work, as he saw it,
resembled that of the modern
‘salvage archaeologists’ who
try to dig and record what
they can before the pipeline
is laid or the new office
building erected.*

Hutton also describes Leland as a “soldier of fortune,” for which I find absolutely no evidence, if we take that term to mean a mercenary or even someone fighting outside his native land for idealistic reasons. A couple of days’ youthful participation in one of the

1848 Parisian uprisings did not make him a soldier of fortune. Charles Godfrey Leland, whose occupation the 1867 Philadelphia city directory had upgraded to simply ‘gentleman,’ never appears to have renounced the privilege and position that family, education, financial inheritance, and his own hard work as a writer had given him.

Hutton’s basic objection to *Aradia* is that “nothing like it is in medieval literature.” But Leland never suggests that the “Gospel of the Witches” was a written document of the Middle Ages. Nowhere does Leland assert in *Aradia* or in the earlier *Etruscan Roman Remains* that a series of written texts preceded his own; rather, he saw himself as performing a sort of salvage operation, trying to save what could be saved before the onslaught of modernity. In fact, he described the Italian witches as “far too illiterate to comprehend my real object in collecting [in other words, they assumed he was learning sorcery only.]”²¹ His work, as he saw it, resembled that of the

modern ‘salvage archaeologists’ who try to dig and record what they can before the pipeline is laid or the new office building erected. When asked by educated, skeptical Italians why no one before him had published such material nor even knew of *la vecchia religione*, he replied by an analogy appropriate to his own middle-class American background: “Just the same might be said of every respectable white native of Philadelphia when I was there a few years ago, as to the Voodoo sorcerers, who, silent and unseen, conjured and worked in darkness among the coloured people of that city.

*... judging from his
reaction to the Spiritualists
and Theosophists,
Leland probably would
have found the Golden
Dawn to be
too conventional and
middle class compared to
his beloved Gypsies,
root doctors,
and streghe.*

a railway company), and who died in the early twentieth century, Leland had plenty of opportunities to watch society and folkways changing. In Italy, he sang a familiar refrain: “of late, the younger generation have ceased to take any interest in such matters [the old religion].” To use a metaphor he was fond of, he was collecting the ore, and it was someone else’s job to refine it.

What did any of us know about even our own black servants in their homes?

And the class which corresponds to the Voodoo acts in Tuscany, in opposition — unlike the American — to a powerful national religion [Roman Catholicism] which till of late ruled by the strong hand, and it fears everybody.”²²

As a man born into preindustrial, pre-Civil War America, who saw the Industrial Revolution marching ahead in his lifetime and participated in it (exploring for oil, doing public-relations writing for

Here we find perhaps the greatest reason why *Aradia* is not more respected by Neopagan Witches: Leland did not write it as a ‘how to’ book and call it *Helping Yourself with Tuscan Witchcraft* or possibly *Secrets of the Strega*. Instead, he repeatedly wrote that he was saving something which inevitably would pass from the popular mind. And for all his love of the ‘picturesque’ Tuscan witches, Leland ultimately identified with the forces of modernity, progress, education, and so forth. As he said in *Etruscan Roman Remains*, his earlier work, “It will come to pass and that at no very distant day, when — although there will be no lack of people who will understand this book perhaps better than I do — there will not be a soul living who can *feel* it ... [when] every man and woman will be educated — and all the better for them — probably into something far more sensible than sentimentalism or superstition, but the ancient spirit in which the past was lived will be irrecoverably lost.”²³ When he wrote *Aradia*, which he saw as completing *Etruscan-Roman Remains*, (theology in the former, spells and rituals in the latter), Leland noted in his preface that he trusted “that these pages may fall into the hands of at least a few who will think better of them [than do those who think Witchcraft is nonsense].”²⁴ He regarded the work as a ‘rescue’ rather than as a sacred text or source book for modern Witches, even though it became the latter. I wonder what he would have said had he known of a new religion of which it could be said, “The first holy books of the Neopagans were anthropological texts.”²⁵ As a source book *Aradia*’s trajectory is not yet finished, as this new annotated translation shows.

Today’s Neopagan movement claims at least partially to recover that “ancient spirit in which the past was lived.” Moreover, its syncretic and postmodern nature seems removed from Leland’s hearty and optimistic late Victorian outlook. Today, ‘Victorian’ is rarely a term of respect except for houses.²⁶ And Charles Godfrey Leland, after all, was a Victorian writer, a contemporary of Mark Twain. To be ‘Victorian’ means, apparently, to be ignorant outside one’s narrow social sphere, wordy, sexually hypocritical, a follower of conventional Christianity (not hardly, in Leland’s case!), and so on. The only Victorians modern Pagans might acknowledge as influential are the magicians of the Golden Dawn. Here the irony deepens, for judging from his reaction to the Spiritualists and Theosophists, which he was perfectly aware of, Leland probably would have found the Golden Dawn to

be too conventional and middle class compared to his beloved Gypsies, root doctors, and *streghe*. (He shrewdly recognized, however, that the large role of women in Spiritualism was typical of heretical, magical, and radical intellectual movements.) But, at best, Leland is often seen today as a deluded old man, paying Maddalena to tell him the original ‘grandmother story.’

In the Craft, as many readers will know, a ‘grandmother story’ is a well-known genre of magical pseudo-history, best executed by the late Alex Sanders, the “King of the Witches,” during the 1960s when he fed the English writer June Johns a story about how as a ten-year-old boy in 1933 he walked in on his Welsh grandmother as she stood in a magic circle and was promptly initiated on the spot himself.²⁷ In other words, claims to have acquired magical training from one’s grandparents, while still made, are usually greeted with suspicion, Grandmother herself almost always being conveniently dead by the time such claims are made.

Leland’s motive, as I have stated, was not to write a “how to” book but to collect material that he thought was in danger of disappearing and to present it, inconsistencies and all. In fact, I would argue that the material’s inconsistencies argue for its authenticity. An alleged “old tradition” that seems too neatly worked out has probably been “massaged” and enlarged by someone with an eye for future book-buyers. Already we have seen how the basic published structures of Gardnerian Witchcraft (its calendar, ritual design, and so forth) have influenced allegedly ancient Welsh, Irish, Italian, and other variants of the Old Religion; books on these purported traditions come near enough to the Gardnerian model to be recognizably “Wiccan” while the appropriate ethnic sauce is ladled over them. The “Gardnerian model,” which I deal with more in the following section, has long served as a Wiccan touchstone. In his *Hippie Commie Beatnik Witches* Aidan Kelly describes, for example, how the group of San Francisco-area Neopagans that became the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn felt at first that only the practices Gerald Gardner described were truly “Witchcraft” even while defiantly arguing that “the authority for doing something comes from doing it.”

Aradia and the Modern Craft

Contemporary historians of Witchcraft generally give Leland less attention as a literary source than they give to Margaret Murray, the English cultural anthropologist whose 1921 book, *The Witch-cult in Western Europe*, her first of three on the subject, advanced the idea that a pre-Christian religion centered on the Horned God of fertility (deliberately mislabeled by churchmen as the Christians’ Devil) survived in Britain until at least the sixteenth century. Murray’s influence on the modern Craft is indisputable, even preeminent, but Leland’s is older. Murray, however, does not seem to have read *Aradia*, and I can think of several reasons why she might not have.

First, Murray was a British university professor and, primarily, an Egyptologist. Anthropology and archeology both grew as disciplines in the early years of the twentieth century, and one byproduct of their development was the tendency for anthropologists to read mainly the work of other anthropologists, and so on. Leland, by contrast, was an American, an amateur (albeit a highly recognized one), and a folklorist. Whereas Leland collected spells, legends, and so forth and gradually developed the idea of an “old religion” preserved by ethnic magical practitioners and uneducated Italians with whom he was personally involved, Murray’s Old Religion theory was the product of intellectual insight buttressed by reading in the historic witch-trial documents of England, Scotland, and France—highly selective and biased reading, according to her later detractors. She did not claim to be in contact with living practitioners.

Murray was a generation younger than Leland, and her insight came in Glastonbury in 1915, sixteen years after the publication of *Aradia*. As she wrote in her autobiography, *My First Hundred Years*, “I worked only from contemporary records [that is to say, records of the witch-trial period], and when I suddenly realized that the so-called Devil was simply a disguised man I was startled, almost alarmed, by the way the recorded facts fell into place, and showed that the Witches were members of an old and primitive

form of religion, and that the records had been made by members of a new and persecuting form.”²⁸

Murray credits “someone, I forget who,” with suggesting to her that “the Witches obviously had a special form of religion.” Doreen Valiente, a former member of Gardner’s ongoing coven and designer of enduring rituals, saw a deliberate evasion in that statement: “I think [Murray] was given some valid information under a promise of secrecy. ... One of the members of the old coven (Gerald’s) told me that ‘Margaret Murray knew a lot more than she had said.’”²⁹ The implication is fascinating, but we can only go by what Murray published. In her work from the 1920s-1930s, she makes no claim of having live informants, whereas Leland did.

Another clear indication that Murray worked independently and was not influenced by Leland is her depiction of the Old Religion as centered on the Horned God. It was no accident that her second book, published in 1931, was called *The God of the Witches*. Leland, on the other hand, while he investigated the survival of the ancient Etruscan male and female deities in folk magic, devoted *Aradia* to the cult of Diana, goddess of “rebels, outcasts, and all the discontented,”³⁰ adding various legends and magical practices concerning her as appendices.

Here two streams, Leland’s and Murray’s, important to the modern Craft come together. While it grew through spiritual inspiration and some (or little) through surviving folk practices, I have no doubt Dorothy Clutterbuck (1881-1951), Gerald Gardner (1884-1964), and the other British Witches of the late 1930s who gave the modern Craft its shape, used books as part of their inspiration and that their shelves held both Murray’s works and Leland’s. The female archaeologist provided much lore of the God while the male folklorist gave form to the religion of the Goddess.³¹

At this point, some readers may object that there is more to Wicca than the Gardnerian tradition. If ‘Gardnerian’ is defined as merely an initiatory lineage, then of course the answer is yes. But through his books and his followers’ books, Gardner’s influence extends far beyond that lineage. I support the argument that Aidan Kelly makes in *Crafting the Art of Magic*:

if you call your religion ‘Wicca,’ if you define sacred space by casting a circle, if you invoke the guardians of the four quarters and then invoke the God and/or Goddess preparatory to some kind of magical working, then you are in the broader sense a ‘Gardnerian.’³² By this definition, ‘Gardnerian Witchcraft’ has acted like a powerful magnet and polarized all the iron and steel in its vicinity. Other practices that may indeed have predated it have drifted towards the Gardnerian model. Some practitioners have chosen to define themselves in opposition to the Gardnerian Craft, but by doing so they are again admitting how strong its influence is.

*‘Aradia’ was, according to
people present at the time,
the principal Goddess name
used ritually
in the Gardnerian Craft
until the early 1960s,
when its publication
by one of Gardner’s rivals
led to a change.*

Aradia provided inspiration for the Charge of the Goddess, the primary invocation of (strictly defined) Gardnerian tradition. Gerald Gardner and other mid-century British Witches often constructed the formal parts of ritual texts from older texts although, of course, they would have created specific ‘workings’ extemporaneously. Stewart and Janet Farrar describe an early form of the Charge as chiefly from *Aradia* “followed by some

voluptuously worded extracts from Aleister Crowley. Doreen Valiente tells us that ‘she felt that this was not really suitable for the Old Craft of the Wise, however beautiful the words might be or how much one agreed with that they said; so I wrote a version of the Charge in verse, keeping the words from *Aradia*, because these are traditional’” (see below).³³ ‘Aradia’ was, according to people present at the time, the principal Goddess name used ritually in the Gardnerian Craft until the early 1960s, when its publication by one of Gardner’s rivals led to a change.³⁴

According to Valiente, Gardner was surprised at her recognizing his adaptations from *Aradia*, but, as I mentioned above, she had read it in her public library while a schoolgirl. Subsequently, she told me, a rumor commenced to circulate that copies of the original 1899 London edition “were rare because old Gerald Gardner had bought up all the copies he could lay his hands on and destroyed them.” But as she notes, the original edition was small and the book was not well known among British occultists.³⁵

Therefore, if Gardner’s Book of Shadows from 1949 includes invocations of Aradia and wording from the Gospel of the Witches (“Whenever ye have need of anything, once in the month, and when the moon is full ...”) and

*Buckland himself
mused on how odd it
was that Aradia
seemed to have
raised so little stir
among folklorists at
the time*

these invocations and ritual texts continued to be revised and re-used, we can see that the trajectory of Leland’s *Aradia* is far from complete.

Kelly goes on to suggest that the growing importance of the Goddess, the “concept that seizes the hearts of those who are drawn into the Craft movement,” came in the mid-to-late 1950s, coinciding with Doreen Valiente’s years as high priestess of Gardner’s coven and following the publication of *The White Goddess*.

This may be so; I also think that the

more Pagan wing of Dion Fortune’s Society of the Inner Light (including Christine Hartley and Charles Seymour) had something indirectly to do with it, as did Fortune’s novels that called for a return to Goddess-worship, such as *The Sea Priestess* (1938) and subsequent works such as *Moon Magic* (1956).³⁶ Eventually it becomes difficult to say what ideas came directly from books, what were “in the air,” and what might have arrived by more subtle and indirect means. Valiente, for one, admitted to being “very fond of Dion Fortune’s books. ... It is notable that her outlook became more pagan as she grew older.”³⁷

But there is no doubt that Valiente, initiated into Gardner’s coven in 1953, was aware of Leland’s importance to modern Witchcraft. Much of Chapter 2

of her book *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* is devoted to him (the rest to Margaret Murray, Robert Graves, and Charles R.F.Seymour), and she writes, “Probably the first major influence [on the lineage of modern Witchcraft] in relatively modern times is that of Charles Godfrey Leland.”³⁸ A short time later, when Gardner gave her responsibility for re-writing some of the coven’s key rituals, she took Leland’s translation of Aradia’s instructions to her followers (“Quando io saro partita da questa mondo/Qualunque cosa che avrete bisogna ...”) and, using the *Vangelo* for inspiration wrote her own poetic “Charge of the Goddess,” the verses beginning “Mother darksome and divine,/mine the scourge and mine the kiss...”³⁹ Later she also produced the prose version, subsequently circulated by the Farrars and other Wiccan writers around the world. As long as it is recited in circle, Leland’s work will live.

Even if ‘Aradia’ was no longer a secret name revealed to initiates, Gardner continued to acknowledge Leland’s book as a source for the Craft revival, according to the Wiccan writer Raymond Buckland, who was initiated together with his wife Rosemary in 1963 after a period of correspondence. “I first heard about the book from Gardner and Olwen. I was told at that time that it was unobtainable. It wasn’t something that [Gardner] pushed in the sense of suggesting that everybody should go out and seek a copy of it. One day in about 1963, I was downtown in New York and went into Samuel Weiser’s bookstore, which had a great second-hand department in the basement. I was delighted to find the book, and I read it,” Buckland said in 1995.⁴⁰

While disappointed at the “vengeful” aspects of Tuscan witchcraft depicted in *Aradia*, Buckland said, “I knew that whether I liked the book or not, it was important to have. I thought it was important that Leland had stumbled upon a coven or something that seemed to show that there was some sort of continuity, that there was some sort of existence of the Craft in Italy, whether or not it was the Craft as I had come to know it. I did what I think was the first reprint of it, which was in 1968 under the Buckland Museum of Witchcraft imprint.” In his introduction, Buckland himself mused on how odd it was that *Aradia* seemed to have raised so little stir among folklorists at the time, how Murray had ignored it, and how rumors of a vague conspiracy to suppress the book became attached to it, almost as though it had been “smothered at birth.”⁴¹

One Italian-American Pagan, Raven Grimassi, claims to carry on an 'Aradian' tradition founded by a fourteenth-century Italian prophetess who founded covens in various locations. Not surprisingly, Grimassi also claims that Leland got it all wrong. This mortal Aradia's followers escaped the Inquisition and maintained their Witchcraft religion until 1946 when Grimassi's mother brought it to America.⁴²

Kelly himself tried grafting the inspiration he gained from *Aradia* onto the eclectic Faerie Tradition of Victor and Cora Anderson (which in turn also owes much to Hawaiian *huna*), calling the result the "Aradian Faerie Tradition." He said he wished in 1991 "to create a fundamental theological document for the Neopagan Witchcraft movement" which involved expanding *Araida* "into a somewhat more complex story by fleshing it out with materials that were similar in outlook and intent. ... The Gospel of Diana now could supply the theology that the Faerie Tradition had lacked, and that Tradition could supply the practical details that the Gospel lacked. The combination worked well: it began to take on a life of its own, and by 1994 there were several dozen Aradianic Faerie initiates scattered across the USA."⁴³

Similarly, *Aradia* has inspired at least one feminist Wiccan 'Circle of Aradia,' not to mention the number of women who have taken it as their magical name. Witches continue to return to the original manuscript of *Aradia*, not just for its poetry but for its rawness.

Gwyneth Cathyl-Harrow, quoted earlier, who encountered the book as a schoolgirl, told me, "Since the winter I turned fifteen, I've offered the 'Invocation to Diana' to Her. Maybe those thirteen lines of translation into English are Leland's greatest gift to us. They work, you know. *They work*." Without the defiant quality embodied in *The Gospel of the Witches*, she went on, we lose a sense of the "older, wilder, less predictable magic."

Diana, remember, is depicted as the protectress of unfortunate men, criminals, and of women "who lead an evil life, and yet [thou] has known/That their nature was not evil, thou, *Diana*,/Hast still conferred on them some joy in life," as Leland originally translated one invocation.⁴⁴

Gwyneth continued, "*Aradia* sat fallow on my bookshelf until the summer of my Eldering as a Dianic Witch when I saw that the American Craft had effectively Disneyfied Diana—pulled her teeth, turned her from the powerful and omniscient Goddess into the benevolent Good Mother. Very few Witches were willing to take the risk of arguing with Her, let alone threatening Her."

In fact, I have had the threatening invocations that Leland collected held up to me by contemporary Pagans as evidence of *Aradia's* unreliability as a document of *la vecchia religione*. Leland himself knew better: such threats are common in classical and medieval magic and are reflected sometimes even today in the treatment of saints' images in popular Catholicism. A saint's statue might be removed from its place of honor, even buried, for instance, if he or she fails to respond to believers' prayers.

Gwyneth Cathyl-Harrow argues, and I concur, that something has been sacrificed in the cause of making Neopagan Witchcraft seem entirely safe, the attitude sometimes ridiculed as 'Bambi Paganism.' A magical practice that is entirely safe runs the risk of being flaccid and flavorless. It is hard to argue with the spirit of the times, however, and that spirit, as evidenced by product-liability lawsuits and the like, seems to be that all experiences should be safe and that if anyone suffers harm, someone else should pay money and pay a lot. Some of the old tribal people of the Pacific Northwest had a saying that Witches would do better to remember: "The world is as sharp as the blade of a knife." Our athames should be sharp too.

Sitting at his desk in Florence of the 1890s and contemplating the changing times, the *Fin de Siècle* as the turn of the century was being called, Leland predicted, "Yet a few years, reader, and all this [*la vecchia religione*] will have vanished from among the Italians before the newspaper and railroad, even as a light cloud is driven before a gale, or pass away like snowflakes in a pond."⁴⁵ Now we are ending another century, and *mirabile dictu*, his *Aradia*, newly translated and annotated, continues forward, valued even today by the wisest followers of the "new" Old Religion.

References:

1. Aidan A. Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic, Book 1* (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1991), xiii.
2. Sam D. Gill, "Nonliterate Traditions and Holy Books," in Frederick M. Denny & Rodney L. Taylor, (eds.), *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993 [1985]), 226.
3. From the time of the ancient Romans on to ours, however, the purpose of casting any other group of people as 'noble savages' has not been to glorify them so much as to criticize the writer's or speaker's own culture.
4. Loretta Orion, *Never Again the Burning Times: Paganism Revived* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1995), 71.
5. Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 37
6. Adler, 90. 7. Doreen Valiente, personal communication, 22 January 1996
8. Aidan A. Kelly, *Hippie Commie Beatnik Witches: A History of the Craft in California, 1967-1977*. (privately published, 1993), n.p.
9. Gwyneth Cathyl-Harrow, personal communication, 30 December 1995. Her reference is to Lady Sheba [Jessie Wicker Bell], *The Book of Shadows* (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1971).
10. Elliot Rose, *A Razor for a Goat* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 218.
11. Tom Kneitel, review of *Aradia: The Gospel of the Witches*, by Charles G. Leland, *Green Egg* 73 (21 September 1975), 11-12. In attempting to discredit Leland, Kneitel apparently misses the Civil War-era context of his political satires and seems unaware of Leland's forceful editorializing in favor of President Lincoln's war policies.
12. Turok (72274.2530@compuserve.com), "REPLY: "Leland, Charles?" CompuServe New Age B Forum, 5 May 1995.
13. Searles O'Dubhain (74750.221@compuserve.com), REPLY: "Leland, Charles?" CompuServe New Age B Forum, 6 May 1995.
14. Dennis M./Sysop (75325.1441@compuserve.com), "REPLY: Leland, Charles?" CompuServe New Age B Forum, 6 May 1995.
15. Ronald Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 301. Hutton's metaphor, "barefaced cheek," is singularly inappropriate since Leland wore a long, flowing beard for most of his life.
16. Charles Godfrey Leland, *Etruscan Magic & Occult Remedies* (Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1963), 199 [originally published as *Etruscan Roman Remains*, 1892].
17. See, for example, the many examples of mutual aid between the anthropologist Karen McCarthy Brown and the priestess Alourdes Margaux, described in Brown's book *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
18. Leland, *Etruscan*, 3.
19. Leland, *Etruscan*, 15.
20. Hutton, 301.
21. Leland, *Etruscan*, 5.
22. Leland, *Etruscan*, 11.
23. Leland, *Etruscan*, 123. Emphasis in the original.
24. Charles Godfrey Leland, *Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches* (London: David Nutt, 1899), xi.
25. J. Gordon Melton, personal communication, 21 November 1995.
26. Real estate agents in my area tend to describe as "Victorian" any house built before 1920, even though Queen Victoria died in 1901. But in Colorado "Victorian" is as old as you will find.
27. June Johns, *King of the Witches: The World of Alex Sanders* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1969), 13-17.
28. Margaret Murray, *My First Hundred Years* (London: William Kimber, 1963), 104.
29. Doreen Valiente, personal communication, 10 July 1985.
30. Leland, *Aradia*, 106.
31. Robert Graves's *White Goddess* was influential too, but it was not published until 1948. By the mid-1960s, Graves was wryly aware of his influence on the modern Craft and claimed to have turned down the opportunity to be an active leader in it.
32. Kelly, *Crafting*, 177.
33. Janet and Stewart Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches* (London: Robert Hale, 1981), 42, n.8. A line-by-line examination of Leland's and Crowley's contributions to the Charge of the Goddess, written by Ceisiwr Serith, "The Charge of the Goddess: A Source Analysis," was published in *Enchanté* 21:22-25.
34. Kelly, *Crafting*, 170.
35. Valiente, personal communication.
36. Chas S. Clifton, "A Goddess Arrives: The Novels of Dion Fortune and the Development of Gardnerian Witchcraft," *Gnosis* 9 (Fall 1988), pp.20-28.
37. Doreen Valiente, personal communication, 25 July 1985.

38. Doreen Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (London: Robert Hale, 1989), 19.
39. Valiente, *Rebirth*, 61.
40. Raymond Buckland, personal communication, 13 October 1995.
41. Raymond Buckland, Introduction to *Aradia* by Charles G. Leland, (New York: Buckland Museum of Witchcraft & Magick, 1968).
42. Aidan Kelly, *Alphabetic List of Histories of Covens (Groves, Etc.) in the USA and Canada* (privately published, 1994), n.p. See also Raven Grimassi, *Ways of the Strega* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1995.)
43. Kelly, *Alphabetic List*.
44. Leland, *Aradia*, 24.
45. Leland, *Aradia*, 117

Chas S. Clifton has been practicing the Craft for twenty years and writing about it almost that long. He published Iron Mountain: A Journal of Magical Religion in the mid-1980s, is a contributing editor of Gnosis, and writes an irregular column, "Letter from Hardscrabble Creek," which appears in several Pagan magazines. He is the author of Ghost Tales of Cripple Creek (Little London Press, 1982), The Encyclopedia of Heresies & Heretics (ABC-Clio, 1992), and edited Nine Apples: A Neopagan Anthology (Artemisia Press, 1979) and four volumes of Llewellyn Publications' Witchcraft Today series: The Modern Craft Movement (1992), Modern Rites of Passage (1993), Witchcraft & Shamanism (1994), and Living Between Two Worlds (1996). His collaboration with Evan John Jones, Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance, is forthcoming from Llewellyn. He teaches at the University of Southern Colorado.

This page intentionally left blank.

This article was originally written as an introduction to
Aradia — A New Translation.
 Watch for it from Phoenix Publishing.

The GOLDEN ASS of Lucius Apuleius

by Maggie Carew

One of the classics of Roman literature, Apuleius' *Golden Ass* freezes, like a snapshot, a moment in time which was of crucial significance to the history, not only of Graeco-Roman Paganism, but of western religion in general. I have used Graves' translation of this work for my quotations since Graves translates 'sense for sense,' as King Alfred put it, producing an elegantly readable text. The original Latin is both difficult and idiosyncratic, and Apuleius uses both archaic expressions and neologisms for effect. The dialogue of uneducated people is slangy and probably reproduces quite faithfully the way they actually spoke. Hanson's version has the original Latin on one page and his more literal translation opposite. He has copious notes, including many on style. He points out, for example, when Apuleius is imitating or quoting another author. If you want to make a serious study of this work, Hanson is your man. But if you just want a good read, I recommend Graves.

The original name of this work was *Metamorphoses*, which means 'Transformations'. The better-known title of *The Golden Ass* became current toward the end of the 4th century and has been attributed to St Augustine; the term 'golden,' in the context of classical idiom, being used in the sense of 'metaphysical' or 'supernatural.' It is considered by scholars to be the prototype for the novel, and as such is the only such work in Latin to have survived in its entirety, although fragments of others do exist. The book takes the form that came to be known as a 'picaresque' novel: one in which the protagonist, who in this case narrates in the first person, goes on his travels, having episodic adventures and meeting people who tell stories which he records. With the notable exception of a long and detailed version of the tale of Cupid and Psyche, Apuleius' stories are about ghosts and murders and sex on the sly; bawdy and often very funny, but not (at least on

the surface) particularly uplifting. They are, by and large, not original stories either. In previous ages familiar tales were endlessly reworked and the writer's art consisted in making them fresh and new and, most important, relevant for the times. Apuleius' stories are scurrilous old chestnuts, which have continued to be re-worked by great writers such as Boccaccio.

I believe that Apuleius wrote this book as a popular novel because he wanted to reach a more general audience than a scholarly dissertation would, and that, like the novels of Dickens, it was widely influential because it was widely read. His other works are all more or less academic in nature. To put it bluntly, he had an axe to grind — a hidden agenda, as the modern phrase goes.

In the second century of the Common Era, Rome was approaching the zenith of its civilization and Greece had declined to the status of an imperial province. Apuleius was born in a Roman city on the North African coast, well-educated and well-to-do; a Roman citizen with all the rights and privileges that implied. He describes, however, a very different world from the high civilizations we were taught to admire. As Lucius, his alter ego in the book, travels about the 'old country' of Greece, which had inspired so much of what is admirable in Roman culture, he meets only greedy, ignorant, superstitious people of every class. Apuleius also presents quite a negative image of the Olympic gods and goddesses, and has little good to say about the various religious practices which he encounters in his journeys either. These implied criticisms of classical Pagan religion have coloured the assumptions of our culture ever since. When I first read this book, I remember asking my classics teacher at school: If the Greeks and Romans were supposed to be so smart, how could they believe in these awful gods?

The student of history should keep in mind that this is a comic and satirical novel, and as such should not be taken too literally as an accurate portrayal of life in the world of late antiquity. In every age there are silly and superstitious people, as well as high-minded souls, mystics, intellectuals, moralists and skeptics. Apuleius was contemporary with Hadrian and the Antonine emperors, men renowned for wisdom and virtue, and yet he presents us with a cast of characters who are all foolish and venal. What appears to be a cross-section of his society, from slaves and outlaws to

priest and the kind of people who go to dinner with “everybody who is anybody,” is neither an accurate nor a fair sample. There are no Stoics or other serious philosophers, not even the ordinary, everyday, decent human beings who make up a large percentage of every population. All the priests are degenerate, all the men are vain and arrogant, all the women will commit any crime to assuage their sexual passions, all the outlaws are mindlessly cruel.

The wife of one of Lucius’ hosts is a mistress of powerful and malign magic who derives her powers from “the blind violence of the gods who have been coerced.” Lucius seduces one of her slave girls and cajoles her into letting him watch this sorceress transform herself into an owl. She accomplishes

*When I first read this book, I
remember asking my classics
teacher at school: If the Greeks and
Romans were supposed to be so
smart, how could they believe in
these awful gods?*

this by rubbing a salve into her skin “from the soles of her feet to the crown of her head,” but when Lucius tries to do the same with an ointment stolen by his sweetheart for the purpose, alas, she has brought him the wrong jar and he is transformed not into a bird but into an ass. This is not the cute Sicilian donkey who is patient and gentle and intelligent. The ass of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor was large, powerful and believed to be sexually insatiable. It was not so much tamed as broken; sometimes gelded (Lucius is threatened with gelding in two episodes), and sometimes used to produce the more tractable horse/ass hybrid, the, mule. So transformed, Lucius continues to travel and has adventures, but now, although he still has the consciousness and understanding of Lucius, he experiences the extreme hardships of the life of a beast of burden, beaten and abused even by slaves.

In his animal form he continues to recount stories which become progressively more grotesque. At last he is chosen as the instrument of execution of a female criminal. She is to be raped by him in the theatre as part of a public spectacle and then eaten alive by wild beasts. Driven to desperation by embarrassment and horror, not to mention by fear for his own safety, Lucius manages to escape by bolting from his pen. But in his wild dash for freedom he runs over a cliff and falls onto a deserted beach where he lies, knocked senseless, until long after sunset.

With only two chapters and a brief postscript to go, the style and tone change abruptly. “I can hear my readers protesting,” Apuleius admits. “... are we going to have to allow an ass to lecture us on philosophy?”

Regaining consciousness at last, Lucius washes himself seven times in the sea (in accordance with the practice of the Pythagoreans) as the full moon rises over the water. Then, purged by his suffering, he prays in his misery to Isis, “sole sovereign of mankind,” invoking her by many names before finally falling asleep, whereupon Isis appears to him in a dream. He describes her in detail: her clothing, the ritual objects she carries, her fragrance. She addresses him at length. She describes herself as “Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of the elements ... the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are. ... Though I am worshipped in many aspects, known by countless names, and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole earth venerates me.” She claims to be foremost among the heavenly beings: the mightiest of deities, and the queen of the dead. Her rule extends beyond the starry heights of heaven, the health-giving breezes of the sea, and the plaintive silences of the underworld: “My one person manifests the aspect of all gods and goddesses,” among whom she numbers such major deities as Cybele, Athene, Diana, Proserpina, Ceres, Juno, Bellona, and Hecate. If this sounds familiar to you, it should: it is the model on which the Wiccan Charge of the Goddess is based.

At last comes Lucius’ chance to be changed back into a human being. Isis provides him with detailed instructions to receive his human form again, while taking part in a ritual on her festival day. In gratitude Lucius, now speaking in a more elevated style, seeks initiation into her priesthood, as Apuleius himself is known to have done. He looks forward to spending the

rest of his life in the service of Isis and Osiris.

The allegory is clear: only through true religion and purity of life may one become truly human. Apuleius is clearly writing with the intent to proselytize. Turn away from the darkness and superstition of Fortuna, whose service is fit only for beasts, and serve Isis, the One True Goddess. Although he may seem to be preaching a form of monotheism (in the second century, an idea whose time had certainly come), this form of devotion is technically known as 'henotheism': the veneration of one favoured deity chosen from among many.

For the purposes of this paper, let us assume that the *Golden Ass* is not an ill-organized collection of scabrous tales loosely hung on the ludicrous story of the Man-turned-Ass, but rather is the serious confession of an Apuleius saved from the errors of the flesh by the grace of Isis, and desiring to thank the goddess and convert the reader. Apuleius is clearly devoted to the worship of Isis and, by comparison to her, the other Roman deities serve humanity poorly if at all. Gods and goddesses alike, they are far more interested in advancing their own needs than in helping or protecting their mortal supplicants, and they expend the bulk of their energies protecting themselves from the results of their own misbehaviour and the wrath of the other deities. Nowhere in Apuleius is this more apparent than in the story of Amor and Psyche. In her torment the pregnant Psyche invokes Juno as saviour goddess, as the protector of women in marriage and childbirth, and particularly as the guardian of "pregnant women in peril." But she receives no support from Juno, for although she is the queen of the gods, Juno is unable to help lest she be embarrassed by setting herself against the will of her daughter-in-law Venus. Venus herself is unable to help because she has no power against her "enemy Temperance," whom she has so often offended precisely because of her son Cupid's extravagances. Although Jupiter, the very king of the gods, is often invoked by travellers as "guest god" and "the special protector of guests," his name seems to carry little weight with those who rob and otherwise abuse unfortunate travellers.

The emergence of the Egyptian Au-Set as the universal Queen Isis is one result of the Roman hegemony in the civilized world of the time. As the Empire grew, it took in more nations and became more culturally diverse

and, to its credit, showed a remarkable tolerance toward exotic religions, not unlike that experienced by minority religions in our own age. The Jewish religion, for example, was (except for the Roman military responses to

If this sounds familiar to you, it should: it is the model on which the Wiccan Charge of the Goddess is based

Jewish military rebellion in 70 and 132ce) well tolerated, and Jews made up nearly 10 percent of the population of the Roman Empire. Christianity was, for the most part, regarded with an open mind as well. Such persecutions as occurred were for political rather than theological reasons: since Christians felt that they were on a 'mission from God' to convert the world to the 'right' religion, they often refused to compromise in the matter of public religion. But since these observances served as an affirmation of national identity, and as an acknowledgement of the provenance that watched over and maintained the Empire, to refuse to take part in public ritual was the Roman equivalent of 'un-American' behavior, and was regarded with the same suspicion. By way of contrast, Apuleius makes it clear that Isian religion was prepared to be accommodating. While Isis was the 'true' name of the Goddess, she was worshipped by many names, and from this it can be inferred that 'other' gods and goddesses were understood not to be 'wrong,' but merely 'local.'

In *The White Goddess*, Robert Graves suggested that we look at the icon, rather than at the words. The idea makes me think of those games where you have to invent captions for cartoons; the captions can be wildly different from each other, but the cartoon remains the same. Consider for example the universal icon of the mother and child. Add a father figure, usually in the background and evidently of less importance — at least to the artist. This is an icon of Isis with her brother/consort Osiris, and their son Horus. Or of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Or of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (the Spirit certainly being grammatically feminine). The nominal identities

of the figures shift, but the meaning of the triad (and its origin) remains unchanged.

Syncretism, of course, was the province of all deities, and Isis was not the only one to be identified by devotees with popular local gods or goddesses. In Apuleius, for example, the eunuch priests of Cybele attempt without much success to characterize their own deity as Bellona, Atargatis, Astarte, and even Dionysos. But these priests and their goddess are a sorry lot, and their attempts at syncretism are a travesty. Lucius comments that the priests and those who follow them behave “as if indeed, the gods’ presence was not supposed to make men better than themselves, but rather weak or sick.”

*The people of the 5th century
Roman Empire were apparently,
like Apuleius, willing to give up the
worship of all their former
Pagan deities — except for Isis.*

There was a good deal of other syncretic activity going on in the cosmopolitan Roman Empire. The Christianity that emerged from the ecumenical Council of Nicea (325ce), at which the Nicene Creed was formulated, was clearly very different from the gospel accounts of an evangelical rabbi from Galilee who aroused the animosity of the Judean establishment. The stature of Jesus had, in 300 years, evolved from ‘Christos’ (the Greek word for ‘Messiah,’ which means ‘The Anointed One,’ a title implying that the bearer is a royal heir to King David, and capable of ‘saving’ the Jews by reestablishing the Israelite nation) to an actual deity, being declared ‘of one substance’ with God himself. The patronizing Christian belief that the Jews will be converted at the Second Coming of Christ is based on a failure to grasp the fact that Jews (and, later, Muslims) are true monotheists, and that to them the deification of Jesus of Nazareth — by Roman gentiles who had only a few short years before been making

gods of their emperors — must have seemed an act of blasphemy. A century later, Mary (an insubstantial figure in the canonical Gospels) was, at the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), giving the title ‘Theotokos’: Mother of God, and no devotee of Isis could have missed the implications of this title. The people of the 5th century Roman Empire, who by this time were all nominally Christians, were apparently, like Apuleius, willing to give up the worship of all their former Pagan deities — except for Isis. And so Isis was, by popular demand, given a different name and inserted whole into the pantheon of the new imperial Christian religion.

Much later, European Christianity underwent another major transformation in response — as ever — to social ferment. Beginning in 1517, when Martin Luther championed the causes of Nominalism and Humanism by nailing his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenberg, the popular folk beliefs that had accumulated to Christianity over the centuries were intentionally and rigorously excluded from the new Protestant canon, and regarded with deep suspicion by the post-counter-Reformation Roman Catholics. Everything feminine was excoriated, and Mary was removed from the icon by the Protestant reformers. For two thousand years or so our culture had had gods (and at least one goddess) that actually liked people (even if their inquisitors occasionally did not). But Evangelical Protestantism placed its emphasis on the Old Testament and on the book of Revelation, both of which describe God as an arbitrary and vengeful thrower of thunderbolts. We make the gods in our own image, and we get the gods we deserve.

The history of religions abounds in ironies. Who would have guessed that Apuleius’ hymn to the one true Goddess would be adapted in our century for the worship of the Goddess of the Witches? If we as Wiccans would learn from church history in order to avoid repeating it, we need to do some serious scholarship. I think we can study history and philosophy and comparative theology without producing a rigid orthodoxy. I think we need to acknowledge that other religions have validity and are worthy of respect (bearing in mind that all of them, including ours, have a lunatic fringe). I think we need to understand why we have chosen the Wiccan path and exactly why we repudiated our birth religion (if we did). Most particularly I fear we will never win for the Craft the respect it deserves as a religion if all we have to present to a skeptical world is either a post-hippie, sweetness-

and-light flakiness that is not very useful when life gets real, or a kind of terrorist cabal which seems to believe that Fortuna and her Nemesis are actually a good idea. We could begin right here, with Apuleius' *Transformations* of Lucius, a book written for a general audience; entertaining, spicy, and full of inferences waiting to be drawn.

Bibliography:

The Transformations of Lucius, otherwise known as *The Golden Ass*. translated by Robert Graves, revised by Michael Grant. London: Penguin, 1990.

Metamorphoses. translated and edited by J. Arthur Hanson. Cambridge: Harvard UP: Loeb Classical Library, 1989.

Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess*. UK: Faber & Faber, 1948. (there are later, revised and expanded editions)

Articles on 'The Nicene Creed', 'Apuleius', and 'The Golden Ass'. *Encyclopedia Americana*. USA: Grolier, 1994.

PAGAN DEISM: Three Views

by Margarian Bridger

Most discussions of the variety of Wiccan beliefs start by assuming that there are two basic positions: either one believes literally in personal, named deities ('deist', in the common parlance), or one does not ('non-deist'). The more I talk to non-deist Witches, the more I believe that this is an oversimplification. I'd like to suggest a new model, using not two but three endpoints, to which I have assigned primary colours for convenient reference.

Red: The first of these endpoints is the orthodox deist position: the gods are personal, named, individual entities, with whom one can communicate almost as one would with human beings. They may or may not be humanlike. They exist in a way ('level', 'plane', or 'dimension') that is far beyond human comprehension, but their existence is objectively verifiable.

Blue: Deity exists. It is the Ultimate Sacred / Great Mystery / Source. It is so great, so subtle, so all-encompassing, that we cannot hope to comprehend more than a tiny fraction of it. Being ourselves human, we relate best to things that are humanlike, and so we have 'the gods': humanlike metaphors or masks which we place upon the faceless Face of the Ultimate, so that through them we can perceive and relate to a little of It.

Yellow: The gods exist only as constructs within the human mind and imagination. They are Truths — valid ways of making sense out of human thought and experience, personifications of abstracts that might otherwise be too slippery for the human mind to grasp — but they are not Facts; they have no objectively verifiable existence. Like other abstracts (e.g. Freedom, Democracy, Love, Truth) they enrich our lives and are worth believing in,

but it is naive to think that they have any objectively verifiable existence. It doesn't matter that the gods aren't factual; they're true, and that's what's important.

Now, let's arrange these endpoints in the shape of a triangle, with Red at the top, and Blue and Yellow at the left and right of the base.

Many people's beliefs don't fall precisely on one of these endpoints, but somewhere along one of the edges, or even in the middle. A person's beliefs

may change from moment to moment, or may remain fixed for years.

Wiccans can work the same magic, share the same rituals and language, and practise the Craft side by side without ever noticing that what is literal fact for one is metaphorical truth for another.

Eco-feminist Witches, to whom the Earth is the living body of the Goddess, mostly cluster along the Green edge, between Blue and Yellow; those who believe in transcendent deity are along the Purple edge, from Red to Blue. Those who relate to the gods in a very personal way, but are agnostic about Their nature, are probably the Orange edge. Most

Jungians cluster near the Yellow point; pantheists are mostly Blue or Green. A totally agnostic Witch is an earthy shade of mud-brown; an atheistic one must be on the Yellow tip.

Yet even this is an oversimplification. Two Witches who cluster very closely on this triangle might have very different beliefs about reincarnation, or about the nature of magic; two who are widely separated on the triangle might have identical beliefs on these topics. For most of them, additional axes in another dimension would be needed; some would require entirely

independent complex maps. Nevertheless, let's take the triangle as a working model for the moment.

This triangle is about conscious beliefs, those which we can analyze and put into words. But Wicca is, first and foremost, a mystery religion. The more deeply we participate in the Mysteries, the less relevant distinctions of belief and interpretation become. We can represent this by drawing a pyramid upon the triangular base we have established. When we debate the differences in our beliefs, we are operating near the base of the pyramid. The more we simply let ourselves experience the Mysteries, and suspend our interpretation of them, the more nearly we approach the apex. The triangular cross-section becomes smaller, the different beliefs draw closer together. At the apex, they merge into a single point — and it is this point, this rare moment of total immersion in the Mysteries, that all religions have in common.

This suggests a further geometric model. That peak that transcends belief systems becomes the centre of a sphere. Our original triangle may be mapped onto its surface, together with the maps of the beliefs of other religions. More likely, it's a hypersphere, as every religion has common boundaries and areas of overlap with many others.

Beyond the sphere lies the void of non-religion. But how can we define this? Not as atheism; for atheism is itself a type of religion. Not as agnosticism; even agnostics can find a place for themselves within the sphere. Perhaps we can best define this as nihilism, or perhaps religious apathy.

From this macrocosmic view, let's now return to the original triangle. What does it mean for us, individually?

Most of the time, a Wiccan's personal beliefs about the nature of deity are almost invisible. Wiccans whose beliefs plot onto the triangle at very different places can work the same magic, share the same rituals and language, and practise the Craft side by side without ever noticing that what is literal fact for one is metaphorical truth for another. A Red may be more reluctant than a Blue or Yellow to mix pantheons, or to speak of the various

horned gods as if they were interchangeable. A Yellow may spend less energy than those of other colours on explicit worship, and more on explorations of human psychology. Yet such patterns become apparent, if at all, only over many months or years. It's easy for most of us to slip into the assumption that most of our friends and coveners believe as we do. The discovery that they don't can lead to feelings of betrayal and loss of trust. This can degenerate into name-calling, the Yellows being labelled 'not real Witches' and retaliating with such epithets as 'superstitious' and 'dogmatic'.

Unless we wish to discard our focus on mystery and experience, and instead become a religion of creed and dogma, we can't afford such battles. However, it is also unwise to bury our heads in the sand and pretend to a nonexistent homogeneity of belief. We must accept that all of us, in our various colours of belief, are Witches together. In order that we may be better able to serve as priestesses and priests, we need to explore and understand one another's beliefs.

What is the source of the different perceptions of deity? It's not a difference in experience; three different Witches might have very similar encounters with deity, but interpret them differently according to the colour of their beliefs. Neither is it purely a difference of personality types; if it were, the same individual would never move from one belief to another over time, without showing signs of major personality change. If there is any consistent distinguishing factor, perhaps it is a difference in needs.

The primary need of the Yellow Wiccan is the need for truth. Perhaps this person is naturally skeptical, or perhaps at some time they've suffered serious disillusionment. Either way, this person cannot believe without doubting, and cannot reconcile belief with doubt. The images and experiences of the Craft are as treasured by this type as by any other, but to them, a belief that cannot be questioned is vulnerable. A twig that cannot be bent can only be broken.

The gods, to the Yellow Wiccan, are symbol and metaphor, and the religious journey is the quest for self-knowledge. Through meditation, through myth and myth-making, and perhaps through direct conversations with that higher and deeper, but to them, still human, awareness which expresses itself as

'the voice of the god/dess', ritual becomes for the Yellow a tool for enriching human life and awareness, and for participating more fully in the world and its needs. Jungian psychology and its language may figure prominently in their rites, and the gods may at various times be perceived as specific aspects, as archetypes, or as an undifferentiated whole. Whether they cling to the time-tested value of traditional ritual forms, or create entirely new material, their task is to design ritual that works.

Faith is the primary need of the Red Wiccan. To them, the gods simply are. Whether the Red is naturally trusting, or whether they have repeatedly tested their perceptions of the gods and concluded that they have objective reality, they believe the many gods are facts of the universe, impossible to question or doubt without doubting one's own version of reality. Belief is not a question, it is the cornerstone from which all else of religion springs. How can one practise the Craft without such beliefs, they ask, except as a hypocrite? It simply wouldn't make sense.

*If there is any
consistent
distinguishing
factor, perhaps it
is a difference
in needs*

For the Red Wiccan, ritual is about interaction with the real, living Gods. Whether by seeking to re-create the ancient forms of Their worship, or by getting to know Them personally and devise new forms that will satisfy Them, everything focuses around one or more of the individual Gods. Sometimes They must be propitiated, at other times They seek to share only our laughter and celebration. Often They have advice to offer, or mysteries to share. But always, the focus is upon invocation of, and service to, the individual and personal Gods.

The Blue Wiccan is, perhaps, the mystic of the Craft. This person's primary need is to belong. Only in a whole and holistic universe, where all things are part of one great Pattern, can one be sure that one's own existence has meaning and purpose. The deity of such a universe must necessarily be whole and singular; it is only because of our own limited perceptions that we can only experience it by dividing it into many aspects and many forms.

The purpose of religion is to explore, and more actively participate in, the pattern which is the sum of these many parts.

A Blue Wiccan's favourite rituals, therefore, are those which advance our understanding of the Mysteries, and which let us participate more consciously in the monthly and annual cycles. Blues will likely favour magic which reshapes the patterns of the universe to their needs, or which helps them become more aware of those patterns in order to act more effectively as a part of them. Meditation, celebration, and cyclical or patterned activities appear often in this person's rites, as do efforts, both pragmatic and symbolic, to reshape the wholeness of the pattern where it is broken.

Whatever our individual beliefs might be, all of us need to have faith, to belong, and to know truth. All of us have the capacity, therefore, to understand the needs and attitudes of our fellow Wiccans whose beliefs might differ from our own. And that is just as well, as we are all part of the same religion. With mutual understanding, perhaps we can work together to help the Craft grow in directions which will serve the needs of us all, and of the gods, whatever we might each perceive them to be.

INSIDE THE SIEVE: A scholarly study of Neopaganism in the 90s

Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft

James R. Lewis, editor

State University of New York Press (SUNY), 1996

Reviewed by Kate Slater

Do you remember the cartoon of island natives spotting a boat and yelling, "Here come the anthropologists, quick, hide the television set!" Well, this is one of those books. It's an edited collection of essays about Neopaganism and Wicca, and it's not without its problems. Neopagans have experienced three waves of scholars: first sociologists, then anthropologists, and now, at last, religious scholarship (where the study of Neopaganism probably belongs), and this book contains essays and studies from all three disciplines. The authors are both pagan and non-pagan, but they are not always identified as such. In fact, the book contains little background material about the authors, or for that matter, the editor, James R. Lewis, who is only introduced by a spot of the back cover. Several authors are well-known pagans, and one, Dennis Carpenter, offers his qualifications. Sian Reid says that a version of her paper has been presented to the American Academy of Religion, and it is possible that some other studies were made as parts of their authors' thesis research — but in which discipline is unclear.

Had adequate background been included, this book might have been stronger. Did Lewis ask his authors for bios and was he turned down? More important, do we read these papers more objectively without knowing for sure whether the authors are presently living inside or outside the Neopagan sieve? I was less comfortable with the fact that the authors' countries of origin are not mentioned. Viewpoints can be coloured very differently from

country to country, and this can have a fairly significant influence on the information presented.

Lewis has collected a volume of 17 papers by 15 authors, running the gamut from a seventies religious tract on the Goddess to two papers that put the scholars into the sieve and analyze their methods and ethics. Of these 17 papers, only Jeffrey Kaplan's competent history of Norse Neopagan traditions, and James R. Lewis' account of Fundamentalist paranoia in fiction, fall outside the Wiccan/Neopagan circle.

So, what insights can we glean from these papers?

Of the fifteen authors only one totally avoids using the words Wiccan or Witch, but only four clearly self-define as some variant of Neopagan now or previously: Dennis Carpenter, Judy Harrow, James Baker, and Otter and Morning Glory Zell. So if this is a cross section of opinion, it may be OK to say the W-word, but not necessarily OK to be one. Apparently it is not OK to print the words "Horned God" in North America. Perhaps one doesn't even whisper them in a scholar's ear. About five of the papers mention male divinity, Gods or a God of the Hunt. Only the British paper suggests horns.

From the papers discussing theology, Neopagans are described as almost completely immanentist, Goddess primary and ecologically conscious, but otherwise diverse. Far more important, among the authors that discuss Craft history, almost everyone has decided that modern, religionist, white witchcraft in its current form began circa 1940 with Gerald Gardner building on the theories of Murray, Frazer and Leland. They've all accepted Aidan Kelly's explanation. Period. No further discussion.

We like to think that identifying as a Pagan is "coming home" rather than fulfilling the traditional Pauline model of conversion as a drastic change in response to outside influences. In "Embracing Jesus and the Goddess: Towards a Reconceptualization of Conversion to Syncretistic Religion," Christel Johanna Manning lists four subtler modern definitions of "conversion" and acknowledges that dual Pagan/Other still escapes the semantic net. To describe links between other religions and Paganism, Manning proposes the term combination — the blending of two or more

religions into a new syncretic worldview. Anyone doing ministerial interfaith work had better read this, since Manning seriously challenges our stance that we are not a religion of converts. Neo-Pagans trying to understand the complexity of belonging to more than one Tradition may also find this article interesting.

Kaplan's article on "The Reconstruction of the Asatru and Odinist Traditions" ends in 1993, missing the rejuvenation of the Ring of Troth but

*... although we talk a good line
about accepting the dark,
Neopagans, tend to externalize it
and drive it out. Her portrait of a
Wicca which is comprised almost
entirely of British Traditional
and feminist, largely separatist,
witches is ominous.*

otherwise seems to be the kind of history that would be helpful for many of our other Neo-Pagan branches.

Carpenter also has a strong paper on contemporary Pagan thought, and James Baker's paper, "White Witches: Historic Fact and Romantic Fantasy" is excellent history. Baker honestly discusses his early hopes that there really was a pre-Gardnerian Craft of the type we now know and his impatient dismissal of the lingering traces of the old cunning folk. I found his paper closer to my own feelings than any other.

In "The British Occult Subculture: Beyond Good and Evil," Susan Greenwood investigates the attitudes of Neo-Pagans and magicians to the concept of evil, concluding that although we talk a good line about accepting the dark, Neo-Pagans, even chaos magicians, tend to externalize it

and drive it out. Her portrait of a Wicca which is comprised almost entirely of British Traditional and feminist, largely separatist, witches is ominous.

A most interesting paper is Dennis Carpenter's second, "Practitioners of Paganism and Wiccan Spirituality in Contemporary Society: A Review of the Literature." In this, he reviews the scholars as much as their conclusions. What happens when we tell a scholar about ourselves? For one thing, we may not be as anonymous as we think. I tweaked Carpenter's list of studies by substituting Rabinovitch's thesis for the Midwestern tarot readers and then averaged the numbers of people surveyed. The average of ten studies

*We are a religion shaped by
many books. We like to tell
scholars our dreams: the way
we wish it could be.*

was 217 persons in each. If the two highest and two lowest populations are deleted, the average number in a study is 118 persons.

This is a problem for at least two reasons. First, I think the confidentiality guideline on what Wiccans can safely say about each other runs something like this: if a description of someone narrows that person's identity to within 100 persons, it may be fairly easy for a determined researcher to identify the person. So, if I say that I know a transit driver in my city who is Wiccan, it's a vague enough statement. If I say I know a woman transit driver . . . this cut it to maybe one in forty. Too close. In this volume there is a painful example of this. One researcher made identifications much too closely and another writer then quotes them in a different paper. Always assume that the researcher you are talking to is hot; that his research (your life story) is amazing stuff, and that it will be quoted in textbooks and other strange places for the next thirty years. It could happen.

Another problem with research on such small populations is that questionnaires self-select for the mavericks. I've had the chance to answer four or five study questionnaires. Mostly they wanted to know how I got to

be weird and which box described my net family income, so I threw them out. But let's say I'm Elvira from Moose Jaw and I believe in space aliens and I just love answering questionnaires: how much can one person bend the profile of Neo-Paganism?

Study populations are also the researcher's dilemma: one example of this is Shelley Rabinovitch's 1991 thesis research on Canadian Pagans, the basis for her paper, "Spells of Transformation, Categorizing Modern Neo-Pagan Witches." If the title of this paper had clearly said "Canadian", she might not have been savaged by a California reviewer over the limited scope of her information. Rabinovitch was faithful to her data, as scholars are supposed to be. In 1991, Canadian witches were clustered in a couple of places and scattered in ones and sixes elsewhere. Rabinovitch traveled 6000 miles to interview this scattered populace. If they failed to tell her what Californians take for granted, it wasn't her fault. I do believe that the self-selection biased her interview population, producing the extremely high incidence of persons reporting difficult or abused childhoods. My guess is that these rates are perhaps double what they would have been if the interviews had been absolutely random. But even half the rate she found would be stunningly high.

What happens when you lie to the scholar? Probably no one will believe you did so afterward. In 1980 one researcher is supposed to have been systematically hoaxed by a group of witches who didn't like her previous writing about Paganism. She is quoted in three papers in this book. What happens when the scholar lies to you? In 1978 a Wisconsin anthropologist did this quite shamefully, presenting herself as a seeker, recording the personal histories of witches she met in this way, and publishing her research with their Craft names attached. She is an authority quoted in two papers.

We are a religion shaped by many books. We like to tell scholars our dreams: the way we wish it could be. And, if they come back years later to visit us again, as Margot Adler did, we hope that what was published of our dreams has passed the vision to others, and now the reality has come closer to the dream. Books that describe us eventually shape us. Many authors were quoted or referenced in the papers in this book. Which authors are most significant? I made a preliminary count and weighted the references

with 1 for a mention and 2 for a more significant citation. In order the key references were: Adler and Starhawk (15 each), followed by Tanya Luhrmann (11) and Aidan Kelly (8)*. If we disagree with some of these authors, we should observe carefully what they have said about us, because their opinion is molding what the scholarly world thinks. If we disagree with them, perhaps we should say how and why, for the record, soon.

This is a book for the serious library. I may not agree with all of it, but I recommend it highly.

Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft
James R. Lewis, ed.
State University of New York Press (SUNY), 1996
ISBN 0-7914-2890-7 (pbk)

*Our two-bits worth concerning Aidan Kelly:

Ten years ago we were uncomfortable with the (then popular) belief that the traditions of Wicca went all the way back to the Neolithic. Nowadays we're equally uncomfortable with the (currently popular) notion that Gardner made up simply everything. A scholarly rebuttal of Crafting the Art of Magic is becoming seriously overdue. Already the air is far too full of derisive remarks about those Gardnerians who claim that they have evidence proving Aidan wrong, but the evidence (alas) is secret.

The Pom Editors

We Weren't Going to Publish Interviews, But

The Pom interviews a notorious pagan editor, John Yohalem of Enchanté: The Journal for the Urbane Pagan, which is available from him at P.O. Box 735, NY NY 10014, and has just published its twenty-second issue, "Rituals of Theatre/Theatre of Ritual," with articles on ancient Egyptian ritual theatre, the Vendetta motif in ritual and theatre, the Passion Play Project in New York, Antero Alli in California, and of course an episode of All My Avatars: The Pagan Soap Opera.

P: You've been coming out with this thing for how long?

JY: Seven years. No, eight. Sorry, eight.

P: It looks pretty grand.

JY: Yes; it costs me a fortune to print it. That's why I think the cover price is pretty reasonable. I just raised it to \$5.95.

P: I'm amazed you can get it out four times a year.

JY: Yes, I'd be amazed if I could do that, too. I never have. "Quarterly" is a figure of speech. When I say I publish quarterly, it means I publish in some of the quarters of the year. But not in all of them. Different ones each year; that's why I date each issue with different holidays from different ancient calendars, so no one can figure out how far behind I am. Of course, subscribers get four issues, they just don't get them all in one year. That's because I don't follow the Gregorian calendar.

P: Which one do you follow?

JY: The Maya calendar, which is about 18 months long and is based on the intersection of the planet Venus with the rising of the Pleiades.

P: And that's why you publish four times every 18 months?

JY: Well, that and the fact that I'm usually broke.

P: *Were you a pagan before you began publishing?*

JY: Oh yeah. I've been a practicing pagan since I was eleven. I started casting spells at eight, but it was when I was eleven that I made Pallas Athene my personal saviour. But I only got involved with Wicca and the pagan community in 1987, when I was living in Seattle. Before that I was solitary, not to say hermetic. I thought I was the only pagan. Well, outside of, say, the 600,000,000 polytheists in India. Then I met Laughing Otter through the Radical Faeries, and he told me some friends of his were celebrating the Mysteries of Eleusis on an island in Puget Sound. So we went, and there were 150 pagans there. You could have knocked me over with a sheaf of wheat.

P: *So you started a magazine.*

JY: No, first I studied for a year and a day with Leon's Outer Grove in Seattle. He had been Otter's teacher, and was High Priest of the coven Otter belonged to, and Otter took me to his house. And it was lust at first sight: One look at his library and I didn't care what he was teaching. But about the third or fourth class something dawned on me. (I'm kinda slow, but I talk fast so people won't notice.) He wasn't teaching me mouldy old spells; he was teaching me how to re-do my entire life. Anyway, I got to thinking, I've had all this stuff in my mind and I never dare bring it out to the world and show it off, and maybe it's time I did. So I learned how to do set type, and then how to lay out a magazine, and then a whole bunch of computer programs, all sorts of things. And I met all sorts of people, who showed me how and gave me discounts and gave me art and articles to run, and, incredibly enough, a lot of people seem to respond to my personal weirdness, which is very encouraging.

P: *Did your paganness, or witchness, help you? Did Pallas Athene?*

JY: I wouldn't be surprised if She had a hand in it. My paganness helped because after I found the witches, the pagan community, and they responded to me, it made me want to do it, to trust them even when I didn't trust myself. I wanted a family, and I sort of felt I didn't have one. I don't form lasting pair-bonds with anyone of either sex, and no group I'd ever tried to join had seemed to be my kind of people before. And the witches and pagans were. So I wanted to do something for them, even if it cost more than I could afford. I mean, I'd never dared risk money for anything before. It was my first leap off a cliff.

P: *And you flew. Or glided.*

JY: Well, I haven't landed yet. Let's be cautious and leave it at that.

P: *Where did you get the name?*

JY: That was a joke, of course. They're always jokes, to start with. Like in my pagan soap opera, All My Avatars. I think of a pagan joke, and then I try to imagine a character who would say such a thing, and then I think of a situation for the joke to appear, and then I have the bare bones of a plot.

...when angry witches who know nothing about history but have read Margaret Murray or The Chalice and the Blade say that most of the people in Europe during the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages were following a religion full of ancient, pre-Christian fertility rituals, I agree. But the religion was called Roman Catholicism...

And then I fall in love with my characters, and they develop personalities, and all these adventures just pop up. I'm sure it was the same for Dickens. The hard part is getting it all to tie back in, but that becomes the fun part, too. Um, what was your question?

P: *Enchanté: The Journal for the Urbane Pagan. That was a joke at first?*

JY: No, that was the punchline. The set-up is: What do you say when you first meet a witch? The answer, of course, is "Enchanté", which is French for "Enchanted," you know, like, "Charmed, I'm sure." Which is also a magical phrase, come to think of it.

P: *So when you meet a French witch ...*

JY: No, man, don't try it. I found out last time I was in Paris that no one says "Enchanté" any more except when they're being very very sarcastic. I mean, a guy I'd just fooled around with in a backroom introduced me to his lover, who was not pleased, and he looked at me and said, coldly, "Enchanté." And I thought, Oops.



P: But you kept the name.

JY: I had 12 issues done by then. I was stuck with it.

P: And why is it “The Journal for the Urbane Pagan”? Why not Urban?

JY: Well, everyone was talking about urban pagans for a while, which was a joke on the origins of the word “pagan”, which meant country-dweller, and was a sort of sneer by Christians, who began as a very urban religion, among the Jewish merchants in Roman cities and their friends, at the peasants in the countryside, the *pagani*, who still practiced fertility rituals. Of course, eventually the Christians absorbed the fertility rituals. That’s why when angry witches who know nothing about history but have read Margaret Murray or *The Chalice and the Blade* say that most of the people in Europe during the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages were following a religion full of ancient, pre-Christian fertility rituals, I agree. But the religion was called Roman Catholicism, and it hasn’t died out there yet. Anyway, in the ‘80s “urban pagans” meant city-dwellers who didn’t give a shit, who did magical things and didn’t fit any preconceived mold. “Urban shamans” was another phrase for them, marginal people, who somehow did something magical within the energies of the city.

P: And you weren’t that? You were urbane?

JY: Well, that started out as a joke, too, but when I began to think about it, it was right. Urbane pagans live in a civilized manner with others — we don’t put down beliefs we don’t share. The Urbane Pagan is the worshipper of the old Gods of the natural world who nonetheless possesses savoir-faire, who is on cordial terms with those who profess other beliefs, who can laugh at all things human and divine, but knows when to be serious, and how to do it. The meanings, urban and urbane, are related, but the implications are very different.

P: What Gods should editors pray to?

JY: Procrustes is the symbolic hero of editors. He was the nasty customer with a spare bed for guests: if they were too short for it, he’d stretch them till they fitted, and if they were too tall for it, he’d cut parts of them off. Theseus killed him, but his spirit lives on in every compositor.



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Rowan Fairgrove

What We Don't Know about the Celts

2

Ronald Hutton

The Neolithic Great Goddess:
A Study in Modern Tradition

22

Chas S. Clifton

Margaret St. Clair,
Forgotten Foremother of Pagan Science Fiction

36

Book Reviews

The Spell of Making
Castings: The Creation of Sacred Space
Diana Tracy

48



The Pomegranate

Editorial Staff

Maggie Carew, Stephen McManus, Fritz Muntean, Diana Tracy

Copyright

© 1997 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate

is published four times a year at the Cross-Quarter Holidays by *The Pomegranate*, 501 NE Thompson Mill Rd, Corbett, OR 97019.

Deadline:

The Solstice or Equinox preceeding each issue. See the inside back cover for our Call for Papers, and send to the above address for our Writers' Guidelines, or to our email address below.

Internet Home Page:

<http://www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/>
(email: antech@teleport.com)

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monodfield
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within the Craft. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included. In the interests of promoting lively discussion, we encourage both our writers and our readers to keep an open mind, and to be ready to explore a wide variety of outlooks.

Notes from the Underground

I am most pleased to see that so many of you have returned to read the second edition of our new journal. We have prepared for you a veritable feast of articles designed to entertain as well as to educate. Although thematic issues were never part of our original plans for this magazine, several of the writings here assembled for your pleasure might be thought of as having been inspired by Cleo, the muse of History (and one of my own distant cousins). One of these will transport you back to the world of the Ancient Celts — via the rich domain of ancient literature and modern archaeology, not the tawdry realm of cheap fiction (those of you wearing 'celtic' pentacles, kindly take note). In another we will examine the development, over the last century and a half, of today's widespread belief in a pan-European, monotheistic Great Goddess of the Neolithic. A third piece began life as a kind of obituary (an art form honoured in my kingdom), but it grew, not an unusual thing in my realm of Change, into a kind of capsule history of the early days of the Craft in North America.

In addition to these, we present another installment of our advice column as well as a review of two new, and most welcome, books on the creation of rituals and ritual space.

One thing that you will not, alas, find in this issue is a column of Letters to the Editor. Those of you, dear readers, who enjoy participating in the exchange of ideas are encouraged to take virtual pen in hand and begin this process by writing letters to us at once. My hard-working minions eagerly await your input.

We hope you find this issue as intriguing as the last, and we trust that you will also eagerly look forward to our third issue — three being an important number in my kingdom, both of magazines and of pomegranate seeds. We bid you welcome to our table: please subscribe; tell your friends; write articles; write letters ... and do have some more of this divine fruit, my dears!

Persephone (and her minions)

What We Don't Know About the Ancient Celts

by Rowan Fairgrove

When one says that one wants to study and, perhaps, reconstruct the religion of the ancient Celts, it is well to be clear about whom one speaks. 'Celtic' describes a language group which, over time, has divided into two strains — P-Celtic (Brythonic) spoken in Wales, Cornwall and Brittany and Q-Celtic (Gaelic) spoken today in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man. Celtic speaking people inhabited much of Europe for millennia and their descendants live on today. One must also be clear about the possible tools for such study that are available. As so many things Celtic comes in threes, so do our sources — archaeology, classical commentaries and the vernacular traditions of the Celtic countries.

Archaeology is the study of material culture. We dig a grave and observe that the body was accompanied by food, jewelry, a sword — we can't know that one particular necklace was beloved because of lifetime associations or exactly what the haunch of pork signified to those who interred the body. So we have 'real' facts, but they are definitely open to interpretation.

Classical sources are fragmentary, and each of the classical authors who wrote about the Celts saw them from their own particular perspective. Posidonius saw them through the lens of Stoic philosophy as primitives closer to the Golden Age than the more civilized Greeks; Caesar reported on them as a conqueror who continually needed to convince his government to support the war effort. Yet these sources are the only contemporary view we have of the living Pagan Celtic culture. We don't have any contemporary religious writings from the Celts themselves because, as Caesar tells us, they had a religious prohibition against writing things down (although they eventually kept trade-related records using Greek characters).

The vernacular traditions are those hints we can get of Gaelic and Brythonic cultures, through the annals compiled by Christian monks centuries after the

fall of Celtic Paganism from the 8th to 13th centuries, and in the folklore of the Celtic language areas compiled by scholars from the 17th century to the present. The early monks recounted tales of the pre-Christian history of Ireland and Wales for several reasons — to maintain legal precedents (despite their origins in Pagan times), to craft histories of their nations (for example relating them to the Christian notion of the Flood and Noah) and to satisfy local aristocrats who fancied the idea of ancient lineages or enjoyed hearing hero tales of their ancestors. The later antiquarians, tale-collectors and Celtic revivalists generally had their own agenda as well — often they were involved in a nationalist movement in the Celtic country in question. They were certainly Christian and saw ancient Celtic religion through that lens — witness the early Druid revivals of the 17-18th century which painted Druids as monotheists who had expected the birth of Jesus and were just waiting to hear word so they could convert. (An excellent essay by Dr. Michael Raoult on the early Druidic revivals can be found in *The Druid Renaissance*.)

Obviously, none of these sources is sufficient to give us a clear vision of the religious beliefs or practices of the ancient Celts. And I fear that even in aggregate, with the addition of the comparative study of other Indo-European religions, they are insufficient for more than a fragmentary understanding of a Celtic religious worldview. This paper will generally confine itself to study of the archaeological and classical source materials.

Who were the Ancient Celts?

When I speak of the ancient Celts, I am referring to the communities of people sharing linguistic and cultural ties who inhabited most of Northern Europe between 800 BCE and 400 CE. The folk of the Urnfield culture which preceded them may also have spoken a variety of Celtic, but they had not yet created the material culture that we identify with the Iron Age Celts. At the height of their expansion (4th-3rd centuries BCE) Celtic communities spread from Ireland to the Near East.

Hallstat culture (800-250 BCE), named after a type-site at Hallstat, Austria, is the name given to the material culture of the early Iron Age Celts. Their range spanned from the Paris basin to valley of Morava in Eastern Europe and from the Alps to the north European plain. During early Hallstat (800-600 BCE) there is little evidence of great distinctions of wealth in burials. A few people are buried with wagons and horse gear, rather more are warriors (both genders) buried with their swords, most people are buried with personal ornaments and pots containing food. Cemeteries are small and associated with small settlements, perhaps one family or a group of related families.

Then between 600-450 BCE things begin to change as Mediterranean luxury goods begin to appear. Hilltop forts and a hierarchy of rich graves begins to appear. These aristocratic burials are associated with much larger residences inspired by Greek architectural styles. Archaeologists have suggested that *paramount chief* burial is accompanied by inhumation in a wooden chamber with wagon and horse trappings as before, but now there would also be a wide range of imported goods including bronze wine drinking vessels, silk, gold,

The economy was based on conspicuous consumption and potlatch-style distribution of goods. . . . warrior societies arose whose wealth came from raiding the settled traders.

amber, glass and coral. A *vassal chief* would be similar but the goods are more of local manufacture without the wide range of imports. *Sub-chiefs* are again similar but less elaborately furnished with totally local manufacture. Below this status wagon burials are not present. This type of burial and the prestige goods economic system it represents was spread from Burgundy to the middle Rhine. The economy was based on conspicuous consumption and potlatch-style distribution of goods. This is an unstable system relying on a continuing stream of imports and exports. Around this core, warrior societies arose whose wealth came from raiding the settled traders. This was an unstable equilibrium which was unbalanced by political changes in the Mediterranean and population growth among the Celtic tribes. After the collapse, the Celtic migrations began (circa 400 BCE).

La Tène culture, known for its elaborate artwork, coincides with the last 50 years or so of Hallstat. It is this culture which was carried by the migration. Warrior bands moved southwards and eastwards toward the rich pickings of the cultures they had previously traded with. Rome was attacked in 369 BCE and the thrust continued into Italy. Delphi was attacked in 279 BCE by eastward moving bands who then continued on to Asia minor. Migrations in response to population pressure continued on throughout the next few hundred years, culminating in the aborted migration attempt of the Helvetii mentioned in Caesar's commentaries.

A drastic change took place during the eight year war with Caesar's Rome as hundreds of thousands of Celts were killed, sold into slavery or maimed. And

then Caesar went home to where, for him, the real politics were and Gaul and Britain were left alone for 15 years. When later Roman emperors began to set up administration of Gaul things changed again. Most of southern and eastern Gaul was brought into the Empire fairly easily because they had already adopted a sedentary lifestyle and trade-based economic system. The borders of Empire remained in flux for some time with the pressure of the so-called Germanic tribes pressing in from the east which finally contributed to the end of Empire in the 5th century CE. There is controversy about how different the Celtic and Germanic tribes actually were and where the division may be made. Caesar arbitrarily called anyone north of the Rhine Germanic and anyone south Celtic. Archaeology makes clear that while there were two different material cultures (with different house building and burial styles) they were much more intermixed than Rome's simplistic geographical divisions would indicate. H.R. Ellis-Davidson has discussed the intersections and diversions of Celtic and Germanic culture in several books, to which I direct the interested reader.

Continental vs. Insular Celts

There are differences between the religious practices of European and British Celtic peoples. Some deities span the entire scope of the Celtic world but most are specific to a place. The south of England which was settled by Belgic peoples is more closely tied to the Continent, while northern England has more unique deities and practices. Ireland had even less contact with Europe and maintained their culture the longest. Continental Celts had felt the pressures of the Mediterranean cultures much earlier than Insular Celts. Traffic between Gaul and the eastern Mediterranean began as early as 8th century BCE. Regular trade with southern Britain begins in the 6th century BCE. However the impact of occasional maritime traders is quite different than the concentrated river trade which occurred constantly in Gaul.

Sources of Information

Classical Commentaries

A number of classical writers mentioned the Celts. The very first use of the term *Keltoi* is by the Greek Hecataeus of Miletus circa 500 BCE. Most of these Greek and Roman authors whose works have survived didn't have any first hand knowledge of the Celts. Most of the extant writing comes from the first two centuries of the common era and rely on observations of Stoic philosopher Posidonius (early 1st century BCE), whose own writings have been lost. His information was based on first hand knowledge of Celtic society in Gaul. Scraps of his writings are contained in later writings, especially Athenaeus, Diodorus Siculus (mid-1st century BCE) and Strabo (40 BCE-25 CE).

From Posidonius we learn that Celts subscribed to the Pythagorean idea of transmigration of the soul, which Julius Caesar mentions as well (though he couches it in terms of making the fighters unafraid of death). Caesar had the opportunity to see Celts at first hand, both on the continent and in Britain, but he wasn't particularly interested in religion other than to note the influence of the Druids on the nobility. Caesar describes the Druids, saying they "officiate at the worship of the gods, regulate public and private sacrifices, and give rulings on all religious questions. Large number of young men flock to them for instruction and they are held in great honor by the people. They act as judges in practically all disputes whether between tribes or between individuals." He also notes that there are many and diverse deities but does not name them except to use the name of whichever Roman deity possessed similar attributes.

It is to Pliny the Elder (1st century CE) that we owe our image of the Druids cutting mistletoe with a golden sickle. It was an afterthought on the mistletoe entry in his book on trees! The word he used was *sacerdos*, not Druid, and it was probably really the Vates who would perform such a ritual. We get this division of the Celtic 'priesthood' from Strabo's *Geographica* written at the end of the first century BCE, which states "Among all the Gallic peoples, generally speaking, there are three sets of men who are held in exceptional honour: the Bards, the Vates, and the Druids. The Bards are singers and poets; the Vates, diviners and natural philosophers; while the Druids, in addition to natural philosophy, study also moral philosophy." (His use of 'men' is generic, there are women in all three classes both in the vernacular and classical sources.) Additionally, Irish vernacular evidence does tend to support this tripartite division.

We believe that Classical sources tended to sensationalize Celtic religion. They were, after all, writing about foreigners whom they considered barbarians. It is the odd and 'uncivilized' information that is most often reported. There is very little information on the deities themselves in these sources because the writers tend to conflate Celtic deities with their own where their worship is similar. Thus, we get sensationalists like Lucan (1st century CE) reporting that there were three major Gods of the Gauls who demanded human sacrifice, Taranis (burning), Teutates (drowning) and Esus (hanging and wounding). The Romans had banned human sacrifice only a generation or two earlier and felt superior on this account.

Classical writers also tell us something of the Celts' appearance. Diodorus says Gauls are tall and fair with loud voices and piercing eyes. He says the women are nearly as big and strong as their husbands and as fierce. Tacitus identifies the Caledonii of Scotland as having reddish hair and large loose limbs whilst

the Silurians of Wales were swarthy with dark curly hair. Dio Cassius describes Boudica as large and frightening with bright red hair. Strabo tells us that both genders liked to wear lots of jewelry and this is certainly borne out by the

*There is very little information on the deities
themselves in these sources because
the writers tend to conflate Celtic deities
with their own . . .*

archaeological record which shows heavy torcs, broaches, rings, necklets and bracelets. A lovely quote from Virgil sums up thusly the idealized classical view of a Celt, "Golden is their hair, and golden their garb. They are resplendent in their striped cloaks, and their milk-white necks are circled with gold."

Inscriptions

Inscriptions on altars and votive objects provide us with almost 400 names of Celtic deities. Unfortunately many of these names appear only once and have no elaborating evidence to allow us to understand the nature of the deity named. Other names have descriptive epithets added to the names. Still others are paired with Roman deities whose known character allows us to guess more accurately about their Celtic counterparts. Some of these classical Roman deities also receive Celtic epithets. Classical gods often also receive Celtic consorts. When possible we compare inscriptions from more than one area and infer the characteristics of the deities, supplemented by contemporary comments.

Cosmology

The Celts do not seem to have had a hierarchy of divinity in the sense of a coherent pantheon dwelling in some remote place. The human world and the Otherworld formed a unity in which the human and divine interact. Each location has numinous powers which are acknowledged by the people as we can see by their naming of mountains, rivers and other natural features many of which have associated deities.

When the Celts invaded Greece in 278 BCE, Brennus entered the precinct of Delphi, saw no gold and silver dedications and only stone and wooden statues

and he laughed at the Greeks for setting up deities in human shape. Caesar mentions that the Germans worship forces of nature only.

... in archaeology, wooden buildings pose a problem of interpretation ... all that remains in the record is the positioning of post holes!

Domestic Cult

The most basic sanctuary in a traditional culture is the home and hearth. Often non-family members are not allowed to approach the hearth. Archaeological evidence of elaborately decorated hearths and fire-related tools indicates that the domestic cult of the Celts was centered here. Each family would have had its rites, sacrifices to the house deity (perhaps as elaborate as the *penates*, *lar* and *genius* of the Romans), protections for the house and family, etcetera. Many fire tools echo the sacrifice, being in the form of horses or rams, garlanded and thus ready to nourish the Gods and the people.

The next level of ritual around the hearth would be the banquet. There are elaborate eating utensils present in the archaeological record and Posidonius (quoted by Athenaeus) gives a good account of a Celtic feast:

The Celts sit on hay and have their meals served up on wooden tables raised slightly above the earth. Their food consists of a small number of loaves of bread together with a large amount of meat, either boiled or roasted on charcoal or on spits. This food is eaten cleanly but like lions, raising up whole limbs in both hands and biting off the meat ... When a large number dine together they sit around in a circle with the most influential man in the centre, like the leader of the chorus, whether he surpasses the others in warlike skill, or lineage, or wealth. Beside him sits the host and next on either side the others in order of distinction. ... The Celts sometimes engage in single combat at dinner. For they gather in arms and engage in mock battles, and fight hand-to-hand, but sometimes wounds are inflicted, and the irritation caused by this may even lead to killing unless the bystanders restrain them. And in former times, when the hindquarters were served up the bravest hero took the thigh piece, and if another man claimed it they stood up and fought in single combat to death.

Another component of the feast is the Gift. The Celts practiced the redistribution of wealth at their feasts, creating an elaborate debt structure which binds the society together. Recipients of gifts may repay the giver in kind or in loyalty and service. In an extreme form, life itself may repay the gift. This system of clientage is documented both in myth and in the ancient laws of Ireland and Wales which have come down to us through Medieval redactors.

Other interesting evidence of the importance of feasting to the Celts are burial goods which indicate the belief in the Otherworld feast, many of which are also known from Irish and Welsh mythology, such as Manannan's Feast of Wisdom and Age, the feast of Bran's head with his companions, or Giobniu's Feast where the participants neither aged nor died. Otherworld feasts generally feature an ever filled cauldron so that food never runs out, or animals who rise up ready to be slain again the next day. Grave goods include flagons of wine, drinking vessels, animals and hearth implements,

Public Cult

How much of a public cult existed depends on which period of Celtic history is being discussed. In earliest times, sacral power was part of the sovereignty. The Queen and/or King would have done divination, carried out sacrifice, identified sacred springs or other natural features and other religious duties for the Clan, including becoming the ultimate sacrifice in times of trouble, according to mythological sources. Continental Celts were just beginning to develop cities in the last few centuries BCE. This led to a secular administration in the form of judges. Some cities were built around sanctuaries or religious schools, others were centers of commerce or military strongholds. Archaeology is only beginning to give us insights into the type of civic ritual present in the cities.

The common form of sanctuary in early times (500-250 BCE) is an enclosure delimited by a ditch and sometimes a palisade, interior pits and posts delimited sacred space and received sacrifices. As time went by interior buildings and more elaborate ambulatories were constructed (in archaeology, wooden buildings pose a problem of interpretation — all that remains in the record is the positioning of post holes!). At the time of conquest many sanctuaries were dismantled and hidden by their worshippers. These areas seem to have kept their sacred character, however, as Romano-Celtic temples are often built on the same sites. Since the form of temples in both cultures was similar except for materials used, conflation was not difficult. Most Romano-Celtic temples had a central sanctuary surrounded by an ambulatory within a precinct surrounded by walls and ditches. There are variations which include auxiliary buildings or a divided sanctuary, but the general pattern is clear. These structures don't lend themselves to congregational-style worship. There is a

small shrine where the statues of deities or sacred symbols are housed and the ambulatory gallery, perhaps with openings through which the worshippers could see into the sanctuary, but any large gatherings were probably held outside in the enclosure around the temple precinct.

Sanctuary enclosures were rectangular or sometimes circular. The great variation in materials deposited at such sites suggests that each was dedicated to a specific deity with particular requirements. There is some evidence that the posts, lintels, gates and other features of the palisade were highly decorated: carved, painted, hung with offerings. The entrance was a very important feature. In early ditch enclosures the entrance is a break in the ditch. Palisades brought in the custom of gates, monumental porticos, etcetera. At Gournay (France), a pit is dug at the entrance with a foot bridge to cross to enter the sacred space. The entrance was hung with human skulls. Two large heaps of cow skulls and weapons were deposited on either side in the ditch. These may be the result of the dismantling of successive displays at the entrance. Deposition in the ditch elsewhere is more even.

In the interior the center point of the sanctuary is indicated by a post, a pit or a building. Presumably the center is closest to the Otherworld being farthest from the outer world beyond the ditch. A system of posts with directional and astronomical significance were aligned around this center. Another interior feature are pits, the shape and size of which vary from site to site. At one site in Czechoslovakia the central pit was 11m x 8m and 2m deep! A more common pattern is 10 pits grouped in threes and a central pit. Sacrifices may have occurred at the central pit with the others being sealed so that sacrificial animals placed within could decompose. The animal bones are then thrown into the perimeter ditch. It is not uncommon in the ancient world to have seen pits as entrances to the Underworld (Greek *bothroi* and Roman *mundi* for example). Elsewhere in the Celtic world deep shafts are dug with ritual depositions, so the Celts may have shared this interpretation.

In addition to dedicated sanctuaries, the entrance to a city seems to have been a particularly important ritual area as well. In many British hillforts, ritual pits have been found at the entrance and along the principal roadway with horses, humans, and more rarely dogs, are buried there. It is unclear whether the human burials represent sacrifice or merely deposition near town.

One classical source, Strabo, gives a little insight into town gates. He says the Celtiberians worshiped an unnamed God of the full moon. "They perform their devotions in company with all their families in front of the gates of their townships and hold dances lasting throughout the night." Classical writers

mentioned (probably using a single, now lost source) the practice of choosing a scapegoat who was supported richly at the expense of the community for a year before being ritually killed to remove all ill luck from the people. Because the

Before the influence of Mediterranean cultures, the Celts do not seem to have anthropomorphised their deities.

original source is lost, it is hard to say where this was observed. One writer places it at Marseilles.

Military Cult

Shrines were set up along borders where preparatory rituals could be done before a conflict and rites of thanksgiving and victory could be celebrated. Often sacrifices (or post-Roman, altars) were promised beforehand and these would be carried out at such a shrine. There are many altars dedicated to various deities with inscriptions such as "so-and-so gladly and willingly fulfills his vow". Unfortunately, they only rarely indicate what it was the deity provided in exchange. Military offerings were also deposited in water, see below.

Celtic Deities

Animal Divinities

Before the influence of Mediterranean cultures, the Celts do not seem to have anthropomorphised their deities. There are statues of boars, horses, bulls, bears, birds, etcetera, long before there are human featured ones. What we cannot know is how the people thought about these figures. Were the animals seen as symbolic of natural forces? Were there attributes of the animals which were revered as being associated with divinity? Some deities later given human form are inextricably linked with specific animals — eg, Epona and horses, Cernunnos and stags, Artio and bears, Arduinna and boars.

An interesting sidelight on animals as sacrifice — at Gournay-sur-Aronde there is an enormous deposition of animal bones. The horses and cattle are both elderly specimens and do not show signs of butchering. Pigs and sheep at the site are young and were eaten. Were horses and cattle revered and brought here

for ritual and burial? And at South Cadbury in England there are horse skulls all carefully buried right side up.

Goddesses, Gods, Divine Couples

Cernunnos

The name Cernunnos, meaning 'horned' or 'peaked' one, appears only once in an inscription in France. However, the name is generally applied by archaeologists to all male antlered deities found in Celtic iconography. A Horned God is the only pre-Roman anthropomorphic deity, having appeared in a rock carving in the 4th century BCE in Northern Italy. He is there accompanied by a ram-horned snake and bears two torcs, which remain common features of the 'Cernunnos' iconography in both Gaul and Britain. Bull or goat horned heads are also found in La Tène metalwork. He is also

The name Cernunnos, meaning 'horned' or 'peaked' one, appears only once in an inscription in France. However, the name is generally applied by archaeologists to all male antlered deities found in Celtic iconography.

associated with a variety of animals both wild and domestic, especially stags, and with fertility symbols such as cornucopias and bowls of grain or money. He (or his male companions) are often ithyphallic as well. There are also several representations of Horned Goddess(es), including one representation in Gaul where she appears as consort to a Horned God. The frequent depiction of Cernunnos in a cross-legged pose has been cited by some as a "Buddha-like" posture tied to Indo-European roots and by others to indicate his ties to the common folk who (according to Classical sources) sat on the ground.

Jupiter Taranis

The Roman Jupiter, while often Optimus Magnus (Best and Greatest), also has Celtic surnames, often territorial. Jupiter Optimus Magnus Beissirissa (associated with the Bigerriones in southern Gaul), Jupiter Ladicus (as the spirit of Mount Ladicus) and Jupiter Parthinus (associated with the Partheni in Yugoslavia/Bulgaria). An interesting aspect of the Celtic Jupiter is that he is

often mounted, unlike his Roman counterpart. Jupiter is also paired with Taranis, one of the primary Celtic deities of Gaul. Caesar said that Taranis "held the empire of the skies" when likening him to Jupiter. Taranis was a thunder god who relished human sacrifice (according to Lucan), a later commentator describes Jupiter Taranis as Master of War. Seven altars to Taranis have survived from far flung locations indicating that his cult was widespread. Dr. Miranda Green believes that prior to conquest Taranis may have simply been an elemental force.

Sulis Minerva

Sulis Minerva is the primary deity of the temple complex at Bath, England. Sul or Sulis is thought to have been the primary deity of the area in pre-Roman times. When the Romans exploited the therapeutic potential of the thermal spring, Sulis became equated with Minerva Medica. Through the many inscriptions in the form of curses and altar dedications to Sulis we can get some idea of how her worshippers thought of her. She had the power to grant healing, of course, but also to witness oaths, catch thieves, find lost objects and generally right wrongs. Some examples include, "I have given to Minerva the Goddess Sulis the thief who has stolen my hooded cloak whether slave or free, whether man or woman. He is not to redeem this gift unless with his blood." and "May he who carried off Vilbia from me become as liquid as water. May she who obscenely devoured her become dumb whether Velvinna, Exsuepeus Vbrianus, Severinus Augustalis, Comitianus, Catusminianus, Germanilla or Jovina." and "Docimedis has lost two gloves. He asks that the person who has stolen them should lose his mind and his eyes in the temple where she appoints."

Another way to try to figure out how she was thought of is to study the cognates of her name. *Suil* in Old Irish is 'eye' or 'gap'. *Heol* is 'sun'. Other possible interpretations are 'gap', 'orifice', or 'the center of the whirlpool'. There also exists a trio of Goddesses called the Suleviae, of the beneficent and protecting mother or matron type. Inscriptions to the Suleviae are found at Cirencester, Colchester and in several locations in Gaul. Suleviae may be "the triple Sulis" as we have the triple Brigid and many other three-fold Celtic deity forms. One of the inscriptions at Bath, on a statue base says "To the Suleviae, Sulinus, a sculptor, son of Brucetus, gladly and deservedly made this offering" so we know they, as well as the singular Sulis Minerva, were known at this site also.

Mars, Lenus Mars

We moderns have this idea of Mars as exclusively a brutal war god. To the Celts he was more often a peaceful protector, a healer or a tribal god. This is

much in keeping with the original Italian Mars who was a guardian of fields and boundaries and sometimes a storm god. It was only his late-classical/Imperial conflation with the Greek Ares that gave him the combative, warrior-for-gain aspects. Mars was venerated as Mars Albiorix by the Albici in southern Gaul who considered him a protective mountain spirit. Albiorix means 'king of the world'. Mars Camulos was widespread, found in both Britain and on the Continent.

Lenus Mars is a great healer god who presided over a large temple complex at Trier and a sanctuary at Pommern. He also was known in Britain. He uses his warrior strength as a protector against illness and death. His epithet Iovantucarus shows his special role as a protector of the young. Lenus Mars also has a Celtic consort, the mother Goddess, Ancamna. (She is also paired with Mars Smertius by the Treveri.)

Mars Loucetius ('bright' or 'shining') gives us another insight into Mars. Loucetius in the Roman world is usually an epithet of Jupiter. Mars Loucetius is paired at Bath with Nematona (Goddess of the Grove) and on the continent with the war Goddess Bellona.

Mars Mullo (Latin for mule) was very popular in northern Gaul. He was associated with a shrine at Allonnes where pilgrims came to have their eyes cured. Many votive sculptures of the ailing part have been found there.

Rosmerta and Mercury

Rosmerta is a very widespread Celtic Goddess, her name means Great Provider. Her male equivalent would be Smertius. After conquest she is often paired with the Roman Mercury. She has similar attributes and Mercury was probably subsumed into her cult when introduced. She is also conflated with Fortuna, but they also appear together or with Maia (Mercury's mother). Rosmerta is shown associated with a cornucopia, purse, patera, caduceus, scepter, wheel, rudder, globe and, in Britain, a wooden barrel or bucket. The high status of her cult is indicated by the rank of some of her worshippers and the fact that her name is linked epigraphically with the Emperor. Presumably she was invoked for good fortune in commerce, in life and in death (the caduceus is a symbol of guidance through the Otherworld). Mercury is usually represented very classically, he carries his caduceus, wears his winged cap, holds or wears a purse. He is accompanied by a cock, goat and/or turtle.

Epona

Depictions of mounted women or charioteers are found on Iron Age coins and may also represent horse-related Goddesses, in addition, representation of

women and horses as linked continues in the vernacular traditions in the stories of Rhiannon and Macha. Epona, whose name is derived from the Celtic word for horse, is the Goddess of horses and horse breeding. As mares were often used as working animals on farms, some writers have speculated that Epona has aspects of fertility of the land and the domestic cult. Her worship became very

... the original Italian Mars was a guardian of fields and boundaries and sometimes a storm god. It was only his late-classical/Imperial conflation with the Greek Ares that gave him the combative, warrior-for-gain aspects.

widespread — there are over 300 representations and inscriptions found bearing her name. She was adopted by cavalry soldiers throughout the Roman world, perhaps because she was a deity who offered protection both for the soldier and the horse! She was the only Celtic deity whose festival was celebrated in Rome itself, on December 18.

Representations of Epona always have a horse present. She is most often shown sitting sideways on a mare, sometimes a suckling mare. Sometimes Epona is standing or sitting beside or between horses. She holds symbols of plenty like cornucopiae, patera full of grain and fruit. She sometimes is feeding her equine companions. She often appears with the Mother Goddesses in inscription and iconographically. There are even several finds where she herself is tripled and an inscription is dedicated to "the Eponas".

Statues of Epona have been found associated with healing springs. It is hard to know what significance this has. Many Celtic deities have a healing aspect. Perhaps she was invoked for healing of horses. Her image appears on tombstones and in graves. One statue where she has a man behind her on her horse has been interpreted as taking the soul on horseback to the Otherworld. She is shown holding a key or a mappa (a napkin used to begin races) which may link her to the beginnings and endings.

Seasonal Festivals

The seasonal festival dates that we associate with the Celts come from a variety of sources. Classical writers speak of periodic assemblies where Druids performed rites and judged inter-tribal disputes but dates are not given. An Imperial temple at Lugdunum (Lyon) was dedicated on August 1, probably in recognition of a feast of Lugh (and the Emperor Augustus' birthday — such a coincidence would probably be played up). However, we lack direct evidence to substantiate this assumption although given the fact that the city is named after Lugh and Lugh's feast is similarly dated in later Irish tradition we can speculate with some certainty. This lack of direct evidence hampers us with other dates as well — important events in mythology happen on Beltaine, Samhain, etc, but no coherent scheme is set down. The earliest calendar that we have, the Coligny Calendar, mentions Samhain which appears as Samonios.

The Coligny Calendar, which dates from between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE, is both a lunar and solar instrument, providing reconciliation between the two years. A year was divided into 12 months of alternating 29 and 30 days. Every 2-1/2 years a 13th month was added. According to Diodorus every five years a great sacrifice was held. The Coligny Calendar provides information on auspicious and inauspicious days and we can see that they reckoned by nights. It is the oldest inscription we have in a Celtic language (the letters themselves being in the Roman alphabet.)

Votive Offerings

Votive offerings often provide us insight into the powers of a site, and into the motives of the worshippers. It is assumed that artisans and workshops associated with larger temples and shrines made souvenirs and mass-produced offerings available. We know from some chance anaerobic depositions that wooden objects were used. Because these do not survive well, we mainly find the offerings of the higher classes. In areas where pottery or pipe clay was common, we presumably have more offerings from all classes represented.

The most common offerings are coins. In addition to regular coins in circulation there are tiny coins whose small character makes it unlikely that they were used for anything other than offerings. For example at the site of the temple at Bath over 16,000 Roman coins have been found dating from the mid-first century CE.. and continuing until the late fourth century, shortly before Rome abandoned Britain. A handful of pre-Roman coins of the local tribe the Dobunni suggest that coins featured in worship at the spring before the Roman invasion. Many of the coins found were clipped to mark them as property of the

Goddess and therefore no longer legal tender. Some of the coins are quite rare, others were coins of the eastern empire with no value in the west but perhaps representing pilgrimage to the shrine from distant parts. A substantial number of mid-fourth century coins depicted a phoenix rising from the ashes, possibly alluding to the hidden fire that heats the spring water. On the continent wheel models are often present in coin deposits.

The next most numerous offering is personal jewelry (bracelets, broaches, rings, earrings, hair and dress pins, etcetera) In some cases these appear to have been "killed" before deposition. We can speculate that items so closely associated with a person would be useful in sympathetic magic. Unfortunately, we have no certain way of knowing what the ancients were thinking when they threw their jewelry or coins into the sacred springs. Is our custom of throwing coins into wells a survival of these practices?

Another type of offering, especially at healing centers, are anatomical models of, presumably, the afflicted area which needed the deity's attention. For example at the shrine of Sequana, Goddess of the River Seine, come models of eyes, breasts, heads, limbs and internal organs. Some of the models showed particular ailments: eye disease and respiratory problems seem to have been the main afflictions among her pilgrims.

Sacred springs and rivers also received many martial offerings, primarily swords, scabbards, helmets and spears. Some such artifacts appear to have been made especially for sacrifice as they are of precious metals and elaborately decorated rather than made of workable materials for a warlike function. The Celtic practice of throwing things in springs was so common and resulted in such rich deposits that such sites were auctioned off by the Romans after conquest. One sacred site of the Volcae Tectosages is reported to have yielded 100,000 lb. of silver and 100,000 lb. of gold!

Sacrifice

Human Sacrifice and Head Hunting

Evidence of human sacrifice comes from various Classical literary sources. Dio Cassius mentions a sacrifice to Andraste by Boudica on behalf of the Iceni. Lucan attributes sacrifices on behalf of three Gaulish Gods, Taranis, Esus and Teutates. Archaeology doesn't confirm such sacrifices, with the possible exception of the man found in the Lindow Moss. There are also a couple of sites where a burial can be interpreted as sacrifice or as punitive criminal burial.

The severed head seems to have had significance for the Celts. Veneration of the head is found in all Celtic areas and over the entire temporal spread. The head is seen in art, as a religious symbol and as a battle trophy. There is ample archaeological evidence for the human skull being given special treatment. Niches in shrines such as the Celto-Ligurian lintel is merely one manifestation. Human skulls have been found deposited in lakes and wells.

*People wishing to practice some form of
“Celtic” religion pull threads from the
tattered cloth of our knowledge and wrap them
around some other system.*

Vernacular sources such as the story of Cu Chulainn in Ireland present vivid descriptions of head taking as do the accounts of classical authors. Diodorus Siculus (quoting Posidonius?) says: “They cut off the heads of enemies slain in battle and attach them to the necks of their horses. The blood-stained spoils they hand over to their attendants and carry off as booty, while striking up a paeon and singing a song of victory, and they nail up these first fruits upon their houses just as do those who lay low wild animals in certain kinds of hunting. They embalm the heads of their most distinguished enemies in cedar-oil and preserve them carefully in a chest, and display them with pride to strangers, saying that for this head one of their ancestors, or his father, or the man himself, refused the offer of a large sum of money. They say that some of them boast that they refused the weight of the head in gold.” It is interesting to speculate why such a sum would be offered. Perhaps the kin of the slain would pay a ransom to have the head returned for proper ceremony? Livy, writing in the 3d century CE, reports that the Boii who captured Consul-Elect Lucius Postumius in Northern Italy “stripped his body, cut off the head, and carried their spoils in triumph to the most hallowed of their temples. There they cleaned out the head, as is their custom, and gilded the skull, which thereafter served them as a holy vessel to pour libations from and as a drinking cup for the priest and the temple attendants.” The head is also very common as a motif in art. Statues of heads and disembodied heads in coins, reliefs and jewelry are quite common.

Animal Sacrifice

There are a variety of animals, both wild and domestic, whose remains may

represent sacrifice. Some are burned or buried whole while others are butchered and, presumably, consumed. Archaeological evidence in either case is somewhat problematic, although the location of deposition in a temple area may suggest the sacrificial interpretation. However, a butchered animal may not have been killed with a sacred purpose and a non-butchered animal may simply have died of old age and been buried rather than dying as a result of sacrifice.

Among sacrificial animals we find horses, cattle, lambs, pigs, and dogs, also stags, hares, birds and wild pigs as well as other wild animals. Young animal often show signs of butchering, older cattle and horses mostly do not. Pig, either wild or domestic (its hard to tell!), is a favorite in both burial and temple deposition. Pliny mentions bull sacrifice by the Druids.

Summation

Much work has been accomplished toward studying the Celtic world. It is unlikely that more classical sources will be uncovered, but archaeology gives us a tool for discovery which we are only beginning to use. A grounding in the physical remains will allow us to interpret the later literature more accurately and provide a more complete picture of our ancestors' worship. But I hope it is plain from my discussion, that our ancestors did not leave us a whole cloth in which to wrap ourselves.

In the absence of such a tapestry, it is necessary to be aware that speculation is rife — and amongst the NewAge/Occult community is sometimes based in little more than wishful thinking. If one is interested in reconstructing and practicing Celtic religion it is well to be aware of the sources and of the philosophy in the researches of any teacher or group you may join or any book you may read. People wishing to practice some form of ‘Celtic’ religion pull threads from the tattered cloth of our knowledge and wrap them around some other system. Some, such as the Neo-Pagan Druids of Ar n’Draiocht Fein, study the Celtic religious data and then combine their researches with information on the religious traditions of other Indo-European cultures. Other practitioners pull threads and wrap them around some other system, thus creating syncretic traditions such as the various forms of ‘Celtic Wicca’, ‘Celtic Magic’ and such. Unfortunately, some (perhaps most) of these have nothing particularly Celtic about them except the use of Celtic deity names within a system very different from any conceived by the ancient Celts.

I believe that the greatest source of magic and religious inspiration exists within each person. Practicing based on the dictates of one's own experience with one's land, Otherworld spirits and divinities is certainly valid religious practice.

If, however, we wish to claim that what we do comes to us from the religion of the ancient Goidelic or Brythonic peoples, I believe that we must do our best to research and understand their worldviews and practices.

Particularly when teaching, passing on the research along with the practice helps the student to better understand and evaluate whether a tradition fits with her/his aims and worldview. I believe we owe it to our students to tell them our inspirations and our experience and to credit any source materials — spells adapted from vernacular prayers or ancient inscriptions, practices gleaned from archaeological study or borrowed from a magical traditions of other cultures. There are few things more embarrassing than sharing some bit of ‘ancient’ lore and finding out that the person you told it to wrote it a decade or so before.

References:

- Brunaux, Jean Louis. 1988 (Eng trans). *The Celtic Gauls: Gods, Rites and Sanctuaries*. London: B. A. Seaby.
- Caesar, Julius, 1980 (new trans). *The Battle for Gaul*. Boston: David R. Godine.
- Chadwick, Nora. 1970. *The Celts*. New York: Penguin.
- Cunliffe, Barry (1979) *The Celtic World: An Illustrated History of the Celtic Race, Their Culture, Customs and Legends*. New York : McGraw-Hill.
1988. *Greeks, Romans and Barbarians: Spheres of Interaction*. London: Batsford.
1997. *The Ancient Celts*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Davidson, HR Ellis. 1988. *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions*. Syracuse UP.
- Gantz, Jeffrey. 1988. *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*. NY: Penguin.
- Green, Miranda. 1992. *Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend*. London: Thames & Hudson.
1989. *Symbol and Image in Celtic Religious Art*. London: Routledge.
1986. *The Gods of the Celts*. Totawa, NJ: Barnes & Noble.
- MacCana, Proinsias. 1968 (1991). *Celtic Mythology*. New York: Peter Bedrick.
- Ross, Anne. 1967. *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
1970. *The Everyday Life of the Pagan Celts*. London: Transworld.
- Ross, Anne and Robins, Don. 1989. *The Life and Death of a Druid Prince: The story of an archaeological sensation*. London: Random Century Group.
- Rutherford, Ward. 1987. *Celtic Mythology: Nature & Influence of Celtic Myth - Druidism to Arthurian Legend*. Wellingborough, Eng: Aquarian Press.
- Stewart, Robert J. 1990. *Celtic Gods, Celtic Goddesses*. London: Blandford
- On the web:*
- Clannada na Gadelica – <http://chattanooga.net/~clannada/>
- IMBAS – <http://www.aa.net/~morrigan/imbis/>
- Nemetón – <http://www.seanet.com/~inisglas/>
- O’Dubhain’s Cauldron – <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/odubhain/>
- The Sanctum of Cathbad – <http://www.uoguelph.ca/~bmyers/sanctum.html>
- In Print:*
- Laurie, Erynn. 1995. *A Circle of Stones: Journeys & Meditations for Modern Celts*. Chicago: Eschaton Books.
- Keltria Journal of Druidism and Celtic Magick*. P.O. Box 48369, Minneapolis, MN 55448, \$12/four issues. <http://members.aol.com/keltria/kjourn.html>

The Neolithic Great Goddess: A Study in Modern Tradition

by Ronald Hutton
University of Bristol

Modern belief in the veneration of a single Great Goddess in the European Neolithic is often accompanied by the notion that those cultures of 'Old Europe' were woman-centred in society as well as religion. What is the long history which precedes these contemporary notions? What is the complex history of their political development. A chain runs from Classical times to Marija Gimbutas and our own day.

Sources amongst the Classical pantheon

An important shift in the way in which goddesses were treated in European letters took place towards the end of the 18th century. Until then, as in the classical ancient world, they had been regarded mainly as patronesses, or allegorical figures, of civilization. Eric Smith's *Dictionary of Classical reference in English poetry* (1984) provides a quick guide to their relative popularity in English literature between 1350 and 1800. Most favoured was Venus, mentioned in 66 works, followed by Diana in 42, Minerva in 32, and Juno in 26, with the other ancient female deities trailing far behind. What they represent between them is love, maidenly chastity, wisdom and majesty. Only Diana is shown in any connection with the natural world; in these cases (which are rare), she is represented mainly as goddess of hunting, the chief recreation of the nobility.

It is more significant to our present purposes that the ancient Greeks had spoken of the earth as being female in gender and the sky as male (in direct contrast, for example, to the ancient Egyptians); this language became embedded in western science which derived from Greek roots. It was reinforced by the mind-set of the patriarchal societies which occupied medieval and early modern Europe, in which intellectuals in general, and those who dealt with the sciences in particular, were overwhelmingly male. Carolyn Merchant has led a number of writers in emphasizing the development of a scholarly language which

identified the author and reader as male adventurers occupied in exploring and exploiting a female natural world (Merchant 1980).

The Romantic impact

This was the pattern which prevailed, with remarkable consistency, until the decades around 1800, when it was altered permanently by that complex of cultural changes known conventionally and loosely as the Romantic Movement. One aspect to it was the exalting of the natural and the irrational, those qualities which had conventionally been feared or disparaged and characterized as feminine. Cultural historians have devoted many works to tracing the course of this revolution in taste, which for the first time gave emphasis to the beauty and sublimity of wild nature and of the night. None had yet made a study of its impact upon western images of the divine feminine.

That impact is clear enough in English letters, and Smith's *Dictionary* once more provides an easy means of tracing it in the realm of poetry. Between 1800 and 1940 Venus (or Aphrodite) retains her numerical supremacy in appearances, with Diana (or Artemis) still coming second. Juno, however, almost vanishes, and so does Minerva after 1830. The third place is now taken by Proserpine, as goddess of the changing seasons, and fourth by Ceres or Demeter, lady of the harvest. A reading of the texts listed discloses a much more striking alteration. Venus now appears not merely as patroness of love but in relation to natural surroundings. Diana, no longer primarily a symbol of chastity or hunting, stands for the moon, the greenwood and wild animals. Furthermore, when a goddess is made the major figure in a poem, instead of the subject of a comparison or reference, the supremacy of Venus is overturned. In these cases, by the 1810s the divine feminine is personified either as the moon (apostrophized with particular religiosity by Keats) or the spirit of the green earth (for whom Shelley makes an equivalent, especially in 'Song of Proserpine'). In the latter capacity she often sheds any classical label altogether, becoming simply 'Mother Earth' or 'Mother Nature'.

These new emphases remain absolutely constant through the remainder of 19th-century English literature. They are reproduced in the parallel world of opera libretti, where we see them in the most famous opera of the century to treat of Druids, Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma* (1831). Here the librettist, Felice Romani, broke with the tradition of Druids as sun-worshippers to make the heroine, standing in a sacred wood, pray to a moon goddess. It only remained for Swinburne to take the final stage of development in 1867 when he apostrophized the goddess of nature under the German name of Hertha. This poem knocked God out of the structure altogether, by making her the single mighty deity who created and maintains the universe. It would be interesting

One aspect to [the Romantic Movement] was the exalting of the natural and the irrational, those qualities which had conventionally been feared or disparaged and characterized as feminine.

and easy to show how the same themes remain stable long into 20th-century English letters, and to provide parallel examples from the Continent.

Also relevant from the 19th century is a different sort of cultural phenomenon, a debate among European intellectuals over the nature of prehistoric religion. Crudely speaking, this was divided between those who suggested that primitive religious belief was a superstitious compound of ignorance and fear, and those who viewed it as an embodiment of sublime truths, which had degenerated and been forgotten among most modern tribal people. The first 'ignoble' theory was especially popular among thinkers of the French and Scottish Enlightenments, the second 'noble' view among the German Romantics. The Germans assumed the tone of these eternal truths consisted of monotheism, and usually linked it to an instinctual understanding of the processes of nature and of human life.

The notion of a single great goddess

So it makes good sense that in 1849 a German scholar, Eduard Gerhard, advanced the novel suggestion that behind the various goddesses of classical Greece stood a single great goddess, venerated before history. As the century wore on, other classicists began to adopt this idea, drawing support for it from the assumption that the cultures of Anatolia and Mesopotamia were older than, and in some measure ancestral to, those of Greece. Those cultures did contain some figures of pre-eminent goddesses, identified with motherhood or the earth. This tendency of thought was given an additional impetus at the end of the century when excavation began to turn up figurines, many apparently feminine, on prehistoric sites in the southeast of Europe and the Levant. It was possible to interpret these as representation of the original single goddess, and this is what sometimes occurs (Ucko 1968:409-12, and sources listed there). It is worth stressing that most classicists and Near Eastern archaeologists did not adopt the concept, but equally significant to recognize that among those who did were some major figures. In the British context the most important was probably Sir Arthur Evans, who made something of a personal conversion to it. In his writings of the 1890s he did not connect the statuettes found in his excavations on Crete to any specific deity, but in 1901 he identified them firmly with the

Babylonian Mother Goddess. By 1921, and the publication of his celebrated volumes on Knossos, he was convinced that all must be images of a prehistoric Great Goddess, at once Virgin and Mother (Evans 1895:124-31; 1901:185; 1921:ii, 45-52). This compound was achieved by blending together those historic goddesses who represented separately these two apparently exclusive characteristics. For those used to a Christian culture, of course, there was no difficulty in doing so; behind the emerging figure of the prehistoric deity now stood not only Mother Nature but the Virgin Mary.

By the mid 19th century this image was already starting to combine with another, which had emerged from a debate between lawyers over the origins of society and of the human family. One of the contesting theories in this exchange, articulated first in 1862 by the Swiss J.J. Bachofen, was that the earliest human societies had been woman-centred, altering to a patriarchal form before the beginning of history; what was true in the human sphere had apparently to be true in the divine one. The notion of a primitive matriarchy was first fully expressed by J.F. MacLellan's *Primitive marriage* (1875), and from 1903 Jane Ellen Harrison combined it with that of the Great Goddess to produce a full-blown vision of how prehistoric southeastern Europe should have been. A major figure among British classicists, she was the pivot of a well-known group of Cambridge scholars. Her work, both celebrated and controversial, posited the previous existence of a peaceful and intensely creative woman-centred civilization, in which humans, living in harmony with nature and their own emotions, worshiped a single female deity. The deity was regarded as representing the earth, and as having three aspects, of which the first two were Maiden and Mother; she did not name the third. In Harrison's vision male deities existed only as sons and consorts of the Great Goddess. This happy state of affairs, she proposed, had been destroyed before the opening of history by patriarchal invaders from the north, bringing dominant male deities and war-like ways. She believed that European humanity had never recovered from this disaster (Harrison 1903: esp 257-322; 1912).

Significant in Jane Harrison's interpretation was its being both feminist and conservative; a life-long Tory and an opponent of female suffrage, she preferred women to devote themselves to education and to fostering culture in the broadest sense, leaving politics and government to men. Following her work, the idea of a matrilineal early Europe which had venerated such a deity was developed in books by amateur scholars such as Robert Briffault's *The mothers* (1927) and Robert Graves' *The white goddess* (1946). In the same years, acceptance of the concept of the single prehistoric goddess continued to grow among experts in the prehistory of Greece, the Balkans, and the Near East; in 1929 the British archaeologist G.D. Hornblower gave it a backward projection

by linking it to the figurines, again often feminine, found on a scatter of European sites from the early period of the Upper Paleolithic. After this these statuettes were regularly cited as evidence that a Great Goddess, Mother Goddess, or Earth Mother had been venerated all through the Stone Ages (Ecko 1969:409-12).

The Goddess and British prehistory

She remained, however, very much a concern of specialists in the Balkan and Mediterranean regions. Those concerned with the emerging field of western European prehistory, and especially of the British Neolithic, reserved judgment; the evidence was not comparable, and no parallels had been found to the figurines abundant in the southeast. The western Neolithic tradition included the very widespread megalithic monuments. Some French tombs contained the carved figure of a female being, which gave some grounds for arguing in favour of a goddess cult; but the decisive evidence for one was lacking, and archaeologists did not feel able to pronounce upon the matter without it. Between 1920 and 1940 Gordon Childe, Grahame Clark and O.G.S. Crawford all published surveys of prehistoric Britain which scrupulously avoided pronouncing upon the nature of its religions. Childe and Crawford suggested that the megalithic tombs had been monuments of a single faith, and Childe even characterized it as spread by missionaries from the Near East (another comfortable fit with Christian tradition); both declined to identify the being or beings upon which it had been focused (Childe 1940:46-118).

No such caution, of course, restrained non-academic writers. By 1910 Rudyard Kipling had already absorbed enough of the arguments of thinkers such as Bachofen, MacLellan and Harrison to portray a prehistoric England run by priestesses in his book of children's stories, *Rewards and fairies*. From the present perspective, the most revealing of these authors was H.J. Massingham, best known for his intensely romantic descriptions of the English countryside, evoking its deep roots in the past. What drove Massingham was an unusually bitter detestation of modern, industrialized, urbanized civilization — an 'utter darkness and savagery' (Massingham 1944:49). In opposition, he evoked the spirit of traditional Christianity; viewing it as a purified version of ancient paganism, he said that as rooted in primeval communion with Nature which had to be renewed if humanity was to be saved. In this profoundly reactionary vision, the favoured period was the Middle Ages, when society was ordered, contented and infused by spiritual values; the contemporary institution which Massingham most admired was the Roman Catholic Church, purely because it resisted so many features of modernity. When he wrote a book about the Cotswolds, in 1932 he took his information about their long barrows straight from the famous survey by O.G.S. Crawford — with this difference; whereas

It looks as if the Grimes Grave 'Goddess' was a fraud; like the Piltdown skull, it had success because it represented precisely what some were hoping to find at that moment.

Crawford had avoided characterizing the deity of the megalithic culture, Massingham repeatedly declared, with perfect confidence, that she had been Mother Earth. For scholars who wanted to think like Massingham, the barrier was apparently removed at last in 1939, when A.L. Armstrong claimed to have found the unequivocal proof of the worship of an Earth Goddess in the British Neolithic. At the bottom of one flint mine at Grimes Graves, he allegedly uncovered a female figurine, seated upon a crude altar and with a vessel (apparently for offerings) placed before her. From that moment onwards, the statuette appeared in works upon the New Stone Age in general and Grimes Graves in particular, interpreted as a deity. The Ministry of Works, as custodians of the site, placed a picture of it upon the cover of its official guide-book and reconstructed its 'shrine' for visitors to see.

From its reported discovery, rumours circulated within the archaeological community to the effect that it was a fake, planted either by or upon Armstrong. Such was the discretion of that community that not until 1986 did one of its members, Stuart Piggott, raise the matter in print (Piggott 1986:190). An investigation into the matter was carried out by Gillian Varndell, as part of a general reappraisal of the Grimes Graves material, and in 1991 she reported the following points: the excavation was never published; Armstrong's site notebook stopped abruptly on the day of the vital discovery, without recording it properly; on the day of the find, most unusually, he had directed all other experienced excavators to leave the site; the figurine and vessel look suspiciously freshly-carved; and somebody on Armstrong's team was an expert carver, because similar objects, including an Egyptian sphinx, made from the same chalk rock were among his possessions from the dig (Varndell 1991:103-06).

As no method exists for dating chalk objects, Varndell added, the authenticity of these cannot be objectively tested; but not surprisingly, she concluded that the circumstantial evidence made their status extremely dubious. This doubt is increased by the fact that since 1939 not a single other figurine has been found in an unequivocally sacred context from the British Neolithic. It looks as if the

Specialists in the history and theory of religion now took the former existence of [a Great Goddess] as proven fact, and incorporated it into their own works. Works on the history of art absorbed the same idea and it governed the initial interpretation of fresh excavations in the Near East, such as those of James Mellaart at Catal Hüyük.

Grimes Grave 'Goddess' was a fraud; like the Piltdown skull, it had success because it represented precisely what some were hoping to find at that moment. Its effects could be seen in the 1940s, upon a wife-and-husband team very prominent among them, Jacquetta and Christopher Hawkes. In 1945 and 1940 respectively, they published textbooks in which they suggested that the megalith builders of western Europe had been converted to the religion of the Great Goddess of fertility, by missionaries moving through the Mediterranean from the old centre of her cult in the Balkans and Levant. This religion was replaced in turn, so both argued, by new cults introduced by the Beaker People, conquering westward from central Europe (C. Hawkes 1940:84-9, 153, 180, 198; J. Hawkes 1945:16-18).

Jacquetta Hawkes and a goddess religion

By the early 1950s they had parted in every sense. Christopher Hawkes did not return to the topic, concentrating instead upon later pre-history; Jacquetta developed it with passionate enthusiasm, having become a professional writer of novels, plays and poetry as well as popular works of archaeology and history. The latter earned her an enormous readership, even while she continued to command affection and respect among archaeologists of her generation. She was awarded the OBE and an honorary doctorate, and became one of the two British members of UNESCO (along with the scientist Sir Julian Huxley). By 1951 she had developed a view of the Neolithic which she was to elaborate far into the 1960s — essentially the view of Jane Harrison and Harold Massingham, with an explicit acknowledgment of the poetic vision of Robert Graves. Her New Stone Agers were also women-centred, peaceful, creative, and living in harmony with Nature, worshiped as a single goddess. This happy religion united the figurine-makers of the southeast and the megalith-builders of the west, with a chain of cult centres such as the temples of Malta. Like her

predecessors, Hawkes declared that it had been destroyed by war-like patriarchal invaders worshipping sky gods: she gave a further apparent precision to this process by identifying these conquerors with the Indo-Europeans, regarding the Beaker People as their western manifestation (Hawkes 1951:158-61; 1954a:20-21, 198, 243-44; 1954b; 1962:57-87; 1963:204-344; 1968a).

Her politics were likewise of a piece with those of Harrison and (more particularly) Massingham. Her favourite period was the 18th century, the last time in her opinion at which civilization and nature were harmoniously intertwined in England; to understand how provocative this concept would be to a socialist in the 1960s it would be remembered that the century concerned was also the time of the Atlantic slave trade, rotten boroughs, the Bloody Code of capital offenses and the golden age of aristocratic oligarchy. With the industrial revolution, as Hawkes saw it (1951:143, 198, 200-01), England grew 'hard, dirty and hideous', and the 'Great Goddess was seen in her aspect as Cinderella, with soot in her hair and dust on her skirt'. Modern science was 'a Frankenstein's monster', leaving the present world 'in helpless expectation of a searing death', and the computer 'a parasite of the Appalonian mind' (Hawkes 1968b:260; 1962:240-41). Her hatred of technology was honed to an intense suspicion of socialism. It is not surprising to find her going out of her way to condemn communism, but there is a startling moment when she describes the American nuclear weapons research station at Los Alamos as the exemplar of 'what socialism would achieve if it had its head' (Hawkes 1954: chapter 8; 1955:277). Salvation, for her as for Massingham, lay in a renewed sense of kinship and unity with Earth, the Great Goddess (Hawkes 1954b:245-49). All these emotional impulses were legitimized, for her general readership, by her authority as an archaeologist. Small wonder that she was so popular, for she provided the prehistoric counterpart to the sentimental conservatism represented in the same period by the histories written by Sir Arthur Bryant and guides to English counties produced by Arthur Mee.

The Universal goddess

Within the British scholarly community, Jacquetta Hawkes was only the most passionate and overtly ideological representative of a broader trend. Whether or not there ever was an Age of the Goddess in Neolithic Europe, there certainly was one among European intellectuals between 1951 and 1963. During the mid 1950s three giants of British archaeology, Gordon Childe, O.G.S. Crawford and Glyn Daniel, declared their belief in the veneration of a single female deity by Neolithic cultures from the Atlantic littoral to the Near East (Childe 1954:64-65, 268; 1958:21, 46, 58, 124-39) Childe was the most tentative, Crawford the most enthusiastic, having been converted to the notion in 1953 and later



devoting a large and euphoric book to it. Both projected the image into later ages; Childe asserted that it lay behind the medieval Christian veneration of female saints, while Crawford found traces of his goddess in a range of folk customs, such as corn dollies. Specialists in the history and theory of religion now took the former existence of such a figure as proven fact, and incorporated it into their own works. Works on the history of art absorbed the same idea and it governed the initial interpretation of fresh excavations in the Near East, such as those of James Mellaart at Catal Hüyük (Mellaart; 1967).

The most remarkable illustration of a wider impact on intellectual culture came in the field of psychology. Freud seems to have said nothing directly about the matter, although his work did emphasize the universal importance of mother figures. Jung, in view of his famous theory of archetypes, was surprisingly offhand when dealing with that of the Mother Goddess. Declaring that the essential archetype was that of the mother, he saw the goddess as merely one derivation from it — not of immediate concern to psychiatrists because the image of her was rarely encountered in the modern world; indeed, he seemed to imply that he only considered her at all because historians of religion had made such a fuss about her (Jung 1959:75-102, *passim*). It was left to his devoted disciple Erich Neumann to argue in 1963 that the evidence for the universal goddess indicated that the archetype of the Great Mother had been a constant 'inward image at work in the human psyche'. Neumann developed this argument into an elaborate theory of human spiritual development, in which the goddess stood for 'the archetypal unity and multiplicity of the feminine nature' and even now 'determines the psychic history of modern man and of modern woman' (Neumann 1963: esp. 1-2, 336). The process now set up was circular; Neumann had based much of his argument upon the data assembled by archaeologists who had developed the notion of the Great Goddess; and his work inspired Jacquetta Hawkes to declare that depth psychology had proved that such an image was natural to human beings — the last evidence she needed to establish its existence in prehistory (Hawkes 1968b:260).

The goddess questioned

So it was that belief achieved the sort of apogee which comes before a fall. In 1962 a young scholar, Peter Ucko, published an essay questioning the interpretation of the Near Eastern figurines as images of a single female deity, and so rocked the foundations of the whole structure of theory (Ucko 1962). His arguments inspired a leading figure in the profession, Stuart Piggott, who more than a decade before had apparently been the only one to view the Neolithic as patriarchal with the same instinctual leap of faith which had carried others towards a matrilineal interpretation (Piggott 1949:82-95). Even Piggott had briefly been carried away by the rush to accept that it venerated a goddess

The process now set up was circular; Neumann had based much of his argument upon the data assembled by archaeologists who had developed the notion of the Great Goddess; and his work inspired Jacquetta Hawkes to declare that depth psychology had proved that such an image was natural to human beings ...

(1954: 46); after Ucko's work he felt able to attack the whole idea (Piggott 1965:114-15). Ucko himself pressed forward his critique at the end of the decade (Ucko 1968); he was joined by another rising scholar, Andrew Fleming, who uncoupled the chain of reasoning which had supported the notion of the Goddess at the other end, by challenging the idea that the western European megaliths could definitely be associated with such a cult (Fleming 1969). Neumann's extrapolation of the image into Jungian psychology was subsequently attacked in its own right, by feminist thinkers who pointed out, convincingly, that it actually provided a pseudo-history to justify male domination (Reuther 1975: 154-57). The effect upon professional prehistorians was to make most return, quietly and without controversy, to that careful agnosticism as to the nature of ancient religion which most had preserved until the 1940s.

The goddess and feminist thinking

The change of view took longer, of course, to filter through to other disciplines which had absorbed the former orthodoxy; it has still not reached many members of the general public. A significant example of this insouciance was the work of Michael Dames, who in the late 1970s wrote a pair of popular books (Dames 1976; 1977) which interpreted the Avebury ritual landscape in terms of the cult of the Great Goddess, relying heavily upon the ideas of Hawkes, Briffault, Graves and other writers in that tradition, and blissfully unaware of any re-interpretations which had been made since. He had so little grasp of archaeology that he made errors which would have appalled somebody such as Jacquetta Hawkes, assuming (for example) that long barrows were in use at the same period as henges and failing to notice that to Hawkes the divide between woman-centred and male-centred cultures had actually separated these classes of monument. By claiming the most spectacular structures of British

She carefully remodeled the image of [the Great Goddess] to conform with evolving feminist opinion, reducing the association with motherhood, fertility and sexuality to emphasize her far more as a mighty creatrix, presiding over all life and death.

prehistory for a single 'age of the Goddess', however, he gave immense pleasure to the increasing number of people who were now actively seeking a feminist alternative to Christian or Hebrew monotheism.

One of these was Marija Gimbutas, the only major figure in professional archaeology to ignore — or rather to reverse — the shift of opinion characterized above. As she was the foremost western expert in the prehistory of eastern Europe, a status largely achieved through her superlative command of the languages of that region, her pronouncements commanded attention. Three aspects of her work are relevant in this context. In strict archaeological terms it was amazingly conservative. Her view of prehistoric Europe remained based firmly upon the theory of invasions first elaborated by Gordon Childe, while her notion of a continent-wide veneration of a single prehistoric goddess was an elaboration of the orthodoxy of the mid-century. In an important sense, her ideas developed in a straight line from the 1950s onward, ignoring all criticisms and counter-models made after that time. She may have been encouraged in this by the necessarily close co-operation which she made with scholars from what were until recently the Warsaw Pact states, upon whose monographs she depended for much of her data. Their attitude to the prehistoric past was likewise bound by relatively inflexible ideological models, which included a belief in primitive matriarchy based upon the admiration which Friedrich Engels had conceived for the theories of Bachofen.

If her work was conservative in a technical sense, its political import was not. Since the opening of the 20th century, as indicated, the prehistoric Goddess has been most often associated with a reactionary literature and a rhetoric of hatred for modernity. Marija Gimbutas, retaining the rhetoric, gave it a radical feminist tone. This aspect of her thought emerged slowly. Her first contribution to the field of prehistoric religion came in 1974, over 20 years into her professional career, when she published *The gods and goddesses of old Europe*, an interpretation of the data from southeastern Europe which built implicitly on the

work of Jacquetta Hawkes and explicitly upon that of Erich Neumann. In harmony with the prevailing reaction against the concept that a single goddess had been honoured there, she classified female deities in the plural. In 1982 she republished this text; reversing its title to give goddesses precedence over gods, but it was only in the books brought out at the very end of her life, in 1989 and 1991, that she began to speak, in the old fashion, of one Great Goddess venerated throughout Neolithic and Chalcolithic Europe, of whom all apparently differing female representations were merely aspects.

She carefully remodeled the image of this being to conform with evolving feminist opinion, reducing the association with motherhood, fertility and sexuality to emphasize her far more as a mighty creatrix, presiding over all life and death. Whereas in 1974 she had acknowledged her debt to Neumann, in 1989 she distanced herself from him by criticizing the limitations of his concepts (Gimbutas 1974:238-39; 1989:316). She sharpened the sense of moral outrage with which the destruction of the matristic clutters had already been invested by previous writers, portraying the whole period from that time until the present as a patriarchal dark age. Her Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures were allowed no vices, the succeeding ages no virtues (Gimbutas 1989:316-21; 1991:vii-xi, 4). Above all, she claimed for the presentation of these ideas the shock of a brand-new revelation, challenging existing orthodoxies and assumptions. She allowed Joseph Campbell, a psychologist famous for popular books on mythology, to declare in a foreword that she had deciphered the Neolithic as Champollion had decoded the hieroglyphs of Egypt (Gimbutas 1989:xiii-xxi; 1991:vii-xi).

The third great characteristic of her later work was that, like Jacquetta Hawkes, she ceased to direct books at fellow scholars and aimed them instead at an inexperienced general public, with impassioned and moving eloquence. She was correspondingly indifferent to professional criticism; her behaviour after 1985 was that of a convert to a faith, preaching it in order to save a threatened world while there was still time, and only too ready to emphasize the distance at which she stood from most other archaeologists (Noble 1989:5-7). A language of revelation coloured the interviews which she gave to feminist periodicals; in one of these she recalled how, on commencing her famous excavations at Achilleion, she picked up a figurine 'of the Goddess' which had been washed to the ground's surface by rain, and thought this 'surely a blessing on her work and her destiny' (Noble 1989:6). The same atmosphere informed her two last, largest and most popular books.

When the latter dealt with southeastern Europe, she was able to draw upon her own immense expertise in the prehistory of that region. It was necessary for her

polemical purpose, however, to argue as Jacquetta Hawkes had done, that the whole of Europe had once been the realm of the Goddess; in extending her claim to the west of it, she relied upon a patchy and selective reasoning, in which a writer such as Michael Dames was accorded equal status with that of professional prehistorians, and some of his mistakes were repeated. Her notions of how a matristic society should have been cause her to attribute the Linkardstown cist culture of Ireland, dated to the 4th millennium, to the 'patriarchal' Indo-Europeans, while the great Wessex henges — almost a thousand years younger — were assigned to the woman-centred 'Old Europe' alleged to have preceded them (Gimbutas 1991:206-19, 341). Such errors were almost inevitable, given the fact that she was working against the clock of a debilitating and ultimately mortal illness. She died hailed by her followers as the avatar of a rediscovered religion; it is suggested here instead that the rediscovery — or discovery — of that religion was a long time in the making, and that it proceeds from the very essence of modernity.

A longer version of this article was first published in Antiquities, Vol 71, #271, March 97, and is printed here with the kind permission of the author and editor.

Check out Antiquities on the Web at <<http://intarch.ac.uk/antiquity>>

References:

- CHILDE, V.G. 1940. *Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles*. London: Routledge.
 1954. *What happened in history*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
 1958. *The prehistory of European society*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- DAMES, M. 1976. *The Silbury treasure: the Great Goddess rediscovered*. London: Thames & Hudson.
 1977. *The Avebury cycle*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- EVANS, SIR A. 1895. *Cretan pictographs and pre-Phoenician script*. London: Quaritch.
 1901. The Neolithic settlement at Knossos and its place in the history of early Aegean culture. *Man* 1: 184-86.
 1921. *The Palace of Minos*. London: Macmillan
- GIMBUTAS, M. 1974 *The gods and goddesses of Old Europe*. London: Thames & Hudson.
 1989. *The language of the goddess*.
 1991. *The civilisation of the goddess*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- HARRISON, J.E. 1903. *Prolegomena to the study of Greek religion*. Cambridge UP.
 1912. *Themis*. Cambridge UP.
- HAWKES, C.F.C. 1940. *The prehistoric foundations of Europe*. London: Methuen.
- HAWKES, J. 1938. The significance of Channelled Ware in Neolithic western Europe, *Archaeological Journal* 14: 126-73.
 1945. *Early Britain*. London: Collins.
 1951. *A land*. London: Cresset.
 1954a. *A guide to the prehistoric and Roman monuments of England and Wales*. London: Chatto and Windus.
 1954b. *Man on Earth*. London: Cresset.
 1962. *Man and the sun*. London: Cresset
 1963. *UNESCO history of mankind* 1(1). New York: UNESCO.
 1968a. *Dawn of the gods*. London: Chatto & Windus.
 1968b. The proper study of mankind, *Antiquity* 42: 255-62.
- JUNG, C. 1959. *Collected works* 9(1): *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. London: Routledge.
- MASSINGHAM, H.J. 1932. *World without end*. London: Cobden-Sanderson.
 1944. *Remembrance: an autobiography*. London: Batsford.
- MELLAART, J. 1967. *Catal Hüyük*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- MERCHANT, C. 1980. *The death of nature*. San Francisco: Harper Row.
- NEUMANN, E. 1963. *The Great Mother: an analysis of the archetype*. Princeton UP.
- NOBLE, V. 1989. Marija Gimbutas: reclaiming the Great Goddess, *Snake Power* 1: 5-7.
- PIGGOTT, S. 1949. *British prehistory*. Oxford UP.
 1965. *Ancient Europe*. Edinburgh UP.
 1986. Ancient British craftsmen, *Antiquity* 60: 189-92.
- REUTHER, R. 1975. *New woman, new Earth*. New York: Seabury.
- UCKO, P. 1962. The interpretation of prehistoric anthropomorphic figurines, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 92: 38-54.
 1968. *Anthropomorphic figurines of Predynastic Egypt and Neolithic Crete with comparative material from the prehistoric Near East and mainland Greece*. London: Royal Anthropological Institute. Occasional Paper 24.
- VARNDELL, G. 1991. The ritual objects, in Ian Longworth *et al.*, *Excavations at Grimes Graves, Norfolk 1972-1976: Fascicule 3*. London: British Museum.

Margaret St. Clair, Forgotten Foremother of Pagan Science Fiction

by Chas S. Clifton
University of Southern Colorado

The importance of science fiction and fantasy writing in the Pagan community is undeniable. Most often told is the story of how Robert Heinlein's 1961 novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* (SISL) helped spawn the Church of All Worlds. As CAW co-founder Oberon (Tim) Zell recently wrote, "SISL introduced me and a few friends to the ideas of Immanent Divinity ('Thou Art God'), Pantheism ('all that groks is God'), Sacraments (water sharing), Priestesses, social nakedness, intimate extended families as a basis for community; and, of course, open, loving relationships without jealousy; and joyous expression of sexuality as divine union." From that introduction, Zell, Lance Christie, and others created the Church of All Worlds, and as Zell acknowledges, "organized SF fandom ... had an enormous influence on the CAW and the newly emerging Pagan movement, providing a template for our organization that continues to this day."¹ For instance, organized Pagan festivals, which began in the mid-1970s and blossomed in the 1980s, often carried the syllable 'con,' from 'convention,' in their names (Gnosticon, Esotericon), a practice begun by the organizers of SF fan conventions. (More recently, as festivals moved from urban hotels to outdoor campgrounds, more are described as 'festivals' or 'fests'.)

We might even speculate that SF was more important in North America than in the British Wiccan revival, because North American Pagans could not tell themselves a story about re-connecting with the religious tradition of their land's former inhabitants. Instead, they had to forge their own and they drew often as not on visions of alternative futures for inspirations. Fantasy works turn up frequently on coven reading lists. A writer in the Colorado-based magazine *Mountain Oracle* suggests that aspirants to a Wiccan first-degree initiation should read Katherine Kurtz's *Lammas Night* (based on the ritual work said to have been carried out in 1940 to halt the planned German invasion of England),² Ursula LeGuin's *Earthsea Trilogy* and other works of fantasy, together with the expected works of Margot Adler, Scott Cunningham and other

contemporary writers on magic. Additional works (Charles De Lint, Castaneda) are prescribed for the second degree.³

With the exception of the Church of All Worlds, the preceding paragraphs largely describe the decade of the 1970s and subsequently. But Neopagan Witchcraft and the world of science fiction intersected at least as early as 1963, the year of publication of Margaret St. Clair's novel *Sign of the Labrys*. Unfortunately, St. Clair, who lived from 1911 to 1995, would be caught between her writer's craft and the secrecy of the Craft. Accused by her Craft

mentors of having 'given away too much,' she would back away from overtly Wiccan themes while still expressing her underlying spiritual and ecological philosophies. In her later years, her writing output declined, and few contemporary Wiccans are aware of her work.

*Margaret St. Clair's use
of the word 'labrys' in
her title suggests that she
had been reading Robert
Graves, who announced
in The White Goddess
that the double-headed ax
was a sign of goddess
worship.*

When *Sign of the Labrys*⁴ came out in 1963, 'SF' definitely stood for science fiction then, although of course it was speculative too. This was the age of 'space opera' starship troopers and slim-finned rockets pulling G's as they strained

to leave planetary gravity. Technocrats ruled, while "Beyond the perdurite windows, magnified in the crystalline clarity of the asteroid's synthetic atmosphere, loomed a row of the immense squat turret forts that guarded the Astrophon base — their mighty twenty-four-inch rifles, coupled to the Veronar autosight, covered with their theoretical range everything within Jupiter's orbit." Women, when they appeared, were "Elora Renee ... the lovely dark-eyed Martian girl" or "his wife, Myra [who] fluffed up her red hair in a distracted fashion."

That is not Margaret St. Clair's writing; the first two quotations came from Jack Williamson's story 'Hindsight' and the third from 'When the Bough Breaks,' by Lewis Padgett. Both stories appeared in John W. Campbell Jr.'s 1952 anthology of works previously published in *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine, one of the classic SF 'pulp.'⁵ It was a masculine world of drawing boards and atomic pistols, and the only witches were female, perhaps interplanetary sorceresses like James H. Schmitz's *The Witches of Karres*⁶ or priestesses of exotic religions far off in time or space. But even those fictional characters had some

imaginal power: How many of Schmitz's readers wondered if they too could mentally sense some equivalent of the klatha power?

Still, as Ramfis S. Firethorn noted in a recent issue of *Green Egg* devoted to the theme of 'science fiction and Paganism,' the 'Golden Age' of science fiction—the late 1930s and early 1940s—generally ignored Witchcraft as a theme.⁷

*Sign of the Labrys is
sprinkled with signatures of
the Gardnerian Craft: people
saying 'Blessed be' to each
other; use of ligature and
drugs to gain 'the sight,' ...
ritual nudity, ritual garters,
and Sewell's initiation by a
man in a stag mask
with a scourge ...*

Robert Graves, who announced in *The White Goddess* that the double-headed ax was a sign of goddess worship. But who was she? In 'Thoughts from my Seventies,' her introduction to a collection of her earlier stories, *The Best of Margaret St. Clair*, published in 1985 by Academy Chicago, she wrote, "The road from ... Kansas to science fiction writing in California is a tortuous one and one that I don't want to try to retrace. John Clute, who did a critical study of my work in Science Fiction Writers, characterized me as 'elusive,' and it may be so."

She had moved with her family to California when she was 17. Presumably that was in 1928, just a year before the economic crash that marked her generation's lives. She attended the University of California at Berkeley, and went on to get a master's degree in Greek. She met her husband, Eric St. Clair, at Berkeley also. In that same introduction, she talks about the craft of science-fiction writing. She liked the freedom that the genre gave her as a writer, but she seemed perplexed by fandom. "I am often puzzled by the intensity of feeling people bring to [science fiction]. Is it a sacred cause? Have science fiction writers become the seers, the prophets, the moral teachers of our age? Can they

"There was plenty written about high sorcery and high magic in ancient kingdoms. Magic swords abounded, and towers in which fearful wizards conjured terrible demons, but people who practiced simple magic in a religious context were peculiarly absent. Then two literary events occurred ... [Margaret Murray's works] and the publication of Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*."⁸ Margaret St. Clair's use of the word 'labrys' in her title suggests that she had been reading

give us guidance on levels unknown to the writers of detective or gothic fiction? I don't find the qualifications for these elevated roles among my colleagues or in myself." In her opinion, SF's "predictive and prophetic value, in which public respect for science fiction seems to be rooted, have not proved very great." Instead, she offered, "the historic task of science fiction is to develop a global consciousness. ... It may be that science fiction writers, without ever being conscious of it, have been moved as a group to blow on the spark of a new awareness in human beings: that we live on a sacred planet." If she was right, then Jack Williamson's story 'Hindsight' unconsciously fit the mission, for despite its space-opera trappings, its plot turned on the desperate attempt by the citizens of Earth to break loose from the rule of the Astrarch, a space pirate who became dictator of our solar system. (That the Earth people all seemed to be Americans was another matter; *Astounding Science Fiction* was an American magazine.)

In 'Idris' Pig,' the first story in *The Best of Margaret St. Clair*, the sacred planet was Mars—an inhabitable Mars, like that of Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*. The title itself gives a clue: 'Idris Seabright' was one of St. Clair's pen names, and if she got 'labrys' from Graves' *White Goddess*, she cannot have missed his references to Idris, one of the Three Happy Astronomers of Britain, according to the Welsh triads, and to Cader Idris, a Welsh mountain with a stone 'chair' at its summit, "where," Graves wrote, "according to local the legend, whoever spends the night is found in the morning either dead, mad, or a poet."⁹ George, the male protagonist, traveling on an interplanetary spaceliner between Earth and Mars, 'planet of perfumes,' accepts a mysterious commission to deliver an odoriferous miniature pig to someone who will recognize his password at the spaceport. There are various mix-ups, some violent, and eventually he becomes allied with Blixia, a "good-looking [Martian] girl" with dark red hair. Just when two drooling bad guys have George and Blixia cornered, she plays her trump card:

"'Ando djar,' Blixia said. She raised one hand and swept the red curls back from her forehead.

"'D-d-dai?' the shorter addict said.

"'Andor,' Blixia replied. George, peering at her obliquely, saw that on her forehead shone, in pale blue fire, the intertwined symbols of the full and crescent moon."¹⁰

The bad guys beg the priestess's pardon and retreat, leaving George and Blixia to complete their mission. The moon symbols sound just like those often displayed on a Witch Queen's crown or on an athame, yet 'Idris' Pig' was first published in 1949 in the magazine *Startling Stories*. That was only a year after *The White Goddess*.

Sign of the Labrys begins, “There is a fungus that grows on the walls that they eat. It is a violet color, a dark reddish violet, and tastes fresh and sweet. People go into the clefts to pick it.” By the second paragraph, the reader is into a familiar scenario of Cold War-era science fiction: a post-catastrophe world where huge underground shelters were constructed and “never actually occupied, and there had been no need for peace to be made for them to be abandoned entirely. People live in them now because they are quiet, even luxurious.”

Sam Sewell, the narrator, lives in “the tier called E3” under an unnamed city in the former United States. Due to global ‘yeast plagues,’ Earth’s population has plummeted, government and commerce dissolved, and the survivors merely drift through their days, finding what they need in the massive stockpiles of emergency supplies, their chief meaningful, organized labor being the collecting and mass burial of victims of the continuing, although abated, plagues. By page 2, Sewell has been contacted by an agent of the FBY (Federal Bureau of Yeast?): “As far as we can be said to have a government nowadays, it is the FBY; I don’t know why we dread it so. Perhaps it is the background of ‘science,’ which, to a man of my generation, is automatically dreadful.” The FBY is hunting a woman named “Despoina, or Spina, or just D ... We suspect that she may be a sower [of infectious yeasts].” Despoina, the agent informs him on his next visit, is a witch.¹¹ Sewell’s reaction is predictable: he thinks first of old hags, broomsticks, and so forth, whereas Despoina is described as a “girl ... slender and small-boned, with a remarkably fair skin [and] very heavy red-gold hair.”¹²

If readers have guessed that Despoina is the priestess, that Sewell will become her partner, and that the FBY will play the role of the Inquisition, they have the bare bones of the plot. And if they detect a parallel between Sam Sewell and Jan Bonder and between Despoina and “pliant and graceful” Morven the witch (with “pure ivory flesh” and “red-gold hair”¹³), they might wonder if Margaret St. Clair had picked up a little-known novel of 1949 called *High Magic’s Aid*, by a writer using the pen name ‘Scire.’ Most definitely she had read the same writer’s next book, *Witchcraft Today*, published in 1954 under his own name, Gerald Gardner.¹⁴ *Sign of the Labrys* is sprinkled with signatures of the Gardnerian Craft: people saying ‘Blessed be’ to each other, use of ligature and drugs to gain ‘the sight,’ recovered memories of the Burning Times and an ancient Sabbat rite (‘Horse, Horse and hattock!’), ritual nudity, ritual garters, and Sewell’s initiation by a man in a stag mask with a scourge (a detail which would cause St. Clair some small problems later).¹⁵

Sign of the Labrys carried a publication date of August 1963, which is significant, because according to mainstream Wiccan history, the Gardnerian tradition arrived in North America in the persons of Raymond and Rosemary Buckland slightly later. The date has led some Witches to speculate on a pre-Buckland strain of Gardnerian-influenced Wicca in North America. According to Buckland himself, however, St. Clair had read *Witchcraft Today* and

*Another visitor to that
same house was Ed
Fitch, a younger
American who found
the Craft through the
St. Clairs.*

combined its influence with her own preexisting desire for a Pagan renaissance but was not yet formally initiated. Both St. Clairs were interested in magic and were, in effect, Neopagans before the term was in common use. Margaret’s background in Classics contributed largely to that fact; she would have read such scholars on Greek mythology as Jane Hamilton, who contributed a lot to the mythos of

‘ancient matriarchies.’ The St. Clairs had been in touch with Gerald Gardner circa 1962, and, Buckland said, “Gerald put them on to me.”¹⁶ Margaret St. Clair sent him a copy of her new book, *Sign of the Labrys*: “Perhaps a little late in the day, she asked me if I would critique it for Craft details. I thought they were very good at the time except for the fact that she had a man initiating a man.”¹⁷ The error in ritual did not prevent a friendship from developing. “They were absolutely wonderful people, very warm and loving,” Buckland recalled. After correspondence and visits, the Bucklands flew from New York to California and initiated the St. Clairs, who used the Craft names Froniga and Weyland, on 15 April 1966. Eric’s Craft name reflected his interest in smithcraft and jewelry-making; he made the silver witch queen’s crown that Rosemary Buckland wears in photographs in Raymond’s book *Witchcraft from the Inside*.¹⁸

The St. Clairs’ house “was a great place to visit,” Buckland recalled. “It was high up in the hills [above Berkeley] with a fantastic view—an all-wood house; the walls were plain, bare wood. They had floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and the most incredible collection of the first editions of all the Oz books by Frank Baum. Margaret was very much into herbs and had an herb garden.” Another visitor to that same house was Ed Fitch, a younger American who found the Craft through the St. Clairs. He confirmed that their interest in magic predated their Gardnerian initiation.¹⁹ “When I first walked into their house down at the end of Skyline Drive in Richmond (California) in 1964, the hardwood floor had a triple circle with a pentagram inscribed in it. Me being the innocent, I figured, ‘Oh, how very interesting,’ And I saw the ceremonial sword on the wall, but I

did not connect two and two to make four. The key thing about the circles on the floor is that that's not the way the Gardnerians would have done it. That is pre-Gardnerian, although it's conceivably out of *High Magic's Aid*. What they had there predated their association with the Bucklands."

Like the majority of 1960s Wiccans, Fitch made his initial connection through books. He had already read Gardner's *Witchcraft Today*; then, "I was living in Baltimore at the time with my parents after I got out of the Air Force the first

Unfortunately for her potential readers, the 'slap on the wrist' she apparently received for spilling secrets — as 'secrets' were perceived in the 1960s — seems to have soured her on creating any more obviously Wiccan characters.

time. When I started getting restless, I would go out to the airport and watch the planes go in and out. I browsed through their really good book section and came across *Sign of the Labrys*. I flipped through it, put it back on the shelf, took a couple steps, stopped, and said, 'Wait a second! Moon phases ... priestess ... this fits with what Gardner said and what Robert Graves said.' I read it carefully and said, 'Aha, this is the Craft.' I read it and re-read it. Once I began writing to Margaret in care of the publisher, I began a steady exchange of letters, and

they invited me to come out and visit them. Late that year I did exactly that." When Fitch rejoined the Air Force and was stationed in Massachusetts, "they sent a report on me to the Bucklands and said that I was good material for the Gardnerian Craft. I got a letter from Rosemary, and as soon as I got settled in at the air base, I contacted the Bucklands, went down [to Long Island] to pay them a visit and we were friends instantly. That was how Margaret and Eric got me connected in with the Craft." In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Fitch continued to visit the St. Clairs. "We would settle down and talk and talk and talk — they were willing to go all night, but I would start collapsing at about 3 a.m." Neither he nor Buckland remember them ever leading a coven. Childless by choice, bookish, both writers, the St. Clairs preferred their long-distance friendships to taking a hands-on role in the growing 1970s Pagan renaissance. By then the St. Clairs were in their sixties, and as Fitch recalls, there was a certain generation gap between them and the new psychedelic Pagans. Not that they were prudes, he continued. They were well-traveled, stayed at nudist colonies, and "while they approved of a lot of the liberal attitudes, they disapproved of most of the people that were putting things forth and thought

that they were pretty gauche. Also, they were 'hardshell Gardnerians,' I guess you'd say. About the time that they were initiated, we were all convinced that the Gardnerian Book of Shadows was cast in granite and that it had been that way with every word unchanged for centuries. We don't believe that anymore, but at that time, they did, and so they had a strong suspicion of anybody that would call himself or herself a Witch." Nevertheless, Fitch said, "If anyone deserved the term 'elders,' they did."

The St. Clairs had also disconnected themselves somewhat from the Bay Area, moving to a new home on the Pacific coast near Point Arena. They had read Dion Fortune's novels *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*, and recreated their atmosphere in a house where every window had an ocean view. Eric St. Clair died in 1987. Ed Fitch last saw Margaret in early 1994, a little more than a year before her death. "She was so very frail that afterwards [some other friends] and myself felt that she might not survive the trauma of when her old cat died. Her cat seemed to be the one friend that she still had left. More people should have visited her."

Perhaps Margaret St. Clair felt she had given away too much in *Sign of the Labrys*, for her subsequent novels were not so overtly Wiccan, even though a feminist Pagan outlook continued to inform them. Despite wearing the camouflage of the male-oriented 'Golden Age of Science Fiction,' she had always tended to deflate the heroic ego in her stories. Her 'successful' male characters, like Sam Sewell, were skeptical and humble; when more heroic, grasping types defeated them, the long-term prognosis for humanity was going to be bad. Her 1949 story 'Hathor's Pets' undercut the traditional 'Golden Age' female characterizations: helpless, inferior, or evil. Although the narrator's sister "was never very logical" and hardly "violated the cult of feminine delicacy," she is a product of her times: "the government-sponsored cult of feminine modesty, chastity, and brainlessness in the late 1980s had put an end to [feminine intelligence and independence]. Nowadays a woman was a cross between a dripping sponge and a vegetable." Perhaps St. Clair was prophetess enough to foresee the rise of the Religious Right and Focus on the Family.

In *The Dancers of Noyo* she entered the sub-genre of Northern California After The Big Collapse, similar territory to that explored by Ursula LeGuin in her *Always Coming Home* or Ernest Callenbach in *Ecotopia*. Maybe she had witnessed some members of the Psychedelic Generation engaging in what we called at the time psychedelic fascism: 'Be hip, or else.' *Dancers'* world is divided into coastal tribes: back-to-the-land hippies who have aged and become the Mandarins, "all the old activists ... the most self-righteous generation since Queen Nefertiti." They enforce vision quests and the production of

hallucinations upon the younger generation. “I’ve never been able to understand, though, why the Mandarins prize visual illusions so much,” the young narrator says. “... the trouble was that the people my own age, though they hated the whole mystic bit, confined their action against it to bitching.”²⁰ *Dancers* is less Wiccan than *Labrys* but none the less magical. Its magic, however, is more shamanistic and bioregional than Gardnerian; after earthquakes and plagues, the children of the wannabe Indians are in fact beginning truly to inhabit the land. “It seemed to me that the legends were coming back,” says the narrator, another Sam. “The coast was reappearing itself with figures from its ancient past ... The old ways were coming back.”²¹ As in *Sign of the Labrys*, this Sam and his female companion must uncover and destroy an evil conspiracy.

St. Clair published two novels between *Labrys* and *Dancers*. These were *Message from the Eocene* (1964) and *The Dolphins of Altair* (1967), about humans conspiring with intelligent dolphins to save the environment. I have been unable to locate either one, but as the Eocene era marked the rise of mammals, I suspect that the former as well as the latter showed her ecological concerns. Science fiction’s impact on Neopaganism and Wicca may well have lasted because its characters sometimes offered role models of a sort to a community overloaded with ‘beginners’ and short on ‘elders.’ In addition, as I suggested earlier, science fiction might possibly have been a more potent ‘growth agent’ on Neopaganism in North America than in Britain, for instance.

I would also suggest that St. Clair’s work set a course that would be followed later by North American Wicca. It began with combing through ceremonial magic, succeeded by some wholesale borrowings from Gardnerian Wicca, and now, I suspect, is moving towards a more place-oriented practice and an attempt to discover a new spiritual relationship with the land that at the same time does not merely copy or ‘steal’ the practices of native tribes. Unfortunately for her potential readers, the ‘slap on the wrist’ she apparently received for spilling secrets—as ‘secrets’ were perceived in the 1960s—seems to have soured her on creating any more obviously Wiccan characters. Years would pass before any other author did so. Nevertheless, Margaret St. Clair was able to communicate her broader concerns. At this writing, at least one publisher has expressed interest in reprinting her Pagan-themed work, so possibly her influence will spread a little further.

*An earlier version of this essay appeared in Songs of the Dayshift Foreman
(Box 1607, Aldergrove, BC V4W 2V1, Canada),
an articulate Pagan newsletter highly recommended
by the editors of The Pom.*

References:

1. Oberon Zell, ‘Science Fiction, Double Feature,’ *Green Egg* 118 (March-April 1997): 3. Cf. Chap 6, ‘A Religion from the Future—the Church of All Worlds’ in Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), as well as Robert S Ellwood, *The Sixties: Spiritual Awakening* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994): 183-85.
2. As I argues in my 1985 paper, ‘Secrecy and Historicity in the Book of Shadows,’ the story of 1940 magical workings to thwart the threatened German invasion is foundational to the British Craft. It established Wicca’s patriotic credentials and, esoterically, drew a set of parallels in which Britain = Native Paganism and Nazi Germany = Christianity.
3. Kieran Rhys, ‘A Matter of Degree,’ *The Mountain Oracle* 1:3 (Summer 1997): 82-83.
4. Margaret St. Clair, *Sign of the Labrys* (New York: Bantam Books, 1963).
5. John W Campbell, ed. *The Astounding Science Fiction Anthology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952).
6. James H Schmitz, *The Witches of Karres* (New York: Ace Books, 1966). A portion of this novel was published in Campbell’s 1952 anthology, noted above.
7. Those years were the ‘Golden Age’ as defined by literary critics. The other ‘Golden Age of Science Fiction,’ I am told on good authority, is whenever the reader was 13 years old.
8. Ramfis S Firethorn, ‘Speculative Theurgy,’ *Green Egg* 118 (March-April 1997): 8.
9. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1966 [1948]) 91.
10. *The Best of Margaret St. Clair* 36.
11. St. Clair, *Labrys*, 13.
12. St. Clair, *Labrys*, 8.
13. Gerald Gardner, *High Magic’s Aid* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1975 [1949]) 204.
14. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider & Co, 1954).
15. St. Clair, *Labrys*, 53-54.
16. Raymond Buckland, personal interview, 5 June 1997.
17. Gardnerian initiations were supposed to be of men by women and vice versa. Hearing of this mistake in the text, a contemporary Gardnerian priestess said, “If I were arguing for St. Clair back then, I would have argued that I had turned it around deliberately.”
18. Raymond Buckland, *Witchcraft from the Inside* (St Paul: Llewellyn, 1971).
19. Ed Fitch (pseudonym), personal interview, 6 June 1997.
20. St. Clair, *Dancers*, 8-9.
21. St. Clair, *Dancers*, 163.

BOOK REVIEWS: Two New Books on Pagan Ritual

The Spell of Making

Blacksun

Chicago: Eschaton Productions. 1995

Castings: The Creation of Sacred Space

Ivo Dominguez, Jr. (Panpipe)

Georgetown: SapFire Productions, 1996

Reveiwed by Diana Tracy

Back in the dark ages when many of us started Wicca, we were starved for knowledge, and, being of the intellectual bent, headed to our nearest libraries and bookstores looking for revealing tomes. What we found were abstruse esoterica only indirectly related to our doings, or decidedly spare recipe books of 'spells' and a few rituals. There were few sources that provided satisfactory 'whole cloth' rituals, nor were there books that explored the implications and obligations of doing magic.

When Neopaganism began to flower on the late 70s and early 80s, a new generation of books proliferated. Unfortunately, even the best of them tended to be 'how' books, with only minimum attention paid to the 'why' and 'wherefore' departments.

Currently there is another surge of new titles at the local bookstores, and no few of them are on the art of creating ritual. To my joy and amazement, even the weakest of them seem to cover at least some aspects of ethical, spiritual and theoretical issues. Do you suppose this means that we are actually *thinking* about what we're doing, rather than just doing it? What a refreshing concept!

The following two books are, in my mind, a couple of the best available. Both deal thoroughly with the issues raised by doing magic. One goes deeply into the mechanics of actually creating a ritual from start to finish, and the other focuses

mainly on the creation of sacred space. I had originally thought that I would be judging these books on an 'either/or' basis, but I find that I'm glad to have both of them on my bookshelf.

The Spell of Making by Blacksun could be thought of as a detailed operator's manual for the creation of ritual, full of detail, and complete with a tutorial. Breezy and accessible, this book reads like having a series of fireside conversations with this 20 year veteran of Wicca. Blacksun, is a long time high priest of a large west coast organization (he lives in Seattle), and he has researched and lectured on this subject, as well as refined his ritual making technique in both large and small venues. His first published work on the subject, *The Beginning Elements of Ritual Construction*, has been sold and distributed by Circle for better than ten years; and his series of articles in the old *Georgian Newsletter* concerning ritual-making precede even that. Much of Northwest Wiccan ritual shows the touch of his most competent hand.

Ritual is certainly not unique to just Pagans, and Blacksun's formula could be applied to any religion at all. But his experience as a coven's High Priest for 17 years is used throughout to illustrate the principles and techniques he describes in his book. This makes it not just a dry work of theory for study, but a comfortable read that will give you insight and understanding as well as knowledge. Parts are inspiring, others are humorous, but all are educational and enjoyable.

Though *The Spell of Making* is written as if it were a fireside conversation, beware: this is compact information. Few could read it from front to back without having to put it down several times and mull over the information. Even one chapter a day will keep you thinking long into the night. It is a whole new approach to looking at religious ritual that you won't find in any text book or college course. Even if you only plan to attend rituals, this book will give you insight that will be invaluable in making your participation more magical and spiritually significant than before. And if you plan to create or produce rituals, and you want to insure that you know what you are doing and why it should be done, this information will give you the best chance of making those rituals truly wondrous.

The book is written in three parts. The first part of the book details what religious ritual is and how it works. Blacksun makes a passionate case against casual preparation and production of rituals. He gives specific definitions to various words and spiritual concepts that are frequently used inexactly in the neopagan community. With his explanation of the conscious and unconscious



mind, he explains why and how symbols are used within ritual and how to make our magic real.

The second part of *The Spell of Making* gives a step-by-step 'blueprint' of a ritual. Each step (focus, vision, handling energy, cleanup) has a chapter of its own, and much effort is put into explaining not only the 'hows' but the 'whys and wherefores' as well. Along the way, Blacksun explains what each step is supposed to accomplish and offers familiar examples of how that can be done. As the reader is led from one step to the next, Blacksun shows how each is connected and dependent on the others before it. However, he notes that these

If you are a third degree Wiccan ... The Spell of Making is for you. If you are a Neopagan new to magical work ... then you'll be wanting to read Castings: the Creation of Sacred Space.

steps are merely framework; that to build truly great ritual is an art which uses this framework to make something beautiful and spiritually meaningful. As with other arts, time and practice are the necessary ingredients for creating good ritual.

The last section of the book may be the most valuable to those with no mentors who are faced with the task of writing ritual. Blacksun has provided two complete rituals in the Appendices, complete with line numbers. These are rituals that are currently being performed, and have been refined over time. In chapter 14, he goes over one of the rituals line by line, dissecting and explaining what he was writing and why he did it that way. All of the principles and formulas described in the previous chapters of the book are employed, and the reader is given a real, practical look at how they are used in this particular ritual.

In the following chapter, the reader is then led through the process of building a ritual from scratch. Some parts are produced only to be discarded later, as will happen in real creative process. Blacksun discusses his thinking as the ritual-building progresses. The process of development is written for all to see, and the result is a well made ritual that works exactly as intended. Appendix B contains the completed ritual, as actually performed.

This book is not aimed at neophytes. It assumes at least some knowledge of theory and practice, and some experience at least participating in rituals. Although couched in primarily Wiccan terms, it is certainly applicable to the broader Neopagan community, as well as anyone needing to understand the principles of ritual writing.

Castings: The Creation of Sacred Space by Ivo Dominguez Jr. (Panpipe) is an invitation to and an exploration of sacred space. Dominguez is an active member of the Neopagan community on the east coast, and has participated in a variety of esoteric disciplines. This is reflected in his book; although applicable to Wicca, it focuses on a much broader spectrum of traditions, including Quaballah, ceremonial magic, astrology, and the more traditional eastern and western religions.

Castings, like *The Spell of Making*, is divided into sections. The first contains a series of lessons and simple illustrative exercises, the second deals with magical symbolism, and the third is a variety of casting techniques. If you go through this book as intended, following the exercises and castings in order, you will have a very solid foundation for working magic.

The introduction almost put me off. Although filled with good information, especially for the neophyte, I found the language a bit thick and 'over-scholarly'. However, this was less apparent in the rest of the book.

The first three chapters deal with the self. Inner work that everybody who makes magic should do is laid out in a sensible progression. Issues like inner vision, state of mind before, during and after magical work, and the most important of all, awareness of self are explored using the basic senses as a pathway to understanding. From chapter three, Inner Preparations: "Of all the variables to consider, the quality of any casting is determined, to the largest part, by the internal state of the person or persons involved in the creation of the space."

Further chapters covering the use of energy, grounding and centering, and immanence and transcendence complete this first section. The information is dense and detailed. More complex exercises build on the previous workings. Definitions are clear, and pros and cons of different actions ("What happens if I don't ground?") are discussed.

Next, Dominguez undertakes a discussion of magical symbolism. He shows a wide variety of symbol languages from a variety of traditions, and does a



remarkably good job of showing how they work together as a magical fabric covering all esoteric traditions. He makes it clear that castings can be as simple or complex as you wish, depending on the amount of work you wish to do.

The final section is a series of casting exercises, some designed for solo work, and some for groups. These show Dominguez' ease with moving amongst the many traditions that he's studied. Each working is laid out in detail, including what to expect from a magical standpoint, and what to notice when reviewing the work. Although I must say that I'm not entirely tuned in to all of his modalities, each work does present a different way of manipulating magical energies. A run through all of them would give a practitioner a good solid feel for how the energy is moving during a ritual.

A short chapter is given to working with large groups, including a ritual that worked successfully for their group. A final word about importance of intent during magical work wraps up this excellent book.

Both books are well laid out, and progress from simple to complex information, bringing the reader along with exercises and examples. They both accomplish what they set out to do with aplomb. Neither is a cover to cover read. One should expect to read, work, and then digest the information presented before moving on. My only major criticism of them is their lack of quality bibliographies. Neither of these books would benefit greatly from footnoting, but both should, in my opinion, be providing extensive reading lists. That said, I shall be recommending both of these books to my students.

If you are a third degree Wiccan who has only participated in rituals and has suddenly been required to provide effective ritual for your group, *The Spell of Making* is for you. If you are a Neopagan new to magical work, or if you are a Wiccan from one of those 'boy scout badge' type of groups, and you want to *really* understand what magic is all about, then you'll be wanting to read *Castings: the Creation of Sacred Space*.

The Spell of Making
Blacksun
Chicago: Eschaton Productions. 1995.
ISBN #1-57353-109-X

Castings: The Creation of Sacred Space
Ivo Dominguez, Jr. (Panpipe)
Georgetown: SapFire Productions, 1996.
ISBN #0-9654198-09-0



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Nancy Ramsey

The Myth of Historical Narrative in
M. Murray's *The God of the Witches*

2

Pam A. Detrixhe

Excavating Sites of Production:
M. Murray's Theory of Religion in Context

16

Fritz Muntean

J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*:
A Critical Appreciation

28

Book Review

Diane Purkiss' *The Witch in History*
Ronald Hutton

40

Readers' Forum

*Pagans & Wiccans, The Charge of the
Goddess, Research Methods*

47



The Pomegranate

Editorial Staff

Maggie Carew, Stephen McManus, Fritz Muntean, Diana Tracy

Copyright

© 1997 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate

is published four times a year at the Cross-Quarter Holidays by *The Pomegranate*, 501 NE Thompson Mill Rd, Corbett, OR 97019.

Deadline:

The Solstice or Equinox preceeding each issue. See the inside back cover for our Call for Papers, and send to the above address for our Writers' Guidelines, or to our email address below.

Internet Home Page:

<http://www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/>
(email: antech@teleport.com)

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monodfield
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within the Craft. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included. In the interests of promoting lively discussion, we encourage both our writers and our readers to keep an open mind, and to be ready to explore a wide variety of outlooks.

Notes from the Underground

Since last we spoke, my eager minions have been busy indeed. Among other exciting adventures, two of their number attended the American Academy of Religion's annual meeting in San Francisco, a 3-day extravaganza featuring thousands of Religious Studies scholars of every possible stripe. Our fledgeling magazine was passed around to general approbation, and many subscriptions were bought and paid for on the spot. Even more exciting, several scholars offered articles of their own for publication in *The Pom*, and many others expressed interest in doing so in the not-too-distant future.

As was recently mentioned, we never intended to build our issues around thematic material. But once again, those articles which have crossed our threshold this time around all seem to be concerned with those 19th century 'armchair' anthropologists — James George Frazer and Margaret Alice Murray — whose work proved so inspiring to the early Neopagan pioneers. In fact, we have not one, but two articles about Murray's work to offer our readers in this issue.

If that is not exciting enough, dear readers, we also have, for the first time in this issue, the premier installment of our long-awaited Reader's Forum. It is our fondest hope that *The Pom*'s articles and reviews will continue to generate interest (and even controversy) among our faithful subscribers, and that all of you will do your part and write to us. Remember, a free issue will be sent to every readers whose letters we publish!

So we all hope that you are as excited about this, our third issue, as we are. We also hope that you will continue to subscribe to our magazine, write letters to our eager editorial staff, and (most important of all) submit articles for us to publish.

Persephone (and her minions)

The Myth of Historical Narrative: Margaret Murray's *The God of the Witches*

by Nancy Ramsey

University of California, Santa Barbara

An important area of contention that arises when the scholars of today approach the religions of Witchcraft and Paganism concerns the origins of modern Witchcraft and whether any historical continuity exists between contemporary Pagans and the ancient pagan religions of Europe. One cannot examine this subject without taking into account the work and writings of Margaret Murray. The impact of her work remains extraordinary, serving as inspiration for the works of many other authors. For good or ill, it has greatly influenced scholarly attitudes toward the history of Witchcraft, the ideas held by popular culture about the origins and characteristics of Witchcraft, and the beliefs of contemporary Wiccan and Neopagan populations about their own self-identity and personal historical narrative. Therefore, a closer look at Murray's career and work prove vital to a clear understanding of both the history of Witchcraft and the approach religious studies scholars utilize when delving into this history and the nature of Witchcraft then and now.

Evolution, Pagan 'Survivals,' and the 'Soul' of a Nation

Mircea Eliade stresses that an important factor in the study of religion lies not in the validity of a particular theory but in its reception by academia and popular culture (1976: 3). Margaret Murray's theories and work contain enormous inaccuracies, yet her corpus of literature received wide attention and wielded enormous influence. An exploration into the cultural fashions of the early 1900s can shed a great deal of light on why this took place. Three prevalent ways of conceptualizing religion gave Murray's work the impetus it needed to gain a place in the academic world and popular culture. Her work built upon and took advantage of evolutionary theory applied to religion, the idea of pagan 'survivals,' and the longing for a national mythology.

Most thinkers of her day subscribed to the concept of evolution in culture and religion. The persuasiveness of this evolutionary outlook, which viewed history as progressing and improving according to some sort of divine plan, both predated and coincided with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, and had a prominent role in the cultural fashion of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The idea that nature marched along the path of evolutionary history mirrored the popular concept of the evolution of culture and religion.

The study of the history of Witchcraft in the early 20th century grew primarily out of anthropological research. Many theories of the history of Witchcraft, including those of Murray, drew heavily on the Enlightenment idea of evolutionary progress popularized in the nineteenth century. The idea of pagan 'survivals,' practices that had originated during an earlier evolutionary period and survived into a later stage of development, meshed easily with the evolutionary perspective of this period. Although many, if not most, scholars of the day fell in with evolutionary ideas and utilized the concept of pagan 'survivals,' perhaps their most prominent advocate was Sir James Frazer. The Frazerian view, that magic, religion, and science belong to an evolutionary sequence, received wide acceptance among scholars of popular religion of the European countryside until the 1960s. When the twelve volume edition of his major work, *The Golden Bough*, was published between 1907 and 1915, it came at a time when chemical fertilizers had just begun providing a seemingly miraculous surplus of food, and the idea of fertility and fertility religions grew as a cultural fashion. It then became the norm to interpret rituals through this light, seeing varied and diverse rituals as all deriving from fertility magic, all serving the same purpose.

Murray found support in her suppositions in the work of Frazer and its immense popularity. She held that these folk practices had always existed alongside and rivaled Catholicism. According to H.R. Trevor-Roper these ideas did not begin with Murray:

It has been argued by some speculative writers that the demonology of the sixteenth century was, in essence, a real religious system, the old pre-Christian religion of rural Europe which the Asiatic religion of Christ had driven underground but never totally destroyed (1970:127).

Murray built on these ideas, maintaining that these beliefs constituted a rival religion, which she refers to as "the Old Religion." She further equated this religion to the ancient fertility cults which Frazer detailed in *The Golden Bough* (Rose 1962: 19). These cults, as Murray painted them, centered around the mythology of a dying and resurrecting god, a god whose birth and death reflect

*Public understanding of primitive religions had shifted ...
to a more concrete idea of fertility religions specifically
concerned with crops, animals, and fecundity.
By manipulating data to fit her Frazerian outlook, Murray
invented "... a startling new figure, the Witch as a
benevolent purveyor of fertility ..."*

the seasonal cycle and the cycle of crops (Adler 1986: 47). An important point lies in the fact that, in Murray's mind, this religion did not exist as a reaction to Christianity but predated it and had always existed alongside of it.

Although Murray's thesis was not original, the ideas achieved unprecedented popularity through her writings. In fact, the very theory Murray advanced, namely that Witchcraft was the survival of European pagan religion, appeared among scholars as early as the 1820s but received no serious consideration at that time (Rose 1962: 149). In *Deutsche Mythologie*, published in 1835, Jacob Grimm asserted that scattered relics of a pre-Christian Teutonic religion made up the witch-beliefs of the Middle Ages (Trevor-Roper 1970: 146). The fact that this work failed to influence where Murray's work managed to hold sway for decades underscores the importance and influence of Murray's cultural milieu and what this atmosphere meant to the study of religion.

Murray's assertion that Witches kept alive an ancient fertility religion fit in with assumptions popular in the 1920s. Public understanding of primitive religions had shifted from the a vague view of a generalized animism or sun-worship to a more concrete idea of fertility religions specifically concerned with crops, animals, and fecundity. By manipulating data to fit her devoutly Frazerian outlook, Murray invented "... a startling new figure, the Witch as a benevolent purveyor of fertility ..." (Simpson 1994: 92). This figure appealed to the public imagination and therein lies part of the reason that Murray's work remains in print today. A further benefit as regards timing lay in the release of a one-volume edition of *The Golden Bough* in 1922. Frazer's twelve volume work came out prior to the publication of Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*; however, his widely-read one-volume edition made Murray's ideas all the more popular and accessible to the general public.

Murray proved by far the most influential proponent of the theory that a secret

survival of pagan practices existed in Europe. Her books represent perhaps the most radical attempt to provide a new explanation of European and American witch-hunts. Her works rest on the assumption that scholars must examine witchcraft beliefs in context with other systems of ideas and that they cannot dismiss these beliefs as sheer nonsense.

Murray played to public opinion in another fashion very indicative of her time. She not only claimed that the 'Old Religion' deserved serious consideration as a religion, she maintained that it had been the true religion of Britain from Neolithic times until the recent past. Further, she asserted that this religion held sway not only in Britain, but in all of western Europe, and influenced everyone from the uneducated peasant to even the highest nobility. The nationalistic nature of this claim fed into popular ideas that a healthy national life remained possible only so long as the traditional cult of national gods, "rooted in the soil of the fatherland," remained strong. (Rose 1962: 200). This viewpoint proved similar to those of German romantics, such as Friedrich Schlegel, Joseph Görres and Friedrich Creuzer, who supported nationalistic ideals with the call for a new mythology uniquely belonging to their own fatherland.

Robert Graves and D.H. Lawrence echo this desire for a return to the old mythologies of Europe. According to this train of thought, the genius of a culture lies in the worship of the first deities it created (Rose 1972: 200-01). Murray's perception of witchcraft as a joyous religion builds on this. In *The God of the Witches* she describes the 'Old Religion':

Throughout all the ceremonies of this early religion there is an air of joyous gaiety and cheerful happiness which even the holy horror of the Christian records cannot completely disguise (Murray 1931: 114).

By writing about the secret society of witches in glowing terms, Murray looks nostalgically upon a non-existent past when Britain truly lived "according to its genius" (Rose 1972: 200-01).

Murray's use of evolutionary theory applied to religion, the idea of pagan 'survivals,' the longing for a national mythology and, above all, the theories of Frazer, allowed her work not only to survive but to influence all later work in the field of the study of witchcraft.

Murray's Place in Her World

Before elucidating the particulars of Murray's work we must first explore her academic background in order to gain insight on the origin and formation of her ideas. Murray enjoyed a good reputation as an Egyptologist at University

College London. During her generation, women seldom received a formal academic training and Murray learned Egyptology not from a university program but from Sir Flinders Petrie, and although Murray's primary training and career lay in the field of Egyptology; folklore and anthropology remained strong secondary interests throughout her life. Murray began studying Witchcraft when the First World War disrupted Egyptian fieldwork. Her status as an Egyptologist and her position as Chair in Social Anthropology in the University of London provided her with credentials lacked by most of her contemporary authors writing on this subject (Rose 1986: 15). In 1929, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* commissioned her to write the encyclopedia's entry on Witchcraft. This section appeared in reprints of the encyclopedia until 1969 and did much to establish Murray's views on the history and origins of Witchcraft and ensure that her ideas became a deeply rooted part of popular culture.

Murray's fascination with Witchcraft led to several publications on the subject, based upon her examination of trial documents from the Inquisition. "Organisations of Witches in Great Britain," appeared in volume 28 of *Folklore* in 1917; *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, published in 1921, remains the centerpiece of her work on the subject; *The God of the Witches* came out in 1934; and finally, *The Divine King in England*, published in 1954, took her theories to their utmost extreme (Simpson 1994: 89). The assertions of her works grew progressively more fantastic; in fact, in her final publication, she claimed that every king of England from the reign of the William the Conqueror through that of James I served in secret as high priests of the Witch cult.

When her published work on the subject of Witchcraft debuted in 1917 scholars in general attacked her findings and her interpretations. Two separate reviews on *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* provide clear examples of the general attitude of academia toward the Murrayite tradition. W.B. Halliday's review of the book appeared in *Folklore* in June 1922. Halliday dismissed Murray's thesis, asserting that she ripped documents from their historical contexts without attempting to master even the rudimentaries of medieval thought and superstition, not to mention the historical antecedents of the late classical ideas that served as the foundation of this worldview. Halliday further complained about Murray's frequent use of irrelevant facts and her tendency to switch from the literal to the interpretive viewpoint when presenting data.

In July 1922, George L. Burr's review of the same book appeared in *The American Historical Review*. An advocate of liberal-rationalist arguments regarding the reality of Witchcraft, Burr remained contemptuous of the

The sheer flood of 'evidence' from such a variety of sources added to her credibility in the eyes of a general audience who were awed by what appeared to be extensive knowledge

contention of both Summer (see below) and Murray that Witchcraft in any way existed as a real phenomenon. Burr points out that those historians who praised the work of Murray knew little of English history and the history of Witchcraft. Burr's primary argument against Murray's theories was that her lack of knowledge about scholarship in the field she presumed to write about negated any serious consideration of her ideas. Burr suggested that her work should not come up for review until she rectified this omission. Burr's one commendation of Murray was that she did not fall prey to the biased partisanship of many earlier historians and the hostility towards Witchcraft which they displayed when interpreting the evidence.

Despite substantive academic criticism by her contemporaries, Margaret Murray's work holds a strong appeal and exhibits a longevity many scholarly works did not enjoy. It remains impossible to delve into the study of Witchcraft's historical origins without running into the Murrayite tradition. *Folklore* published a special edition in her honor in 1961. In this edition, Sona Burstein sheds some light on precisely why her work received such interest in the past and still remains relevant today:

Firmly pushing her way through the mists of emotion and dogma and obscurantism ... she insists that we look with her on real people, villagers who go on foot to a real witch meeting. She will have nothing of mysterious transvections or mystical experiences. Whenever she see her way to a factual explanation ... she puts her considerable persuasive energy into establishing it. I think it may safely be claimed that many a student of folklore, even when in stubborn disagreement with Dr. Murray's major theories, has been consciously or unconsciously influenced by her to keep his feet on the ground in his investigations (Burstein 1961: 521).

This excerpt gives a clue as to the location of Murray's work within the broad spectrum of the study of the history of Witchcraft. Next, this paper presents in greater detail the scope of opinion in the field, where exactly her works stand within it, and precisely what Murray accomplished during her long career.

The assertions of her works grew progressively more fantastic; in fact, in her last publication, The Divine King, she claimed that every king of England from the reign of the William the Conqueror through that of James I served in secret as high priests of the witch cult.

Murray's Place in the Study of Witchcraft

The study of Witchcraft, its practice, its history and its particulars, like the study of other religions, possesses a long and varied history itself as well as a wide range of opinion on exactly how to define the topic of the research. At one extreme stood authors such as Montague Summers, who asserted that Witches existed and really committed the supernatural Satanic acts ascribed to them in medieval literature (Simpson 1994: 90). Summers appeared to delight in the tortures and agonies of the witchcraft trials, and goes so far as to praise *The Malleus Maleficarium*, that unfortunate and misogynistic treatise on how to find, torture and kill witches in your own community, as "among the most important, wisest, and weightiest books of the world" (Summers 1928: viii-ix). In his *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* he further asserts that, "we know that the Continental stories of witch gatherings are with very few exceptions the chronicle of actual fact" (Summers 1956: vii).

Even though Summers considered Murray his great antagonist, the two authors approached the historical data in a similar fashion, in that they both took confessions at face value. Summers faults Murray for her status as an anthropologist, since anthropology, in excising the supernatural, cannot explain Witchcraft. Summers insists that only "a trained theologian can treat the subject" (Summers 1956: 45). Here lies a major difference between Murray and Summers for, unlike Summers, Murray divorced the element of the supernatural from the data, remaining a firm secularist in her interpretations. This shift appeared to provide a more sound basis for historical study by purporting to dwell solely in the rational realm. Murray's findings were open to scholarly debate rather than presented as support for a faith claim (Simpson 1944: 90).

Her shift in emphasis aligned Murray with a perspective far more common among her contemporaries, such as Jeffrey Russell, who theorized that Witchcraft never existed, except in the imaginations of ecclesiastical authorities, and that the history of Witchcraft is one of repression and inhumanity

perpetrated by the Church and civil authorities in order to secure power and profit. The Church considered the confiscation of the property of the accused one of the most vital functions of the Inquisition, their greatest weapon in fighting heretics. This was a great fuel to the fire of the Inquisition, so much so that Inquisitor Eymeric complained in 1360 that:

In our days there are no more rich heretics; so that princes, not seeing more money in the prospect, will not put themselves to any expense; it is a pity that so salutary an institution such as ours should be so uncertain of its future (Robbins 1981: 271).

Co-operation of the state and the eagerness of the Inquisition in carrying forward its work proved proportionate to the profit available. The power and profit motive remain the key facts for those scholars who view Witchcraft as a dark fantasy dreamed up by greedy authorities. Scholars holding this opinion consider the Inquisition a vicious 'McCarthyian' endeavor, bent on the persecution and murder of thousands and the subjugation and terror of millions more. In the Middle Ages both Jews and Witches served as the scapegoats for widespread social tension. This method of transferring blame and fear from an enemy without to an enemy within provided an enemy within reach, one "waiting to be massacred, imprisoned, tortured, burnt" (Ginzburg 1991: 52).

According to this view, nothing like a religion survived the trials and persecutions of the Inquisition. Any pagan practices or beliefs evident during the medieval period consist of little more than fragments or folk beliefs surviving from the older religious traditions of Europe. Perhaps the belief in pagan deities and the religious underpinnings of rituals vanished soon after the arrival of Christianity whereas magical rites, such as fertility rituals, continued because peasants perceived them as efficacious. Murray claimed to occupy a middle position between these two positions. She argued that European Witchcraft grew out of the ancient fertility religions of pre-Christian Europe. She maintained that the pre-Christian traditions of Europe survived Christian persecution and that traces of this religious cult still existed (Murray 1917: 228).

Unfortunately, Murray drew her portrait of Witchcraft by selecting and distorting data to fit her thesis. Murray mixed up the beliefs of accused Witches with their practices and took the confessions of those condemned by the Inquisition as factual representations of Witchcraft in the Middle Ages. This proved necessary in part since the only support for her thesis came from confessions extracted under torture. However, whereas Summers and others embraced these testimonies as proof of supernatural devilry, Murray went to great lengths to find rational explanation for facts she took at face value.

Unfortunately, some of these lengths both approached the ridiculous and the academically dishonest. Neither Murray nor Summers examined the data in terms of its cultural context, looking at the societal background that lent these beliefs, fears, and stories credibility and purpose. This enterprise remained firmly in the hands of those who disbelieved in the reality of Witchcraft, either as the work of Satan or as a religion.

Critique of *The God of the Witches*

In *The God of the Witches*, Murray extended and refined the arguments presented in *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*. Since *The God of the Witches* represents a continuation and emphasis of the thesis put forward in her other works on Witchcraft, any critique of this work must also refer back to Murray's early book. The central thesis for all of Murray's work on Witchcraft, that:

Pagan folk practices and beliefs, whether Greco-Roman, Teutonic, or Celtic, did not die out with the introduction of Christianity but rather remained and constituted the fundamental substratum of witchcraft (Russell 1972: 37).

received a more forceful presentation in *The God of the Witches*. In addition to extending and refining her arguments, Murray popularized them. *The God of the Witches* appealed more to non-academics than did her earlier writings, and even though it was shortened and tightened and written twelve years after *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, Murray neither addressed the critics of her first work nor did she try to redress errors pointed out by scholars in the field. In fact, her treatment of the subject matter proved more rigid, more extreme and less acceptable in *The God of the Witches* and even more so in her last work, *The Divine King in England*.

This rigidity extended beyond picking and choosing sources on the basis of whether or not they supported her thesis. In order to strengthen her argument in the second book, Murray further damages the quality of her work by manipulating data in a more blatant and obvious fashion. The doctoring of quotes in order to build her case for a naturalistic religion makes Murray's extensive reliance on supporting documents suspect, rather than supportive of her thesis.

Another major shortcoming of Murray's work lies in her organization of the material. She lumps together examples from varied cultures and times as if they all fit neatly together. For instance, in the first chapter, "The Horned God," Murray begins with art from the Paleolithic period and moves quickly to gods of Mesopotamia and Egypt to the Greek God Pan and on to ancient Britain, pronouncing these diverse deities to be equivalent, and then equating this

... even though it was shortened and tightened and written twelve years after The Witch-Cult in Western Europe, Murray neither addressed the critics of her first work nor did she try to redress errors pointed out by scholars in the field. In fact, her treatment of the subject matter proved more rigid ...

construct with the Christian Satan (1931: 23-40). Fairies, the Irish Tuatha-da-Danann, the Neolithic peoples of Britain and accused Witches also appear as related (1931: 55-58). The sheer flood of 'evidence' from such a variety of sources added to her credibility in the eyes of a general audience who were awed by what appeared to be extensive knowledge.

The God of the Witches also appealed to a popular audience through the use of well-known historical or quasi-historical figures which Murray creatively linked to the 'Old Religion.' Joan of Arc, Saxon saints, British royalty, and biblical figures such as Joseph and the prophet Samuel appear in her parade of characters (1931: 150-70). While this tactic may appeal to the general public it lends an aura of unbelievability to Murray's arguments. Murray's strong desire to support Frazer and align her work with *The Golden Bough* caused her to emphasize the idea of the divine victim, or dying and resurrecting god, more so in *The God of the Witches* than in her earlier work (1931: 121-28). The final chapter, "The Divine Victim," goes into this aspect of her theory in great detail, referencing British kings, Thomas à Becket, and Joan of Arc as examples of participants in this rite (1931: 160-97). This tendency reached its height in her last book, *The Divine King*, where Joan of Arc, Gilles de Rais, various kings of England, and several of their wives, ministers or favorites all volunteered for the honor of the status of Divine Victim (Simpson 1994: 94).

As a work of serious scholarship, *The God of the Witches* fails in most respects, nevertheless, it served to further research on the part of other scholars. By appealing to the popular imagination and gaining a wider reading for *The God of the Witches*, Murray not only changed popular culture, but her work also formed one of the foundations for a new religion's sense of identity. As such, it remains as important in this small part of the field of religious studies as J.J. Bachofen's work in the area of feminist studies of religion. Sometimes, as

Later scholars, such as Arno Runeberg and Carlo Ginzburg ignored the exaggerations of Murray and built upon the strengths of her ideas.

Mircea Eliade stated, what remains important is the effect an idea had on popular culture, not its validity.

Murray's Influence on Later Scholarship

Margaret Murray once presented herself as the middle ground between the certain belief in the supernatural nature of Witchcraft and the equally certain view that Witchcraft, supernatural or otherwise, never existed (Parrinder 1963: 103). Today her work occupies the extreme margin in a schema that completely discounts the work of writers such as Montague Summers. Murray and her place in the scholarly study of the religion of Witchcraft remains an important consideration for contemporary scholars. Her stature as a scholar appears evident; equally evident is her fall from grace. This fall did not result from her choice of subject matter, but in her treatment of the data. Julian Franklin wrote of Murray's academic dishonesty and expressed regret at this turn of events:

In 1931, Dr. Margaret Murray published a book entitled *The God of the Witches*. All who admired her as an Egyptologist and folklorist of outstanding merit were saddened by this publication because in it Miss Murray had bent the facts to fit the theory (Franklin 1971: 72).

However scholars viewed her work, they had to confront it and the contributions Murray made to the field. According to Margot Adler, author of one of the few scholarly books on contemporary Witchcraft and Paganism:

The primary value of Murray's work was her understanding of the persistence of Pagan folk customs in Britain and her realization that Witchcraft could not be examined in isolation from the comparative history of religions or from the study of anthropology and folklore (Adler 1986: 48-49).

While Murray gave evidence for pagan survivals in Britain, little evidence exists which supports the existence of the organized cult that she proposed (Adler 1986: 48). Nonetheless, to discount the confessions as presenting only the fantasies of the accusers likewise remains untenable. Later scholars, such as Arno Runeberg and Carlo Ginzburg ignored the exaggerations of Murray and built upon the strengths of her ideas. Arno Runeberg's book, *Witches, Demons and Fertility Magic*, published in 1947, lent new credibility to Murray's central thesis (Cohn 1975: 113). Carlo Ginzburg suggests that in the end, Murray and

her thesis prevailed (1991: xix). Ginzburg utilized the same sources as Murray, the trial records of the Inquisition, and corrected many of the shortcomings of Murray's treatment of the same. Ginzburg's work actually seemed to support the idea that Murray's work contained an element of truth. Like Murray, he claimed that a pervasive belief in a Goddess, profoundly related to the world of the dead, possessed many local and interconnected variations.

While acknowledging the failings of her work, Geoffrey Parrinder refers to *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* as "one of the most outstanding modern books on witchcraft" (1963: 12). Parrinder goes on to state that Murray's later books, namely *The God of the Witches* and *The Divine King*, revealed a progressive tendency to radically rewrite history. In trying to press her case too hard she negated the value of her earlier works (1963: 106).

A recent and surprising support for Margaret Murray lay in the ideas of Mircea Eliade. In his essay, "Some Observations on European Witchcraft" he acknowledges the errors in Murray's work although he also argues that:

What medieval authors designated as witchcraft, and what became the witch crazes of the fourteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, had its roots in some archaic mythico-ritual scenarios comparable with those surviving among the Italian benandanti and in Romanian folk culture (Eliade 1976: 85).

Academics, it seems, sometimes run too far in the opposite direction when a theory or its author runs into trouble with credibility. The truth all too often lies in the middle, not in the extremes.

Conclusion

Whether one engages in "maleficography," the study of the study of Witchcraft, or studies the origins and ideologies of contemporary Witches, the work of Margaret Murray holds an important position in any research. Though deeply flawed, her work represents one of the main theories in this area of study. It remains the task of the careful researcher to shift through Murray's manipulations to get at the truth of data when researching the history of witchcraft. Murray led an enigmatic career and if only academic circles debated the merit of her work its flawed nature would guarantee it a negligible role. Elliot Rose expresses this enigmatic quality when he writes:

... if I insist, thus ungallantly, that she is not to be trusted, it is without any intention of blame, and only because at the time I write no one is more often treated as an authority on the subject or has committed more nonsense to print (1962: 56).

Although Rose's verdict is not the last word on the subject, critiques of her

work and the presence of a veritable choir of academics pointing out its flaws make exercises into this area unproductive. Reference to Murray and her work and critiques of the same exist in nearly every contemporary work on Witchcraft. But another facet of influence exists and the need for further research into this area remains unfilled.

Murray's books on Witchcraft and the works of other authors following the Murrayite tradition helped found a new religion and stimulated its rapid growth. Her views sparked the interest of Gerald Gardner who, two years after England's repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1953, wrote *Witchcraft Today*, agreeing with Murray's theories, and stating that he, as a modern Witch in England, had practiced the "Old Religion" since 1939. The founder of Gardnerian Witchcraft, which most modern Pagans consider to be the oldest form of Wicca, Gardner claimed to have met and been initiated into a pre-existing tradition of European Witchcraft as practiced by the 'New Forest Coven.' He is now credited with 'reinventing' Wicca, drawing additional inspiration from the writings of Aleister Crowley, Masonic rituals, and other occult elements.

How members of a religion form their self-identity and a sense of continuity with the past serve as major focuses for religionists. The Wiccan and Neopagan communities contain members who, by and large, read Murray, Frazer, Russell, Robbins, and the host of other academics who work in the field. Their knowledge of and ability to argue viewpoints based on this corpus of literature make a comparable knowledge of sources a necessity for field research. This fact makes the study of Murray and her work worthwhile today. The inspiration that Gardner drew and contemporary Witches draw from the Murrayite tradition remains self-evident. This fact alone gives her books on Witchcraft a continuing place in history.

Nancy Ramsey is a doctoral student in Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She has an MA in Religious Studies and another in Sociology from the University of South Florida. Her main area of research is Wicca, Neopaganism and other assorted Goddess and nature religions. She may be reached at <NRamsey679@aol.com>.

Bibliography

- Adler, Margot. *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.
- Burstein, Sona. "Some Modern Books on Witchcraft." *Folklore* 71 (1961): 520-34.
- Cohn, Norman. *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*. New York: Basic Books, 1975.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.
- Franklin, Julian. *Death by Enchantment: An Examination of Ancient and Modern Witchcraft*. London: Hamilton, 1971.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*. trans. Raymond Rosenthal. New York: Pantheon Books, 1991.
- Murray, Margaret A. "Organisations of Witches in Great Britain." *Folklore* 28 (1917): 228-58.
- _____. *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921.
- _____. *The God of the Witches*. 1931. Reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Parrinder, Geoffrey. *Witchcraft: European and African*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963.
- Robbins, Rossell Hope. *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1981.
- Rose, Elliot. *A Razor for a Goat: A Discussion of Certain Problems in the History of Witchcraft and Diabolism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.
- Russell, Jeffrey B. *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972.
- _____. *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 1980.
- Simpson, Jacqueline. "Margaret Murray: Who Believed Her, and Why?" *Folklore* 105 (1994): 89-96.
- Summers, Montague, ed., trans, and intro; 1948 edition *The Malleus Maleficarum*, by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger. 1928. Reprint, New York: Dover, 1992.
- _____. *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology*. 1956. Reprint, New Jersey: University Book, 1973.
- Trevor-Roper, H.R. "From the Ethnography of Witchcraft." In *Witchcraft and Sorcery*, ed. Max Marwick, 121-150. Baltimore: Penguin, 1970.

EXCAVATING SITES OF PRODUCTION: Margaret Murray's Theory of Religion in Context

by Pam A. Detrixhe
Temple University

Even though many scholars and practitioners of Wicca recognize English archeologist and historian Margaret Murray's influence in significantly shaping the Wiccan myth of origins, the implications of her scholarly method and colonial contexts have received little attention. This is a problem because her work — despite all the necessary qualifications — serves as a record of Pagan origins for Neopagans and Witches. When contemporary Witches tell the tale of Witchcraft's survival under European Christianity we often replicate Murray's renditions found in *The Witchcult in Western Europe* (1921) and *The God of the Witches* (1931). In fact, the naturalization of this story and its variations is fairly well advanced; that is, her account is largely taken for granted, her authorship and its construction in particular time and space effaced by with its repetition. Unaware of Murray's historical and methodological contexts we — academics and Pagans — miss the extent to which her work is informed by and could be burdened with empire-servicing theories of comparative human development, Western notions of universality, and individualistic and feminized trends in Victorian Protestant piety. Our inattention to these issues is perhaps a result of shortcomings in the accuracy of her characterization of European Witchcraft. However, if we dismiss Murray with this critique we miss an opportunity to explore the transfers of power which occur between western colonialism, ideologies, academic productions and contemporary myth. This paper begins to address these problems.

I will start with a very brief overview of Murray's life and work, drawing primarily on her autobiography.¹ From there I go on to outline the Western theories of human origin and cultural change that were operational during the peak of colonization and Murray's formative years. Then I focus specifically on Murray's theory of religion and the ways in which it is marked by her own

historical-religious context. Finally, I focus still closer on Murray's treatment of European Witchcraft, showing how her use of comparative religion allowed her to bring to bear her accumulated knowledge in order to fill a gap she found in European history with Witchcraft.²

Born in Calcutta, India in 1863, Margaret Alice Murray was the daughter of British colonists, who — like many of their compatriots — sought their fortunes in British holdings throughout the world. As was usual for her time and class, young Margaret was sent to Europe for most of her formal education. She returned often to India to visit her mother, father and sister who continued to live there for several more years. Beginning in 1894, Murray studied Egyptology at University College in London and worked with Flinders Petrie, one of the founders of modern archeology. In its infancy, archeological study of Egypt was often short-handed, and Murray soon found herself not only in the position of student, but also that of teacher. With Petrie away on excavations a great deal of the time, her own archeological work had to be squeezed between academic sessions. Nonetheless, in the winters of 1902 and 1903 she — the first woman to do so — led her own excavations at Abydos, Egypt. This pattern of alternating teaching and fieldwork persisted with occasional family related interruptions until WWI put a stop to work outside of the country until 1921. Further, her sense of women's particular responsibilities to others finds expression not only in the contexts of her work and family but also — as I shall discuss later — in her theory of religion.

During the latter war years, Murray — then fifty-one and having exhausted herself working in a military hospital — traveled to Glastonbury with orders to 'rest.' There she became interested in Joseph of Arimathea and the myth of the Holy Grail, which she wrote up in "Egyptian Elements in the Grail Romance."³ From the Grail she moved to Witches, publishing her first paper on the topic in 1917, then a book — *The Witchcult of Western Europe* — by 1921. In the latter she organized the mass of material she found in the Witchcraft trial records, augmenting her material with cross-cultural comparisons. With the end of the First World War, she left Europe for a dig in Malta. Returning to the topic of Witches in 1931, Murray published *The God of the Witches*, a reworking of the material in *The Witch-Cult of Western Europe*. In *The God of the Witches*, Murray proceeded from having proven the existence of an organized pre-Christian Pagan religion to argue more forcefully for its universal elements.

In 1931, she again left Europe to spend 2 years excavating among the megaliths of Minorca. Despite her formal retirement in 1935, she worked until 1938 on

Petrie's last dig in Palestine, excavating at Tel Ajjul and cataloging the pottery uncovered there. Once again war interrupted work outside of Britain. After this, her last dig, she continued to publish general writings on Egypt. In 1963, she published her treatise on the origin of religion and her autobiography. She died later that year at the age of 100.

Murray's life and writings indicate that she was a beneficiary of the Enlightenment and its possessive curiosity regarding many diverse peoples in the world. This was a long-lived curiosity, fed by explorations, colonization, appropriation and scholarly speculation. Social scientists of Europe debated the relationships between so-called primitive cultures, setting up scales and typologies, theories of origin, and theories of cultural advancement or degeneration.⁴ Degenerationist theories argued that from a pristine state of 'true' culture and religion humanity had deteriorated in varying degrees toward barbarism. Progress theories, on the other hand, held that civilization evolved from savagery and barbarism although at different rates among different peoples. Proponents of both theories tended to identify their own culture as most closely matching the highest expression of civilization. By the time Murray entered the field the 'progress' narrative dominated.

Part of the progress narrative — as Murray received it — involved the concept of cultural diffusion. Diffusionist theory basically argues that elements of culture cross political and cultural borders much like molecules in solution pass through permeable membranes. Like other diffusionists in late nineteenth century Britain, Murray saw this process as leading to cultural advancement, even when facilitated by armed invasion. This view, as advanced for example by John Myers and Arthur Evans among others, was used to account for the origin of Europe. They argued that both hostile migrations of Indo-European peoples from the north and more peaceful exploration missions from as far south as Greece and Egypt, made Europe and specifically Great Britain a sort of melting pot, in which a hybrid culture developed and quickly advanced.⁵ Late 19th and early 20th century German scholar Gustaf Kossinna agreed in part, while claiming that higher civilization proceeded from a solely Northern German origin point, in fact from territory recently annexed by Germany.⁶ While Murray granted that invasions by 'barbarians' and 'savages' could result in a degeneration of culture, for the most part she assumed that diffusion resulted in human social progress. Her comments on war support this interpretation:

Though war may be regarded as a terrifying and horrifying factor, destructive and hateful, it often has a stimulating effect on a nation, which had lapsed into a condition of sloth after long periods of peace ... War often sweeps away many old

ideas and customs which are outward and which clog and prevent advance. That alertness of mind so necessary in times of danger, lifts the whole nation forward on the path of civilization.⁷

In fact, the beauty of archaeology for Murray was that through it "one could study 'one small portion of the world,' one small nation and trace it through the vicissitudes of its advance in civilization until it is overwhelmed by a higher culture or obliterated by an invasion of barbarism."⁸ Apparently another

Diffusionist theory basically argues that elements of culture cross political and cultural borders much like molecules in solution pass through permeable membranes. ... Murray saw this process as leading to cultural advancement, even when facilitated by armed invasion.

advantage was that it foreclosed criticism of the colonizing enterprise as well. Colonial oppression and exploitation were unfortunate inevitabilities figured as culture building in much the same fashion that suffering is sometimes said to build character.

Returning to the pathways of her work we begin to see that Murray's social-historical location was not only intellectually but also materially implicated in these methodological and political issues. Her scholarly travels neatly matched the steamer and train routes of her childhood as well as the trade routes between Britain and its colonies. Even her writings on the Witches of Europe are related to her childhood travels. Her interest in them stemmed from her youthful fascination with local legends and prehistoric excavations near her Uncle's vicarage — where she lived when 'home.' Furthermore, war — the strong arm of colonization — was not only a factor in the diffusion of culture, but also shaped the very course of her work. The British colonial possessions visited by Murray were, after all, taken by conquest. Even competition between colonial powers factor here: were it not for WW1, she might never have stayed in the English countryside long enough during her adult years to write about Witches.

In addition to general notions of cultural progress, Murray was intrigued by the

development of religion over time. While she certainly was involved in the material advance of culture through her work in archeology, when Murray wrote specifically about religion in particular her discourse shifted more toward mental advance. As humans evolved mentally, faculty for religion likewise

Murray asserted that males had no use for the earliest religion: it was a religion for women.

For Murray, males were essentially responsible for themselves. Women on the other hand were (are?) instinctually responsible for themselves and children . . .

evolved. Through archeology one could study this advance because archeology is, according to Murray, “the study of the Advance of Man, mentally and therefore spiritually.”⁹

Thus we can see that, for Murray, the spiritual was subsumed under the mental: “religion must keep pace with the developing mind.”¹⁰ This emphasis on the mental side of religion should not be surprising given that, for Murray — as for other liberal Protestant thinkers and social scientists of religion — religion in general had to do with *feelings*. And feelings, by virtue of our being human, were common to us all.¹¹ The primary feeling as regards to religion, for Murray was and continued to be an awareness of an “Unseen over-ruling Power which Science calls Nature and Religion calls God.”¹² For Murray, strongly influenced as she was by a privatistic Protestantism, religion involved — again — “a *feeling* that prompts the worship of God.”¹³

This feeling is universal. Although the names for God may change, the powers to which humans are subject remain the same: we need food, shelter and something to believe in, according to Murray. “The family is still the unity, the mating of the sexes still continues and children are brought into the world, life and death still walk hand-in-hand, the changes and chances of this mortal life are still as uncertain as ever they were.” The resultant feeling is one of “utter dependence of Man for the barest necessities of life on powers that he could not control.”¹⁴ Rituals, while their outer forms change, are essentially about accessing this power to provide “help in time of trouble, comfort in sorrow, and courage in the face of death.”¹⁵ Yet for Murray — who we will remember was

also an evolutionary diffusionist — the expression of this fundamental commonality both varies across cultures and is influenced by cultural contact.

But with what human experience did these universal religious feelings originate? What prompted this mental awareness? Murray wrote that the occasion of this “phenomenon not shared by other members of the group, yet . . . known and recognized in all groups,” occurred at *quickenings*.¹⁶ Yes, the source of religion for Murray was to be found in pregnant women. In fact, Murray asserted that males had no use for the earliest religion: it was a religion for women. For Murray, males were essentially responsible for themselves. Women on the other hand were (are?) instinctually responsible for themselves and children: “This individual personal responsibility belongs to the woman only and cannot be shared, it is in a category all by itself. Though the transmission of life requires the union of the two sexes, the full responsibility of guarding that contribution to the preservation of the race is confined to her sole keeping.”¹⁷

In addition to instinctual responsibility was capability. In tandem with the biological capacity to reproduce was the ability to readily accommodate the added physical demands of child-bearing and rearing. That is, women have superior mental abilities which enable us to assume responsibilities for more than one.¹⁸ This is Murray’s own uniquely gendered connection between instincts for ‘survival of the self’ and ‘survival of the human race.’ Women, in their very essence, bridge individual and human survival.

The nature of this twinned survival impulse is protective. Yet its source as well as the source of the pregnancy remained unknown and hence unseen. According to Murray, with the first movement of the child, women conceptually recognized a fierce sense of ‘protection.’ Emotional, conceptual, the source of protection was linked by Murray with the very physicality of pregnancy only to quickly become a mental concept. In time, protective Power was expressed through decorative markings (especially red), amulets, and the heads and mandibles of particular people and/or animals. Eventually religion went from being a sense of protectiveness to being a means of protection, a tool with which to engage ones environment. Markings on the bones of the dead and specialized placement of skulls and mandibles became protective tools through Murray’s treatment of religion, revealing awareness of a Power which came from a beyond of some sort — a not apparently here, or necessarily now — and hence an Unseen which intervened against “imagined future eventualities.”¹⁹

While what immediately marks Murray's place in Enlightenment approaches to religion is her search for a universal origin for religion within a model of human development, prominent as well is the active role of 'concepts' and 'conceptual thinking.' Religion is more mental than physical, despite its very physical beginnings. We can also see a strong individualist bent in this all-encompassing theory. Murray's origin of religion is found alone, in "still moments."²⁰ Thus, we see here the influence of Murray's privatistic Protestantism. Murray's first religious experience for humanity was an individual experience of feeling. It was not a group activity. And while she described it ostensibly occurring among women who lived together for their own protection and said that others knew and recognize it, the origin of religion was for the most part a private cognitive experience, conveyed to others but not shared with them.

Yet not only was this an individual experience, but it was also a gendered experience. Murray's universal women's experience dovetailed with historically particular Victorian notions of womanhood. The origin of religion conformed to a family model which very much resembled Murray's own struggling middle-class work and family life. While she never had children, her sister and other women around her did and those events impacted her life. Remember here that in addition to the years she spent holding down the fort at the Department of Egyptology at University College while Flinders Petrie took the best seasons in the field, there were also times during which family responsibilities kept Murray from her fieldwork. Furthermore, Protestantism during the industrialization of Europe, and the United States for that matter, was marked by the privatization and feminization of religion. We can see here shades of the Cult of True Womanhood with its emphasis on women's natural responsibility for both domestic and religious upkeep. Like many scholars in anthropology and archeology in her day, Murray then projected this model back to human origins.

Both archeology and anthropology were, for Murray 'modern sciences' involved reciprocally in the 'Study of Man.' The difference for Murray was simply that one concerned the past and the other the present. The importance of anthropology for archeology was that one needed to know the present in order to interpret the past. In return, archeology provided information about traditions which informed anthropological interpretations of contemporary cultures. Past and present inform each other in a feedback loop:

The past is understandable only by realising how closely it resembles the present, for then it is possible to differentiate the *essential* factors from the non-essential,

the *permanent* from the transitory, and to mark the effect of climate and natural conditions on customs and beliefs.²¹

Those artifacts and practices which seem to appear in both past and present must be essentials which endure. Their sameness is apparently self-evident.

The universal consistency of religion was crucial to Murray's treatment of European Witchcraft. Since universal forms of religion grow out of basic human

... not only was this an individual experience, but it was also a gendered experience. Murray's universal women's experience dovetailed with historically particular Victorian notions of womanhood. The origin of religion conformed to a family model which very much resembled Murray's own struggling middle-class work and family life.

experience while varying from condition to condition, particular expressions of basic forms could then be used to explain, or even substitute for, each other in a comparative religion approach. Thus Murray's own cultural experience provided a resource for her understanding of the origin of religion. In *The Witch-Cult of Western Europe* we can see that she used the congregational model of Protestant church organization as a comparative tool to characterize the organization of European Witch covens.²² Additionally, the animal images she found throughout the Witch persecution documents provided many opportunities for cross-cultural comparisons. She wrote:

In many religions the disguising of the principal personage — whether god or priest — as an animal is well known. The custom is very ancient — such disguised human beings are found even among the Paleolithic drawings in France; and on a slate palette belonging to the late pre-dynastic period of Egypt there is a representation of a man disguised as a jackal and playing on a pipe ... From the *analogy* of other religions in which the custom occurs, it would appear that it is a ritual for the promotion of fertility; the animal represented being either the sacred animal of the tribe or the creature most used for food.²³

The theme of fertility reoccurred when she discussed the Witch dances recorded

The beauty of universal theories such as Murray's is how easily they assimilate each new bit of evidence as one more example proving the assumptions held at the outset.

The Western imperial Enlightenment project could incorporate/appropriate anything, including its own primitive past.

in the trial documents.²⁴ So established in the literature by this time is the category 'fertility dance' that she could simply refer to it as a universal type. The following quotation illustrates her application of this comparative approach:

When any ceremony is performed by several people together it tends to become rhythmic, and a dance is evolved which, after a time, the actions are so conventionalized as to be almost unrecognizable. The so-called Fertility Dances are a case in point, for though they were once common throughout the world they survive in recognizable form only among the more backward peoples. In Europe the details have not always been preserved, and it is often *solely by comparison* with the dances of savages that their original meaning can be seen.²⁵

Obviously the comparative device was especially important for Murray's claims about Western European Witchcraft. Holes in the historical record could be filled using this approach. Appealing to European concerns with things European, she wrote in *The God of the Witches*:

...but the religion of those early times [in what became Europe] has been entirely neglected, with the exception of a few references to Mother-goddesses and to burial customs. The student of early religion begins his subject in the early Bronze Age of the Near East and totally ignores Western Europe in the Stone Ages ... There is, however, a continuity of belief and ritual which can be traced from the Paleolithic period down to modern times. It is only by the anthropological method [that is, a gap-filling comparative method] that the study of religions, whether ancient or modern, can be advanced.²⁶

Her conclusions drawn from the evidence of the trials were in part justified by

the prevalence of apparently similar practices elsewhere. Thus 'gaps' in European history were filled by comparison and reading anti-Pagan literature and prosecution documents in light of prehistory. Indeed, Murray's writing is filled with references to filling in 'gaps.'

In conclusion, Murray's attempts to explain religion as a whole by assembling its parts are in line with much of early Western European writing on religion and for that matter culture. In her 1910 presidential address, "The Value of European Folklore in the History of Culture" Charlotte Sophia Burne argued that European folklore could serve an explanatory function between 'savage' and 'advanced' cultures of her day.²⁷ The beauty of universal theories such as Murray's is how easily they assimilate each new bit of evidence as one more example proving the assumptions held at the outset. The Western imperial Enlightenment project could incorporate/appropriate anything, including its own primitive past.

Were Murray's characterization of Witchcraft in Europe less influential all this may not matter. However, Murray's work as well as that of her contemporaries is appropriated by contemporary Witches and Neopagans as a story of origins. We should keep in mind Gordon Melton's observation of which Chas Clifton reminded us in an earlier issue of *The Pomegranate*: "The first holy books of the Neopagans were anthropological texts."²⁸ Both practitioners of Wicca and scholars need to be aware, in the present case, of both Murray's method and its context to further our understanding of what I see as universalizing, comparative, and appropriating tendencies in some of our textual sources.

It is not the purpose of this paper to 'blame' Margaret Murray (or anyone else for that matter) for her own time, nor for some disturbing trends now found in contemporary Wicca and Paganism (and much of the New Age movement as well). Rather, it is my thesis that her life and work provide a useful entrance point to grapple with some of the following troublesome questions. What can we learn from the 'paper trails' between Murray's account of European Witchcraft and contemporary Wiccan self-perceptions? Where have we unwittingly and/or uncritically imported Western colonialist tendencies in our sacred histories? Particular historical contexts enabled (or disabled) the histories Murray chose to tell. In turn those histories, together with the manner in which we appropriate them, open and close possibilities in our particular present. What possibilities do these accounts open and close in terms of how we see and conduct ourselves? What possibilities are we opening and closing when we tell

our stories, and are they the ones we want?

Furthermore, a look at the notion of comparative religion provides an opportunity to consider what are perhaps more pressing issues: The very idea of a universal category of religion assumes that all the diverse things we chose to call religion at some basic level are about the same thing (hence their placement in the category religion). The belief that one can take an objective stance above all the particularities to see the big picture is part and parcel of Western modernist thought.

Such a worldview also justifies the assimilation/acquisition of knowledge, peoples, lands, and cultures by those who manage to achieve such intellectual heights. The only boundaries that matter are our own, and these boundaries — by virtue of being enforced by hegemonic status — serve as relatively safe havens should the ‘natives’ get restless. In the event of unrest in the colonies or battles between empires, Murray could return ‘home’ to Great Britain and write about Egyptian elements in the Grail romance, unencumbered by the particular political battles being waged over and in this colony as she intellectually traveled time and space in her quest to link ‘religion’ around the world. If being a beneficiary of Western imperialism becomes too distasteful to me, I can ‘return’ to its pre-imperial home — a past unsullied by hegemonic privilege. In this manner, the products of colonialism can be used to enable neo-colonialism.

Pam Detrixhe is a Witch in the Reclaiming tradition and a PhD. student at Temple University's Department of Religion in Philadelphia. An earlier version of this paper was given at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in San Francisco (November 22, 1997) as “Foundations of Religion: Contextualizing the Gospel According to Margaret Murray.”

1. Margaret Murray, *My First Hundred Years*, (London: William Kimber, 1963).
2. It would also be interesting to explore her bridge between European Witchcraft and ancient Egypt.
3. I have not yet seen this reference.
4. c.f. Bruce Trigger, *Gordon Childe: Revolutions in Archeology*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), esp. “Archaeology Before Childe” 20-31 and George W. Stocking, Jr. *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology 1888-1951*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).
5. Trigger, *Gordon Childe: Revolutions in Archeology*, 30.
6. *ibid.* 25-26.
7. Murray, *My First Hundred Years*, 203.
8. Murray, *The Splendor That Was Egypt*, new and revised edition, (New York: Hawthorn Books Inc., 1949, 1963), xvi.
9. Murray, *The Splendor That Was Egypt*, xvii.
10. *ibid.* xvi.
11. c.f. J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) esp. Chs. 5, 7, and 8 on Hume, Tylor, and Durkheim respectively.
12. Murray, *The Genesis of Religion* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963) 1.
13. Murray, *The Splendor That Was Egypt*, xix, emphasis mine.
14. *ibid.* xix.
15. *ibid.* 124.
16. Murray, *The Genesis of Religion*, 59 and 64.
17. *ibid.* 69. In fact Murray argued that this was still the case.
18. *ibid.* 65-69.
19. *ibid.* 26, esp. 64, and 80, fn. 38. Here Murray is making reference to K. P. Oakley’s work, *Man the Toolmaker* (British Museum) distinguishing humans and animals on the basis of the ability to imagine ‘future eventualities’ as she argues for the evolution of religion from its beginnings in the ‘childhood’ of humanity.
20. *ibid.* 60.
21. Murray, *The Splendor That Was Egypt*, xix, emphasis mine.
22. Murray, *The Witch-Cult of Western Europe*, 13.
23. *ibid.* 60-61, emphasis mine.
24. *ibid.* 130-131.
25. Murray, *The God of the Witches*, 106, emphasis mine.
26. *ibid.* 13.
27. c.f. Charlotte Sophia Burne, “The Value of European Folklore in the History of Culture” in *Folklore* 21 (1910) 14-41.
28. Chas S. Clifton, “Aradia and the Revival of Modern Witchcraft” in *The Pomegranate* Imbolc 1997, 11. Melton’s comment was, I believe, made at the Philadelphia American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting (November 21, 1995), during a session on New Religious Movement methodology.

James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*: A Critical Appreciation

by Fritz Muntean
University of British Columbia

There is a lake near Rome known as 'The Mirror of Diana.' An ancient volcanic crater, the lake is perfectly round and almost completely enclosed by steep wooded slopes. Lake Nemi and its surrounding forest, in our age, is a heavily numinous landscape still. In classical times, there was a sacred grove of Diana at Aricia on the shores of this lake, and in command of this sanctuary was a royal and priestly steward of nature known as the King of the Wood. Sword in hand, this sacred king paces around a sacred oak in a sacred grove by an ancient sacred lake, in the extraordinary opening scenes of Sir James George Frazer's pioneering study of magic and religion, *The Golden Bough*.

This enormous piece of work, first published in England in 1890 and expanded twenty years later into 12 volumes plus a supplement, is now recognized as "a milestone in the understanding of man's cultural past, and a profoundly significant contribution to the history of ideas" (Gaster 1959: v). In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer took the vast body of mythical and anthropological material available in his day and constructed an over-all picture of how, at the primitive level, humanity in general might have thought and behaved, and how that primitive mentality persists even into the modern age. Not only did the book provide a frame of reference for interpreting and understanding the phenomena of particular cultures, both ancient and modern, but Frazer's work also "helped reveal the full significance of mythology, which otherwise might have remained an airy fancy with no social or psychological relevance to modern humanity" (Vickery 1973: 5).

In the intervening hundred years, *The Golden Bough* has had enormous influence on the rapidly expanding fields of anthropology and sociology, as

well as the studies of mythology and religion. The book, however, is not without its flaws. Frazer seems to have been willing to present as sober hypotheses even the most outrageous series of assumptions. To his own credit, Frazer predicted, with the Victorian scholar's amazing capacity for detachment, the future destruction of many of his ideas. This prediction has substantially come true, and so most of this essay will take the form of an appreciative critique. First, however, let us look at *The Golden Bough* itself and review Frazer's main theories of magic and religion in both the primitive and ancient world.

According to Frazer, such royal and priestly stewards of nature as the Arician King of the Wood are found among primitive peoples everywhere. As magician and priestly king, chief and war-lord, protector and engineer of human and natural, he literally incarnated the well-being of the community. As a result, this priest-king had to be kept alive and well at all cost. Over the course of the centuries, savage humanity developed for this sacred and essential purpose, strategies — both actual and symbolic — such as magic, taboo and sacrifice.

In Frazer's model, magic is based on two major principles. First is *homeopathy*: the idea that 'like produces like.' In accordance with this principle, the priest-king serves also as the bridegroom of a corresponding female deity and mates with her annually to produce fecundity for the people. According to Frazer, such 'sacred marriages' are commonly found in both ancient and primitive cultures. They are a formal expression of the idea that sexual intercourse promotes vegetation—an belief which also inspires the orgiastic practices Victorian society believed to be characteristic of primitive seasonal festivals.

As the embodiment of the spirit of fertility, the priestly king is a human god, and special care has to be taken to prevent any impairment of his 'soul' or vital essence. The 'soul' of all human beings, it is believed, can quit the body temporarily in moments of sleep, sickness, or stress; grow enfeebled through old age; or be deliberately (even accidentally) extracted by malevolence (or incompetence). Accordingly, all primitive people are subjected to a more or less elaborate system of taboo, by which such calamity is supposedly prevented. These systems of taboos are based on the second principle of magic — *contagion*: the idea that things or persons which have once been in contact can for ever after have an influence on each other. The priestly king, by virtue of the superior importance of his 'soul,' is subjected to these taboos to an increased degree.

Frazer's discussion of the beliefs and behavior of the ancient Greeks and Romans, detailing the ways in which life and thought in classical antiquity strongly resembled that of the primitives and savages, may have appealed to his cultured readers who were just beginning to feel a little uneasy about the superior literary value of classical mythology. But it is now no longer accepted that the 'dying and reviving gods of ancient religion,' ie, such figures as Adonis, Attis, and Osiris, merely personify vegetation.

allowed temporarily to exercise sovereignty. The Roman Saturnalia is evidently a relic of this institution, as is also the European Feast of Fools, with its Lord of Misrule, Abbot of Unreason, and the like.

The concept of a priestly king as the dying and reviving embodiment of fertility

If, however, despite all precautions, the priestly king of savage society does show signs of bodily defect, blemish, or disease, he has to be deposed or put to death while he is still hale and hearty, in order that the divine spirit which he has inherited from his predecessors can be transmitted to his successor while it is still in full vigour and has not yet been impaired. Frazer maintains that it is often the custom among primitive peoples to slay or depose the king in any case after a fixed term, and this explains, according to Frazer, the institution of seven-, eight- or nine-year kingships often attested in antiquity (e.g., Minos of Crete) and a survival may be seen in the annual election of mock sovereigns, like the Kings and Queens of the May, in European folklore. Between the removal of the old king and the installation of the new, normal life is in a state of suspension. This is represented in popular custom by a period of license in which the normal order of society is halted or deliberately inverted, and a slave, misshapen person, or condemned felon is

is supposed to appear not only in ritual and popular custom, but also in mythology. According to Frazer, examples of this are found in the classical myths of Attis, Adonis, Osiris, Dionysos, and the Scandinavian myth of Balder, all of whom Frazer understands as divine protagonists in the same, ubiquitous, recurrent vegetational drama. This explains why Frazer's priestly king at Lake Nemi carries a sword. In the tradition of sacred kingships everywhere, succession to the priesthood at Aricia could be won only by a person who managed to slay the 'reigning' incumbent in single combat. In order to qualify for this sacred if savage task, and to ensure proper transmission of the indwelling spirit of fertility, every aspirant to the office of King of the Wood had first to pluck a golden bough or sprig which grew high up on a sacred tree. Frazer identifies this bough or sprig, with its numinous allusion to Aeneas at the gates of the underworld, as the parasitic mistletoe, which is credited in European folklore with all manner of magical properties.

With its ubiquitous recurrence of oak trees and mistletoe, maternal goddesses and seasonal slaughter, sacred kings and dying gods; with its universal usage of magic (both homeopathic and contagious), sacrifice, and taboos; the circle is closed and Frazer's labyrinthine system of primitive and classical magic and religion is complete. But any summary of Frazer's argument gives little idea of how it actually feels to read *The Golden Bough*. A modern reader is struck by the great (and in the 12 volume edition absolutely mind-numbing) mass of 'evidence'—whose relationship to the matter being argued is frequently anything but evident. One reason for such a profusion of data is Frazer's unbridled willingness to digress. Another is the oceanic nature of the subject material, in which virtually any topic, as in a dream, may turn into any other.

His original Victorian readers, however, were quite untroubled by these failings. Frazer's predecessors included F. Max Müller, a professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, who believed myths to be the result of a linguistic breakdown that had occurred since the collapse of a pre-literate Golden Age. His theories were avidly opposed by Andrew Lang, a classic scholar and a brilliant wit. But by 1890, after a generation of controversy between Lang and Müller, most readers were weary of arguments about changes that may or may not have occurred millennia ago in the reconstructed languages that might have been spoken by the Indo-Europeans. On the other hand, everyone recognized the lore of everyday life, whether in the exotic colonies or at home in Britain among the lower classes. Everyone could understand the importance of the fertility of the natural world and the anxieties that primitive humanity might have entertained about it.

Frazer also possessed an enormous talent for physical description, and with his complex and almost Biblical rhythms and phrasing, he succeeded in maintaining an entertaining pace while engaged in seemingly endless summarization of extremely prosaic material. In fact, the importance of *The Golden Bough* is really as much literary as scholarly, and from a purely literary point of view, it is certainly one of the most influential works in the twentieth century. At one end of the spectrum is its well-known importance to works like *The Waste Land* and *Finnegan's Wake*. And at the other extreme is its mostly unrecognized effect on serious minor fiction: the novels of Mary Renault, and even Raymond Chandler detective stories. The book provided a unique opportunity for writers like Yeats to have a committed encounter with sacred reality, and for those like Conrad and Eliot to experience in its pages a full-scale confrontation with the primordial forces of evil. Under the influence of Frazer, mythology greatly broadened its significance to literature from what had been a source of predominantly ornamentative beauty to "a dynamic illumination of the wellsprings of the human imagination" (Vickery 1973: 36).

In addition, no other work in the field of anthropology has contributed so much to the psychological climate of our own times. Indeed, what Freud and the psychoanalytic school did for the individual, Frazer did for civilization as a whole. Just as psychology gave us a better understanding of the behavior of the individual by recognizing the ruder world of the unconscious, where so much of our behaviour originates, so Frazer "enlarged our understanding of the behavior of societies by laying bare the primitive concepts and traditional folk customs which, as a subliminal element of culture, underlie so many of our institutions" (Gaster 1959: xix-xx).

Clearly, *The Golden Bough* has now become part of the basis of modern culture, so much so that many educated people who, often casually, employ its arguments are unaware of their origins. However, in spite of the literary value and cultural impact of his work, it is important to remember that Frazer thought of himself, like Darwin and Freud, as a scientist, as one for whom truth and fact were not only accessible values, but the ultimate values. Unfortunately, as a scientific work, the book is seriously flawed. Since the completion of *The Golden Bough*, our knowledge of primitive thought, folklore, and religion has been broadly systematized and vastly increased. Many of Frazer's basic premises have been shaken by the findings of modern scholarship. The reliability of his sources — many of them the unscientific observations of missionaries and travelers — has been seriously impeached, and much of the

information upon which his hypotheses were based has subsequently failed to be collected in the field.

This is not to say that Frazer was a dishonest scholar or an incompetent scientist. He was, however, typical of those '19th century anthropologists' who

started with a favoured theory and then scoured both the far corners of the world and the dimmest recesses of the past for 'evidence' that either supported or could be made to support that theory. Frazer clearly began and ended his work with the substantially unquestioned belief that man moves progressively from barbarism and savagery to a civilized culture, that the evolution of religion — and society in general — is basically the same everywhere in the world, and that the human mind operates in accordance with fixed laws. He believed, along with Lewis Henry Morgan, that the customs and convictions of humanity can be arranged in chronological order; and he made continuous use of the

Frazer postulated a primitive world that was the diametric opposite of his own Victorian society — with its deep-lying obsessions with sexuality, private property, and social class. ... Frazer blandly assumed as a given that his primitives must be universally promiscuous, non-monogamous, incestuous, and Goddess-worshipping.

evolutionary anthropology of Edward B. Tylor, which held that human nature and development are relatively homogeneous and that variants from the norm of a particular evolutionary stage are to be explained as survivals from an earlier state. As a result of his adherence to these superficial interpretations of evolutionary theory, none of which remained in currency past the middle of our century, Frazer seems himself to be a relic of a habit of thought that, if not exactly primitive, then is at least of long ago and far away. He seems to us a victim, finally, of his mountains of data, an unfortunate example of the 'armchair school' of anthropology that was swept away by the advent of fieldwork.

Nowhere are the flaws in Frazer's system more apparent than in his most

central thesis concerning the connection between savage custom and classical myth: the leitmotif of the Golden Bough itself. Frazer's opening description of the sacred grove on Lake Nemi and its warrior-priest has become justly famous as a masterful example of Victorian romantic nature prose-poetry. But far more than half of those 466 words of purple prose is derived entirely from Frazer's imagination. His sole reference for this lengthy description is Strabo's

Frazer believed that Magic and Religion stand in genealogical succession ... only in the very earliest stage of human development did magic exist by itself as the simplest possible exercise of mental powers, specifically, the confused and mistaken association of ideas. When its practical inadequacy as a means of coercing nature was discovered, then the general cultural shift from magic to religion occurred.

shrine.” (Glaster 1959: xvi).

The equation of the golden bough of Virgil with the branch at Lake Nemi, and its further identification as mistletoe, serves as the connecting link between all of the various elements in Frazer's theory. It is an all-too-central assumption in the work. But even a casual reading of Book 6 of the *Aeneid* clearly shows that Virgil's magical bough is said to be “like mistletoe” in its golden appearance, so

Geography V.3.12, which itself is a model of verbal economy, consisting of only seventeen words in the Greek original: “He is appointed priest who, being a runaway slave, has managed to murder the man who was priest before him; he is always armed with a sword, keeping watch against attacks and ready to ward them off.” The motifs of the tree, the sacred kingship of the priest, and even the golden bough itself, are not even hinted at in Strabo. (Smith 1972: 347-48). Modern scholars now believe that the sanctuary at Aricia was probably no more than an asylum for runaway slaves; and the golden bough, “far from being a vessel of divine power or identical with that carried by Aeneas on his journey to the underworld, was in all likelihood simply the branch characteristically borne in antiquity by suppliants at a

it is unlikely that the branch itself was actually mistletoe, for what classical poet ever compared a thing to itself? In Icelandic mythology, Balder is slain with a shaft of *mistilteinn*, which is alternately described in the text of the saga as being “pulled up” rather than down, as mistletoe would be from a tree, “a tall branch of fate,” “a branch that seemed so slender,” etc. Mistletoe has none of these characteristics, and furthermore does not grow in Iceland, so whatever slays Baldur — if it is a plant — it is certainly something more reed-, spear-, or arrow-like than mistletoe. More likely what is being referred to is the name of a specific weapon. In the words of J.Z. Smith, one of Frazer's modern critics, “With the collapse of this hypothesis one is tempted to write ‘balderdash,’ but, alas, the word has nothing to do with the Norse deity...” (Smith 1972: 369).

One of the major themes of *The Golden Bough* is the suggestion that primitive as well as classical deities were primarily vegetative spirits rather than solar gods. Frazer's discussion of the beliefs and behavior of the ancient Greeks and Romans, detailing the ways in which life and thought in classical antiquity strongly resembled that of the primitives and savages, may have appealed to his cultured readers who were just beginning to feel a little uneasy about the superior literary value of classical mythology. But it is now no longer accepted that the ‘dying and reviving gods of ancient religion,’ ie, such figures as Adonis, Attis, and Osiris, merely personify vegetation. (Andrew Lang called this ‘the Covent Garden school of mythology,’ in allusion to London's well-known fruit market.) Modern mythologists consider these deities primarily as embodiments of ‘providence’ in general. The myths and rituals associated with these classical deities are thus no mere allegories of sowing and reaping, but account for the rhythm of nature by furnishing reasons why that providence is periodically withdrawn or absent. In the particular case of Osiris, for example, his character as a god of vegetation is not, in fact, original, but entirely secondary, being a later accretion. (Gaster 1959: xvii).

Furthermore, Frazer's thinking became involved in a complex web of contradictions as a result of the strain that aesthetic idealism had placed on 19th century thought. The most notable example of this is found in *The Golden Bough's* circumspect and dispassionate catering (one might even say ‘pandering’) to “the fascination with the interrelationship of pain, love, and death that polite Victorian society had for so long tabooed” (Vickery 1973: 34). Frazer was a follower of John F. McLennen, who died in 1881, but who had developed in the middle of the century two topics that served to pervade (and distort) the study of religion through the 1920's: exogamy and totemism. (Ackerman 1987: 80). In the manner of Morgan, McLennen and J. J. Bachofen,

Frazer postulated a primitive world that was the diametric opposite of their own Victorian society — with its deep-lying obsessions with sexuality, private property, and social class. Under their influence, Frazer blandly assumed as a given that his primitives must be universally promiscuous, non-monogamous, incestuous, and Goddess-worshipping. “With an almost salaciously maternal attitude of concern, he delighted in their pranks and pleasures, while regretting their naughtiness” (Malinowski 1944: 186).

Even more unfortunately, he widely popularized the armchair theories of these philosophical anthropologists, many of which were already being discredited in his own time, ‘re-popularizing’ some of their typically Victorian theories of ancient matrilatry, savage sexuality and the nature of primitive family structure, which — subsequent to the publication of *The Golden Bough* — enjoyed a resurgence of credibility and began appearing in equally popular works by Engels and others (including Freud) before the turn of the century. They contributed to the anthropological calamity of Margaret Mead’s theories in the 1930’s, were further repopularized in the 1950’s works of Robert Graves, and continue to resurface as unquestionable givens in the popular ‘anthropological’ fiction and ‘Golden Age’ polemic writings of today. This latter is particularly ironic in that Frazer was clearly opposed to the Neo-Rousseau Golden Age theories of his own day as represented by Müller, Bishop Whatley, and others.

Even more ironic was Frazer’s reaction to Freud. He rejected psychoanalysis and could never be persuaded to read anything by Freud or his school, “in spite of the fact that Freud’s anthropological contributions are clearly based on Frazer’s writings” (Malinowski 1944: 182). It is interesting to note that one of the major differences between the theories of Freud and those of Jung is based on the fact that Jung took it on himself to do his own ethno-mythological research, and came as a result to dramatically different conclusions than had Freud in his reliance on Frazer’s material.

Frazer believed that Magic and Religion stand in genealogical succession, that Religion is due to a refinement of the more primitive ‘magical’ mentality. According to Frazer, only in the very earliest stage of human development did magic exist by itself as the simplest possible exercise of mental powers, specifically, the confused and mistaken association of ideas. When its practical inadequacy as a means of coercing nature was discovered, then the general cultural shift from magic to religion occurred. (Vickery 1973: 43). His effort to trace universal Ages of Magic, Religion, and Science led Frazer to believe in a rigid, uniform progression from magic through religion to a positive science as

the pathway toward understanding that humanity was in fact in the process of following. While early man was supposed to have moved historically from a society founded on the hunt through a pastoral order to an agricultural state, he also progresses from a psychological state controlled by magic to one under the sway of religion, and finally to a scientific view of life.

Frazer never mentions the name of Jesus, but only the slowest of his readers could have failed to make the comparison ... If Christianity derives from primitive fertility or vegetative cults in which the dying and reviving god is central, then “the uniqueness of Christianity is dissolved in its emergence from primitive fertility cults”

equally deep-seated hostility between priest and scientist that occurs later in human history. The basic premise of *The Golden Bough* relies on a belief in the essentially magical character of primitive outlook and primitive behavior. Yet throughout Frazer’s voluminous presentation of factual material, he unintentionally confirms — not his untenable theory of magic as a misapplied principle of association, nor even his evolutionary theory of three stages — but the sound and (to a modern reader) correct view that science, magic, and religion have always controlled different phases of human behavior.

The real difference between magic and religion is to be found first in the subject matter. “Religion refers to the fundamental issues of human existence, while magic always turns round specific, concrete, and detailed problems” (Malinowski 1944: 200). Whereas science is embodied in technology, based on

The polemical subtext of *The Golden Bough* becomes more apparent to the modern reader when Frazer begins to align magic with science in basic outlook. According to Frazer, both magic and science view the world as rigid and invariable and founded on impersonal laws, the knowledge of which permits us to gratify our wishes in any respect. Religion, on the other hand, is in Frazer’s mind opposed in principle to both. Religion regards the world as elastic or variable, capable of being altered by the superhuman powers that created it. Frazer believed that the deep-seated hostility between priest and magician that he postulated in antiquity was the forerunner to an

observation and contained in systems of knowledge, magical systems are revealed, not through observation and experience, but in mythologically related miracles. Religion, on the other hand, takes the eminently practical form of public or private ceremonial, prayer, sacrifice and sacrament.

By using (we would now say ‘misusing’) the evolutionary point of view, which focused on lower or less developed forms of nature, *The Golden Bough* could trace sophisticated religious concepts such as incarnation and immortality to primitive mimetic rituals and misconceptions about natural phenomena — both of which were based, according to Frazer, on a faulty psychology of association — and thus provide the explanation for current modes of belief. Frazer never mentions the name of Jesus, but only the slowest of his readers could have failed to make the comparison between the pagan rites — that result from an imperfect (because irrational) understanding of the universe — and contemporary Christianity. Basically, Frazer employed the ‘objective,’ scientific comparative method as a weapon to finally dispatch Christianity specifically, and religion in general, as an outworn relic of misunderstanding, credulity, and superstition. If Christianity derives from primitive fertility or vegetative cults in which the dying and reviving god is central, then “the uniqueness of Christianity is dissolved in its emergence from primitive fertility cults” (Vickery 1973: 67).

Frazer intended with his evolutionary methods and voluminous material to free humanity from the clutches of Religion and to allow the universal acceptance and unfettered advance of the obviously (to his mind) superior model of Science. Yet it is Frazer’s elaboration of mythological material, along with the more recent work of anthropological scientists and scholarly mythologists — which he more than partially inspired — that has led to our modern reevaluation of religion, even of magic, as a positive and creative cultural force, the very study of which promises to not only enhance our potential to become more expressive and creative beings, but to enable us (just possibly) to bring the fearsome run-away results of a century of uncontrolled scientific inquiry under some kind of enlightened and ethical control. I believe that we owe to Frazer the honour of making elaborate use, not of his naive theories, but of his enormous volumes of information — by essentially not throwing out the timeless baby of mythology with the muddled Victorian bath water.

Fritz Muntean is a 30 year veteran of West Coast Wicca, and a founding member of the Bay Area’s NROOGD tradition. He lives in Vancouver and is just now completing the MA program in Religious Studies at the University of British Columbia. He is a contributing editor of The Pomegranate.

Bibliography

Ackerman, Robert. *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work*. Cambridge UP, 1987.

Fraser, Robert. *The Making of “The Golden Bough”: The Origins and Growth of an Argument*. London: Macmillan, 1990.

Gaster, Theodor H. *The New Golden Bough*. New York: Mentor, 1959.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. “Sir James George Frazer: A Biographical Appreciation.” *A Scientific Theory of Culture*. North Carolina UP, 1944.

Smith, Jonathan Z. “When the Bough Breaks.” *History of Religions*, Vol. 12: 342-371, 1972.

Vickery, John B. *The Literary Impact of The Golden Bough*. Princeton UP, 1973.

BOOK REVIEW: The Witch in History

The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations

Diane Purkiss (University of Reading)
London: Routledge, 1996

*Review by Ronald Hutton
University of Bristol*

The dust-jacket of this book defines Diane Purkiss as a Lecturer in English; within its pages she prefers to describe herself as a feminist literary critic. It is a potent combination, and has resulted in a thoroughly individual and very important book. Its preoccupation is with the manner in which images of English witches have been formed and manipulated during two distinct periods of history, that of Elizabeth and the early Stuarts, and the late twentieth century. In tackling the job, the first half of Dr Purkiss's identity has given her an instinctual love of texts and of language, reflected in her own exuberant and often very funny use of words. The other half has reinforced both an attachment to current critical fashions and ideologies and a style which might be politely described as pugnacious, although I suspect that she herself might prefer the expression 'feisty'. A reader is given little option other than to applaud or to fight back; this one, perhaps unsurprisingly, is going to do both.

The book opens with a firework display of destructive polemic, in three bursts. The first attacks radical feminist views of early modern witchcraft, the second the views taken by modern witches, and the third the treatment of the subject by English historians. Of these the first is the most effective, because the target is most compact and Dr Purkiss is writing with real understanding of the issues.

She is not primarily concerned to demonstrate, as other academics have done before, that the radical feminist notion of the Witch Hunt is wildly unhistorical, but to show how and why it evolved and to argue against its message in feminist terms.

The result is devastating, and the more so because of Dr Purkiss's genius for aphorism. The myth of 'The Burning Times' is shown to have evolved as part of the feminist concern with domestic and sexual violence during the 1970s. It is damned for reducing the victims of the Hunt to suffering bodies, never allowed to speak for themselves, for destroying the historical specificity of both the Hunt and the Nazi Holocaust with which the myth associates it, and for portraying women as merely the helpless victims of patriarchy. The writers with whom she takes issue are the major figures of the genre — Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin, and Starhawk — and although the first two have hardly been immune from feminist criticism since the 1980s, their stature in itself enhances the importance of the intellectual demolition carried out in these pages. My only reservation concerning it is a difference of emphasis, that she tends to view the feminist community in its own terms, as a seamlessly international one, whereas I am more inclined to perceive the myth of The Burning Times as a specifically American discourse, rooted in the culture of the modern United States. This does nothing, however, to vitiate her comments.

The treatment of modern pagan witchcraft, by contrast, suffers from the fundamental weakness that Diane Purkiss does not understand the phenomenon with which she is finding fault. She constructs an image of it which it is itself a myth, a mashing together of three different genuine entities. One is American feminist witchcraft, based upon the idea that the witch figure and its divine complement, the Goddess, can be evoked by any woman bent upon personal liberation. The second is Wicca, a mystery religion developed in England and based upon a rigorous process of training and initiation and a cosmos polarized between equal female and male forces. The third is hedge witchcraft, the modern version of cunning folk, featured here in its commercialized form of individual practitioners offering occult services for money. The sources from which she creates this confusion are a themselves a medley, of influential writers (like Starhawk), authors who have had no impact in Britain (such as Elisabeth Brooke), advertisements, and conversations with individual witches who are quite rightly kept anonymous but who are also left completely unlocated within the complex society of present-day witchcraft. All this material is vaguely considered to be normative.

The problems with the result include straightforward errors; Sir James Frazer was an opponent, not a proponent, of the idea of ancient matriarchy, and relatively few modern witches worship a Mother Goddess. Gerald Gardner, the publicist (and perhaps creator) of Wicca, did not fail to acknowledge the

*... modern pagan witchcraft [is] a
mashing together of ... different genuine entities.
One is American feminist witchcraft, based upon
the idea that the witch figure and its divine
complement, the Goddess, can be evoked by any
woman bent upon personal liberation.
The second is Wicca, a mystery religion developed
in England and based upon a rigorous process of
training and initiation and a cosmos polarized
between equal female and male forces.*

contributions of his pupil Doreen Valiente because of gender bias, but for the simple reason that not until after his death did Valiente wish her identity as a witch to be known; the distortion of the facts here itself suggests a hint of such bias. When these misunderstandings are cleared away, Dr Purkiss proves to be most effective once again on her home ground, when revealing the woolliness, nostalgia, and impracticality of the thought of American feminist witches and the supercharging of the same qualities by crass commercialism. The creation myth of Wicca is efficiently knocked to pieces; but then it has been disintegrating amongst Wiccans themselves ever since the 1970s. The *joie de vivre* of the chapter makes it another marvellous read, and this reader only wishes that it had been based upon better information.

The section upon academic treatment of the Hunt suffers from a similar lack of instinctive understanding, combined with sheer bad luck. As Dr Purkiss notes, professional study of witch trials has apparently languished in English universities since the celebrated socio-economic analyses of Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane in the early 1970s. What she apparently did not realise at the time of writing was that this is largely because for about ten years historians

have been awaiting the completion of major research projects in different areas of the field, by Robin Briggs, James Sharpe, and Stuart Clark. Since she completed her book, two of these have reached publication and the third has been submitted. All have in common a rejection of the functionalism of their predecessors, an emphasis on the need to reconstruct holistically the mental world of the participants in the trials, and a perception of the enhanced importance of folklore studies and psychology in the interpretation of the Hunt. These are exactly the approaches taken by Diane Purkiss herself. Such a pattern demonstrates vividly how much scholars work within common intellectual atmospheres at given moments, while weakening Dr Purkiss's claim that her feminism provides her with a dramatically different perspective.

This said, to some extent the claim stands up. She is novel and convincing in her demonstration that the sceptical writers upon witchcraft in the early modern period were if anything even more misogynist than the demonologists. There is truth and justice in her assault upon the neglect by most English historians of recent theorisations of childbirth, maternity and the body by feminist writers. The obvious defence against the latter, however, is that the writers concerned are locked in an ongoing debate, and that scholars not expert in the issues at stake would like to see it resolved before they employ the latest contributions to it as worthwhile theoretical constructions; the formulations favoured by Dr Purkiss, notably those of Helene Cixous, have themselves since been challenged as misleading by other feminists.

Likewise, she is accurate in her criticisms of the sceptical and rationalist discourse which has prevailed among historians of the Witch Hunt ever since the Enlightenment. What she seems not to appreciate is the context of that discourse, at least until the mid-twentieth century; that it was the product not of a smug cultural hegemony but of liberals terrified of the potential for irrational violence in human society. It was certainly blinkered and sexist, but it was applied to a specific purpose, of hammering home the folly and pointlessness of the Witch Hunt until there was absolutely no danger that it could break out again. We certainly need to move beyond it now — and for thirty years scholars have been doing so — but it should be granted some virtues in its time.

A similar blindness to context weakens the force of Dr Purkiss's comments upon Margaret Murray's characterization of the Witch Hunt as the destruction of a surviving pagan religion. She accuses the historians who attacked it in the 1970s of savaging a soft target with motivations of gender prejudice, with the assertion that the faults of the Murray thesis had been agreed upon by experts

ever since it was first aired in 1921. What she plainly does not realise is that Margaret Murray's books only became best-sellers during the 1950s and 1960s. During that time they not only made a huge impact upon the general public and a host of popular writers, but their main argument was repeated by leading historians such as Christopher Hill, Sir Stephen Runciman, and Sir George Clark, as well as archaeologists, folklorists and pioneers of oral history. The intensity of the attack in the '70s derived from the realisation that fifty years of criticism within the small body of experts upon the subject had apparently been unavailing, and that the Murray thesis had to be stopped once and for all.

After all this sustained finding of fault with others, the natural reaction of a reviewer is to feel that whatever Diane Purkiss now has to say upon her own account, it had better be damned good. The delightful discovery which follows is that it actually is so. First, she uses trial records to reconstruct the experience of encounters with a presumed witch from the point of view of successive female witnesses. The result is to draw us, convincingly, into a symbolic world in which the witch-figure operates as antihousewife, antimother, and antimidwife, a screen onto which are projected a set of specifically female fears and worries. Then she links beliefs about witches and their familiars to prevailing theories concerning the nature of the human body, and of the female body in particular. At a time when medical opinion had long held that bodies flowed with substances which threatened to get out of hand, a woman was seen as especially leaky and permeable, and a witch as effectively boundless and so dangerously intrusive. This insight is illustrated repeatedly from popular sayings and customs. An especially effective case-study takes its starting point from the contemporary medical belief that a mother's milk was the blood which had nourished the foetus, and which after birth was purified through the heart before being pumped into the breasts. Within this system of thought, the suckling of the animal familiar with blood, generally from a teat concealed in the groin, was the use of a polluted organ in a polluted place, a nurturing with poison of an entity created to do evil.

The final part of this central section is devoted to considering the defences provided by accused witches, and displaying the range of very different strategies which they adopted. Some actively sought an identity as users of good magic, others created counter-tales about themselves using materials provided by the accusers, and yet others created their own materials. Virtually all struggled hard to reassert control over the meaning of their lives. Looking at the mass of information which Dr Purkiss has assembled to illustrate this point, one of the most striking aspects of it is that it is derived from accounts of trials

in which the defendant was found guilty; her analysis of it helps us to understand what must have gone on in the (naturally much more sketchily recorded) majority of witchcraft cases, in which the defence was successful

In this fashion, Diane Purkiss provides a set of genuinely new and valuable perceptions of the subject, accessible to her as a feminist writer. She proceeds in the final third of the book to pull off the same trick, but this time with a

... she uses trial records to reconstruct the experience of encounters with a presumed witch from the point of view of successive female witnesses. The result is to draw us, convincingly, into a symbolic world in which the witch-figure operates as antihousewife, antimother, and antimidwife, a screen onto which are projected a set of specifically female fears and worries.

heavier emphasis upon her skill as a textual critic, by analysing the representations of witches in Elizabethan and early Stuart drama. The present reviewer was quite prepared to be overawed by her sparkling reinterpretation of the famous set of canonical texts, although it must be admitted that here she is most firmly upon her home ground and he is furthest from his own. A historian's range is, however, quite wide enough to assess the worth of her comments upon the relationship of the stage with wider culture, and these again seem to be both accurate and important.

More than anybody before, she brings home not merely the diversity of early modern opinion concerning witches, but the sheer variety of channels through which it could be mediated — parents, neighbours, sermons, ballads, pamphlets, learned literature, and plays. She is also a pioneer in the way in which she emphasises how complex that relationship between drama and the complex matrix of wider culture actually was. The stage was very far from being a mirror for society; rather, it was a world with a dynamic of its own and an equivalent variety of ideas. For one thing, trials of witches (at least in the

Home Counties) and plays about witches did not follow the same trajectory; the former had passed their peak and were in decline when the latter were most fashionable. For another, stage representations did not depend upon stories from trials, or the beliefs in which they were rooted. Not only did they draw upon alternative sources, notably the classics and the handy trove of material made by the sceptic Reginald Scot, but produced witch-figures far more flamboyant, more theatrical, and more essentially ridiculous; and in the process may actually have helped to foster scepticism about witchcraft in metropolitan (and thus national) culture.

Not even a review with as generous a word-limit as this can do real justice to the mass of insights, suggestions, and provocations provided by so rich and combative a work. In its author's eyes, it appears to function mainly as a battering-ram, driven first against the errors of contemporary feminist mythology and then against those of a male-centred academic historiography which is itself based in patriarchal culture. It is to congratulate rather than to diminish her that this reviewer sees it more as an important and unanticipated addition to a set of innovative new publications by English scholars upon early modern beliefs and trials concerning witchcraft; not so much a stone hurled into a stagnant pond, as part of a wave of exciting research, in a subject which seems finally to be coming of age.

A longer version of this review first appeared on the Reviews in History website at <<http://ihr.sas.ac.uk/ihr/reviews/introw.html>>.

For the complete review (as well as a reply by Dr Purkiss) see <<http://ihr.sas.ac.uk/ihr/reviews/hutton.html>>.

Reviews in History is highly recommended by The Pom editors.

For further reading on the issues raised in this review, please see:

- Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London: HarperCollins, 1996);
 - James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England, 1550-1750* (London: Hamilton, 1996);
 - Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

Our readers' attention is also directed to Professor Hutton's review of Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts by Anne Barstow, which appeared in Enchanté magazine #19 (1994).

THE POMEGRANATE: Readers' Forum

To the Editors,

Reading your web pages, I was intrigued and impressed by your new journal. I especially appreciate the requirements for backing up with notes and references articles and contributions. However, there is a point I am curious about. While you use the terms Neopagan and Pagan community, and seem to be aiming at the general Pagan population, upon reading further I find only Wiccan material. We are not Wiccan, and we do wonder if you are being accurate in your advertising that you are truly going to be for the general Pagan population. You may not be aware, but there are those of us that are feeling that the Wiccan faith with its many variations is doing its own form of converting and proselytizing. Your publication as it is presented so far, appears to us to be doing something of the same, in that you appear to be a 'Pagan' publication, yet only seem to have Wiccan influence and information.

This is not to be critical or to be seen as any sort of negative statement, only an observation from some of us outside the Wiccan world that are quite happy with our own Pagan lifestyles, but who deal quite a lot with Wiccan burnouts just as we do Christian burnouts.

Only a thought, Marion Skydancer

The Pom Editors reply: *All four of The Pom's editors are Wiccan, and as a result so are most of the people whom we know well. So when we shook the bushes for material to put in the first issue, what fell into our collective lap was (surprise!) articles on Pagan topics written by Wiccans. We assumed that most of The Pom's content, particularly the articles on The Golden Ass and 'Pagan Deism' (as well as the review of Enchanté magazine) would be of interest to everyone in the Neopagan community, regardless of their tradition or*

denomination. On the other hand, upon re-reading some of these and other articles, We've noticed that many of us have casually used the terms 'Wicca' and 'the Craft' where 'Pagan' would have been more appropriate. Likewise, we have had a tendency to automatically say 'Coven' where 'Coven/Circle/Grove, etc' would be more correct. We promise to be more careful (and more inclusive) with our language in future.

At any rate, the best way to assure that your own interests are met is for you and your fellow practitioners to submit articles from your (non-Wiccan) point(s) of view and give us a chance to print them. We would particularly appreciate an article (or a letter) on the following subject, about which we are all curious:

There are several Pagan circles in here in the NW whose members cast a circle with a wand or athame; salute the four quarters; invoke and draw down ancient European deities; raise spiritual energies through chanting, dancing, or guided meditations; perform acts of magic; share cakes and wine; and devote the circle by grounding the energies raised — but who claim not to be Wiccans! We're not saying that these people are 'wrong,' but we are curious and we would appreciate any explanation of this apparent contradiction that our readers could offer.

Dear Editors,

Congratulations on a truly remarkable first issue of *The Pomegranate*. I appreciated Kate Slater's shrewd book review, adored the interview with John Yohalem, and incorporated Margarian Bridger's framework for Pagan deism into philosophical exploration with potential fellow practitioners. Never have I encountered such a substantive (and handsome!) Pagan publication. Here's my subscription, and my heartfelt encouragement to keep up the great work.

May I ask for a point of clarification? As Chas Clifton points out in his engaging and impressively researched article, the modern-day Charge of the Goddess draws heavily on wording from *Aradia*. A footnote directs interested readers to a source analysis published in *Enchanté*, in which Ceisiwr Serith traces contributions to the contemporary Charge from Valiente, Gardner, and Crowley as well as Leland. Then, in Maggie Carew's intriguing interpretation of *The Golden Ass*, Isis' majestic self-declaration upon appearing to Lucius Apuleius is cited as "the model upon which the Wiccan Charge of the Goddess

is based." Carew goes on to ask, "Who would have guessed that Apuleius' hymn to the one true Goddess would be adapted in our century for the worship

Has a literary or traditional connection been established between the hymn to Isis in *The Golden Ass* and the Dianic material of *Aradia* that evolved into The Charge of the Goddess? Or are the similarities coincidental, but not unexpected ...

of the Goddess of the Witches?" Not Ceisiwr Serith, apparently!

Has a literary or traditional connection been established between the hymn to Isis in *The Golden Ass* and the Dianic material of *Aradia* that evolved into The Charge of the Goddess? Or are the similarities coincidental, but not unexpected — a result of the nature of the Divine and Her relation to the mortal realm? Much obliged for any clarification, and many wishes for continued successes!

Sincerely, A. Kantola

Dear Editors,

I was introduced to *Aradia* before any more current Wiccan material, and the work has had a particular interest to me ever since. I agree that it is one of the root sources of the modern craft, and as such deserves a more respectful treatment. I am curious about one thing: while another root source of modern Wicca, Murrays' works, have been refuted for serious lapses in scholarship, some modern historians have concluded that Murrays' basic premise was sound: that there was indeed a surviving "witch cult" in Europe into the period of the inquisition (Carlo Ginzberg, *Ecstasies*). Has Leland's work ever received any academic validation, or even condemnation? Granted some modern witches would rather have *Aradia* dismissed, but I can't help but think that the work of the 19th century folklorists like Leland are still a useful source for those of us in the 20th century craft revival. Also, I remember thinking about *Aradia* when I read Jerzy Kozinski's novel, *The Painted Bird*. His fictionalized autobiography of surviving the Nazi and later Soviet takeovers of Eastern Europe contain some

accounts of surviving folk magic that could have come straight from Leland. Perhaps the trail isn't as cold as we might think, even though the roots that survived of the ancient traditions into recent times are considerably less Gardnerian than we could wish...

Eric Wegner

Chas Clifton replies: My thanks to A. Kantola, whose letter prompted me to re-read the wonderful final chapters of The Golden Ass. I have no trouble in seeing the 'names' section of Isis's speech ("Some know me as Juno, some as Bellona of the Battles; others of Hecate ..." etc.) as prompting the composition, by Doreen Valiente or whomever, of the 'names' portion of the Charge of the Goddess. I think that Maggie Carew goes a little too far in saying that Apuleius' hymn "would be adapted in our century ..." But think it certainly served an inspirational function. To claim that Apuleius' hymn influenced the Aradia text, however, would be a leap of a different magnitude. In the absence of evidence, I would not say there was a literary connection, unless, perhaps, it came through the medium of the Roman Catholic Church. Various writers have claimed that Mariolatry absorbed much of the Isian liturgy.

And next, thanks for Eric Wegner, perhaps I will have to re-read Jerzy Kozinski's The Painted Bird as well and look for echoes of folk magic.

Chas S. Clifton, University of Southern Colorado

Dear Pom Editors:

Thanks for your review: "Inside the Sieve" in the Imbolc 1997 issue of The Pom. I see I shall have to add *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* to my library. I'm delighted that someone has tackled a subject which has fretted me for several years now. I've been worried about what researchers were concocting about modern Pagans, and knew that much of their data had to be skewed, because I saw some of it being gathered. In 1991, Shelley Rabinovitch from Carleton University came through Winnipeg on her thesis trip, which would produce her paper "Spells of Transformation". We welcomed her and did our best to make her at home and answer her questions truthfully. But at that time the local scene consisted of perhaps a dozen 'old-timers' (most of them under 40, almost all childless), and two or three dozen newbies — persons with

three or fewer years of formal practice, with more book learning than practical experience. I fell quite firmly in that latter group, I'm afraid. By 'local scene' I mean those people who would speak to researchers — there were and are many pagans here who are quite private and have nothing to do with us loopy beginners.

At that time I might describe the 'scene' as roughly divided into three groups — a very large and militant Dianic population, a smaller, perky group of friends who did pagan PR and offered open circles, and a separate group of more serious magical practitioners. The groups overlapped, but all three self-selected for a number of traits, and thus limited the kinds of people who would be comfortable and persist as members of the 'scene.' For instance, homophobic newcomers wouldn't last long, nor would high-powered career people. Into this mix of exalted newcomers came the researcher. She might have believed she was writing on a steady-state culture, but nothing could have been further from the truth. She was instead observing the heated ferment of a young population who had gotten drunk together on books and ritual, and had not yet had the spiky corners rubbed off their interrelationships by long years of acquaintance. Some of her interviews were one-on-one, some in groups. I really don't know what accepted practice is for sociological research, but I can't believe that answers collected (in some cases) by a show of hands at a potluck dinner would be considered rigorous data. How could a group questioning fail to create some skewing to the data — not towards white-bread normalcy in this group, but towards mutually supportive revelations of hurt and grievance? Ms. Rabinovitch may have been "true to her data," but data isn't any more reliable than the care which yields it.

Over the years I have answered questionnaires for perhaps eight researchers, mostly university students in religious studies or sociology. Many of these people do not clearly understand what sort of thing they are researching. What use, then, can their results be? I am glad somebody (Carpenter) took on this subject, since somebody should. If there is a university student out there, here's a new idea for a paper — find only older practitioners, over forty, with more than ten years experience in the craft, also selecting for stability (employment, children) and for interests outside the craft (carpentry, astronomy, knitting). Ask these people your raft of questions — if they will speak to you.

Holly E. Nelson, Winnipeg
<redking@pangea.ca>

Shelley Rabinovitch replies: I am sure what you are suggesting would also make a very interesting study, but it would in itself skew the results. I cannot understand why the writer feels only older, or long-time, Pagans are either normative in a given community — or the ones which one should be interviewing. My research was Ethnography: describing a given religious community.

I stand by my research techniques as an anthropologist of religions, having had my methodology approved by my advisor of the time, my department, and the Ethics Committee of my university. Most of my work was face to face, person by person. I cannot control who volunteered to be interviewed, but I can say with absolute surety that those I spoke to across Canada during my research were typical of the public and private Pagans I have met in Canada, the USA and the UK. My mix ran from newly minted Pagans in their teens to elders in both age and experience, many of those being over 40 years of age.

The fact is that most Canadian cities have a very high percentage of those who fit the description Ms Nelson gives of Winnipeg's young Pagans. An overview of any religion includes the elderly, the young, the 'newly-converted,' and the well-established membership. If I had wanted to do a study of Elders in Neopaganism, I would have done one. However, that is a different thesis still waiting to be written.

*Shelley Rabinovitch
Dept. of Religious Studies
University of Ottawa
<tsivia@uottawa.ca>*

The most exciting, interesting and provocative part of many Neopagan magazines and journals has often been the Letters to the Editor or Readers' Forum sections, and it is our fondest hope that The Pom will prove no exception to this rule.

We would especially appreciate it if someone from either the Reclaiming Collective or the Belili Project would respond to Ronald Hutton's recent article on Marija Gimbutas and the Neolithic Great Goddess.



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



John Yohalem
The Sacred Marriage:
Hierogamy in Grand Opera 2

Maggie Carew
The Magician of Shakespeare's
The Tempest 18

Kate Slater
A Yellow Dress at Brauron:
The Taming of Wild Girls 31

Workings
Masks in Magical Meetings
M. Macha NightMare 44

Book Review
Margo Adler's *Heretic's Heart*
Chas S. Clifton 50



The Pomegranate

Editorial Staff

Maggie Carew, Stephen McManus, Fritz Muntean, Diana Tracy

Copyright

© 1997 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate

is published four times a year at the Cross-Quarter Holidays by *The Pomegranate*, 501 NE Thompson Mill Rd, Corbett, OR 97019.

Deadline:

The Solstice or Equinox preceeding each issue. See the inside back cover for our Call for Papers, and send to the above address for our Writers' Guidelines, or to our email address below.

Internet Home Page:

<http://www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/>
(email: antech@teleport.com)

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monodfield
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within the Craft. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included. In the interests of promoting lively discussion, we encourage both our writers and our readers to keep an open mind, and to be ready to explore a wide variety of outlooks.

Notes from the Underground

This fourth issue of *The Pomegranate* is both a landmark and a watershed. We are proud to have made it through a full year of publication, even though it took us a year-and-a-half to do it, but we're more than aware that nearly everyone who supported our fledgling publication by subscribing did so for the first four issues, and now virtually all of those original subscriptions must be renewed. We do trust that you will all take advantage of the (stamped!) self-addressed resubscription form attached herein and cheerfully sign up for at least one more year.

We needed to publish four issues in order to determine actual printing and mailing costs, and we hope that our more realistic subscription price of \$16US for four issues will not frighten away any of our devoted readers. Since we accept no advertising, *The Pom* depends entirely on reader support. So please resubscribe if you value our uncompromising commitment to quality and relevance, and wish us to continue to serve you in the future. We look forward to being granted not-for-profit status soon in both the US and Canada, and at that point we will begin soliciting donations as well.

With this issue we introduce a new, and hopefully regular, feature entitled 'Workings'. We hope you will enjoy our first offering, and that you will feel moved to submit other careful, dispassionate, ethnographic even, descriptions of actual rituals. Our intention is to fill the need for decent 'reportage' in Neopagan writing. Submissions should emphasize 'what was done' rather than 'what to do', and could include the entire trajectory of the ritual, even to the extent of incorporating, say, subsequent dreams and other results.

Alas, as you will surely notice, there is no 'Readers' Forum' in this issue. We would love to read (and print) your letters, so please do write ...

Persephone's Hard-working Minions

THE SACRED MARRIAGE: Hierogamy in Grand Opera

by John Yohalem

The world must be peopled” — says Benedick, in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Benedick, the eternal bachelor, the constant railer against the fair sex — especially against Beatrice, cobra-tongued niece of the Governor of Messina — abruptly finds himself in love, resolved to be married — to Beatrice, of course. He tries, not too successfully, to persuade himself that this is a logical turn of events. His last reason is, to our over-populous times, the least convincing of all, but for Shakespeare’s audience, it was the heart of the matter.

Perhaps the original drama is the drama of mating. Tension arises from the question of whether nature, against all odds, is going to permit reproduction to occur, life to go on. Will flower One bloom long enough for its pollen to reach flower Two, and will Flower Two be ready for it when it comes? Will boy bird succeed in impressing girl bird? Will the sperm survive the endless uphill trek to the egg? Considering the preposterous odds, the fecundity of life may be the strangest thing about this planet — yet it is also the most ordinary.

Accordingly, it is not odd that so many folk tales, myths, pagan rituals, operas and limericks are concerned with this matter, to the exclusion of all others: will X marry (or at least impregnate) Y, despite the obstacles and, therefore, will life continue? Marriage, in the fables and the movies, is the happy ending — it took the bourgeois novelist to realize that, for people who think, whose lives have more complexity than flowers and birds, the institution of marriage is just the beginning of the interesting part. And you know the old curse: May you live in an interesting institution.

Thus, the hierogamy, or sacred marriage, represented in Wicca by

the Great Rite, does not merely symbolize Father Sun fertilizing Mother Earth, or the Sovereignty Goddess granting seizin, acceptance, to the tribe of her annual lover — it is a metaphor for survival itself.

I was meditating on this at a recent performance of Puccini’s *Turandot* at the Met. In this work, left unfinished at the composer’s death in 1924 and therefore the very last Italian opera in the more than 300 years that make up the standard repertory, *Turandot*, a Chinese princess, hating men due to the legend of the rape of one of her ancestors a thousand years ago, refuses her hand to any prince who will not attempt three impossible riddles — and she beheads those who cannot answer them. An unknown prince, captivated by her beauty, dares the riddles and, to her horror, answers them. But the prince wants her love, her partnership, not merely her conquest, so he offers her a deal: if she can guess his name by dawn, she can behead him. In the garden later that night, she admits that his look made her tremble, that she knew he would guess the riddles, that she did not know what she feared more — his success or his failure. She begs him to leave her in peace; he refuses, and kisses her; she bursts into tears — her first tears. Triumphant, he tells her his name: Calaf, prince of Tartary. She exults: “I know your name!” The final scene takes place before the Emperor and the full court. “August father, I have learned the name of the intruder! It is — love!”

It has to be love. *Turandot* “the pure” is a symbol of virginity — not frigid but frozen. (“You who are made of ice, you too shall yield to love,” prophesies Liù, the meek slave girl who kills herself rather than reveal the prince’s name under torture.) Icy *Turandot* must melt, must forget her obsession with independence in order to cohabit — to engender life. “This is the end of the glory of *Turandot*,” she moans, when the prince boldly kisses her. “No,” he replies, “it is the beginning of your glory!” The Maiden thus becomes the Mother, and a princess needs a prince to achieve that.

Calaf is pure, too — pure, mindless testosterone. From the moment he sees *Turandot*, he has no doubts and only one objective. He is single-minded, as lust is. When the ghosts of the 26 princes she has murdered try to warn him off, he tells them they didn’t love her enough. He disregards the warnings of the mandarins and the Emperor, the pleas of Liù and of his old, blind father. He tosses off the riddles with little hesitation, and gives *Turandot* another chance — he wants her on his terms, not hers. Yet he can be tender: he trusts her with his name, because he knows he has not conquered — she has surrendered. Having wept, having melted, she

Tosca ... is more personally shocking because Puccini underlines every step of his heroine's path, the narrowing of a woman's choice to the point where she feels obliged to kill her sexual tormentor – and then he gives us the murder itself, on-stage and far more graphically than opera had been used to ...

would be powerless if he chose to rape her – but rape is not his desire. He wants her to admit she loves him, to enter into a partnership, to create a family. Thus the ending is happy: Turandot is not conquered, she is transformed, able to accept love.

Singers of the role take different tacks. Birgit Nilsson, who owned the role for decades, was ice, turned to fire by her prince. Joan Sutherland and Montserrat Caballé were less sure of themselves – from the first aware that this was the man who might change them, therefore implying that the ice was always a piece of self-deception, a façade. At this recent Met performance, Jane Eaglen sang the tortuous role so serenely, effortlessly, that her confidence seemed unshakable, even before Luciano Pavarotti's legato. Even her size – Eaglen is larger than Pavarotti – seemed to make her impervious, a dreadnought princess. Perhaps it was the singing – and the suicide – of Hei-Kyung Hong's exquisite Liù that changed her mind.

This moral may trouble some feminists, and plenty of trouble can certainly come of taking such a myth, such a metaphor, too literally. There was little thought, in the days of primal myth, for the feelings of individuals – it was recognized that these archetypes were no more real than the archetypal farmer's daughter and the traveling salesman. But as they became figures in drama and poetry, artists began to speculate on the hardships of woman's place in society. In classical Athens, Aeschylus might condemn, in his plays on the Danaids (*Suppliants*), the woman who responds to rape (or forced marriage) with murder, but Euripides, in *Ion*, explored the fate of the woman pregnant out of wedlock in a patriarchal society, and condemned the god who raped her – radical stuff, as his contemporaries were swift to recognize.

In operatic terms, this version of the fertility myth evolved into such works as Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Verdi's *Attila* and

Puccini's *Tosca*, where the assaulted heroine turns the tables – and the phallic blade – upon the male. The shock of the famous Mad Scene in *Lucia*, Freudian critic Brigid Brophy pointed out, is that the blood with which the bride is dripping as she emerges from the nuptial chamber is not her own, and evidence of her maidenhead, but the bridegroom's. Her madness is the only acceptable explanation for her behaving in so 'unwomanly' a way – and it certainly isn't characteristic of the yielding, bullied persona she has presented to us for the previous two acts. In *Attila*, Odabella is avenging her entire civilization, the Roman Empire, on its violator – but it is difficult to feel much sympathy for this iron-clad battleaxe of a matron. If Attila finds this strenuous fire-eater bride material, he obviously deserves what he gets on the wedding night. *Tosca* is the old chestnut about the corrupt judge who will spare the boyfriend if the girl makes it worth his while, but of course he intends to betray her. It is more personally shocking because Puccini underlines every step of his heroine's path, the narrowing of a woman's choice to the point where she feels obliged to kill her sexual tormentor – and then he gives us the murder itself, on-stage and far more graphically than opera had been used to, a foretaste of the slasher flicks later in the twentieth century.

In all these works, lust (in *Lucia* and *Attila*'s case, even lust with marriage) is no longer its own justification. Civilization implies that unthinking biological necessity is no longer the sole motivation accepted as good. And yet it is our very expectation of single-minded male lust and the narrow range of traditionally permitted female response that makes poignant, indeed terrible, an opera like Verdi's *Rigoletto*, where Gilda, seduced and betrayed by the Duke and fully aware of his libertine character, nonetheless sacrifices her own life to save his – though he will never even know of her sacrifice.

In myth, and in opera, the riddles that represent the effort the male must make to achieve the fulfillment of lust are not always posed by the female. Often, it is her father or guardian who makes things difficult – walls her up in a tower or conceals her in some exotic disguise, which the correct party never fails to penetrate. In Greek myth, suitors for Hippodamia, heiress of Oeneus, king of Elis, were obliged to race chariots against the old king, who slew the losers. Pelops bribed Oeneus' charioteer to throw the race, promising him the first night with the bride – then slew the charioteer when he arrived to collect. (This is only one of the reasons Pelops's descendants, Agamemnon, Menelaus and Orestes, were accursed.)

In medieval legend, Tristan's father falls in love with Blanchefleur during a tournament in which he is wounded. Convinced he is too weak to require a chaperone, Blanchefleur's duenna lets the girl into the sick room, and Tristan is conceived with his father's all-but-dying breath. His mother then dies giving birth to him, and his life of love and death intertwined is thus set before he has begun to live it. His later stratagems, and Isolde's, to elude the jealous vigilance of King Mark, are only more of the symbolic hurdles that, by raising the stakes and the lustful energy of the male, ensure the excitement proper to his undertaking the sexual act — pointlessly in this story, since Isolde never becomes pregnant. In Wagner's opera, they never quite manage to have sex — the drama and, even more, the violently chromatic music, are about yearning for a fulfillment, an ease, that is never attained. Death rather than life is the consummation of such a passion.

But in the Celtic legends that were the source for the medieval epics that Wagner quarried for his libretto, the duel between the right (usually young) man and the old one, the formal (legal) possessor, father in authority if not blood, is the purport of the tales of Deirdre and Naisi, Grainne and Diarmuid. The fact that none of these tales of de facto adultery, of the female slipping from the grasp of the official husband to that of a more appropriate lover, ever leads to pregnancy was intended by the poet to add an extra touch of poignancy, a sense of biological waste, to the concluding tragedy. *Ernani*, Verdi's opera from Hugo's revolutionary play, is a version of this tale: Elvira loves Ernani, not her guardian, her elderly uncle, Silva; thanks to the interference of the witty Emperor Charles V (who also desires her), she is given to her true lover — but Silva, eaten up with the unassuageable jealousy of age for youth, uses the notion of family honor to oblige Ernani to kill himself before the wedding can be consummated. Biologically, what a waste — but, dramatically, how poignant!

Classical opera (and the drama contemporary with it) is full of maidens who can only be won when a father's prohibitions are met. If it's a husband, rather than a father, who must be outwitted, the result tends to be a farce rather than a serious work — Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, Ravel's *L'Heure Espagnol*, Offenbach's *La Belle Hélène*. The implication is that the lover of a daughter is pursuing his society-mandated role, which is a serious matter, but the lover of a wife is doing the job the husband is incapable of. This is funny — deception, disguise, is always, in some sense, comical — but, biologically, it is equally necessary. As long as another generation is provided for, the ending is happy in some sense. All

Civilization implies that unthinking biological necessity is no longer the sole motivation accepted as good. And yet it is our very expectation of single-minded male lust and the narrow range of traditionally permitted female response that makes poignant, indeed terrible, an opera like Verdi's Rigoletto,

mythic cycles — think of the sexual tales and prohibitions in the Torah — approve of any sex, no matter how vile, if it leads to reproduction. (The Torah quotes tales of incest, rape, prostitution and fornication more or less approvingly — but prescribes death for masturbation and homosex.)

The Count in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* would be merely threatening, wicked, if he were just the man in authority threatening young love — but since he has a lovely wife, who may not be immune to the flirtations of other men, he becomes comical as well, which turns the poison of possible tragedy into classic comedy.

In Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Prince Ottakar's chief huntsman has offered his daughter, Agathe, to the man who can win a shooting contest. Max, her lover, is so desperate to win that he all but sells his soul to the demon Samael for six magic bullets. When, at the conclusion, the truth is revealed, the marriage is postponed for seven years — an unmythical ending, typical perhaps of the imposition of Christian moral standards on mythic turf. In Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, Pogner, the wealthy goldsmith, offers his daughter, Eva, to the man who can win a singing contest. In love with Walther (who has failed to make the run-offs), Eva attempts to elope with him, but the opera's true hero, Hans Sachs, prevents this — obliging Walther (with Sachs's aid) to enter the contest and win Eva fair and square, according to the demands of society. In the same composer's *Siegfried*, the hero must kill a dragon and cut the world-ruling spear of Wotan, king of the Gods, before he can penetrate the magic fire with which Wotan has surrounded his favorite daughter, Brunnhilde, Siegfried's destined bride.

In the operas of Verdi, to whom (for reasons that scholars still debate), the parent-child bond is always significant, often more intense

All mythic cycles – think of the sexual tales and prohibitions in the Torah – approve of any sex, no matter how vile, if it leads to reproduction. (The Torah quotes tales of incest, rape, prostitution and fornication more or less approvingly – but prescribes death for masturbation and homosex.)

than the bond between lovers. The attempts of fathers or father-figures to prevent access to their daughters except by approved suitors (in Verdi's *Ernani*, *Jerusalem*, *Luisa Miller*, *Rigoletto*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *La Forza del Destino*, *Otello*, *Falstaff*) are seldom successful and often disastrous. Disobedient daughters who choose for themselves often come to grief (Elvira in *Ernani*, power-hungry Abigaille in *Nabucco*, the saintly warrior Giovanna d'Arco, the adulterous Lina in *Stiffelio*, Luisa Miller who falls for a disguised Count, Gilda seduced by a disguised Duke, Leonora in *Forza* who falls for an Inca Prince despised by her racist father, Desdemona in *Otello*), but daughters who accept the family choice hardly do better. Lida in *La Battaglia di Legnano* and Elisabeth de Valois in *Don Carlos* marry men they don't love for selfless reasons, and reap nothing but bitterness and thanklessness for their pains – from the men they marry, from the men they really love and, by implication, from their whole societies.

For Verdi, it is the parental bond that is most significant in their lives – and the survival, by hook or by crook, of future generations is seldom an issue. This may be the triumph of personal myth over primal myth – and certainly Verdi is an unusual Italian composer in that his creations have enough psychological complexity to give their dilemmas depth and resonance. We feel we know them, through their music, because the music exhibits undercurrents, doubts, secondary meanings. They can be acted in more than one way. But the resonance, the way these dramas reach us, is more through troubling personal echoes than through the position of the figure in society. We seldom feel at the end of a Verdi opera, the sense that our society has triumphed in a satisfying conclusion – we are more inclined to feel a resentment, which is perhaps the emotion

Verdi is sharing with us, a bitterness retained from his youth throughout a career of artistic success and financial triumph.

In the operas Mozart wrote to librettos by the roué Lorenzo da Ponte, the quest is not so much for the male to secure the consent of the proper female, but for society to keep the sexual male within his proper bounds. In *The Marriage of Figaro*, Figaro and Susanna love each other, and the Countess loves the Count – but the Count and his adolescent page, Cherubino, the wild card in what would otherwise be a simple farce, ardently pursue every available female. That the Count, who sees himself as the reigning stud in this herd, constantly finds the ardent boy in his way, quicker with every available female, is the sly change playwright Beaumarchais and librettist da Ponte ring on the old theme.

But men are not the only transgressors of proper, pre-ordained mating patterns – for the Countess is not above some tender flirtation with Cherubino, and the elderly Marcellina has a yen to marry Figaro, and is only dissuaded by the discovery that he is her long-lost son. The plot encompasses an elaborate series of stratagems to shame the Count into being faithful to his wife and, incidentally, to get Marcellina married off to Figaro's father, his old enemy Dr. Bartolo, and Cherubino to Barberina, the gardener's daughter. Can we believe that any of these matches – except that of Figaro and Susanna – will remain constant? Fortunately, that is not a question we are obliged to answer – the opera is a comedy. That is, the survival of social mores, not of life itself, is the matter symbolically at stake.

In *Don Giovanni*, an even more anarchic rake turns society on its head. The hero not only seduces (or attempts) every woman he encounters, he employs a valet to list them! (2,065 in five countries, if you are interested. And this was before the sexual revolution or, indeed, any other revolution.) Don Giovanni claims that he adores women, but from what we see of his MO, one may doubt that he even likes them, or knows them – once they have said yes, he loses all interest. Indeed, they don't even have to say yes – he attempts rape on three occasions in Act I alone. I had great fun once showing a film of *Don Giovanni* to two liberated women and a sensitive New Age guy (or SNAG). The libretto, which I have known since I was 10, no longer makes much of an impression on me, but watching my friends' first exposure and appalled reactions to its unapologetic and, shall we say, archaic attitudes was utterly refreshing – I was able to share their astonishment and shock.

Clearly Don Giovanni, who nearly wrecks two marriages and is seen dining alone and friendless in the penultimate scene before the vengeful statue drags him down to hell and restores the social and moral order, is not a good representative of the principle of the survival of the human race. Yet his amoral energy has much of the amorality that is perhaps a necessary, concomitant of human nature in lust mode – such that he was seen by 19th-century revolutionaries as symbolizing freedom from the shackles of stultifying authority. If his failure to treat women as anything but lust objects, his failure to regard men as anything but dupes (if they are his social equals) or servants (if they are not), has alienated the modern audience, we can still see his remorseless, untiring need for sexual contact as a mythicized natural function, albeit one perverted out of its proper place in life.

That the Don's music is so much more elegant, more virile, than the music of his sexual rivals, the wimpy aristocrat Don Ottavio and the lumpish peasant Masetto, inclines the hearer to more sympathy with Don Giovanni's amoral erotic intentions than with their highly moral ones. We can only infer that Mozart intended this imbalance – that the opera is a celebration of the male sexual impulse – or that Mozart's own libido ran away with him in idealizing that rather than the prissier alternatives. He had proved, with Belmonte in *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and with Figaro, that he was quite capable of making an aristocratic tenor and a bumptious lower-class bass sound sexy; that he did not do so in *Don Giovanni* must be, on some level, intentional. (In the moralistic *Seraglio*, two men – the aristocratic Pasha and his comic servant, Osmin – command two women, the English Konstanze and Blondchen, to fall in love with them. They have the ladies in their power, but they are not impressed – because they are in love with two younger men, the Spaniards Belmonte and Pedrillo. Freedom of amorous choice triumphs – but, according to the plot, only because the Pasha is a benevolent, philosophic type. He does not, however, sing a note – and the music makes it clear that the triumph is of true tenor-soprano love over any external interference.)

The sexual characters of the third Mozart-da Ponte opera, *Così fan Tutte*, are easily duped by their sexual fantasies into believing whatever they, or the masterful cynic Don Alfonso, wishes them to believe. No one is more surprised than the four lovers are when genuine feeling slips into this complicated tale of fiancée-swapping – but it is this genuine heart, supplied by Mozart's music, that makes them lovable dupes. In the end, Don Alfonso advises the young men to marry their girlfriends despite their infidelities, because “così fan tutte” – all women

Yet [Don Giovanni's] amoral energy has much of the amorality that is perhaps a necessary, concomitant of human nature in lust mode – such that he was seen by 19th-century revolutionaries as symbolizing freedom from the shackles of stultifying authority.

do it. One might add that it doesn't matter, in the long run, if they do – so long as there is a new generation, does it matter who fathered it? But this is not a moral that society was going to permit on the stage in 1790, or for a century or so afterwards, when the opera was considered too immoral to perform without rewriting.

Richard Strauss, who consciously imitated Wagner and, especially, Mozart in many of his operas, is unusual in taking up the question from the opposite side: what makes a woman worthy of becoming a mother to future generations? He genuinely seems to have found women much more interesting than men – indeed, not a few of his heroes are played by women in drag, because he loved the female voice. Men in Strauss's operas, especially tenors, are often ciphers or stooges, but the women usually fascinate. True, they are presented from a man's point of view, and feminists may well find Strauss condescending, but the music is always beautiful and often expresses an emotional and intellectual depth of which the males in his operas are seldom capable.

In his second opera, *Feuersnot* (The Need for Fire), Strauss presents an alter ego, a young magician despised by his neighbors but true to the magical teachings of “Meister Reichert” (that is, Richard Wagner – a motif from the Ring makes this clear). The girl he loves invites him to her upstairs room in a basket, then stops the basket halfway up and exposes him, a laughingstock, to the entire town. Incensed, the hero chants a spell that puts out every hearth fire in town – until the cruel girl gives in and takes him into her bedroom after all. Whatever goes on up there, the hearth fires all light up down below. If the score is mediocre and the drama simplistic, the mythic element is certainly here: the hearth is life, and for life to go on, sex must have its way.

Whatever anthropology books Strauss had been reading, he put them away for his next several operas. Symbolism returns with *Ariadne auf Naxos* in 1916 – a post-modern fable, in which sung exegesis accompanies the action. A wealthy boor (who never appears) has

*This ... is the meaning of Wagner's drama,
rather than the power plays of a bunch of
morally shoddy supernaturals: that humans,
living in the shadow of death and time,
are 'better' than gods,
who are impervious to such things.*

commissioned two entertainments: a light and sexy commedia dell'arte (whose subject was always the seduction of the woman from her husband or guardian by a worthier, or at least sexier, male) and a grand and ponderous opera seria on the subject of Ariadne, deserted on Naxos by Theseus on the way home from Crete. The Prologue includes bitter debates among the cast members over which piece shall be played first, ending when the patron commands that they be performed simultaneously (to save time). The Opera, which follows, does just that: Ariadne, abandoned by her seducer, longs for Death, and the commedia characters try to cheer her up with examples from their own amoral adventures. (Ariadne pays no attention.) At last a godlike figure appears, and she welcomes Death. But it is not Death; it is Bacchus, god of wine and ecstasy, come to bring her to transcendence and apotheosis, a place among the stars earned by her sufferings – or so he says. But Zerbinetta, from the commedia, comments that a broken-hearted woman can always be consoled by a new man. Strauss's score slyly plays it both ways – we have an eloquent, transcendental duet, and also a witty send-up.

In 1920, Strauss threw cynicism to the winds. His librettist, von Hofmannsthal, created a new mythology and a legend worthy of comparison (they felt) with Mozart's Masonic *The Magic Flute: Die Frau ohne Schatten*, The Woman without a Shadow. Here we deal so entirely with archetypes that only two of the opera's characters – the unseen and unheard king of the spirit realm, Keikobad, and the 'everyman' figure, Barak the Dyer – have names at all. The three women among whom the real drama takes place are the Empress, the Nurse and the Dyer's Wife.

Keikobad (the name was taken from a medieval Turkish king) has a daughter who has taken a fancy to humans – a taste "inherited from her mother", we are told, though we learn nothing else about that mysterious lady. In the form of a deer, the girl is pursued by the Emperor of the

Southwest Islands. At the moment of capture, she assumes her real form. Of course he falls in love with her, knowing nothing of her true nature. (All women are 'natural' and mysterious, according to the patriarchal mythos.) But the marriage is not a 'true' marriage – it is merely mutual lust, constantly indulged. For true marriage, the Empress must be capable of becoming pregnant. By her father's decree, as long as she casts no shadow, she remains inhuman, without a soul, literally 'impregnable' – unconquered, like Puccini's Turandot – and if she still casts no shadow at the end of a year, her husband will be turned into stone. Secretly, this is just what her Nurse, a powerful witch, hopes will happen. As the opera begins, only three days remain, and the Empress has no shadow. Learning only now of her father's law, she commands her Nurse to take her to Earth to get one.

They encounter Barak the Dyer and his bored, unhappy wife. The Nurse soon persuades the Dyer's Wife (with many a magical bribe) to agree to sell her shadow – she has no wish for children anyway, and only contempt for her devoted husband, who yearns for a house full of little ones he can slave for. Only when a terrible storm sweeps away their house at the moment she is renouncing her shadow does she begin to see the long-suffering Barak as he is. But it is too late – her shadow is lost and unclaimed.

In her father's realm, having turned away the wicked Nurse, the Empress is confronted with a statue – her husband, the Emperor. Only his eyes are still alive, pleading with her. A fountain rises at her feet – and a voice explains that if she drinks from it, she will receive the shadow of the Dyer's Wife. But in the distance she can hear Barak and his wife singing of their remorse and misery. She cannot bring herself to commit this theft – and by her sympathy and pity for ordinary humans, she finds she has become human as well, with a shadow of her own. The Dyer's Wife gets her shadow back, too, and as the opera ends, both couples are reunited and a chorus of their unborn children sing that the door to the world is open at last.

The Empress has elements within her of both the selfless Pamina in Mozart's *Magic Flute* and Wagner's Brunnhilde – who becomes human after observing the human love of Siegmund and Sieglinde, and feeling, in contradiction to her divine nature, sympathy for them. This, as Shaw pointed out in *The Perfect Wagnerite*, is the meaning of Wagner's drama, rather than the power plays of a bunch of morally shoddy supernaturals: that humans, living in the shadow of death and time, are

‘better’ than gods, who are impervious to such things. Brunnhilde was born a demi-goddess, a force of nature, unafflicted with personality or libido, uninfluenced by the messy concerns of those doomed to die – and not a player in the reproductive game. Wotan, in his attempt to combat the malevolence of Alberich and Fafnir, has tried to produce a child capable of free will, of knowing good from evil – in many mythologies the turning point between a creator deity and the human creature. Too late Wotan realizes that all his plans for the Walsungs are hopeless – they remain puppets. Later still, he realizes that Brunnhilde, his favorite child, is what he wanted all along – a creation capable of making moral judgments for herself, and of ignoring his when hers are superior. It is Siegmund’s love for Sieglinde – and Sieglinde’s even more self-sacrificing willingness to go on living, after Siegmund’s death, in order to bear their child, that has taught Brunnhilde the moral meaning of life: sacrifice of oneself for a greater good. But in making her human, capable of understanding human feelings, this comprehension has also cost her her godhead. (This may have some resonance for believers in the Christian sacrificial myth as well – the dying Wagner was considering writing an opera on that subject.) Wotan, at his supreme tragic moment (and Wagner’s score makes the most of it), understands that Brunnhilde is the child he had always wanted – and that he must lose her forever. She will now ‘belong’ to the man who can surmount the supernatural obstacles (magic fire) to awaken and possess her.

Brunnhilde rejoices in her fate – until she realizes that humans must face other things as well, such as moral ambiguity and even death. The only deaths in the Ring before the concluding calamity that are not the result of being slain (Fasolt by Fafnir, Siegmund by Hunding, Fafnir and Mime by Siegfried, Siegfried and Gunther by Hagen) are those of Hunding – who drops dead at a contemptuous word from Wotan – and Sieglinde’s death in childbed. This event was highly ordinary before the twentieth century, and part of the thrill and terror when a woman yielded to the sexual needs of the male. We must believe that Sieglinde knows what Siegfried’s birth will cost her when she agrees to submit to it – indeed, ecstatically rejoices in her submission. The news that she carries her dead brother’s child sets off a musical explosion, the first appearance in the Ring of the rather Bellini-like theme Wagner dubbed “the glory of woman”. The theme does not reappear until the very end of the fourth and last opera in the cycle – when it is identified with Brunnhilde’s willful (altruistic we are to suppose) destruction of the entire civilization based on the corrupt quest for power set off by the theft of the Ring, gods

The new world ...will be based on love and understanding ...[Brunnhilde] will bring it into being, giving her life (and the lives of a lot of other people) to do so – as Sieglinde (and so many other women before modern times) gave her life simply to bear a child. ... here it is the Daughter of God who brings it about, and she doesn’t let God get off lightly either.

included.

The new world, and you can trust a male chauvinist romantic like Wagner to say it, will be based on love and understanding, ‘feminine’ virtues, if you will. A woman, not a man, will bring it into being, giving her life (and the lives of a lot of other people) to do so – as Sieglinde (and so many other women before modern times) gave her life simply to bear a child. In a sense, this is the story of Jesus redeeming the world from age-old sin – except that here it is the Daughter of God who brings it about, and she doesn’t let God get off lightly either.

Wagner, who never met a man whose wife he didn’t like, had many deep thoughts about the rival claims of legal marriage and passion. He sought what many men seek – a woman who would put up with anything from him, even other women. The giving up of self that is required for true marriage was decidedly foreign to so egoistic a nature, but that didn’t stop him from hymning the glories of matrimony, any more than lifelong bachelorhood stopped Beethoven.

There are six marriages in Wagner’s epic Ring, and in each we have a chance to see what the individual has given up, and what the reward has been for society. In *Das Rheingold*, the prologue to the work, which deals only with gods and other supernatural beings, marriage is symbolized by the bitter union of Wotan and Fricka – who quarrel bitterly (and, we will learn, eternally) over the rules of their contract. Affection has been sacrificed in return for social status – but Fricka is not the one who tries to worm out of the bargain.

In *Die Walküre*, Sieglinde, Wotan’s mortal daughter, partakes of two ‘marriages’ – her legal bond to Hunding, to whom she has been given by the men who killed her mother and carried her off as a child

Sacred sex consecrates the drama that produces a new human ... To make that marriage, an individual takes on responsibilities towards the community, and gives up the potential self ... this sacrifice, which the hierogamy, the union of god and goddess, most sublimely implies, becomes in Goetterdaemerung the holy marriage of Brunnhilde and Siegfried. Their sacred sacrifice will give birth to a new world.

(a marriage, significantly, protected by Fricka, guardian of the law), and her passionate but highly illegal union with her brother, Siegmund (a union denounced and destroyed by Fricka). Fricka thus stands revealed as an opponent of the future of life in the name of legalism – which is precisely the reverse of the Queen Goddess’s role in myth – for Sieglinde and Hunding are childless, but Sieglinde becomes pregnant by Siegmund from their one and only night of love. Her sacrifice – of home and place in the community, not to mention divine approval – is apparently insufficient to her transgression: Wagner exacts her death, as well, in giving us the divine child, Siegfried, fated to lead the world to its salvation.

Siegfried, too, makes two marriages: the bond of love to Brunnhilde, and the legal bond to Gutrune, whose brother Gunther forces Brunnhilde to marry him. Both the legal unions with the Gibichung pair are ‘magical’ in the sense of deceptive, unreal: Brunnhilde has married Gunther because Siegfried, in Gunther disguise, forced her to do so. He has married Gutrune because he drank a potion that made him forget Brunnhilde. Many stagings rightly stress that the bumptious, naïve Siegfried comes from a different world to that of the charming but corrupt woman he has married; in the final scene of the opera, even Gutrune admits she was never anything but Siegfried’s concubine, while Brunnhilde was his true wife. By then it is too late – both bridegrooms are dead, and Brunnhilde has resolved to destroy the whole world for letting the disaster of her betrayal occur in it.

Siegfried, at the first sight of Brunnhilde, has given up the

fearlessness that was his emblematic quality and also his shield against the world. He was “the boy who didn’t know what fear was”, and this enabled him to forge his sword, slay his dragon, take the Ring that symbolizes rule of the world. The sight of Brunnhilde makes him tremble for the first time in his life – and later he proves vulnerable to magic, to skullduggery and to weapons. Brunnhilde, for her part, has given up her godhood, her immortality, in order to become a woman, perhaps a fount of new life, like Strauss’s Empress. This in turn makes her vulnerable to human forces she has always despised – she has never had to care for. Marriage – the ability to love, the willingness to give up one’s individual self – is, in Wagner, a stripping away of the defenses of the individual ego. That this produces good in the continuation of life is shown by the result of Brunnhilde’s sacrifice: She destroys the corrupt civilization and its compromised gods to give birth to a new world order, based on love and sacrifice rather than power and law. It is for this reason that the melody filling the opera house at the conclusion of the Ring, the motive Wagner dubbed “The glory of women”, is the one heard only once before in the entire cycle – at the moment Sieglinde learned she was pregnant, and resolved, despite her despair, to live to give birth to her son.

Sacred sex consecrates the drama that produces a new human, and a baby is one of the most vital symbols for everything that is potential, for the promise of the future. To make that marriage, an individual takes on responsibilities towards the community, and gives up the potential self that exists in individuality. This commitment, this sacrifice, which the hierogamy, the union of god and goddess, most sublimely implies, becomes in *Goetterdaemerung* the holy marriage of Brunnhilde and Siegfried. Their sacred sacrifice will give birth to a new world.

John Yohalem is editor of the award-winning and highly recommended Enchanté: The Journal for the Urbane Pagan, which is available from him at P.O. Box 735, NY, NY 10014. Be sure to visit the Enchanté Web Site at <<http://www.herodotus.com>>

The Magician of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

by Maggie Carew

The older and more experienced I become, the more I admire William Shakespeare. I have seen countless productions of his plays, and read them over and over. I think about him and his characters often, quote him in daily speech, and continually find new insights in his work.

"Age cannot wither [him], nor custom stale
[His] infinite variety." (Anthony and Cleopatra, II:ii)

The 37 plays, 154 sonnets, 2 narrative poems and a few shorter verses he has bequeathed to us excel as drama, as psychology, and as poetry, no matter what criteria are applied. They may be interpreted in countless ways — and have been, according to the temperament of the interpreters and the fashions of thought prevalent at the time. In our century alone, Hamlet, for example, has been seen to suffer from an Oedipus complex (Ernest Jones), to be an Angry Young Man (Kenneth Tynan), and (in a recent British stage production) to be a victim of multiple personality syndrome. At Stratford, Ontario, about 20 years ago, a production of *The Tempest* emphasized the magical elements. Prospero, played by Len Cariou, used the spirits to cast a circle for the masque. *Macbeth* has been presented as a modern American mobster (*Joe Macbeth*), and in Orson Welles' 1948 movie version, the First Witch carries a stang. Verdi based three of his finest operas on *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Falstaff*, adhering fairly closely to the text. *King Lear* has been produced in the style of the Japanese Noh drama and Kurosawa is one of the many distinguished directors to have made movies of the plays. Shakespeare's work went into eclipse in the century or so following his death, but he was rehabilitated by the great actors Garrick and Keane in the 18th century and is at the present time one of the hottest properties in Hollywood.

What can possibly be added to all of this? In my opinion the well is not nearly dry. Every new era, every paradigm shift in the history of ideas, suggests new approaches. In this essay I wish to present my reasons for believing that Shakespeare was familiar (at least!) with the elements of

Ceremonial Magic. I admit that I cannot prove my contention beyond a reasonable doubt, but that is equally true of most of the theories of the past. At the best, I hope to provide a little nutritious food for thought, and you, gentle reader, are at liberty to take it or leave it. It is just one more personal interpretation. We all bring ourselves into our appreciation of any literature, and the author puts himself into the writing of it. We are mirrors for each other, and Shakespeare held, "as 'twere, the mirror up to nature" (*Hamlet*, III: ii). He left no diaries, and no personal letters have been found. The

... in Shakespeare's day female practitioners of magic are 'foul witches' while male magicians are virtuous and learned. Wizards, from Prospero to Oz, are 'very good but very mysterious'

Elizabethan Age was not noted for introspection (although we know that Shakespeare read and admired Montaigne), and autobiographies until modern times were rare. To assume that *The Tempest*, or any other work of his, is autobiographical is just that: an assumption.

When I was at school (about a million years ago), the most influential Shakespearean critic was still the venerable Andrew Bradley. There was a prevailing myth of Shakespeare, in which he was portrayed as a high school drop-out (true), who got a girl into trouble and had to marry her (also true), who was suspected of poaching (not proven) and took it on the lam from his home town to lose himself in the big city; that he never (or rarely — the twins have to be accounted for) returned until he was old; that he was a third-rate actor, and an insomniac ("Sleep no more. Macbeth doth murder sleep" *Macbeth*, II: ii), and a womanizer, who may or may not have written the plays for which he was paid a fortune (not true: Shakespeare's money came principally from his partnership in the company that owned the theatres and from shrewd real estate ventures). Since then, many devoted students have spent hours in dusty archives excavating wills, deeds, and parish registers which, taken together, contribute to a very different appraisal of his character. Computer technology has facilitated techniques of language analysis that are now being applied to all kinds of texts. Very few modern scholars still believe that Shakespeare did not write the works attributed to him.

“An upstart crow,” wrote Robert Greene in 1592, “beautified with our feathers ... as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you ... the only Shake-scene in a country.”

Greene was dying when he wrote those bitter words. In February, 1592, a play of his had bombed badly, while in March, Shakespeare had enjoyed a huge success with *Henry V*.

... the material world is governed by two opposite principles: the Boreal, or northern, principle of condensation; and the Austral (southern) principle of rarefaction. These principles seem to be personified by Caliban and Ariel.

There seems to have been some resentment on the part of the university men towards this upstart from a provincial town, educated at a provincial grammar school, and writing better plays than theirs. The notion that someone else must have written the plays grew largely out of this town versus gown rivalry. Interestingly, one of the staunchest advocates of the theory that Francis Bacon wrote the plays was Manly P. Hall.

“It is quite evident,” he writes, “that William Shakespeare could not, unaided, have produced the immortal writings bearing his name. He did not possess the necessary literary culture ... his parents were illiterate ...”

This is simply not true. John Shakespeare was a respected burgess of the flourishing town of Stratford, and a member of the school board. Another distinguished alumnus of Stratford Grammar School was one John Harvard. In some parts of the United States, a ‘grammar’ school; is an elementary school, but in England a grammar school was (and still is) an exclusively academic high school, where Latin and Greek grammar were taught, together with rhetoric. For his homework, Shakespeare would have been required to write Latin verses on classical models. I think if he had gone on to university, he would have been trained to write like Marlowe and Jonson and all the other talented people of his age. As it was, his language was totally original. He elevated the common speech to the level of poetry. It has been estimated that he coined more than 2000 new words, together with many new phrases that we use daily and have come to think of as clichés. From *The Tempest* alone, example include: ‘brave new world’, ‘in a pickle’, ‘foul play’, and (my

favourite) ‘thin air’. A Cambridge man might have said ‘incorporeal element’, and people can always be found who will prefer such stilted language and think it is somehow superior because ordinary people have trouble with it.

In *Shakespeare and the Drama* (1906), Tolstoy remarked:

“All his characters speak, not their own, but always one and the same Shakespearean pretentious and unnatural language, in which not only they could not speak, but in which no living man ever has spoken or does speak ... a writer like Shakespeare — who had not developed in his mind the religious convictions proper to his time ... corresponded to the irreligious and immoral frame of mind of the upper classes of his time and ours.”

Shakespeare was not a member of the upper classes, but Tolstoy was! One wonders which plays Tolstoy had read, and whose translation. Throughout his plays, Shakespeare expresses sympathy and understanding for the common man, and for the “houseless heads and unfed sides” of the dispossessed.

On the eve of battle, Henry V talks to a group of common soldiers in prose, their own language. He tells them “Every subject’s duty is the king’s, but every subject’s soul’s his own” (*Henry V*, IV: i). In the Elizabethan era that was a courageous thing to say in public. Censorship was a fact of life, and so was jail for writing ‘lewd and seditious’ plays: it happened to Ben Jonson. As for ‘the religious convictions proper to his time’, one of the seminal issues of Shakespeare’s era was the no-hold-barred conflict between Catholic and Protestant ideologies. Prudent men were very guarded on the subject of religion.

Coleridge, on the other hand, praises Shakespeare for exactly the same qualities:

His language is entirely his own, and the younger dramatists imitated him. The construction of Shakespeare’s sentences, whether in verse or prose, is the necessary and homogeneous vehicle of his peculiar manner of thinking ... he is of no age — nor, I may add, of any religion, or party, or profession. The body and substance of his works came out of the unfathomable depths of his own oceanic mind (Table Talk, 1836).

When we look at the great masters retrospectively, our perception is filtered through all the changes that have happened between their time and ours, and we tend to forget that all great artists are modern and innovative. We need to try to see them through the eyes of their own era, to assess them in relation to the work of their contemporaries and predecessors, and to recognize — as far as it is possible — the cultural prejudices ingrained in our own culture.

Shakespeare became successful, respected and rich through a combination of natural talent and exceedingly hard work. He was frequently at court, both in Elizabeth’s reign and that of her successor, James I. Every

recorded description we have by people who actually knew him (except Robert Greene) comments on his 'sweetness', his 'gentleness' (by which was meant something like refinement), and his wit. He kept his friends throughout his life, and allowed his daughters to marry husbands of their own choice, even though he disapproved — with good reason — of his younger daughter's choice. Shakespeare was a dutiful husband, a shrewd businessman, and a hard worker. In short, a 'master of the ordinary'. This was no semi-literate hick.

All drama began in religious ritual, English drama had its roots in the medieval mystery plays performed in churches to instruct the largely illiterate congregations. As these early plays gradually became more theatrical and less religious, they were moved out of the churches into the market square or the inn yard, where they were performed on a 'pageant' — a wheeled cart with curtains around it and a space underneath to store properties. Large inns of the period were usually built around three sides of a square, with an open space in the middle and balconies running around the sides. This model was easily adapted to the shape of the first Elizabethan permanent theatres, such as the Globe. Actors became professionals, passing the hat at performances. It didn't take the theatre owners long to figure out that collecting the money at the door was a more reliable method. At the Globe, people paid one penny for general admission, and additional penny for admission to the covered seats, and a third penny to get into the best seats. Almost everyone could afford it, and going to the play became a popular and frequent entertainment — just like bear-baiting.

During the turbulent reign of Queen Elizabeth I, England became very prosperous. The population of London grew from 50,000 to 200,000 in about 60 years. The city was crowded, jerry-built, dirty, noisy, plague-ridden — and dynamic. Actors enjoyed the status of modern stars. Shakespeare was an actor, and became a shareholder in the stock company that owned the Globe. His plays belonged to the company, and for the most part were not published during his lifetime because the rudimentary copyright laws of the time protected publishers, not authors. The company jealously guarded its properties and tried (not always successfully) to prevent rival companies from mounting pirated versions. During the warm summer weather there was usually plague in London and the theatres were temporarily closed. At such times, the players would take the show on the road — back to pageants and inn yards. These tours would provide Shakespeare with ample opportunities to visit his family in Stratford, and records exist of theatrical performances there.

In 1609 the company opened the Blackfriars theatre in north London.

This was one of a new type of theatre which had features in common with both the Globe and the palace rooms where command performances were given. It was an enclosed theatre, which held a smaller audience but charged a much higher price for admission. It was consequently more exclusive, and not at the mercy of the weather. Evening performances could be given. There was an elevated stage at one end, with a musician's gallery overhanging it, and doors at the back. There was room for machinery and special effects. Seating

*Manly P. Hall claims the whole play is an
encryptment of esoteric — specifically
Rosicrucian — knowledge ... He assumes that
Shakespeare could not have been a
Rosicrucian or a Freemason ...*

was arranged in rows facing the stage, and also in balconies around the walls. It was for this theatre that the last plays were written, and Shakespeare, ever the innovator, must have reveled in the possibilities of the new technology.

But something had happened to Shakespeare. The death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603 seemed to many to mark the end of a Golden Age. She had reigned for as long as many people could remember. Shakespeare's plays took on a pessimistic tone. It was at this period that he wrote the 'dark' comedies and the 'problem' plays. He had no money problems. His wife died in 1609, and perhaps he loved her more than has been supposed. Perhaps his health broke down. Perhaps he was simply exhausted. The records indicate that he spent more and more time in Stratford, buying real estate and apparently planning for his retirement. In London, he trained young John Fletcher to take over the position of principal playwright for the company, collaborating with him on *Henry VIII* and on a play called *The Two Noble Kinsmen* which is so much Fletcher and so little Shakespeare that it is not included in the canon of the complete works.

The last play Shakespeare wrote which was entirely his own work was *The Tempest*, written for the Blackfriars theatre and premiered there in 1612. Try to imagine what it would have been like to attend a performance: the large room ablaze with candles which would reflect from the jewels and rich fabrics worn by the audience, and ceiling and the extremities of the room would melt into shadow and the air would be filled with music.

“... the isle is full of noises.

Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not” (*Tempest*, III: ii).

We do not know who wrote the music for this first production, but whoever he was he was a contemporary of John Dowland and William Byrd. There was probably a consort of lutes and viols in the musicians’ gallery, and many of the cast members were called upon to sing ‘ayres’, a popular new vogue.

It was customary to open a play with a brief conversation not essential to the action. In the absence of lights and curtain this was a useful device to give the audience time to find their seats *The Tempest*, however,

Shakespeare hired professional child actors for the role of Ariel and the chorus of spirits. They would be light in weight, asexual in appearance, and they would sing high treble. It is certainly true that the convention of diminutive fairy folk so deplored by Tolkien had its origins in this period.

begins with a shipwreck — thunder-sheets, flashing explosions, a ship drawn across the back of the stage by a windlass, people yelling above the din. I think the special effects would look contrived, and that the style of acting would be quite mannered, but that would not be a difficulty for people who were used to life at court.

Now that he has everyone’s attention, Shakespeare moves the scene to Prospero’s ‘cell’, or cave on the island. He tells his daughter, Miranda, the story of their past and how they came to the island when she was too young to remember. This exposition, punctuated by her questions, establishes her character as sweet and gentle creature and his as a powerful magician. Prospero, it turns out is the rightful Duke of Milan. His interest in the occult sciences developed into an obsession. Devoting most of his time to magic and science, he allowed his brother to take over the administration. Eventually, the brother saw his way, with the connivance of the King of Naples, to usurp the duchy. Prospero was set adrift in an open boat with his motherless infant daughter. A noble Neapolitan smuggled aboard necessary supplies and “from mine own library ... volumes that I prize above my dukedom” (*Tempest*, I: ii).

Here they have lived for twelve years, but at last a ship is passing near the island which carries the brother, the noble Neapolitan, the King of

Naples and his son. Prospero seizes his opportunity for revenge. We meet first the king’s son, Ferdinand, who has been separated from the others and believes he is the sole survivor of the wreck. Prospero makes it clear to the audience that part of his plan is to marry his daughter to Ferdinand, so we know right away that this will be less of a good old-fashioned revenge tragedy and more of a redressing of the balance. “There’s no harm done,” he assures Miranda. “No harm. I have done nothing but in care of thee” (*Tempest*, I: ii).

The island is populated by spirits, led by Ariel, who is an important character in the play. Prospero uses his magic arts to command these spirits to his service. There is also Caliban, a monster who once tried to molest Miranda, and is kept in total abjection by Prospero (he is the aboriginal inhabitant, and much has been written about the contemporary American colonies both from the point of view of the prejudices of the colonists and from that on the exploited native population). Caliban’s mother was Sycorax, a ‘foul witch’ and ‘blue-eyed hag’ (I think probably this should be ‘blear-eyed’), who was exiled to the island for her crimes. and who locked up Ariel in a tree for refusing to obey her evil orders. It is interesting to note in passing that in Shakespeare’s day female practitioners of magic are ‘foul witches’ while male magicians are virtuous and learned. Wizards, from Prospero to Oz, are ‘very good but very mysterious’.

It interests me that Prospero insists he has done no harm. He has taken upon himself the very gratifying task of manipulating the situation by magical means to achieve the outcome he desires. He might argue that he has acted ‘for the good of all’, but certainly not ‘according to the free will of all’. He implies that the end justifies the means. On the other hand, many occult Orders are hierarchical in nature and constitution.

One of the delights of Shakespeare’s work is that it is possible to read almost anything into it. *The Tempest* may be seen entirely in Jungian terms, with Prospero as The Self (or the Wise Old Man), Ferdinand and Miranda as animus and anima, Ariel as The Child and Caliban as The Shadow. The tempest itself, in this interpretation, would be a mental or spiritual crisis (which may have been connected to Shakespeare’s period of ‘dark’ and ‘problem’ plays and his decision to retire at the comparatively early age of 48).

Manly P. Hall claims that the whole play is an encryptment of esoteric — specifically Rosicrucian — knowledge, and that the First Folio contains much more; and that this would suggest that Shakespeare could not have written it.

The philosophic ideals promulgated throughout the Shakespearean plays distinctly demonstrate their author to have been thoroughly familiar with

certain doctrines and tenets peculiar to Rosicrucianism,” writes Hall; and again: “Who but a Platonist, a Qabbalist, or a Pythagorean could have written *The Tempest*?”

Quite so. But Hall has failed to prove by these arguments that Bacon wrote the plays and that Shakespeare did not. If documentary evidence exists, or ever did exist, it will probably not be made available. I am not a Rosicrucian and I am quite prepared to accept Hall’s judgment on this. He is a recognized authority on arcane systems, but not on everyday life in England in the reigns of Elizabeth and James. He has proved nothing but his own prejudice. I cannot prove my thesis either, but if Hall’s contention is true that Rosicrucian symbolism is encrypted throughout the plays, then it was Shakespeare who put it there. He assumes that Shakespeare could not have been a Rosicrucian or a Freemason, but I can think of no reason why he should not be. In the England of his day it was safer to be an occultist than a Catholic!

According to Catholic canon law, Elizabeth Tudor, who was the daughter of Ann Boleyn, was illegitimate and therefore had no right to the throne. The next heir was her cousin Mary Stewart, Queen of Scots, who was a Catholic. Pope Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth, which meant that her Catholic subjects were no longer bound to obey her (all of this at a time when England’s greatest political rival was Catholic Spain). Elizabeth’s sister, Queen Mary I — ‘Bloody Mary’ — had burned Protestants as heretics. Elizabeth’s spin doctors charged Catholic priests not with heresy, but with treason. They were publicly put to death in a most barbarous manner, and persons who tried to protect them were also imprisoned and sometimes executed. The principle of separation of church and state was a very new idea when it was incorporated into the Constitution of the United States.

Occultists, on the other hand, were not perceived to be a threat to the monarch. During the Renaissance, which reached England at this time, there was a revival of interest in the ideas of the neo-Platonists, Pythagoreans and hermeticists. No distinction was made between astrology and astronomy; Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler, contemporaries of Shakespeare, practised both. In the writings of the period, including Shakespeare’s, there are frequent references to beliefs which were widely held then, but now have currency only among occultists.

For example, analogical thinking was an accepted norm, and so was belief in the dictum of Hermes Trismegistus popularly paraphrased as ‘As above, so below’. It was believed that the natural order of creation was hierarchical, that matter was constructed of the four elements, and that the circle was the ideal form. There was little distinction made between science and what we would call occultism. Medicine, especially, was based firmly on

[John Dee] was an alchemist, a student of the Talmud and of Rosicrucianism, and a medium. It seems strange to us that the Church of England was not nearly as hostile to these practices as it was to Roman Catholicism ...

the theories of Paracelsus.

The most renowned occultist of the period was John Dee. After taking his degree at Cambridge at the age of 17, Dee traveled widely in Europe, where he studied mathematics and astrology. Under a cloud during Mary Tudor’s reign, he came into his own in Elizabeth’s, who paid him the honour of visiting him at his home in order to consult him. He was an alchemist, a student of the Talmud and of Rosicrucianism, and a medium. It seems strange to us that the Church of England was not nearly as hostile to these practices as it was to Roman Catholicism; but as long as metaphysics was studied privately by men of substance, the clergy were content to tolerate it.

In *Psychic Self-Defense*, Dion Fortune writes:

The finest minds in occultism are totally unknown outside their own Orders ... Those who know what to look for, however, can pick them out readily. Perhaps at this length of time I may be forgiven if I break the Oath of the Mysteries that binds to secrecy concerning the names of initiates and suggest that the key to the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy may lie in the fact that Bacon and Shakespeare were members of the same Order.

It must be added that Fortune simply makes the assertion; no supporting evidence is offered in the book for this remarkable statement. It is important to remember that anyone may read almost anything into someone else’s work when it is approached with preconceived expectations. Perhaps that is what I am doing in this essay! With this caveat in mind, I want to point out some details of *The Tempest* which suggest strongly to me that Shakespeare was indeed an occultist.

There seem to have been Masonic lodges in England in the middle ages. The Regius MS. (discovered in the 19th century) is dated 1390. It claims that the Masonic movement came to England in the time of Athelstan, grandson of Alfred the Great. There are other mss. which contain similar information. That these did not surface until the early 19th century —

the periods of Francis Barrett — suggests to me that they may be akin to the Book of the Law suddenly discovered in the reign of King Josiah (*II Chronicles*, 34: 15-21). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that there were Masons in London in Shakespeare's day, and that the Rosicrucian Order was introduced into England by Robert Fludd (1574-1637). After extensive travels in Europe, Fludd settled in London in 1605 or shortly afterwards, six years before *The Tempest* was written.

One of Fludd's beliefs was that the material world is governed by two opposite principles: the Boreal, or northern, principle of condensation; and the Austral (southern) principle of rarefaction. These principles seem to be personified by Caliban and Ariel. Given that the north is traditionally ascribed to the earth element in Western tradition, the brutish and scarcely human Caliban seems to fit neatly. Uriel is the archangel of earth, but by replacing the last vowel of the alphabet with the first one, we get Ariel. If Caliban is (almost) an anagram of Cannibal, then Ariel could be a pun on *aerial*, an apt name for the principle of rarefaction.

At the Blackfriars theatre, Ariel and his attendant sprites would have been suspended with ropes and pulleys to fly about the stage. Popular rivals to the legitimate theatre of this period were the companies of child actors, most of whom had been trained in the great cathedral choir schools. Shakespeare takes a crack at them in *Hamlet*, when he has Rosencrantz describe them as:

... an aery of children,
little eyases, that cry out on the top of the question
and are most tyrannically clapt for it (*Hamlet*, II: ii).

I think 'eyas' may be a corruption of the Greek Aias (Ajax). There are two heroes named Aias in the *Iliad* — Big Aias and Little Aias.

On the principal that if you can't beat them you may as well employ them, Shakespeare hired professional child actors for the role of Ariel and the chorus of spirits. They would be light in weight, asexual in appearance, and they would sing high treble. It is certainly true that the convention of diminutive fairy folk so deplored by Tolkien had its origins in this period.

One of the central events in the plot of *The Tempest* is Prospero's calculatedly cruel treatment of Ferdinand, designed to prove his courage and to arouse Miranda's compassion. He makes it clear that he has every intention of matching these two:

... It goes on, I see,
As my soul prompts it ...
At the first sight
They have changed eyes. Delicate Ariel,
I'll set thee free for this! (*Tempest*, I: ii).

The episode reads very like the traditional ordeal preparatory to initiation, and in this respect resembles the treatment of Tamino in *The Magic Flute*. To celebrate Ferdinand's success in the ordeal, Prospero conjures up not only spirits, but Olympian Goddesses, no less — Juno, Ceres and Iris: goddesses of marriage and prosperity, and their divine messenger. This scene is in fact a masque within the play, and was probably entirely sung, or acted to music. Meanwhile Caliban and the drunken servants are hounded — literally — by spirits in the shapes of dogs, and the ship's crew is in a spell-induced sleep.

Critics have usually identified Prospero closely with his creator, suggesting that in this last play Shakespeare is taking a formal farewell of his public.

*I'll break my staff
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book* (*Tempest*, V: i).

Please note that he says 'book', not 'books' as he is made to do in the recent Peter Greenaway film *Prospero's Books*. It has been suggested that 'breaking-staff' is a play on 'shake-spear', and that the drowned book is a play script; but it is at least equally possible that Shakespeare meant a magician's wand or staff, and his grimoire.

One of the great losses of European art is the opera that Dylan Thomas was collaborating on with Stravinsky at the time of his death. I had managed to come to terms with that, but in the course of researching this essay I came across another loss which I had not known of, and which is so calamitous that I shall be grieving over it for a long time. When he died, Mozart was planning an opera based on *The Tempest*. It would have been a collaboration of the two artists I love the most in all the world.

It is common knowledge that Mozart was a Mason, and so was his friend, Emanuel Schikaneder, who wrote the libretto for *The Magic Flute*. Like *The Tempest*, this last opera was a huge popular success. It was the culmination of Mozart's mature work, written not for the court but for the public theatre, full of melody and high spirits. It also contains much Masonic symbolism, especially in the very instances in which it resembles *The Tempest* — which may well have been what attracted Mozart to the play. Schikaneder was a successful actor-producer whose repertoire included the roles of Macbeth and King Lear. It was certainly Schikaneder who changed the original story line, in which the daughter of the good fairy was abducted by the evil magician, Sarastro. (I have always had difficulties with the abrogation of Pamina's free will and the dangers to which she is exposed during her

captivity.) He it was also who introduced the characters of the Three Boys, who are connected with Masonic symbolism. In Viennese productions to this day, they are always played by members of the Vienna Boys' Choir — the little eyes of the 20th century. I suspect this is the reason why Ariel was triplicated in the movie *Prospero's Books* (it's a pity the music wasn't more inspired).

I can hardly bear to think what the composer of the High Priest's invocation of Isis and Osiris might have made of "Our revels now are ended". Try to imagine Mozart's setting of "Full fathom five" for a treble voice with chorus, and a trio by the three goddesses along the lines of the female duet in *Così fan tutte*. Think of the love duets, the dance of the masque, the storm music of the overture.

Whether or not any merit can be found in an arguments for Shakespeare's being a ceremonial Magician, I think we may agree that he was a magician in a more general sense. His plays, now four centuries old, never cease to inspire pity and terror — and laughter — in new generations of audiences. His characters are so real that they make themselves quite at home in every era. Almost single-handedly he transformed a living language and provided later poets with an unmatched medium for their genius. He was a master of the Art of Naming, and truly as his lifelong friend, Ben Jonson said of him:

"He is not for an age, but for all time."

*Maggie Carew was born and educated in England.
An elder of one of the Craft's less well-known traditions, she presently
lives in a small community in British Columbia where she keeps a low profile.
For many years she published All My Relations,
a Pagan magazine of considerable quality and renown.
Back issues are still available. Contact The Pom for further details.*

A YELLOW DRESS AT CHILLY BRAURON: The Taming of Wild Girls

by Kate Slater

Arkteia — the rite of maidens playing the bear. To play the bear is to consecrate.
Hesychius, *Lexicon*

A certain bear dedicated (kept) in the sanctuary of Artemis was tame. Once a certain maiden teased it, and her face was clawed by the she-bear. Grieving, her brother killed the bear. Artemis, angered, ordered every maiden to imitate the bear before marriage and to tend the sanctuary wearing the saffron-colored robe.

Scholia on Leyden Mss of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, line

645

Decking out his daughter, he hid her in the inner recess, and adorning a goat in clothing, sacrificed it as if it were his daughter.

Pausanias *Lexicon* in *Sale, Temple-legends*

The overall continuity of a sanctuary should not, therefore, be allowed to mask ... profound changes in the nature and significance of a cult.

Francois de Polignac

Two years ago, I set out to write a historical novel about the Eleusinian Mysteries. On the way to Eleusis I turned in the opposite direction, following another ancient pilgrimage, to the marshy shore of Brauron, and the childhood of women, where the story begins. After onsite exploration in Greece my pile of research notes is deeper than the story line so I am glad to offer *The Pomegranate* a report.

My view of the Arkteia is that of a priestess of a modern mystery religion and a designer of ritual. Long ago, I was a Grey Owl leading a pack of excited and homesick little girls with drinking cups and mystic uniforms into woods filled with mostly theoretical bears. The Greeks would have made up a story for that. We, who examine fragments of their stories searching for what they really meant, must remember that their stories varied endlessly with the teller and the time. Stories were open ended, it is we who demand last words.

As a base to ground the speculative freedom of fiction, I needed answers to several questions: What did Classical Greeks hope to get from their investment in maintaining the Arkteia cult and how did this expectation relate to the real or perceived nature and role of women? What was the nature of

Artemis? What does the evidence say about the nature of the ritual? What was its historic background? When did the Arkteia take place? Among competing

... pictorial evidence
for the Little Bears
thus far amounts to
pieces of three well-
drawn red-figure pots
and fourteen more
crudely painted black-
figure pots.

mythic and literary evidence, which synthesis will accept the broadest set? What ritual process can be conjectured that accepts most of these things? All the myths linking Artemis with bears, childbirth, the taming of wild girls, and girls who are saved from sacrifice by substitution and become her priestesses are relevant to understanding the Arkteia cult and the thinking of the society that supported it.

Greek religious cults were generally of two kinds: personal mysteries which relate to the otherworld and are voluntary individual experiences; and regional-cultural-community rituals which relate to this world and which must be performed for the well-being of the populace, but not necessarily by each individual. Playing the bear for Artemis was a this-world pre-puberty ritual designed to protect girls during the dangerous period from menarche until they married and bore their first child, as well as to socially enforce their role as legitimate wives and mothers. Probably only a few of the daughters of citizens served as resident handmaidens at the sanctuary, although if the Arkteia ritual occurred annually at one or both of the dedicated temples, and if the late-date stoa which could accommodate 99 girls really indicates the scope of the Arkteia, then a substantial percentage of Athenian girls could have played the bear during a ritual of short duration. Performance of the rite by representative members of tribes, demes or families would have adequately protected all in their age cohort and certainly their sisters and cousins.

Scholars disagree concerning details of the scant descriptive materials and how they should be interpreted. Since practice of the ritual may have extended for a century though periods of intense political and cultural change, some apparently opposing alternatives could have existed, over time if not simultaneously.

The Arkteia, ritually playing or dancing the bear, took place at two sites. Greek Attica is an inverted triangle whose point juts down into the Mediterranean. Athens lies on the western shore and the sanctuary of Brauron on the eastern, about 24 miles away. The second sanctuary, Mounychia, existed

on a hill four miles south of Athens, separating the port of Piraeus from the open bay of Phaleron. This hill is now covered by a suburb and I haven't seen information that the temple site has been found. Artemis, yet another armed goddess, watched over the ports.

The main site at Brauron was drained and excavated between 1948 and 1963. The excavation director, John Papademetriou, died suddenly before publishing more than progress reports and presumably a great deal of information is unpublished. A small and lovely museum built to hold finds from the sanctuary and the area's Mycenaean graves was opened in 1969. Behind it lies the rocky acropolis hill, an arrowhead of broken syncline pointing to the sea.

On the stepped slope of the acropolis, adjoining the marshland, is the ancient sanctuary. The area was wooded and the stream was tended to keep it within its banks. The sea, now a quarter mile away, came nearly to this point. Marsh-loving Artemis would not be unhappy with her site today. The excavation covers about 230 by 300 feet, possibly all of the temenos.

The site has been lightly used since Neolithic time but cult activity did not begin until 800 BC. Buildings, including a temple and structures in a cave said to be the tomb of Iphigenia are covered by grander buildings from mid-fifth century, built on the ruins left by the Persian Invasion in 480 BC. At its height in the fourth century, the sanctuary held a medium-sized temple and a great U-shaped stoa that fascinates scholars. Because of war or economic reasons one side was never finished. The rest held nine rooms containing eleven couches each. Hostel? Dining room? Ritual or festival shelter? Orphanage? The Perseus website offers a plan of the sanctuary and photos of the ruins.

The sanctuary drowned when its river mouth silted up in about the end of the third century BC and the settlement must have moved into drowsy pastoral and olive orchard life.

When did the Arkteia take place?

Artemis was a springtime Goddess, shown carrying a fawn, "with buds in her hair". The Attic month of *Elaphebolion*, the moon cycle of our March, was named for the festival of Artemis Elaphebolia, "Deer Slayer". This festival seems to have disappeared, eclipsed by the City Dionysia established by Peisistratus in 534. Early summer arrives near the beginning of that month with the rising of the star Arcturus in the constellation of Bootes, the Bear Herder who keeps Callisto (Ursa Major) and her son Arcas (questionably Ursa Minor) from sinking into purifying water, according to Hera's spiteful curse.

Our April is *Mounychion*, named for the Mounychia full moon festival which included an Arkteia rite. Although a full moon would assist a rural

festival, it seems unlikely that the Brauronian Arkteia would have taken place simultaneously, since cross-visitation and sharing of resources might have been desirable. If a chorus of Little Bears lived in residence for an extended time, learning dance and song, they might have served at both temples. I think that opening participation to large numbers of girls would have been a useful social strategy and that all possible combinations of one or both temples holding Arkteia probably happened over time. While Brauron was in ruins after the Persian invasion, Mounychia might have fulfilled its role.

It's unclear as to whether the Brauron Arkteia occurred annually or as part of a larger pentatelic festival (counted as every fifth year but equaling four years apart). In his comedy, *Peace*, staged in 421 BC, Aristophanes has a character say: "She's Theoria, whom we once, being rather tipsy, banged en route to Brauron." The play satirizes Athenian yearning for an expected truce after a long war and Theoria, played as an attractive tart, means 'delegation' or 'embassy'. This line has been interpreted to mean that there was a lusty heterosexual festival at Brauron, or conversely, that it was sarcasm toward the Athenian government or the long-gone Peisistratids.

Following a multi-year plague in Athens, the island of Delos was re-purified and the pentatelic expedition to the island expanded. Minority opinion thinks it may have sailed from Brauron. The Brauron Museum guide says that epigraphic evidence for stables, gymnasium and palaistra indicated a large festival with chariot racing, sports and musical competitions. The Guide says there was also an annual, perhaps local, festival. I think this could have been the small, private to women, Arkteia.

A 1957 travel guide says: "In the precincts of the shrine [on the Athens acropolis], feasts were held every four years during which young girls, aged five to ten, came from Brauronia to bring offerings. They were called 'bears' and in earlier times used to wear bearskins." The idea that a delegation may have come from Brauron to Athens seems reasonable, though current theorists say the girls went the other way. Both journeys may have occurred.

Literary evidence is fuzzy — imagine trying to reconstruct our own beliefs and practices from the works of Tennessee Williams, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and fragmentary records from the taxation office.

What did the Arkteia support:

What was the situation of women belonging to citizen men? While daughters were idealized as intensely loving their fathers, they existed by their fathers' tolerance. Since all legitimate children inherited equal shares of property, limiting the total number of children was important. Shortly after birth, the father decided whether to keep the newborn and, if so, he ritually accepted it. A

rejected child might be exposed, left at a temple or more precarious place where someone might pick it up and adopt it or take it as property. Fragmentary evidence indicates that daughters were more often exposed, though there may have been a law forbidding exposure of a family's first daughter, or perhaps this meant first-born child. Strong laws governing marriage of citizens may reflect

fluctuations in the gender balance, with surpluses of men over women existing even after wars.

Adult women were thought of as helpless and lustful. Medically there is no record that Greek physicians had ever discovered the hymen and virginity therefore seems to have been assumed in the absence of pregnancy or direct evidence of sexual congress.

Simultaneous orgasm was thought

My view of the Arkteia is that of a priestess of a modern mystery religion and a designer of ritual ...

necessary to draw the sperm into the womb. This encouraged men to pay attention to their wives' pleasure but implied that any pregnant woman must have enjoyed the conception. If an unmarried woman became sexually active her guardian had the right to sell her into slavery. Demographics have been deduced from records and from exhumed skeletons. Men married at about thirty, girls at about fourteen, shortly after a later menarche than girls have now. First births, still overseen by Artemis, were more dangerous both because they were first and because they occurred so young. Average life expectancy was about 36 for women and 46 for men, so women lived as widows for about five years.

All citizens were expected to marry, with husbands chosen by girls' fathers. Girls were described as wild domestic animals, fillies or calves, waiting to be tamed or yoked by their husbands. Marriage ceremonies were elaborate transfers of the bride to her husband's house, where she may have been unable to maintain much contact her own family.

Artemis

Leto came from the East. Pregnant by Zeus, she bore Apollo and Artemis, who in the Homeric Iliad, ca 800 BC, is clearly named both Olympian Artemis and Potnia Theron, Mistress of the Animals. Apollo was integrated as a god of civilization and oracles; Artemis remains wild, guarding borders and passages between the unknown and the familiar. Both were intensely jealous of the honours due them and their mother. While her counterpart in wildness, Dionysus, can be humorous and her brother Apollo was a mischievous child,

Artemis has no humor. Both twins shoot arrows of sudden, unexpected death: Apollo to warriors, Artemis to women in childbirth. To these she may offer easy birth or her gentle arrows of release, invited by women whose labor has been too long and difficult. She has variously been called the “Soothe” or “Pacifier.”

Literary evidence is fuzzy — imagine trying to reconstruct our own beliefs and practices from the works of Tennessee Williams, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and fragmentary records from the taxation office.

Eileithyia, the midwife, is too complex to describe here. She (or sometimes the maidens Eileithyiae) is variously called daughter of Hera, a Hyperborean maiden, a nymph linked to Pan, or another manifestation of Artemis. The title Artemis Kalliste (Beautiful) does not in my opinion establish Callisto as an alternate form of Artemis since the two identities are clearly separated in all versions of that myth.

A catalog of gifts received at Brauron describes robes displayed

around (on) or before two or three Goddess statues combining these attributes: the upright one (as opposed to sitting?), the one at the back, the one of stone, the old one and, simply the one (hedos, meaning holy, venerable statue). Some scholars think the “old one” may have been the wooden image which was said to have fallen from the sky to Tauris and brought by Iphigenia to Brauron. Pausanias says this was later taken away by either the Persians or the Spartans. Dates in the catalog occur as late as 342 BC, 120 years after the Persian war, so the “old one” is not likely Iphigenia’s *xoanon*.

Artemis Locheia: Reeder says this title had roots in Minoan religion. Artemis remained the guardian of young women until each had delivered her first child and the *lochos* (afterbirth). In modern medical terminology, *lochia* refers to the discharge that continues until the birth canal is completely healed and unlikely to become infected, about 40 days after delivery. This is the period which Greeks both ancient and recent have believed was the time required for a woman’s state of vulnerability or “pollution” to last. If the ancient Greeks defined *lochia* similarly this would be an interesting herbal signature, since saffron was used for menstrual problems and *lochia* can be a distinctive saffron color.

In *Iphigenia at Tauris*, Euripides wrote that Athena sent Iphigenia to

the Brauron temple and her brother Orestes to the temple at Halai Araphnides (modern Loutsas) on the bay four miles north. Iphigenia was to receive the robes of women who died in childbirth. In memory of the human sacrifice at Tauris the priest at Halai was to prick the throat of a man so that altar received a drop of blood at each festival. Halai Araphnides and Brauron must have been paired, with girls and possibly mothers celebrating the Arkteia at Brauron and boys or men the rites of Artemis Tauropolos at Halai Araphnides.

Male and female rites were unlikely to have been held simultaneously, because there would have been concern for the safety of the girls if many men were nearby. Part of the mystique of the Artemis cult was the mythic danger that girls could be stolen from her temples, as “when, sailing to Brauron, [the Lemnians] seized young girls, basket bearers... [by] no lucky chance [they] carried off the daughters and wives”; and the abduction of young Helen by Theseus while she was dancing in the Spartan temple of Artemis Orthia. Theseus left her with his mother until she grew up enough to marry, while he went on another adventure. Her brothers rescued her by invading Attica. Helen was later stolen and carried to Troy. She was portrayed either as Iphigenia’s aunt or, in a later story, as her mother.

The myths and legends

(Slashes denote units of information that can be used for comparison between the myths.)

Childbirth, midwifery, and death myths:

Eastern Goddess, Leto/ is raped by Zeus and pregnant with twins/ flees Hera’s wrath/ wanders in the wild/ delivers baby Artemis/ while holding onto an olive (or palm) tree/ Hera blocks labor for nine days by detaining midwife Eileithyia/ other Goddesses send for Eileithyia/ who comes and/ helped by Artemis who has grown up fast/ delivers baby Apollo/ while Leto clutches a palm tree/ on Delos island.

Eileithyia/ an aspect of Artemis/ or a nymph/ grants safe quick birth.

Artemis/ controls survival in childbirth [also the child’s?]/ helps Eileithyia/ or grants merciful death/ to women in childbirth/ is special guardian of the first birth/ may protect or punish illegitimate pregnancy/ receives robes and votives for successful births/ of boys or girls.

Iphigenia/ chthonic heroine/ once priestess/ receives clothes of women who die in childbirth/ may care for children of these women.

(Note that Goddess midwives are all celibate, never likely to become polluted or be giving birth themselves when needed by another.)

Heroic myths of bears and wild girls:

Wild young girl Callisto/ daughter of king father/ hunts with Artemis/ is raped by Zeus and pregnant/ is turned into a bear/ by Hera/ or by Zeus/ or by Artemis/ (or in late Roman version remains with Artemis/ nine months later is seen to be pregnant while bathing/ pollutes sacred spring/ and is killed by Artemis)/ has son Arcas/ who is founding hero of Arcadia/ the bears Callisto and Arcas are thrown into sky/ become Ursa Major and Minor/ and is prohibited by Hera from reaching purifying water.

Wild young girl Atalanta/ exposed by king father/ suckled by a bear/ hunts with Artemis/ hunts Calydonian Boar/ returns to father/ is ordered to marry/ races suitors (losers die)/ Aphrodite helps suitor win race/ Atalanta marries (despite oracle against)/ husband does not repay Aphrodite/ who causes them to make love in a temple/ of Zeus or Cybele/ who turns them into lions/ becoming wild/ and celibate because lions mate only with leopards.

Disobedient daughters/ of king Proetus/ are unwilling to marry and leave their home/ which angers Hera/ who makes them wander in the wilds/ celibate, mad and dangerous/ are tamed by Artemis or by a priest in her temple/ return home/ and marry.

Myths validating Arkteia temples:

Brauron: Obedient daughter Iphigenia/ of King Agamemnon/ leaves her home/ prepared and willing to become bride/ is sacrificed by father/ to Artemis/ for favorable winds to hungry Greek army on ships bound for Troy/ Iphigenia is saved by Artemis/ who substitutes a goat, bear or deer/ she is lost to her family/ becomes Artemis' priestess/ is dangerous/ is saved by brother Orestes/ serves Artemis at Brauron.

Brauron: A girl/ from Athens/ leaves her home/ plays with tame female bear [or flirts with tame male bear]/ at sanctuary of Artemis/ has her face scratched/ her brothers (or Athenians) kill the bear/ Artemis sends plague or famine/ Athenians consult oracle/ promise that girls of Athens will play as bears/ or serve Artemis in her sanctuary/ before they marry.

Mounychia: A bear appears/ at sanctuary of Artemis/ harms people/ is killed by Athenians/ plague or famine results/ Apollo's oracle decrees/ that a girl must be sacrificed/ by her father/ to Artemis/ wily father Embarus/ offers obedient daughter/ in exchange for perpetual priesthood at Mounychia/ dresses daughter in a goatskin/ conceals her in back of temple/ sacrifices a goat/ which he calls his daughter/ she serves Artemis at Mounychia/ and girls thereafter play as bears there/ before they marry.

William Sale made a careful textual analysis of several versions of the Brauron and Mounychia temple legends, attempting to determine the sequence

Medically there is no record that Greek physicians had ever discovered the hymen and virginity therefore seems to have been assumed in the absence of pregnancy or direct evidence of sexual congress. Simultaneous orgasm was thought necessary to draw the sperm into the womb. This encouraged men to pay attention to their wives' pleasure but implied that any pregnant woman must have enjoyed the conception.

Obedient daughters/ of Athenian citizens/ leave their homes/ become bears at the temple of Artemis/ are tamed by Artemis/ return, marry and deliver their first children under her protection.

What was the ritual?

Published pictorial evidence for the Little Bears thus far amounts to pieces of three well-drawn red-figure pots and fourteen more crudely painted black-figure pots. The black-figure pottery dates between late sixth century and early fifth (pre-Persian invasion), with one piece showing dancing to an *aulos* possibly dating to 560 BC. The red-figure pots date to about 430-420 BC. All items are broken and incomplete. The pot style has been called *krateriskos*, a small version of the *krater* used to mix water and wine. One black-figure fragment

of their evolution. It seems to me that these are not sequential in time, but inner and outer mysteries that would have existed simultaneously. One, requiring that maidens perform the Arkteia ritual before marriage, may have involved many girls, either as Arktoi or in an activity such as joining with the selected representatives at the Acropolis and processing part of the way toward Brauron.

A second, and to my imagination deeply secret, inner mystery may have been the occasional sacrifice of a daughter to the goddess, so that she might enter permanent service as Artemis' priestess.

What the ancients asserted happened in the Arkteia:

strongly links the *krateroskoi* to the Arktea's races. It shows a *krateriskos*, painted with nude running girls, tipped as if pouring a libation before a laurel

All this would occur on
the greatest adventure
the girls had
experienced, the journey
into a world wild with
birds and pines and hills
and sea, with a cave and
sacred spring and their
own small temple.

sapling. Drawn beside it is a nude running girl.

Many black-figure *krateriskoi* have been found at Brauron and Mounychia. A few appear in the Athens and at Eleusis. These are not thought to indicate Arktea rituals at the other sites. If every Bear had her own drinking cup, either there should be many more, with some taken home, or there were very few Little Bears. Yet there seem to be more

cups than one per year. Perhaps one for each race or ritual event?

The *krateriskoi* are shaped like goblets on cylindrical stems of varying height, with handles which often mimic the shape of a palm tree top. The red-figure items are in a private collection and it is not known where they were found. Color photos of them appear in Reeder's exhibition volume, *Pandora*.

A red-figure *krateriskos* shows young Artemis preparing to shoot an arrow, accompanied by Leto and Apollo. Other fragments show a laurel tree, two fleeing deer, and two humans wearing masks of bears. One theory is that these are Callisto, frozen in a gesture of fear as she begins to turn into a bear, and her son Arcas, who survived to become ancestor of the people of Arcadia. Its shape relates it to the Arktea. Decorations on ritual pottery are often not specific to the rites. Callisto has no literary link to the Arktea; still she is wild and in bear-form is presented as a good mother.

A second theory is that the man and woman are a priest and priestess wearing bear masks in a ritual drama that was part of the Arktea. There may also have been another ritual drama called the sacred hunting of Artemis. This may be represented in the lower band of painting of this *krateriskos* showing Artemis hunting and, in the lower panel, hounds chasing a deer.

The girls' ages cause argument. In Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata*, written in 411 BC, the heroine describes her qualifications as a citizen in terms of her various civic duties for the Gods. Translators of this passage say that she was a bear either in her tenth year or later and as to whether she "shed" or "wore" the yellow *krokotos*. The Scholia on Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* II.B.10,

and *Suda* II.B.13 say bears were between 5 and 10 years old.

The first analyst of the *krateriskoi*, Lily Kahil, estimated the depicted ages as seven to thirteen. Looking closely, I would agree. The younger girls wear short dresses which are sometimes tied up like rompers and the older girls may be clothed or often nude. Souvrinou-Inwood puts considerable effort into her case that the girls are between the five to ten and that the older looking drawings of the ten-year olds are stylized representations of pre-puberty.

The girls on the red *krateriskoi* do not appear frightened or gesticulate to show shock. Little girls on one look intent and happily ceremonial as they run. On another, older nude girls, carrying wreaths, run upright and therefore slowly, away from or possibly toward a bear. In the older, black figure *krateriskoi*, the running girls appear to be going flat out, their naked limbs reaching like little Gorgons or Harpies, racing toward or past a fiery altar with tightly held torches or wreaths. In men's torch races at other festivals the winner lit a fire, probably on an altar. If the wreaths are laurel the girls may have offered them to Apollo. If they are myrtle they could have been blessed and taken home in anticipation of their weddings. From the pictures, I cannot guess which plant appears.

Rituals are partly shaped by their facilities. Whenever a major change in the site or setting occurs, the ritual will change, adapting to new limits or exploiting new possibilities. Theatrical developments from the Dionysia would influence the drama. Imagine a row of little girls sitting on a retaining wall, looking down at a play enacted by torchlight before the stoa columns.

Hollinshead says that Kontis thought that there had been a creche at Brauron. This idea appeals to me. There are four possible sources of children: girls acting as temporary handmaidens to Artemis; children of women who died in childbirth; children of priestesses in allied temples; and girls who have been "sacrificed" to the temple for a life as priestesses. Small boys may have also spent time at the temple, perhaps one token boy, like the token child at Eleusis.

Guesses about the Arktea:

Rituals are built of components suitable to the age and understanding of the participants. What stories would you tell very young girls? Which ones to girls about to marry? They might include star-gazing stories of Callisto, dramas of Artemis hunting, or perhaps even playing at being Leto holding the palm tree and birthing Apollo while the other Goddesses helped. Singing, dancing, racing, sea-bathing and processions are probable. Possibly the girls participated in the sacrifice of a goat, perhaps in memory of Iphigenia. I like to think that Brauron still had a tame bear.

All this would occur on the greatest adventure the girls had

experienced, the journey into a world wild with birds and pines and hills and sea, with a cave and sacred spring and their own small temple. Then, in a loose yellow dress, draped and girdled so that it allowed them room to grow, they went home to looms and houses and marriage, knowing they were under the protection of the Goddess, no longer wild.

The handmaidens of Artemis who may have lived for a year or so at the sanctuary were of varied ages, for aesthetic and practical reasons. A few older girls may have stayed longer and undergone testing to become a future priestess or one of her assistants. Perhaps the girl who could face the bear and not run away became one of these. And perhaps her father, after she had gone home to say goodbye, brought her back to the sanctuary gate, leading also a goat. The girl went inside and the goat was sacrificed and the man received something of value for all that he had given to Artemis. Perhaps ...

In the ritualist's terms, at the end of the ritual, you have done what you believed needed doing. Whether you were successful is still unknown: that depends on the Gods.

How did it end?

Success may have killed Brauron. One of the puzzles of Eleusis is how a large staff managed to accommodate periodic week-long hordes of pilgrims — simply providing toilet facilities for two thousand people must have taken ingenuity. Though Brauron served hundreds, not thousands, the area is much more ecologically sensitive. Increased erosion and failure to maintain the river channel would be enough to doom the unfinished stoa. Was there pestilence? There are debates as to when malaria occurred in ancient Greece and how prevalent it may have been.

In the fourth century, Aesclepius became a divine source of medical care. Did he assume responsibility for childbirth? As Attic power declined, did some of the religious beliefs die, especially those involving women? Did the philosophers outlive the State cults? Did the need to civilize wild girls end? When the *xoanon* disappeared, did Brauron begin to die?

The spring still flows beneath the Brauron hill.

Partial Bibliography, Ancient:

- Aristophanes *Peace*, II.A.2; *Lysistrata* 645
 Bacchylides *Pythian Ode* 11 for Alexandaros of Metaponton, ca 465BC?
 Euripides *Iphigenia at Tauris* 1446-67
 Pausanias I. 23.7, I.26.1, I.32.3, I.33.1, III.16.7, IV.B.1.2, VIII.46.3
 Philochorus Fr 6 from *Scholia on Homer A* 594

Partial Bibliography, Modern:

- Mary Brooks Berg Hollinshed. *Legend, cult and architecture at three sanctuaries of Artemis*, PhD thesis, Bryn Mawr College, 1979
 de Polignac, Francois. "Mediation, Competition, and Sovereignty: The Evolution of Rural Sanctuaries in Geometric Greece." In *Placing the Gods, Sanctuaries and Sacred Space in Ancient Greece*, ed. Susan E Alcock and Robin Osborne, 143-160. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994
 Kahil, Lily. "L'Artemis de Brauron: Rites et Mystere", *Antike Kunst* 20 (1977) 86-98 and plates
 Kontis (Condis) J. "Artemis Brauronia", *Archaeologikon Deltion* 22A (1967) 156-206 (in Greek, summary in French)
 Linders, T.L. *Studies in the treasure records of Artemis Brauronia found in Athens*. Stockholm 1972
 Lloyd-Jones, Hugh. "Artemis and Iphignia", *Jour. Hellenistic Studies* CIII (1983) 87-102
 Osborne, Robin. "Archeology, the Salaminioi, and the Politics of Sacred Space in Archaic Attica." In *Placing the Gods, Sanctuaries and Sacred Space in Ancient Greece*, ed. Susan E Alcock and Robin Osborne, 143-160. Oxford: Clarendon 1994
 Pomeroy, Sarah B. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves, Women in Classical Antiquity* (1975) 68-70
 Reeder, Ellen D. *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995 321-328, 303, 335
 Sale, William. "The Temple-legends of the Arkteia", *Philologie* 118 (1975) 265-284
 Seaford, Richard. "The Eleventh Ode of Bacchylides, Hera, Artemis and the absence of Dionysos", *Jour. Hellenistic Studies* CVIII (1988) 118-136
 Souvrinou-Inwood, C. *Studies in Girls' Transitions: Aspects of the Arkteia and Age Representation in Attic Iconography* Athens: Kardamitsa 1988
 Themelis, Petros G. *Brauron, Guide to the Site and Museum*. Apollo Editions, 1971.

Perseus website: <www.perseus.tufts.edu/art&arch.html>

Kate Slater lives in Calgary, and can be reached at <coyote@direct.ca>

MASKS IN MAGICAL MEETINGS

by M. Macha Nightmare

In Starhawk's recent novel, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, masked representatives of the voices of the four Elements are channeled in trance during council meetings. When I read this idea, I was intrigued by it, so I asked Starhawk if the technique had ever been tried. She said it hadn't, it was just an idea she had.

Opportunity

The Covenant of the Goddess (CoG), a national organization of Witches and covens, holds MerryMeet, its annual Grand Council and festival, in late August each year. Preceding MerryMeet, the Leadership Institute is a day-long workshop or series of workshops for members to continue their magical education and to share their knowledge and expertise. The Northern California Local Council of CoG (NCLC-CoG) and Reclaiming Collective sponsored MerryMeet and its concomitant Leadership Institute in 1996.

As a member of NCLC, I chose as my work on MerryMeet to produce the Leadership Institute. As a Reclaiming Witch, I like to try new methods to use magical techniques in practical ways. It behooves us as Witches to remember that when we come together to do the work of the Covenant, our work is sacred. Employing basic magical practices, such as building a small altar in the meeting room, helps us reinforce and maintain this awareness.

Using mask-wearers to ensure that the proceedings are harmonious with Air, Fire, Water and Earth struck me as a magical undertaking that could enhance our work. Mask-wearers are not direct participants in the meetings. They do not address matters of policy or implementation of projects. They participate in their sacred capacity as voices of Wind, Fire, Water or Earth. Sometimes they may speak or gesture, and sometimes they merely remain alert. When Wind has something to say, the meeting ceases while Wind speaks. Then the meeting resumes, taking into account the spoken words of Wind.

Manifestation

Eleanor Myers is a wonderful magical sculptor who has been associated with Reclaiming Collective since before we actually formed ourselves into a collective. She created the Element headdresses for the first Spiral Dance ritual in 1979. Her main medium is clay, and her work graces many a Witch's altar in the San Francisco Bay Area. Much of Eleanor's work is shamanic in

appearance; she has created masks for hanging, primal guardian figures, small, often horned, shamanic figures wrapped in skins.

At the time these masks were needed, Eleanor lived in Northern California where she maintained her connections with our community. Although her work sells in galleries, Eleanor's most inspired work is done for magical reasons instead of for a commercial market. Since CoG did not have a budget for commissioning works of art, if we were to have masks for these meetings, they would have to be created as priestessly work, not for money. I approached Eleanor with the idea of creating masks for people to wear to channel the voices of the Elements. She agreed, using the rather vague requirements that she and I could ascertain from the technique suggested in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*.

Eleanor began with the notion of creating something along the lines of a Zuni Shálako. To that end, she started with large cylinders three or more feet high. Since we had no money for materials, she checked in regularly with her local recycling center to collect usable cardboard. She worked this cardboard into 15 layers of lacquered paper to create the cylinders that formed the basic structure of all four masks.

To find other materials which would work to create the masks, Eleanor did magic and asked for the materials to come to her. She walked along the banks of the Sonoma River and found interesting materials which had been washed downstream by the winter rains. She found rusty metals, a hub cap, a silicon disc about the size of a ship's porthole, mosses, branches. The shiny chrome hub cap and silicon disc became the sun rising on the East mask. For the South mask she wanted to use copper; she discovered that discarded plastic-sheathed wires at the recycling center contained copper, so she stripped off the plastic and used these many small wires to create the flames of Fire. The West mask bears seaweed and water-smoothed driftwood. The North mask is crowned with mosses, twigs and the antlers of a young deer.

The masks are brownish and the textures are similar to fine bark. They are designed to sit on the shoulders of the channeler. They have eye openings, but are otherwise solid. Their overall appearance is chthonic. One has only to touch them or to carry them or to place them over one's head to immediately feel their primal power. There is nothing flashy about them. They are solid and unmistakable in their power.

Experience

The two morning Leadership Institute sessions were structured in a circle, with four featured participants, people who were working or had experience in the fields which were to be discussed interspersed throughout the group. A large

white candle had been consecrated by the NCLC-CoG staff at the Full Moon two nights before. This candle burned in the center of the room during all sessions of the Leadership Institute and the following Grand Council meetings.

Four volunteers agreed to wear or sit behind the masks during the sessions. The room was uncomfortably hot, inhibiting the actual wearing of the masks for most volunteers. As facilitator, I spoke to the sitters one by one, beginning in the East, suggesting that they let go of their human personae and

... this was just how the ancient oracles operated — the oracle spoke; the interpretation was up to the listeners.

open up to let the Element fill them. I asked the mask wearers to signal if and when — and only if and when — they were moved to speak in the voice of the Element. The first session dealt with prison ministries. During that session, the voices remained silent.

The topic of the second session was counseling the dying, their loved ones and the bereaved. Since I was a featured participant in that workshop, another Witch volunteered to facilitate. This is such an emotional topic that most of what people needed to do was talk about their experiences with dying loved ones. This took up much of the session, and we had little time for more helpful “hands-on” discussion. No channeled voice spoke, but I offer this experience from Rowan Fairgrove, who sat under the Earth mask:

I attended Death and Dying — but I can’t say I was there ... They [the masks] were cylindrical and were made to entirely cover the head and rest on the shoulders. A small slit in the front provided the only ventilation and window on the world. I had volunteered to channel Earth and despite the heat, decided I wanted to wear the mask rather than hold it in my lap, at least for a while. So for about the first 40 minutes or so of the workshop I was deeply in touch with Earth energy. I felt the land we were on, I felt land far away that had things to say to someone who would listen. The sweat pouring from my body became the rivers pouring across the earth. I felt the itch and irritation of pavement and the unthinking works of humans. A part of me heard the folks talking about dying, but mostly the doings of humans were too fast for the pace that I was channeling. It was one of the most thorough trances I have done in a long time.

On the first day of the Grand Council, the masks rested silently, unattended, in the four quarters of the room while the meetings took place. On the second day, I asked our First Officer, Amber K, who was facilitating the meetings, if four volunteers could use the masks in council. She readily agreed.

Cary the Fairy wore the Air mask, as he had in one of the Leadership Institute workshops. He relates:

I was East on two occasions and only felt the need to speak during the second round ... the issue was about burnout, the specific moment was during the questioning of Thorn, when she was asked to address the issue of burnout. As East I did not hear the answer and wanted to speak; however, the group was not focussed enough for me to speak and be heard without some sort of hand waving. At that point I had enough of interruptions, appropriate or not, and point of process was not something I wanted to channel.

I wore the Fire mask. The heat was wicked, as everyone who wore a mask, or not, was all too aware. The site of the gathering being clothing-optional and our being Witches, I removed my clothes and wore only the heavy mask. I was restless. Sound was muffled under there. I moved around a lot and readjusted the mask frequently, but I did keep my focus on being Fire. Sweat ran down my body. At one point in the proceedings, I felt the need to speak, so I stood up, spread out my arms, and spoke the word “burnout.” Discussion stopped and folks looked around in some confusion and asked questions of each other. “What did she mean?” “Did she mean she’s burn out?” “Does she mean it’s too hot in here?” “Does she want to know if so-and-so is burned out, or likely to get burned out?” I had no more to say.

Christopher, who was an active participant in the discussion at hand, remarked later that this was just how the ancient oracles operated — the oracle spoke; the interpretation was up to the listeners.

Mev wore the Water mask. She says: “[Wearing the West mask] was transformative and a much-needed way for me to work my way out of being a CoG member and back into being a private Witch ...” During that session, the Earth, as is its nature, remained silent.

Lessons

Design: The masks are very heavy. They definitely encourage stillness and attention to what one is about. The sculptor provided foam strips to place on the shoulders for protection and to provide individual adjustment to the wearer’s body. They’re definitely made for sitting or standing, not for walking. I don’t recommend any one person wearing one for more than 30-45 minutes in such heat as we experienced that weekend. I wore the Fire mask for an hour and 15 minutes, which nearly exceeded my limits.

As mentioned by everyone, they’re also hot! Eleanor said this is easy to remedy with an Xacto knife; cut slits in the sides so they have more ventilation but their appearance is not changed. Beourn, who wore Fire for a session, said that “[I] was not able to completely ‘disconnect’ and go to a deep trance. I often

‘came up for air’ to change position. Having someone spray me from the spray bottle that came around made a great deal of difference.” He recommended that each mask-wearer have a tender to look after such physical needs. Mev agreed about the need for a helper, particularly during return from trance.

Mev, other wearers, and observers, noted that the placement of the eye slots facilitated going into trance: “The eye slits, being cut as high as they were, pulled my line of sight upward, forming a visual and kinetic focus for trance. I

... [we] felt mask-wearing, participating in this alternative way, to be a way for more high-profile Witches to shift their focus and to participate in both business and magical workings in a completely different manner.

think that having the eyes so high is very, very effective at inducing trance.” The mask does muffle sound quite effectively, both incoming and outgoing.

Assistance: We found that each channeler needs a tender. This tender’s duties are (1) to assist the wearer into the mask; (2) to adjust its fit to some modicum of comfort; (3) to gently talk the wearer into letting go of her human persona in order to allow the voice a vehicle to speak; (4) to fan, spray or otherwise keep the wearer cool if it’s hot, or to cover the wearer’s body if it’s chilly, especially if he is still for a long period of time and his metabolism slows; (5) to recognize when the voice needs to speak, and then stop the proceedings to allow that to happen; and (6) to help the mask-wearer out of the mask, out of a trance state and back to normal reality. This includes helping the person to stand, giving her water and food for re-grounding — and not leaving her until assured that this reintegration is complete.

Function: The idea of using the masks is to maintain a spiritual focus to our undertakings; to assure that our decisions are in keeping with our professed Earth-based, Nature-worshipping values; to keep our proper magical perspective so that our conclusions, and the way we choose to proceed to implement our decisions, remain in balance with the Elements. To this end, the facilitator and all other participants need to be aware of the mask-wearers, and to be alert to when they are moved to speak. The very presence of these living symbols of the Elements of Life can aid us in maintaining this important perspective.

We found that the masks and their wearers were largely ignored. As Cary mentioned, he was moved to speak, but his inspiration went unrecognized, so his voice remained unheard. I, on the other hand, just stood and raised my arms. People stopped the proceedings and listened to my single utterance, “Burnout.” (My presence and desire to speak was no doubt reinforced by the fact that I was skylad.) So in future we all, especially the facilitator, need to be ever alert to the inspiration of the voices.

Uses: Experimental wearers, as well as observers, had some ideas about additional uses of these masks other than the uses mentioned above. Cary thinks that they could be a good way for beginning practitioners of magic to learn to focus their energy and to learn and experience the Elements.

As Mev mentioned above, she found mask-wearing to be an excellent method for those of us who tend to be very active in discussion to, as she said, “work my way ... back into being a private Witch.” I agree that they are a way shift focus, to re-air (inspire/respire), re-energize, re-emotionalize and re-ground. This is why I suggested that she and I try them on for size.

Starhawk, Rowan, Rhiannon and I all felt mask-wearing, participating in this alternative way, to be a way for more high-profile Witches to shift their focus and to participate in both business and magical workings in a completely different manner. Conversely, I believe this could be a good way, somewhat in line with what Cary observed, for shyer Witches to play a vital role in meetings and ritual from a rather low-profile or low-key place.

In addition, the masks, worn or standing alone, make fine Quarter altars and touchpoints for warding a circle. There may also be many other advantages to employing this technique; I invite more people to use masks in their workings and then relate their experiences, and the lessons they learn.

M. Macha NightMare, a long-time member of Reclaiming, recently co-wrote and co-edited The Pagan Book of Living and Dying (HarperSanFrancisco, 1997) with Starhawk.

Currently, she serves as National First Officer of the Covenant of the Goddess (CoG), the oldest and largest ecumenical organization of Witches in the U.S.

BOOK REVIEW: Margot Adler's *Heretic's Heart*

Review by Chas S. Clifton
University of Southern Colorado

Most *Pomegranate* readers know Margot Adler as the author of the definitive journalistic study of the American Pagan movement, *Drawing Down the Moon*, published in 1979 with a revised edition released later. Some hear her voice now and then as a National Public Radio network reporter. But the story Adler tells in *Heretic's Heart* (a title she acknowledges came from Catherine Madsen's song of the same name) is of her life before she found the Craft, when she was a girl growing up in an "atheist, semi-Marxist, non-Jewish, Jewish home" — a "red-diaper baby," to use the old Cold War term. A psychoanalyst like her famous grandfather, Alfred Adler (whom she never met), might make something of Margot Adler's feeling of growing up 'separate'. But her long pilgrimage to the Craft was not a simple case of taking a minority religious path because she felt she was 'different'. Her place in the Craft came only after years of attempting to reconcile her desire to fight social exploitation with a long, less-expressed desire for ecstasy and mystery.

Margot Adler's story is set in the middle of that over-summarized decade, the 1960s. One advantage to reading it is to get past the image of antiwar protests, burning inner-city neighborhoods, and LSD and to hear two people's stories: hers and that of the American soldier who became her pen pal, confidant, and briefly lover.

"Today," she writes, "we tend to lump many aspects of the sixties together — rock music, politics, clothing styles, sex and drugs — but a continuing battle between the 'hippies', on the one side, and the 'politicos' on the other, defined much of the era." For Margot Adler, the "sixties" took off when she entered the University of California at Berkeley in 1964, a pivotal year in that institution's history. "Living in New York City, I looked upon Berkeley as so many Americans have looked throughout history upon the West — as an escape from everything that defined my past. For me, Berkeley was not only an excellent school, and a place with a rich history of student activism; going to Berkeley meant fleeing New York, my parents, the memories of four depressing high school years during which I had few real friends. Most of all, I was fleeing from myself and from the large one-hundred-and-eighty pound body that encased me. ... I was determined to

enter this mythical realm [California] and to claim it as my own ..."

A shy first-year student but a definite 'politico', Adler enlisted as a foot soldier in one of America's first big student protest movements, the Free Speech Movement of 1964. The FSM began as defiance of a university ban on on-campus political activity by civil-rights organizers and others and grew into a nationally televised confrontation between University of California 'knowledge factory' administrators and students in what felt like "a battle to wrest the control of our lives away from the clerks, the files, and the forms that seemed to be increasingly dominating our lives as students — in other words, from the seemingly invulnerable giants of technology and bureaucracy." After her FSM experience, Adler felt drawn to the civil-rights work being done in the South, registering black citizens to vote and so forth. Not only did it seem to be what the 'real activists' did, but she herself had been born in Little Rock, and one of her New York neighbors was Andy Goodman, one of three civil-rights workers murdered in Mississippi during the previous summer.

She continued to be tempted by the tiny American Communist Party but knew herself ultimately to be too much of an anarchist and a heretic to fit in. Yet her left-wing training left her with an intellectual legacy. Adler observes that "the core legacy shared by those of us who went through a serious encounter with Marxism has little to do with economic theory or even communism. It is this: when we look at the world, even today, we take nothing at face value. We are always looking for the unseen relationships."

Describing her former self as "a left-wing nun in the Summer of Love," Adler revisits her correspondence with an American GI serving in Vietnam, Marc Anderson, who had written a bitter letter to her university newspaper about the luxury of those who could smoke marijuana and talk about Maoism while soldiers like him are "dying for lighting a cigarette at night, or 'cause the NCO in charge was drunk." No flag-waver, Specialist 4 Anderson responded to her reply and shared his own disillusionment with the Vietnam War: "I know exactly how you feel, as I fight 'their' war and one with myself." Their correspondence, about war, American society, and the trivia of daily life, forms the book's center. While both naturally present themselves on their best behavior, theirs is the conversation of two 'foot soldiers', one an actual infantryman and one a soldier in 'the revolution' that was always just around the corner in the late 1960s. Reading both sides of the correspondence cuts through the clichés that we still hear about doped-up 'baby killers' on side and 'long-haired free love antiwar demonstrators' on the other.

But the 'Psychedelic Sixties' are also underway and they make Adler



nervous at first; she goes to graduate school in journalism and spends another 'revolutionary' summer harvesting sugar cane in Cuba as part of the Venceremos ("We will win") Brigade, a group of American pacifists and leftists. But as she ages, the old Marxist ideas lose their appeal: "my belief that I should be some kind of socialist revolutionary had not changed. But what I was actually doing was reading about nature and feeling a fear for the plight of the earth." On a second trip to Cuba, this time as a journalist, she begins to realize her need to be a spiritual revolutionary.

When Neopagan Witches get together, stories about 'how I found the Craft' are a conversational staple. Adler saves her core 'conversion story' for chapter 12, but without the previous eleven chapters, it would lack its context. She struggles: "The old Marxist inside me warns that all this religion stuff is an opiate, an oppressor. ... these occult philosophies do let the anxious middle class feel secure with their privilege." Ultimately, as the readers of *Drawing Down the Moon* know, Adler rejects the old Marxist Left as "too afraid of the irrational and its pull," too condescending towards the eternal human need for ecstasy and mystery. "It did not realize that one can enter the flow of the mysterious, the non-ordinary reality known to all artists, poets, and indigenous people without losing one's intellectual integrity ... that one can work to end poverty and exploitation but still embrace song and dance and dream."

Heretic's Heart: A Journey through Spirit and Revolution

Margot Adler

Boston: Beacon Press, 1997

301 pages, US \$24, hardcover



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Jenny Gibbons

Recent Developments in the Study of
The Great European Witch Hunt

2

Mara Keller

The Interface of Archaeology and Mythology:
A Philosophical Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm

17

Fritz Muntean

Asharah:
Goddess of the Israelites

36

Workings

The Rose Beyond the Grave
Evan John Jones

48

Book Reviews

Two Roads to Magical Herbalism
Chas S. Clifton

53



The Pomegranate

Copyright

© 1998 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate

is published at the Cross-Quarter Holidays by *The Pomegranate*,
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019.

Subscriptions:

4 issues: \$16US; 8 issues: \$30US
Please send US Cash, US Stamps,
Checks drawn on US banks, or Money
Orders in US funds to the above address.

Deadline:

The Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue. See the inside back cover for our Call for Papers, and send to the above address for our Writers' Guidelines, or to our email address below.

Internet Home Page:

<http://www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/>
(email: antech@teleport.com)

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

Co-Editors:

Fritz Muntean,
Diana Tracy

Associate Editor:

Chas S. Clifton

Editorial Board:

Maggie Carew,
Stephen McManus

Editorial Assistants:

Angeline Kantola,
Melissa Hope

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

As many loyal readers of *The Pomegranate* already know, Diana Tracy, our co-editor and tireless subscriptions manager, was in a terrible traffic accident three weeks ago. The good news is that everyone involved did survive and all are well on the road to recovery. Diana, however, is laid up (at home, and in excellent hands) for the next month or so, and as a result, this issue has been printed in (and mailed from) Vancouver.

Several of our valued subscribers have recently written to inform us that their subscriptions have apparently fallen between the many cracks that seem to be forever opening up here in the notoriously unstable terrain of the Underworld. If this has happened to you — if there are any issues that you've already paid for but have yet to receive — do us the enormous favour of letting us know! You may email us at either <fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca> or <antech@teleport.com> or drop us a note at the address on the inside front cover. If you have yet to resubscribe, please be so kind as to do so at once. For those of you who may have come in late and now wish to complete your set of back issues, all you really have to do is ask ...

As ever, we eager minions have done our very best to bring you the finest writing in the Neopagan community today. Our headline article (an original to *The Pomegranate*!) contains an update on the latest research being done (mostly in Europe) on the Great Witch Hunt of the 14-17th centuries, including the surprising discovery of the source from which the popular belief in a 'Nine Million Women' deathtoll may have evolved. Our second article is especially welcome — in response to the requests we *Pom* editors have been making to the Reclaiming Collective and the Belili Project, Professor Mara Keller of the California Institute of Integral Studies has graciously allowed us to reprint her recent article in praise of the 'archaeomythological' methodology of Marija Gimbutas, and in defense of her Neolithic Great Goddess paradigm. In a similar vein, our third feature article demonstrates the way in which conventional academic scholarship has succeeded in identifying and defining an individual Goddess — the Canaanite/Israelite Asherah — whose 'career' apparently spanned the Neolithic, Bronze and Early Iron Ages.

Our now-regular 'Workings' and 'Book Review' sections are also presented for your enjoyment. With any luck, our 'Reader's Forum' will soon reappear, hopefully in response to the provocative articles in this very issue!

Persephone's Hard-working Minions

Recent Developments in the Study of The Great European Witch Hunt

by Jenny Gibbons

Since the late 1970s, a quiet revolution has taken place in the study of historical witchcraft and the Great European Witch Hunt. While this revolution may not seem quite as dramatic as the development of radio-carbon dating, many theories which reigned supreme thirty years ago have vanished, swept away by a flood of new data. Unfortunately, little of the new information has found its way into popular history and literature. Many articles in Pagan magazines contain almost no accurate information about the “Burning Times,” primarily because of a heavy reliance on out-dated research.

Beyond the National Enquirer. From the Great Hunt until very recently, historians have relied on witch hunters’ propaganda: witch hunting manuals, sermons against witchcraft, and lurid pamphlets on the more sensational trials. Everyone knew that this evidence was seriously inadequate: imagine trying to study Satanism in America using only the *Moral Majority Newsletter* and the *National Enquirer*. The few trials cited were the larger, more infamous ones. And historians frequently used literary accounts of those cases, not the trials themselves. This is comparable to citing a television docu-drama (“Based on a true story!”) instead of actual court proceedings.

Better evidence did exist, and beginning in the mid-1970s, historians stopped relying on witch-hunting propaganda and began to base their theories on thorough, systematic studies of all the witch trials in a particular area. Courts that tried witches kept records — trial verdicts, lists of confiscated goods, questions asked during interrogations, and the answers witches gave. This evidence was written by people who knew what actually happened. Witch hunters often based their books on rumor and hearsay; few had access to reliable information. Courts had less reason to lie since, for the most part, they were trying to keep track of what was going on: how many witches they killed, how much money they gained or lost, etc. Witch hunters wrote to convince people that witchcraft was a grievous threat to the world. The more witches there were, the bigger the “threat” was. So they often exaggerated the number of deaths and spread wild estimates about how many witches existed. Also, trial records addressed the full range of trials, not just the most lurid and sensational ones.

But trial data had one daunting draw-back: there was too much of it.

The Great “Burning Times” Quiz

1. Approximately _____ witches were killed in the Great European Witch Hunt.
(A) 50,000. (B) 100,000. (C) 1,000,000. (D) 9,000,000.
2. The number of witchcraft trials skyrocketed around _____.
(A) 500 CE, during the Christian conversion of Western Europe.
(B) 1300 CE, when the Inquisition developed the theory that witches were a Satanic cult.
(C) 1450 CE, when the printing press made witch hunting manuals readily available.
(D) 1550 CE, during the Reformation, amidst religious strife between Catholics & Protestants.
3. Overall ____% of witches were women, though in some countries up to ____% were men.
(A) Nearly 100%; 20%. (B) 80%; 50%. (C) 80%; 90%. (D) 60%; 70%.
4. Most witches were _____.
(A) Healers. (B) Pagans. (C) Women. (D) A and C.
5. Most witches were killed by _____.
(A) Non-religious courts. (B) Church courts. (C) The Inquisition. (D) Lynch mobs.
6. You had the best chance of surviving your trial if you were tried by a _____.
(A) Local government court staffed by your neighbors and members of your own community.
(B) National government court (one staffed by the King’s men and professional jurists).
(C) Church court (one staffed by priests or Inquisitors).
(D) None of the above. All courts killed approximately the same percentage of those accused.
7. The first mass trial of witches occurred in _____ and killed approximately _____.
(A) Valais, Switzerland, in 1428; 100 people.
(B) Toulouse, France sometime between 1320 and 1350; several hundred witches, including 400 women in one day alone.
(C) Bamberg, Germany, in 1544; 2,000 people.
(D) Rome, Italy, in 1003; 100 people.
8. Wise-women and traditional healers were often accused of witchcraft by _____.
(A) Doctors. (B) Other wise-women and witches. (C) Their patients. (D) All of the above.
9. Generally speaking, witch hunting was most intense where:
(A) The Church was strong and the State weak. (B) The State was strong, the Church weak.
(C) Both Church and State were weak. (D) Both Church and State were strong.
10. The intensity of the trials varied:
(A) Very little. All countries throughout Europe killed large numbers of witches.
(B) By country. Different countries hunted witches at vastly different rates. But inside a particular country, the persecution was uniform.
(C) By country and by “centrality.” The same as (B), however countries in central Europe tended to have worse persecution than remote countries like Ireland.
(D) By province or even by town. Witch hunting was intensely sporadic and shows few clear patterns.

Answers:

1. (A) 50,000. 2. (D) 1550 CE. 3. (C) 80%; 90%. 4. (C) Women. 5. (A) Non-religious courts.
6. (C) Church or Inquisitorial court. 7. (A) Valais, Switzerland, in 1428; over 100 people were killed.
8. (D) All of the above. 9. (C) Both Church and State were weak. 10. (D) Varied by province & even by town.

Scoring:

By picking answers at random, you should get an average of 2-3 questions right. 4-6 shows you’re reasonably up to date on the subject, and 7-10 is great. If you’re not happy with your score, there are some books which will help bring you up to speed. The best is Brian Levack’s *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, an excellent survey of our new information on Witchcraft. Robin Briggs’ *Witches and Neighbors* is also good, though more localized. Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen put together a fine collection of essays called *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*. It’s the best source of information on trials in outlying areas, like Iceland, Finland, Portugal, etc.

Witch trials were scattered amongst literally millions of other trials from this period. For most historians, it was too much work to wade through this mass of data. The one exception was C. L'Estrange Ewen. In 1929 he published the first systematic study of a country's trial records: *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials*. Focused on England, his work offered vivid evidence of how much data literature missed. In Essex County, for instance, Ewen found thirty times as many trials as any previous researcher. Scholars were basing their theories on only 3% of the available evidence. And that 3% was vastly different from the other 97%.

In the 1970's other researchers followed in Ewen's footsteps, so in the last twenty-five years, the quantity and quality of available evidence has dramatically improved. Now we can look at all the trials from an area and see what the "normal" trial was really like. Court documents frequently contain detailed information on the gender, social status, and occupation of the accused. Today, for the first time, we have a good idea of the dimensions of the Great Hunt: where the trials occurred, who was tried in them, who did the killing, and how many people lost their lives.

400 In One Day: An Influential Forgery. Another, smaller breakthrough also profoundly altered our view of the early history of the Great Hunt. In 1972, two scholars independently discovered that a famous series of medieval witch trials never occurred. The forgery was Etienne Leon de Lamothe-Langon's *Histoire de l'Inquisition en France*, written in 1829. Lamothe-Langon described enormous witch trials which supposedly took place in southern France in the early 14th century. Run by the Inquisition of Toulouse and Carcassonne, these trials killed hundreds upon hundreds of people. The most famous was an outbreak where 400 women died in one day. No other French historian had noticed these trials.

In the early 20th century, the prominent historian Jacob Hansen included large sections of Lamothe-Langon's work in his compendium on medieval witchcraft. Later historians cited Hansen's cites, apparently without closely examining Lamothe-Langon's credentials. Non-academic writers cited the writers who cited Hansen, and thus Lamothe-Langon's dramatic French trials became a standard part of the popular view of the Great Hunt. However, as more research was done, Lamothe-Langon's trials began to look odd to historians. No sources mentioned them, and they were completely different from all other 14th century trials. There were no other mass trials of this nature until 1428, no panics like this until the 16th century. Furthermore, the demonology in the trials was quite elaborate, with sabbats and pacts and enormous black masses. It was far more complex than the demonology of the

While nobody cites Lamothe-Langon directly anymore, his fictions show up everywhere, including in both Z Budapest's *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* and Raven Grimassi's *The Wiccan Mysteries*.

Malleus Maleficarum (1486). Why would the Inquisition think up this elaborate demonology, and then apparently forget it for two hundred years?

Questions like these led Norman Cohn (*Europe's Inner Demons* and "Three Forgeries: Myths and Hoaxes of European Demonology II" in *Encounter* 44 (1975)) and Richard Kieckhefer (*European Witch Trials*) to investigate Lamothe-Langon's background. What they found was reasonably conclusive evidence that the great trials of the *Histoire* had never occurred. First, Lamothe-Langon was a hack writer and known forger, not a historian. Early in his career he specialized in historical fiction, but he soon turned to more profitable horror novels, like *The Head of Death*, *The Monastery of the Black Friars*, and *The Vampire* (or, *The Virgin of Hungary*). Then, in 1829, he published the *Histoire*, supposedly a work of non-fiction. After its success Lamothe-Langon went on to write a series of "autobiographies" of various French notables, such as Cardinal Richeleau, Louis XVIII, and the Comtesse du Barry.

Second, none of Lamothe-Langon's sources could be found, and there was strong reason to suspect they never existed. Lamothe-Langon claimed he was using unpublished Inquisitorial records given to him by Bishop Hyacinthe Sermet: but Cohn found a letter from Sermet stating that there were no unpublished records. Lamothe-Langon was not posted in Toulouse long enough to do any serious research in its archives, and he had no training in paleography, the skill needed to translate the script and copious abbreviations used in medieval documents.

Third, under close examination a number of flaws appeared in his stories. He cited records written by seneschal Pierre de Voisins in 1275, but Voisins ceased being seneschal in 1254 and died not long after. The Inquisitor who ran many of these trials was Pierre Guidonis (nephew of Bernard Gui from *The Name of the Rose*). But Guidonis wasn't an Inquisitor at the time when the trials were held. Cohn and Kieckhefer published their findings in 1972. Since then academics have avoided this forged material. Unfortunately by this point, Lamothe-Langon's lurid trials had entered into the mythology of Witchcraft. While nobody cites Lamothe-Langon directly anymore, his fictions show up

... when Margaret Murray proposed that witches were members of a Pagan sect, popular writers trumpeted that the Great Hunt was not a mere panic, but rather a deliberate attempt to exterminate Christianity's rival religion. Today, we know that there is absolutely no evidence to support this theory.

everywhere, including in both Z Budapest's *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* and Raven Grimassi's *The Wiccan Mysteries*.

There is no simple way to weed out all of Lamothe-Langon's disinformation, but a few guidelines will help: a) Use scholarly texts written after 1975. b) Beware of any trial set in Toulouse or Carcassonne. While these cities did have real cases, only the forged ones get cited regularly. c) Ignore any trial involving Anne-Marie de Georget or Catherine Delort; these are forgeries. d) Ignore any trial that killed "400 women in one day;" this never happened. e) Avoid Jules Michelet's *Satanism and Witchcraft*. Although he wrote a poetic and dramatic book, Michelet never found much historical evidence to support his theory that witchcraft was an anti-Catholic protest religion. What little bit there was came from the Lamothe-Langon forgeries. So when they were debunked, the last props for his book collapsed. f) See the appendix of Richard Kieckhefer's *European Witch Trials*, which contains a list of all known trials that occurred between 1300 and 1500.

The New Topography of Witch Hunting. The pattern revealed by trial records bears little resemblance to the picture literature painted. Every aspect of the Great Hunt, from chronology to death toll, has changed. And if your knowledge of the "Burning Times" is based on popular or Pagan literature, nearly everything you know may be wrong. (To test yourself, try taking "The Great Burning Times Quiz" in the sidebar.)

a) Chronology. Popular history places the witchcraft persecutions in the Middle Ages (5-14th centuries). 19th century historians considered the Great Hunt an outburst of superstitious hysteria, fostered and spread by the Catholic Church. "Naturally," therefore, the persecution would be worst when the Church's power was the greatest: in the Middle Ages, before the Reformation split "the" Church into warring Catholic and Protestant sects. Certainly there were trials in the early modern period (15-18th centuries), but they must have

been a pale shadow of the horrors that came before. Modern research has conclusively debunked this theory. Although many stereotypes about witches pre-date Christianity, the most lethal outbreaks of the Great Hunt actually occurred during the "Age of Reason." Lamothe-Langon's forged trials were one of the last stumbling blocks that kept the theory of medieval witch hunting alive, and once these trials are removed, the development of witchcraft stereotypes becomes much clearer.

All pre-modern European societies believed in magick. As far as we can tell, all passed laws prohibiting magickal crimes. Pagan Roman law and the earliest Germanic and Celtic law codes all contain edicts that punish people who cast baneful spells. This is only common sense: a society that believes in the power of magick will punish people who abuse that power. Furthermore, many of the stereotypes about witches have been with us from pre-Christian times. From the Mediterranean to Ireland, witches were said to fly about at night, drinking blood, killing babies, and devouring human corpses. We know this because many early Christian missionaries encouraged newly converted kingdoms to pass laws protecting men and women from charges of witchcraft — charges, they said, that were impossible and un-Christian. For example, the 5th century Synod of St. Patrick ruled that "A Christian who believes that there is a vampire in the world, that is to say, a witch, is to be anathematized; whoever lays that reputation upon a living being shall not be received into the Church until he revokes with his own voice the crime that he has committed." A capitulary from Saxony (775-790 CE) blamed these stereotypes on pagan belief systems: "If anyone, deceived by the Devil, believes after the manner of the Pagans that any man or woman is a witch and eats men, and if on this account he burns [the alleged witch] ... he shall be punished by capital sentence." In the Middle Ages, the laws on magick remained virtually unchanged. Harmful magick was punished, and the lethal trials we know of tended to occur when a noble felt that he or she had been bewitched. The Church also forbade magick but assigned relatively mild penalties to convicted witches. For instance, the Confessional of Egbert (England, 950-1000 CE) said that "If a woman works witchcraft and enchantment and [uses] magical philters, she shall fast [on bread and water] for twelve months. ... If she kills anyone by her philters, she shall fast for seven years."

Traditional attitudes towards witchcraft began to change in the 14th century, at the very end of the Middle Ages. As Carlo Ginzburg noted (*Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*), early 14th century central Europe was seized by a series of rumor-panics. Some malign conspiracy (Jews and lepers, Moslems, or Jews and witches) was attempting to destroy the Christian kingdoms through magick and poison. After the terrible devastation caused by

the Black Death (1347-1349) these rumors increased in intensity and focused primarily on witches and “plague-spreaders.” Witchcraft cases increased slowly but steadily in the 14-15th centuries; the first mass trials appeared in the 15th century. At the beginning of the 16th century, as the first shock-waves from the Reformation hit, the number of witch trials actually dropped. Then, around 1550, the persecution skyrocketed. What we think of as “the Burning Times” — the crazes, panics, and mass hysteria — largely occurred in one century, from 1550-1650. In the 17th century, the Great Hunt passed nearly as suddenly as it had arisen. Trials dropped sharply after 1650 and disappeared completely by the end of the 18th century.

b) Geography. Before Lamothe-Langon’s forgeries were discovered, the earliest outbreaks appeared to occur in southern France, in an area once the home of the Cathar heresy. This led some historians to suggest a link between Catharism and witchcraft, that witches were the remnants of an old dualist faith. After you delete the forged trials, the center of the early cases shifts to northern Italy and what later became Switzerland, away from Cathar lands. When all trials are plotted on a map, other surprising patterns emerge. First, the trials were intensely sporadic. The rate of witch hunting varied dramatically throughout Europe, ranging from a high of 26,000 deaths in Germany to a low of 4 in Ireland. Robin Briggs’ *Witches and Neighbors* can give you a good feel for how erratic the trials were. It contains three maps showing the distribution of trials throughout Europe, throughout Germany, and throughout the French province of Lorraine, which Briggs studied in depth. They reveal that some of the most enormous persecutions (like the panics of Wurzburg, Germany) occurred next to areas that had virtually no trials whatsoever.

Second, the trials were concentrated in central Europe, in Germany, Switzerland, and eastern France. The further you got away from that area, the fewer the persecution generally became. Third, the height of the persecution occurred during the Reformation, when the formerly unified Christian Church splintered into Catholic and Protestant sects. In countries like Italy and Spain, where the Catholic Church and its Inquisition reigned virtually unquestioned, witch hunting was uncommon. The worst panics took place in areas like Switzerland and Germany, where rival Christians sects fought to impose their religious views on each other.

Fourth, panics clustered around borders. France’s major crazes occurred on its Spanish and eastern fronts. Italy’s worst persecution was in the northern regions. Spain’s one craze centered on the Basque lands straddling the French/Spanish border. Fifth, although it has become commonplace to think of the outbreaks of witch hunting as malevolent pogroms imposed by evil elites, in reality the worst horrors occurred where central authority had broken down.

When the trials peaked in the 16th and 17th century, the Inquisition was only operating in two countries: Spain and Italy, and both had extremely low death tolls.

Both Germany and Switzerland were patchwork quilts, loose confederacies stitched together from dozens of independent political units. England, which had a strong government, had little witch hunting. The country’s one and only craze took place during the English Civil War, when the government’s power collapsed. A strong, unified national church (as in Spain and Italy) also tended to keep deaths to a minimum. Strong governments didn’t always slow witch hunting, as King James of Scotland proved, but the worst panics definitely hit where both Church and State were weak.

c) Christianity’s Role in the Persecution. For years, the responsibility for the Great Hunt has been dumped on the Catholic Church’s door-step. 19th century historians ascribed the persecution to religious hysteria, and when Margaret Murray proposed that witches were members of a Pagan sect, popular writers trumpeted that the Great Hunt was not a mere panic, but rather a deliberate attempt to exterminate Christianity’s rival religion. Today we know that there is absolutely no evidence to support this theory. When the Church was at the height of its power (11-14th centuries) very few witches died. Persecutions did not reach epidemic levels until after the Reformation, when the Catholic Church had lost its position as Europe’s indisputable moral authority. In fact, most of the killing was done by secular courts. Church courts tried many witches but they usually imposed non-lethal penalties. A witch might be excommunicated, given penance, or imprisoned, but she was rarely killed. The Inquisition almost invariably pardoned any witch who confessed and repented.

Consider the case in York, England, as described by Keith Thomas (*Religion and the Decline of Magic*). At the height of the Great Hunt (1567-1640) one half of all witchcraft cases brought before church courts were dismissed for lack of evidence. No torture was used, and the accused could clear himself by providing four to eight “compurgators,” people who were willing to swear that he was not a witch. Only 21% of the cases ended with convictions, and the Church did not impose any kind of corporal or capital punishment. The vast majority of witches who died were condemned by secular courts. Ironically, the worst courts were local courts. Some authors, like Anne Llewellyn Barstow (*Witchcraze*), blame the death toll on the decline of the “community-based” medieval court, and the rise of the centralized “national” court. Nothing could be further from the truth. “Community-based” courts were

Folk healers ... routinely blamed diseases on witchcraft and offered counter-spells to cure their patients. Many were even willing to divine the name of the cursing witch, for a fee.

often virtual slaughterhouses, killing 90% of all accused witches. National courts condemned only about 30% of the accused. Why were the execution rates so vastly different? The differences between local and national courts are relatively easy to understand. Witchcraft cases were usually surrounded by general fear and public protests. "Community-based" courts drew their officials from the the group of people affected by this panic. National courts had more distance from the hysteria. Moreover, national courts tended to have professional, trained staff who were less likely to discard important legal safeguards in their haste to see "justice" done.

d) The Inquisition. But what of the Inquisition? For many, the "Inquisition" and the "Burning Times" are virtually synonymous. The myth of the witch-hunting Inquisition was built on several assumptions and mistakes, all of which have been overturned in the last twenty-five years. First, the myth was the logical extension of 19th century history, which blamed the persecutions on the Catholic Church. If the Church attacked witches, surely the Inquisition would be the hammer it wielded.

Second, a common translation error muddled the waters. Many records simply said that a witch was tried "by inquisition." Some writers assumed that this meant "the" Inquisition. And in some cases it did. But an "inquisition" was also the name of a type of trial used by almost all courts in Europe at the time. Later, when historians examined the records in greater detail, they found that the majority did not involve the Inquisition, merely *an* inquisition. Today most historians are careful about this, but older and more popular texts (such as Rossell Hope Robbins' *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*) still have the Inquisition killing witches in times and places where it did not even exist.

Third, the only witch-hunting manual most people have seen was written Inquisitor. In the 1970's, when feminist and Neopagan authors turned their attention to the witch trials, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches) was the only manual readily available in translation. Authors naively assumed that the book painted an accurate picture of how the Inquisition tried witches. Heinrich Kramer, the text's demented author, was held up as a typical Inquisitor. His rather stunning sexual preoccupations were presented as the Church's "official" position on witchcraft. Actually the Inquisition immediately rejected the legal procedures Kramer recommended and censured the Inquisitor

himself just a few years after the *Malleus* was published. It was secular courts, not Inquisitorial ones, that resorted to this work.

As more research was done and historians became more sensitive to the "an inquisition/the Inquisition" error, the Inquisitorial witch-hunter began to look like a rare bird. Lamothe-Langon's trials were the last great piece of "evidence," and when they fell, scholars re-examined the Inquisition's role in the Witch Hunts. What they found was quite startling. In 1258 Pope Alexander IV explicitly refused to allow the Inquisition from investigating charges of witchcraft: "The Inquisitors, deputed to investigate heresy, must not intrude into investigations of divination or sorcery without knowledge of manifest heresy involved." The gloss on this passage explained what "manifest heresy" meant: "praying at the altars of idols, to offer sacrifices, to consult demons, to elicit responses from them ... or if [the witches] associate themselves publicly with heretics." In other words, in the 13th century the Church did not consider witches to be heretics or members of a rival religion.

It was not until 1326, almost 100 years later, that the Church reversed its position and allowed the Inquisition to investigate witchcraft. But the only significant contribution that was made was in the development of "demonology," the theory of the diabolic origin of witchcraft. As John Tedeschi demonstrates in his essay "Inquisitorial Law and the Witch" (in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen's *Early Modern European Witchcraft*) the Inquisition still played a very small role in the persecution. From 1326-1500, few deaths occurred. Richard Kieckhefer (*European Witch Trials*) found 702 definite executions in all of Europe from 1300-1500; of these, only 137 came from Inquisitorial or church courts. By the time that trials were common (early 16th century) the Inquisition focused on the proto-Protestants. When the trials peaked in the 16th and 17th century, the Inquisition was only operating in two countries: Spain and Italy, and both had extremely low death tolls.

In fact, in Spain the Inquisition worked diligently to keep witch trials to a minimum. Around 1609, a French witch-craze triggered a panic in the Basque regions of Spain. Gustav Henningsen (*The Witches' Advocate*) documented the Inquisition's work in brilliant detail. Although several Inquisitors believed the charges, one skeptic convinced La Suprema (the ruling body of the Spanish Inquisition) that this was groundless hysteria. La Suprema responded by issuing an "Edict of Silence" forbidding all discussion of witchcraft. For, as the skeptical Inquisitor noted, "There were neither witches nor bewitched until they were talked and written about."

The Edict worked, quickly dissipating the panic and accusations. And until the end of the Great Hunt, the Spanish Inquisition insisted that it alone had the right to condemn witches — which it refused to do. Another craze broke out

in Vizcaya, in 1616. When the Inquisition re-issued the Edict of Silence, the secular authorities went over its head and petitioned the king for the right to try witches themselves. The king granted the request, and 289 people were quickly sentenced. Fortunately the Inquisition managed to re-assert its monopoly on trials and dismissed all the charges. The “witches” of Cataluna were not so lucky. Secular authorities managed to execute 300 people before the Inquisition could stop the trials.

e) The Witches. Court records showed that there was no such thing as an “average” witch. There was no characteristic that the majority of witches shared, in all times and places. Not gender. Not wealth. Not religion. Nothing. The only thing that united them was the fact that they were accused of witchcraft. The diversity of witches is one of the strongest arguments against the theory that the Great Hunt was a deliberate pogrom aimed at a specific group of people. If that was true, then most witches would have something in common.

We can isolate certain factors that increased a person’s odds of being accused. Most witches were women. Many were poor or elderly; many seem to be unmarried. Most were alienated from their neighbors, or seen as “different” and disliked. But there is no evidence that one group was targeted. Traditional magick users might have a slightly higher chance of being accused of witchcraft, but the vast majority of known “white” witches were never charged. Before trial evidence was available there were two major theories on who the witches were. Margaret Murray (*The Witch Cult in Western Europe* and *The God of the Witches*) proposed that witches were members of a Pagan sect that worshiped the Horned God. Murray’s research was exceptionally poor, and occasionally skated into out-right textual manipulation. She restricted her studies to our worst evidence: witch hunting propaganda and trials that involved copious amounts of torture. She then assumed that such evidence was basically accurate, and that the Devil was “really” a Pagan god. None of these assumptions have held up under scrutiny.

In 1973, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English suggested that most witches were mid-wives and female healers. Their book *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses* convinced many feminists and Pagans that the Great Hunt was a pogrom aimed at traditional women healers. The Church and State sought to break the power of these women by accusing them of witchcraft, driving a wedge of fear between the wise-woman and her clients. The evidence for this theory was — and is — completely anecdotal. Authors cited a number of cases involving healers, then simply assumed that this was what the “average” trial was like. However, a mere decade after *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses* was published, we knew that this was not true. Healers made up a small percentage of the

To date, less than 15,000 definite executions have been discovered in all of Europe and America combined.

accused, usually between 2% and 20%, depending on the country. There was never a time or a place where the majority of accused witches were healers. In 1990, D. Harley’s article, “Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-Witch” (in *Social History of Medicine* 3 (1990): 1-26.) demonstrated that being a licensed midwife actually decreased a woman’s chances of being charged.

And there was worse to come. Feminist and Pagan writers presented the healer-witch as the innocent, enlightened victim of the evil male witch hunters. Trials showed that as often as not, the so-called “white” witch was an avid supporter of the “Burning Times.” Diane Purkiss (*The Witch in History*) pointed out that “midwives were more likely to be found helping witch-hunters” than as victims of their inquiries. How did witches become witch-hunters? By blaming illnesses on their rivals. Feminist authors lambasted male doctors who blamed unexplained illnesses on witches. Trial records suggest that this did happen, though not terribly often. If you look at doctors’ case books you find that in most cases doctors found natural causes when people thought they were bewitched. When they did diagnose witchcraft, doctors almost never blamed a particular healer or witch. They were trying to explain their failure, not to destroy some individual. Folk healers, on the other hand, routinely blamed diseases on witchcraft and offered counter-spells to cure their patients. Many were even willing to divine the name of the cursing witch, for a fee.

f) Gender Issues. One basic fact about the Great Witch Hunt stands out clearly: most of the people accused were women. Even during the Hunt itself, commentators noticed this. Some speculated that there were 10,000 female witches for every male witch, and a host of misogynist explanations were trotted out to account for this fact. Later, the predominance of women led some feminists to theorize that “witch” and “woman” were virtually synonymous, that the persecution was caused by Europe’s misogyny. Overall, approximately 75-80% of the accused were women. However, this percentage varied dramatically. In several of the Scandinavian countries, equal numbers of men and women were accused. In Iceland over 90% of the accused were men. But Central Europe killed the most witches, and it killed many more women than men — this is why the overall percentages are so badly skewed.

Proponents of the misogyny theory generally ignore these variations. Many simply do not discuss male victims. One of the most egregious examples comes from Anne Llewellyn Barstow’s *Witchcraze*. Barstow says that Iceland

Sociologists draw chilling parallels between the Great Hunt and recent panics over Satanic cults, evidence which hints that we're still not out of the shadow of the Burning Times.

did not have a “real” witch hunt. In fact, Iceland killed more witches than Ireland, Russia, and Portugal combined. Barstow claims that all these countries had “real” hunts, and offers no explanation of what made Iceland’s deaths “unreal.” The only thing I can see is that almost all Icelandic witches were men, and Barstow’s theory cannot handle that.

Given the sexism of the times, it’s not difficult to find shockingly misogynist witch trials. But misogyny does not explain the trial patterns we see. The beginning and end of the persecution do not correlate to any notable shifts in women’s rights. Trials clustered around borders — are borders more misogynist than interior regions? Ireland killed four witches, Scotland a couple thousand — are the Scots that much more sexist? Barstow admits that Russia was every bit as misogynist as Germany, yet it killed only ten witches. Her theory can’t explain why, and so she simply insists that there were probably lots of other Russian witches killed and they were probably mostly women. We’ve just lost all the evidence that would support her theory.

From Nine Million to Forty Thousand. The most dramatic changes in our vision of the Great Hunt centered on the death toll. Back before trial surveys were available, estimates of the death toll were little more than pure speculation. The only thing our literary evidence told us was that a lot of witches died. Witch hunting propaganda talked about thousands and thousands of executions. Literature focused on crazes, the largest and most sensational trials around. But we had no idea how accurate the literary evidence was, or how common trials actually were. So early death toll estimates, which ranged from several hundred thousand up to a high of nine million, were simply people trying to guess how much “a lot” of witches was. Today, the process is completely different. Historians begin by counting all the executions/trials listed in an area’s court records. Next they estimate how much evidence has been lost: for what years and in which courts are we missing data. Finally they survey the literary evidence, to see if any large witch trials occurred during the gaps in the evidence. There’s still guess-work involved in today’s estimates and many areas have not yet been systematically studied. But we now have a solid data-base to build our estimates from, and our figures are getting more specific as further areas are studied. When the first trial record studies were completed, it was

obvious that early estimates were fantastically high. Trial evidence showed that witch crazes were not everyday occurrences, as literature suggested. In fact most countries only had one or two in all of the Great Hunt.

To date, less than 15,000 definite executions have been discovered in all of Europe and America combined. (If you would like a table of the recorded and estimated death tolls throughout Europe, and a full list of the sources for these figures, send me a note at jennyg@compuserve.com.) Even though many records are missing, it is now clear that death tolls higher than 100,000 are not believable. Three scholars have attempted to calculate the total death toll for the Great Hunt using the new evidence. Brian Levack (*The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe*) surveyed regional studies and found that there were approximately 110,000 witch trials. Levack focused on recorded trials, not executions, because in many cases we have evidence that a trial occurred but no indication of its outcome. On average, 48% of trials ended in an execution, therefore he estimated that 60,000 witches died. This is slightly higher than 48% to reflect the fact that Germany, the center of the persecution, killed more than 48% of its witches.

Ronald Hutton (*The Pagan Religions of the British Isles* and “Counting the Witch Hunt,” an unpublished essay) used a different methodology. First he surveyed the regional studies and counted up the number of estimated deaths they contained. When he ran into an uncounted area, he looked for a counted area which matched it as closely as possible, in terms of population, culture, and the intensity of witch hunting mentioned in literary evidence. He then assumed that the uncounted area would kill roughly as many witches as the counted area. Using this technique, he estimated that 40,000 witches died in the Great Hunt.

Anne Llewellyn Barstow (*Witchcraze*) estimated that 100,000 witches died, but her reasoning was flawed. Barstow began with Levack’s 60,000 deaths. Then she increased it to 100,000 for two reasons: 1) To compensate for lost records; and 2) Because new trials are still being found. This may sound reasonable, but it’s not. The 110,000 estimated witch trials that Levack based his calculations on already contained a large allowance for lost records. Barstow was apparently unaware of this, and added more deaths for no good reason. Her point about new trials is true, but irrelevant. Yes, more deaths are being discovered each year. But the more we find, the lower the death toll goes. This makes sense once you understand how historians make their estimates. “New” trials aren’t trials we never dreamed existed. They appear when we count areas and courts that haven’t been counted before. Historians have always known that our data was imperfect, and they always included estimates for lost trials. So when you find “new” executions, you can’t simply add them to the

total death toll; you also have to subtract the old estimate they're replacing. And since old estimates were generally far too high, newly "found" trials usually end up lowering the death toll.

Why It Matters. These changes make it critically important to use up-to-date research in the investigation of historical witchcraft. We have perhaps 20 times as much information as we had two decades ago. Witchcraft studies has also become an inter-disciplinary field. Once the domain of historians alone, it now attracts anthropologists and sociologists who offer radically new interpretations of the Great Hunt. Anthropologists point out the ubiquity of witchcraft beliefs, demonstrating that the Great Hunt was not an exclusively European phenomenon. Sociologists draw chilling parallels between the Great Hunt and recent panics over Satanic cults, evidence which hints that we're still not out of the shadow of the Burning Times.

We Neopagans now face a crisis. As new data appeared, historians altered their theories to account for it. We have not. Therefore an enormous gap has opened between the academic and the "average" Pagan view of witchcraft. We continue to use out-dated and poor writers, like Margaret Murray, Montague Summers, Gerald Gardner, and Jules Michelet. We avoid the somewhat dull academic texts that present solid research, preferring sensational writers who play to our emotions. For example, I have never seen a copy of Brian Levack's *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* in a Pagan bookstore. Yet half the stores I visit carry Anne Llewellyn Barstow's *Witchcraze*, a deeply flawed book which has been ignored or reviled by most scholarly historians.

We owe it to ourselves to study the Great Hunt more honestly, in more detail, and using the best data available. Dualistic fairy tales of noble witches and evil witch hunters have great emotional appeal, but they blind us to what happened, and what could happen again today. Few Pagans commented on the haunting similarities between the Great Hunt and America's panic over Satanic cults. Scholars noticed it; we didn't. We say "Never again the Burning!" But if we don't know what happened the first time, how are we ever going to prevent it from happening again?

Jenny Gibbons has a BA from Cornell University (which she says was about 40% medieval history, 30% medieval languages, and 30% witchcraft and magic). Her MA in Medieval Studies (with a minor in the history of the Witchcraft Trials) is from the University of Toronto, where she was also a Mellon Fellow. She has written for Enchante, Green Egg, and Nova Religio, and currently hosts a web-page at <summerlands.com> dedicated to the history of the Great Hunt.

The Interface of Archaeology and Mythology: A Philosophical Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm

by Mara Keller
California Institute of Integral Studies

In her corpus of twenty books and over 300 articles, Marija Gimbutas makes a comprehensive study of empirical archaeological data that serves as the basis for her challenging new theory of the cultural roots of Western civilization. To substantiate her thesis that Old Europe was relatively peaceful, egalitarian and primarily Goddess-worshipping, Gimbutas cites (1) the frequent placement of villages on open plains without fortifications; the absence of caches of weapons; no artistic images of weapons, warfare or warrior deities; and no evidence of violent destruction of villages (until the Kurgan invasions). (2) comparable burials for women and men in terms of wealth and social status. (3) a much higher proportion of stylized female figures in ritual or sanctuary contexts (interpreted as goddesses) in comparison to images of stylized male figures in similar contexts (interpreted as gods) in the "approximately 30,000 miniature sculptures in clay, marble, bone, copper and gold from some 3000 sites from southeastern Europe alone" (Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 1986: 146). Her discussion of the evidence gives rise to a new understanding of the (pre)history of Europe and to a new theory of cultural transformation (Riena Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, 1987). In this essay I argue that Gimbutas' thesis is worthy of consideration for three reasons. First, a careful reading of her work and of the dynamic controversy surrounding it supports the view that Gimbutas' theory is to date the most scientifically plausible account of the available information regarding Neolithic Europe (c 6500-3500 BCE in Southeast Europe) and the transition to the Indo-European Bronze Age (c 3500 BCE). Second, Gimbutas' methodology of archaeomythology is germinal for the important interfacing of science and religion, for bridging the still antagonistic ideologies of matter and spirit. Third, the implications of Gimbutas' theory of European origins converge with various other tributaries of post-modern reconstructive thought to provide an important stimulus for the contemporary transformation of culture towards a survivable, sustainable future.

I. Gimbutas' Theory of European Origins. The view taught as canonical in universities of Europe and the United States has insisted that civilized history begins at Sumer in Mesopotamia about 3500 BCE with the onset of the Bronze Age and the rise of empire-building, standing armies, class stratification, monumental architecture and writing in service to the ruling class (see Samuel Kramer, *From the Tablets of Sumer*, 1981). The enslavement of defeated enemies by warrior-priest-kings and their armies, to form a slave-based economy, is generally treated by Western scholars with disinterest. The historical subjugation of women and the establishment of male dominance are usually not mentioned, the assumption being, perhaps, that male dominance has always existed (see Lerner 1986: 4, 7-8).

Gimbutas fundamentally challenges this established view in her companion works *The Language of the Goddess* (1989) and *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991). Her theory of the cultural origins of Europe can be described in three stages:

1. Neolithic Europe was a pre-Indo-European civilization that was socially egalitarian, communal, peaceful, highly artistic and primarily Goddess-worshipping. It flourished in Southeast Europe for at least 3000 years, from 6500 to 3500 BCE, and 2000 years longer in Crete and the Aegean islands, until c 1450 BCE.
 2. This civilization was overrun and dominated by patriarchal, horse-riding, Indo-European-speaking, Sky-God-worshipping invaders from the Russian steppes in three successive waves: I. c 4400-4300 BCE, II. c 3500 BCE, and III. c 3000 BCE.
 3. The subsequent cultures of Europe are the result of a hybridization of the Old European and Indo-European cultures.
- I recommend that this dramatically different way of understanding European origins be called the "Gimbutas paradigm."

Some of the major points of controversy around Gimbutas' theory are whether or not Old Europe should be called a civilization, whether or not it should be seen as a sexually and economically egalitarian (or "gynanic") society, whether or not it should be considered a peaceful culture, and whether or not it should be interpreted as a "Goddess civilization." Once these major points of controversy are resolved, we will be able to assess Gimbutas' overarching conclusion that Neolithic Europe underwent a cultural transition "From matrilineal to patrilineal order, from a learned theocracy to a militant patriarchy, from a sexually balanced society to a male dominated hierarchy, and from a chthonic goddess religion to the Indo-European sky-oriented pantheon of gods" (Gimbutas 1991: 401).

II Gimbutas' Methodology: Archaeomythology. During the early 1970s,

... those archaeologists (and others) who hold the epistemological assumption that only empirical knowledge is reliable knowledge cannot logically believe it possible to have any probable knowledge of the mind-states or spiritual experiences of ancient peoples ...

Gimbutas invented the methodology she called *archaeomythology* in order to comprehend the civilization of Old Europe where, as best she could tell, the material and spiritual aspects of culture had not been sundered, but were still whole (Gimbutas 1974). Although "previous books on Neolithic Europe have focused on habitat, tool kits, pottery trade, and environmental problems, treating religion as 'irrelevant,'" Gimbutas insisted that archaeologists "cannot remain scientific materialists forever ... A combination of fields — archaeology, mythology, linguistics, and historical data — provides the possibility for apprehending both the material and spiritual realities of prehistoric cultures ... [which are] intertwined ... reflections of each other" (Gimbutas 1991).

The Greek archaeologist Nanno Marinatos, in her outstanding book on ancient Crete, *Minoan Religion* (1993), also addresses the issue of narrowness in empiricist archaeological research. Like Gimbutas, she argues for a more well-rounded approach that includes a consideration of religion. "Religion is elusive, it is claimed, in comparison to economy and subsistence ... [but] no ancient culture can be understood without its religion. If we reduce the study of culture to pottery classification and data quantification (with some spice from the socioeconomic sphere), the scope of the humanist may be lost to that of the pseudo-scientist" (Marinatos 1993: 10).

Gimbutas' interpretation of the symbol system of Old Europe constructed a bridge between archaeology and mythology. This was the result of a lifetime of work, primarily in archaeology. Gimbutas pursued her internationally acclaimed studies of the Indo-European Bronze Age from the 1940s into the 1970s, publishing extensively, before turning to studies of Neolithic Europe. She directed five major excavations in Southeast Europe, and pursued her study of Neolithic artifacts in museums throughout Eastern and Western Europe. Meanwhile, she continued her exhaustive reading of scholarly reports (in their original languages) on both Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe, combining her background in linguistics with a working fluency

Kurgan burrow-graves appear for the first time, containing privileged male burials that not only have weapons and an extraordinary amount of wealth goods ... but also sacrificed animals such as horses and oxen, and sacrificed women, children and others, probably slaves.

in twenty European languages. Finally, she applied her studies of mythology, history of religion and folklore (which began in her homeland of Lithuania), searching for “internal coherence: in the old European symbols and their associative contexts.” She brought her prodigious knowledge plus her life experience to the construction of a comprehensive view of Old European culture that, to her surprise, contrasted sharply with that of the later Indo-European cultures of which she was a world class expert (see Joan Marler “The Life and Work of Marija Gimbutas” in *The Legacy of the Goddess: The Work of Marija Gimbutas*, 1996).

Partly because of Gimbutas’ ground-breaking work, the field of archaeology is beginning to address the matter of gender, and the role of ideology — not only in ancient cultures, but also in contemporary archaeologists’ culturally constructed and biased frameworks of interpretation. Archaeologists influenced by the feminist epistemological critique of modern science are beginning to replace narrow empiricism with an engendered, anthropological archaeology that has “empirical depth” and is also able to deal with the interpretive, symbolic and even mythic dimensions of culture (Margaret Conkey, “Does It Make a Difference? Feminist Thinking and Archaeologies of Gender,” Chamcool Archaeological Association, University of Calgary, 1990). At the same time, scholars in the fields of mythology, theology, history of religions, and religious studies are developing a more relational and intersubjective understanding of reality, as well as adopting a more multi-disciplinary approach. These epistemological expansions enable us to see more clearly the value of Gimbutas’ archaeomithological approach, which includes her love for and empathic understanding of her subject matter, along with her rigorous scientific investigations and application of extensive mythological, religious, folkloric and linguistic knowledge.

III. Evaluating the Gimbutas’ Paradigm Amid Controversy. Gimbutas’ thesis has not been widely accepted by the archaeological establishments in

the United States and Europe (Philip Davis, “The Goddess and the Academy,” *Academic Questions* 6 (1993): 49-66; Brian Fagan, “A Sexist View of Prehistory,” *Archaeology* 45 (1992): 49-66; Mary Lefkowitz, “The New Cults of the Goddess,” *American Scholar* 62 (1992): 29; “The Twilight of the Goddess: Feminism, Spiritualism, and a New Craze,” *The New Republic* 207 (1993); Lynn Meskell, “Goddesses, Gimbutas and ‘New Age’ Archaeology,” *Antiquities* 69 (1995): 74). I want to address this controversy philosophically in order to engage in dialogue with those who are resistant to, or who actively oppose, Gimbutas’ findings, by referring to the epistemological theory advanced in Plato’s *Republic* called “The Divided Line,” and its corresponding metaphysical or mythological theory as related in “The Myth of the Cave.” These passages from Plato’s writing grapple with the complex, interconnected epistemologies of both science and mythology, and thus serve as a useful beginning point for our evaluation of Gimbutas’ work.

Plato depicts his teacher Socrates explaining that truth-seeking occurs on four levels, with a different method of awareness or recognition appropriate to each. The first two levels deal with the visible world and conventional morality. The first level of awareness, *eikasia*, is that of *imagining what is reflected to us*, taking sense perceptions or moral projections at face value, at first blush. It is the level of unfounded opinion, of imagined perception of objects and values. At this stage of seeking to know, one operates largely on conjecture, and one has the tendency to take as real, as genuine and true, the shadows or somewhat murky reflections of objects not clearly seen. This is like believing in the shadows cast on a cave wall by firelight (to use Socrates’ metaphor), or like believing that what one sees on television, or hears as gossip, is the same as reality. Now, we may want to believe that what we see on television is accurate, or that what we hear from friends as gossip or hearsay is the whole truth, but what we are receiving may be at best only fragments of truth, or partial truths, and at worst distortions or negations of truth by the false use, false conceptualization, or false depiction of events. How can we tell false opinion from correct opinion, for example, in the televised retelling of daily news events, or, for that matter, in the differing scholarly accounts of past events?

The second level of conscious awareness Socrates calls belief, *pistis*. This level deals with the *direct sensory perception* of the objects and relationships of the visible world, “the living creatures about us and all the works of nature or of human hands” (*The Republic of Plato*, Oxford UP, 1965: 224). At this level, Socrates teaches, one can hold correct opinions about directly observed empirical and moral facts, about first-person, embodied experience. For example, one can have a commonsense opinion

about whether the weather is rainy or sunny, warm or cold; or about the general preferability of health to disease, pleasure to pain, kindness to cruelty. To develop clearer beliefs about Old Europe, it would be helpful, for example, if we, like Gimbutas, had firsthand experience of the sites of Old Europe and their thousands of artifacts. While we might begin our search for the truth of a matter through dimly perceived or partial truths, there is a point, especially when one comes upon confused sensations or contradictory notions, at which one feels moved to search further for a more complete and better-integrated picture. Socrates asserts that beyond these first two levels of impressionistic awareness and sense-based beliefs, there is a higher realm of intellectual knowing. It is also divided into two levels.

The third level is that of *thinking within a theory*, using a system of ideas that accepts first principles from which can be deduced reliable conclusions, as in mathematics, science or moral theory. Socrates calls this the level of ordinary knowing by discursive reasoning, *dianoia*. This third level of theoretical understanding does not dismiss the second level of direct sensory perception, but works with it, drawing the sense-based opinions which have been found to be persistent or reliable under scrutiny into a larger interconnected context or matrix, a larger framework or picture which can augment and further clarify the meaning of the facts, so they make more sense, have more meaning. For example, the disparate reports from different archaeological digs can be fitted together to provide a more compelling explanation of how the peoples of a particular region and era lived. A theory is like a vessel or a model that holds together and interrelates various facts into a coherent and comprehensive whole that satisfactorily explains the many parts and their interrelationships. A theory (for example, of cultural origins) is a dynamic intellectual synthesis that would be consistent with the empirical facts, inclusive of all relevant factors, highly plausible, and elegant, and should have predictive or heuristic value for making new discoveries and expanding knowledge into new fields and domains. In addition, a theory must meet the criteria pertinent to a particular field of study. Modern empiricist scientists operate on the second and third levels of inquiry, using sensory observations, measurements, empirical experiments and theoretical frameworks to assess material facts (artifacts), verify material causal relations and develop reliable explanations. Archaeologists use the methods of site survey, excavation and data analysis. Historians of religion, mythology and folklore also operate on these two levels of inquiry, using several methods of fact-finding as well as theological frameworks for interconnecting the facets of meaning into a larger, explanatory whole. Gimbutas used a fact-based, combinatory process, and the intersection of the scientific theoretical

If we want to understand a civilization where spirituality may have been an integral part of peoples' everyday life, which way of looking would be more successful: one that studies only the material artifacts, or one that studies the material artifacts plus the cultural symbolism of the people as expressed in their art, architecture and burials?

framework of archaeology (including the latest laboratory dating methods using radiocarbon 14 and dendrochronology) and the theological frameworks of diverse mythologies, religions and folkloric systems.

But for Socrates, there is a fourth level of intelligibility that is more deserving of the name of knowledge. This is the level of *noesis*, attained by the use of *dialectical reasoning*. Socratic dialectic is a form of critical thinking and truth-seeking by which persons, in dialogue, pursue an ever more truthful understanding of a controversial matter. Each speaker expresses her or his personally held point of view. Where their views differ, the speakers engage in philosophical argumentation in hopes of mutually attaining closer and closer approximations of the truth. Socrates believed it was more important to reach toward truth than to hold on to a personal need to feel right. At this fourth, more advanced level of knowing, persons involved in knowledge-seeking need to be able to realize that competing theories, and especially the first premises they are holding onto as first truths, will have to be reconsidered as primary *assumptions* upon which the rest of each theory, continentally, depends. How then to evaluate which first premises or primary assumptions are more truthful, more reliable? At the point, Socrates becomes somewhat vague, and refers to the power of the dialectic to turn first premises into "hypotheses, in the literal sense, things 'laid down' like a flight of steps up which dialectical reasoning may mount all the way to something that is not hypothetical, the first principle of all; and having grasped this, may turn back and, holding on to the consequences which depend upon it, descend at last to a conclusion ..." (Plato 1965: 226). In this way, Socrates proposes, one arrives at knowledge in the fullest possible sense: *noesis*.

According to this epistemology or theory of knowledge, to attain

... cognitive archaeology ... is beginning to explore the archaeological record for material indicators of ancient mental processes ... To the extent that cognitive archaeology is unwilling to grapple with the possible and probable reality of an immanent and transcendent goddess mythology and its implications for gendered social relations in Neolithic Old Europe, it still appears to carry a cultural bias that hinders its study of the “ancient mind” of Old Europeans.

clear, reliable, noetic knowledge one needs to reach toward the direct apprehension or intuition of “the first principle of all.” Some scholars refer to this act of intelligence as “rational intuition,” others as “mystical intuition” (Thandeka, *The Embodied Self: Friedrich Schleiermacher’s Solution to Kant’s Problem of the Empirical Self*, 1995). For Socrates and Plato (although not for most of us today), these two seem to have meant the same thing. That is, for ancient Greeks from Pythagoras to Socrates to Aristotle, intuition was seen as both rational and mystical. Reality itself, conceived of as *logos*, was understood as being both rational and mystical, and thus essentially accessible to the dialectically reasoning-intuiting mind. Since the classical Greek era, reason has become largely separated from intuition, and it is difficult for many of us today to imagine how the two could be related, let alone how they might be interrelated. And yet this is where I believe a new epistemology of physics and metaphysics is leading us today (a point to which I return in the fourth section).

As I see it, those archaeologists (and others) who hold the epistemological assumption that only empirical knowledge is reliable knowledge cannot logically believe it possible to have any probable knowledge of the mind-states or spiritual experiences of ancient peoples — be they pre-literate or literate. Strict empiricists may disparage as purely speculative or imaginary any efforts to consider and understand religious beliefs, or any beliefs. They have reached the limits allowed them by their own theory of empirical science. But when they justify their positivist views

by invoking the empiricist scientific methodology and its encompassing theory of science, and proceed to reason discursively from only those premises to their conclusions, then their work is constrained by a worldview of theory that accepts without question its own first premises about what is valuable and reliable in the work of seeking knowledge. They are in the epistemologically awkward, self-contradictory position of believing in a theory of empiricism that itself cannot be proven empirically. This is not to say that empirical science is without value; it has great value. But its own method is too limited to explain its own value.

The Euro-American discipline of empiricist archaeology challenges Gimbutas’ new discipline of archaeomythology. Are these simply different fields of study with different theoretical frameworks on interpretation and different methodologies? Shall we resolve the controversy by proposing that those who wish to deal only with matters of empirical (arti)facts should confine themselves to that sphere and engage only in the precise cataloguing of material data (a very valuable task in itself)? Do empirical archaeologists wish to shun all non-material inferences whatsoever and remain strictly silent in relation to the interpretation of cultural meaning from artifacts? If not, if empirical archaeologists to any degree pursue this same goal of the interpretation of cultural meaning, as inferred from the material artifacts, then our two theories and methodologies are to some extent in competition as to which can construct the better interpretation of culture. Then we can ask the question, which is better suited to the task?

Let us compare methodologies by first focusing on the more empirically testable findings of the Gimbutas paradigm. Gimbutas documents a profusion of evidence (mentioned at the beginning of this essay) for her characterization of Old Europe as a peaceful, egalitarian, Goddess civilization. Perhaps most telling for her theory is the contrast between the burial customs of the Old Europeans and the invading Kurgans. In the graves of Old Europe, women, men and children were typically buried with comparable respect, with objects of their crafts, jewelry, tools, trade goods or ritual items. With the incursions of horse-riding nomads from the Russian steppes, the Kurgan burrow-graves appear for the first time, containing privileged male burials that not only have weapons and an extraordinary amount of wealth goods (especially gold), but also sacrificed animals such as horses and oxen, and sacrificed women, children and others, probably slaves (Gimbutas 1991: 331-341, 352, 357-401). An interpretation of these data countervailing the one presented by Gimbutas argues that such cultural shifts are the result not of invasion by outsiders but of a gradual change that emerges from dynamics within the societies in question (Colin Renfrew,

Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins, 1987; Margaret Ehrenberg, *Women in Prehistory*, 1989: 99-107). This view may, to some extent, contribute to a more complete understanding of the cultural shift that took place in the later centers of Old Europe, as it was in transition from a matristic communal society toward a patriarchal class society. However, Gimbutas' discovery of a pattern of Kurgan invasions from the Russian steppes into Eastern Europe has recently been corroborated by the work of the Stanford University geneticist Cavalli-Sforzo ("Demic Expansions and Human Evolution," *Science* 259 (1993) no. 29), who has found genetic evidence for a population expansion into Eastern Europe stemming from an area "that almost perfectly matches Gimbutas' projection for the center of Kurgan culture." Additional scientific corroboration for Gimbutas' theory of the domination of a pre-existing matristic Old Europe by an androcratic Indo-European warrior culture is provided by the work of the geographer Robert DeMeo. Using a vast database and computer-generated models, DeMeo has coordinated climactic changes and human migration patterns around the globe since the Paleolithic. His evidence indicates that climatic changes caused drought and desertification in what he calls "Saharasia," resulting in mass human migrations out of the Middle East as well as from the Kurgan homeland in Eurasia, around 4000 BCE, by what he called "patristic" culture (see Eisler 1995: 92-96).

The burden of proof has now shifted. Those who do not accept Gimbutas' theory of pre-Indo-European Old Europe and its overthrow by invading, horse-riding Kurgan nomads need to present persuasive material evidence of indigenous warfare, sexual and economic inequality and the dominance of male rulers and male power icons (male deities) as typical of Neolithic European (pre)history. Without a preponderance of evidence to the contrary, we are justified in acknowledging that Gimbutas has proposed the most plausible and probable interpretation of the presently available material data for these aspects of Neolithic Europe. What about the less empirical, more symbolic aspects of Neolithic European culture? How does one construct a highly probable interpretation of symbolic meaning from material objects, images and signs? If we want to understand a civilization where spirituality may have been an integral part of peoples' everyday life, which way of looking would be more successful: one that studies only the material artifacts, or one that studies the material artifacts plus the cultural symbolism of the people as expressed in their art, architecture and burials? If we want to understand the social relations of women and men, would we be more successful if we use a methodology that implicitly assumes male dominance, or one that poses gender as a question, discussing the reflections of gender in

Gimbutas could find "no images ... of a Father God throughout the prehistoric record" ... The multitude of correlated signs and images finally led Gimbutas to reconstruct an internally coherent mythological symbol system for Old Europe centered on a Great Goddess of Birth and Nurturance, Death and Regeneration.

the art, architecture and burials? If we want to understand the relations of clans to their neighbors, whether they were largely peaceful or belligerent, would we use a methodology that fails to consider the absence of weapons, fortifications and images of warfare, weapons and warrior deities, or one that seriously considers the significance of this notable absence? If for all these cases we answer that the second methodology would have a greater chance of success in leading to a more complete and coherent knowledge regarding our subject of inquiry, then wouldn't we be agreeing that the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach of Gimbutas is preferable? Wouldn't we be led to adopt archaeomythology as the larger field of inquiry, within which empirical archaeology would serve a valuable and indispensable subsidiary role, alongside the disciplines of linguistics and cultural anthropology and the histories of mythology, religion and folklore?

While Gimbutas amasses material evidence for her conclusions, she also uses intuition to discover within the widespread cultures of Old Europe *repeating patterns* that lead to her interpretations of the symbolic meanings for Old European inscriptions and artworks. How reliable are her claims that peoples primarily worshiped goddesses, as well as gods, during the Neolithic period throughout all of Europe? Did Old Europeans use, as she argues, a sacred script? Should the various societies of Neolithic Europe be grouped together as a single civilization? Were these peoples invaded and subordinated by warriors from the Pontic steppe region who primarily worshiped Sky-Gods? Were the warrior clans socially hierarchical, led by economically and spiritually privileged male chieftains, with women as subordinate to men? In European civilization since the Bronze Age a hybridization of the two cultures, the inheritor of two oppositional symbolic systems expressing countervailing values, ideals, spiritualities? Here we enter a level of interpretation that begins with, but inevitably moves beyond, simple material facts and causal material relations.

It is difficult to imagine more profound implications than those that flow from the Gimbutas paradigm: the re-integration of science and spirituality, the primacy of cooperation over competition as the basis of cultural development, re-conceiving loving relationships among the sexes, and the rebirthing of human community, embedded within an awareness of cosmic unity.

Fortunately, during the 1990s, more archaeologists, including Colin Renfrew and his colleagues, have begun to address the challenges presented by Gimbutas' archaeomythology (as well as by post-structuralist, post-processualist and Marxist archaeology) to the overly empiricist approach of the "New Archaeology" of the 1960s and 1970s. This new approach, called "cognitive archaeology" or "cognitive-processualist archaeology," is beginning to explore the archaeological record for material indicators of ancient mental processes — such as counting and measurement, planning, social relations, art-making, the evolution of symbolic script and religious practices, including ritualized burial practices and the focusing of attention toward superhuman powers of divinities (Renfrew and Bahn, *Archaeology, Theories, Methods and Practices*, 1966; Renfrew and Zobrow, *The Ancient Mind: Elements of Cognitive Archaeology*, 1994). Similar to the practice of Gimbutas, they propose a methodology of drawing inferences from the scientifically analyzed database of the culture to possible and probable interpretations of the artifacts. The primary goal, according to Renfrew and Bahn, is to develop frameworks and explanations for understanding "the symbolic side of human society." Because symbols are assumed above all else to distinguish humans from other animals, it is intended that symbols "will play a central role" in the inferential work of cognitive archaeology (Renfrew and Bahn 1996: 473). While cognitive archaeology reaffirms the importance of scientifically derived "empirical depth," it yet lacks what could be called "mythological depth." At last some of these scholars are beginning to corroborate Gimbutas' general findings and theoretical framework, although they tend to underplay the importance of the elements of goddess-worship, the egalitarian social relations and the general peacefulness of the

people. For example, they have not yet explored in depth the basic questions of the differences between mythological frameworks that are centered on female iconography and those centered on male iconography, or on the significance of mythological systems that hold a belief in the immanence and transcendence of divine powers; nor have they sufficiently explored the possibility that the life of a culture may be altogether spiritual and symbolic and not separated into sacred and secular compartments (see Renfrew and Bahn 1996: 388; Renfrew and Zobrow 1994: 47-48).

Some scholars unfairly seek to dismiss Gimbutas' work as unscientific speculation or merely idiosyncratic interpretation. However, Gimbutas' archaeomythology scientifically analyzes the material database for Old Europe and draws possible and probable inferences from these analyses, mediated by the application of her knowledge of mythology, folklore, history of religion, and linguistics, to reconstruct the symbolic, religious ideology of Old Europe. To the extent that cognitive archaeology is unwilling to grapple with the possible and probable reality of an immanent and transcendent goddess mythology and its implications for gendered social relations in Neolithic Old Europe, it still appears to carry a cultural bias that hinders its study of the "ancient mind" of Old Europeans.

Gimbutas remains unsurpassed as a scholar in the combination of both empirical and mythological breadth and depth of knowledge as the framework of inference and interpretation for Old European civilization and its takeover by Indo-European culture. No one before Gimbutas had made a careful catalogue of signs and symbols of Neolithic Europe and subjected them to exhaustive comparative analysis. When she did so, she began to see repeated correlations of signs and images and contexts (called "continuities of cult" or "redundancies" by other archaeologists) from which she inferred persistent attributes of the female images. She determined that many of these female icons represented goddesses because of their use in ritual context, the consistency of their symbolic designs, the shamanic combination of the human female with animal powers (as in the images of the Bird Goddess and Snake Goddess) and the widespread utilization of similar symbolism across wide expanses of geography and chronology. Moreover, Gimbutas could find "no images ... of a Father God throughout the prehistoric record" (Gimbutas 1991: x). Surprisingly, male icons made up no more than 3-5% of the archaeological record (Gimbutas 1990). The multitude of correlated signs and images finally led Gimbutas to reconstruct an internally coherent mythological symbol system for Old Europe centered on a Great Goddess of Birth and Nurturance, Death and Regeneration. This system contrasted sharply with the well-known warrior Sky-God mythological framework

inferred from the archaeological remains of later Bronze Age Indo-European cultures. Contrasts include different correlations for the color black, the color white, the serpent, the bull and the bucranium, the sun and the horse (Gimbutas 1991: 400).

Gimbutas' study of the "language of the goddess," as she called it, has been criticized but not seriously critiqued by other archaeologists. That is, no one to date has attempted to re-examine all the same artifacts, their contexts, dates and inscriptions, to see if there are repeated patterns of association that substantiate, or unfound, Gimbutas' theory. However, an important step in this direction has been taken by the linguist Harald Haarmann in his exacting analysis in *Early Civilization and Literacy in Europe* (1996). His work confirms that Old Europeans did use a script, most frequently in religious contexts, and that it was nearly identical to the Linear A script of early Bronze Age, pre-Mycenaean Crete! Perhaps Gimbutas' work will provide the key to unlock the full decipherment of Old European and Cretan Linear A writing. When these scripts are finally translated, scholars will have to acknowledge Old Europe and pre-Mycenaean Crete, with their Goddess civilizations, as belonging to "history" (which in scholarly definition, begins with written records) and "civilization." If the empirical aspects of Gimbutas' theory of early European origins are corroborated by empirical science; if her multi- and interdisciplinary methodology is more comprehensive in scope and more appropriate to a culture that was both material and symbolic in expression; and if her symbolic inferences and interpretations are increasingly corroborated by scholars in the fields of archaeology, linguistics, genetics, geography, mythology, history of religion and folklore; then why is there so much resistance to Gimbutas' methodology, findings and resultant theory of European origins? To answer this question, we must address another set of questions, not only about methodology, but about cultural substance and ideology (ideas used for value-based social construction).

IV. Contemporary Cultural Transformation. In *The Civilization of the Goddess*, Gimbutas addresses the contemporary relevance of her work: "This material, when acknowledged, may affect our vision of the past as well as our sense of potential for the present and future. *We must refocus our collective memory.* The necessity for this has never been greater as we discover that the path of 'progress' is extinguishing the very conditions for life on earth." (Gimbutas 1991: vii, emphasis added). Why are some people resistant to entertaining this possibility, to considering seriously the Gimbutas paradigm? Why might some reject this re-telling of the cultural origins of Europeans?

I see the new physics of today as closer to the body and mind physics-metaphysics of the ancient Greeks, and probably also of the Old Europeans, than has generally been recognized.

Socrates believed in the capacity of the human mind to be illumined: to apprehend the underlying oneness, beauty and goodness of life itself. In addition to the "Divided Line" and the "Myth of the Cave," we also have Socrates' teaching called the "Ladder of Love," in Plato's "Symposium." After one has ascended the "Divided Line" or the "Ladder of Love," then from the vantage point of illumination — as if one had looked directly into the radiant sun (to use another of Plato's metaphors), or had received a beatific vision of the heart of reality by turning one's eyes "toward the open sea of beauty" ("Symposium," in *Plato, The Collected Dialogues*, Bollingen Series 71, 1961: 562) — a person becomes capable first of discerning which of the first premises of differing theories are preferable, then of choosing between competing theories, and from there of drawing implications and finally conclusions about matters of fact and of morality in the visible world.

Now, persons who do not believe that an illuminating experience of the essential nature of reality is possible cannot utilize the Socratic methodology of truth-seeking. A person simply cannot use a methodology into which she or he will not put any interest, even tentative trust or effort. And yet, this is problematic for truth-seeking. For, as quantum physics has demonstrated in the sub-visible realm, and psychology has also demonstrated in the invisible realm of the mind; what we see and come to know is interdependent with where and how we choose to look. What if life itself, as embedded in the universe, is rationally approachable yet beyond complete human comprehension, hence also mysterious and thus susceptible to mythological and cosmological explanations?

Socrates and Plato used both logic and analogy, scientific as well as mythological reasoning, to persuade their interlocutors of the insights or wisdom they desired to impart. They used both masculine and feminine metaphors to midwife experiences of spiritual insight or vision. While some of the metaphors may seem more masculine to some (a linear, hierarchical, disembodied ascent up a ladder, using reason, to see the sun, the *logos*), I can also imagine a contrasting process in what seem to be more feminine metaphorical terms (a spiraling descent into the void that issues into

It may be that the resistance to her discoveries stems more from the investment individuals have in the paradigm of civilization that is constructed in accord with the prevailing gender, race and class hierarchies of domination and submission.

embodies love spreading through concentric, nesting circles); both of these may lead to the same place of noetic beholding. Perhaps Socrates, an initiate of the Mysteries of the Goddess at Eleusis, used both these kinds of methods, and a more masculine emphasis was eventually given by an older Plato and subsequent Platonists to the linear metaphors without their feminine complements. In any case, I recommend their combination as a more complete, multifaceted and holistic epistemology.

To further compare our two competing theories of European cultural origins, let us review their first-premise beliefs as if they are working assumptions used for the (re)construction of particular social systems. If, after assembling the relevant material facts and studying the competing theoretical explanations, we could engage not simply in discourse but in dialectical dialogue about European cultural origins; if we could finally allow this dialogue to lead us toward an intuition or vision of the first principle or source of all life, of reality in its fullness; if we could open ourselves to this as though beholding the brilliant, life- and death-giving sun spiraling through the spacious void of the universe; and then, having opened to this radiance and this generous blackness, if we would ask which set of working assumptions leads to greater understanding of human culture, its past, present and future possibilities — what might we believe? One first-premise belief is the prevailing view that the cultural origins of Europe began in the Bronze Age, with its empire-building, standing armies, class stratification, slave-based economies, monumental architecture, writing used in service to the ruling class, male dominance, and male-dominant religions. Would this assumption not bolster the belief that since its inception, the foundations of civilization have included class domination by warrior clans and the rule of the stronger over the weaker, wealth acquisition primarily through force and warfare, men's domination of women and human domination over (the rest of) nature? Would believing in what can be termed the “androcratic warrior theory of the origins of western civilization” further lead to contingent beliefs

that the fruits and pleasures of human creativity are destined repeatedly to be produced and destroyed by forces of personal greed and collective warfare; suffering is the primary fate of the majority of humanity; women should be submissive and accept a servile status in relation to men, who are superior aggressors; the main hope for alleviating the suffering of the many is either a world-renouncing, ascetic, abstract spirituality or other addictions; and the dominant economic and political world powers will probably continue unchecked from their course of the “ecocide” and “omnicide” of the life-systems through a dual attack by the non-sustainable consumption of the environment and military warfare?

On the other hand, might embracing the theory of the origins of European culture as reconstructed by Gimbutas lead to the sharing of a collective memory of an ancestral culture that was gylanic (neither patriarchal nor matriarchal); egalitarian (not exploitative); communal (not egoistic); relatively peaceful (not warring); spiritual in the sense of an embodied, immanent *and* transcendent spirituality (not of disembodied transcendence); goddess-centered and god-revering (not exclusively God-centered); artistically and linguistically advanced, with a sacred script (neither primitive nor illiterate); and nature-embedded (not alienated from nature and the cosmos)? The implications of accepting Gimbutas' radically different view of the origins of Western civilization would be far-reaching, not only for peoples within Western civilization, also but for non-Western peoples, with whom Westerners might begin to feel a greater sense of kinship.

It is difficult to imagine more profound implications than those that flow from the Gimbutas paradigm: the re-integration of science and spirituality, the primacy of cooperation over competition as the basis of cultural development, re-conceiving loving relationships among the sexes, and the rebirthing of human community, embedded within an awareness of cosmic unity. If one were given a choice between the one theory or the other; and if one were able to use empirical data and also artistic sensibility, ethical values and spiritual wisdom; and finally, if one were able to attain a vision that sees clearly into the radiant, vibratory nature of reality — which would be the more truthful, reliable, morally valuable and wise theory to choose?

As I understand it, a *noetic act of intelligence* is a rational intuition of the growthful, adaptive, creative dynamics of life as it actualized the innate potential and interrelational opportunities of sentient beings seeking the experiences of safety, satisfaction and fulfillment. It is a rational intuition that is sometimes imbued with feelings of wonder, awe, reverence, joy and gratitude and, at other times, with feelings of fear, pain, hatred, guilt or other suffering. I see the new physics of today as closer to the body and mind

physics-metaphysics of the ancient Greeks, and probably also of the Old Europeans, than has generally been recognized. Similarly, I think Gimbutas' methodology of archaeomythology comes closer to the noetic insight Socrates recommended than either empirical science or religious studies as separated disciplines, because of its recombination of body and nature with mind and spirit. Here I use the word *spirit* to mean that which animates, like breath, fire, water and earth, like the creative forces of the universe.

As the works of Thomas Kuhn and others working on the sociology of knowledge have informed us, a radical change in scientific paradigms (or philosophical worldviews) is not easily accomplished, even when there is considerable evidence and incentive to do so. While I believe human beings are inherently truth-seeking creatures, we are also survival- and comfort-seeking creatures, and creatures of vested interests. It is very difficult for a person to give up a worldview or theory that has provided a sense of survival, stability and/or privilege. Moreover, even if someone wants to shift perspective from a habitual way of thinking, recent brain research informs us that the brain itself is "wired" into clusters of information, around nodes or central organizing points and matrices, that give each person a "mindset," that is to say, a mind that is set into a structure of neurological networks and fields that becomes more and more firmly established, providing a person with his or her sense of identity. To change our paradigms or worldviews, we need to transform the brain circuitry itself! To change to a new theory of life, or theory of civilization, a person would need to allow him- or herself to experience the discomfort that would come from the deconstruction of a firmly constructed mindset and, thus, the dissolution of identity, with a subsequent sense of loss, disorientation and chaos. Yet these would be the preconditions and prelude to a new frame of mind, a new identity and a new way of viewing the world (Joseph Pearce, *Evolution's End: Claiming the Potential of Our Intelligence*, 1992).

To become capable of accepting Gimbutas' theory of the cultural origins of early Europe, an individual would need to question the inevitability of warfare, economic hierarchies of dominance and subordination and the exclusively male-centered concept of divinity. It is accurate to say that in the West, these are long-cherished and entrenched beliefs that have been upheld as pillars of Western civilization. Thus, when the work of Gimbutas is met with skepticism and rejection, it may not be because her methodology is unorthodox or her conclusions unfounded. It may be that the resistance to her discoveries stems more from the investment individuals have in the paradigm of civilization that is constructed in accord with the prevailing gender, race and class hierarchies of domination and submission. Fortunately, scientists,

humanists, historians of religion and historians of culture are now engaged in revisioning the course of Western civilization and reconstructing the sciences, humanities and religions into a "new paradigm" that is more inclusive, more reliable and more integrated as a hologram of reality. Gimbutas' work plays in concert with this larger endeavor to create a "paradigm shift" that interrelates more of the post-modern expansion of human knowledge. Her theory is compatible with the embodied cultural and spiritual understanding being newly proposed by cultural theorists and theologians, as well as with the "New Science" being developed by physicists, biologists, mathematicians, systems theorists and others coming to terms with the mysterious interface of mind and matter, body and spirit, reason and intuition. The New Science is in the process of exchanging the "dispassionate" pursuit of "objectivity" and "absolute certainty" for an epistemology that is "anticipatory," "interdependent," "inter-subjective" and "probabilistic." It explores the noetic insights of the interdependence and underlying oneness of all life, the primacy of cooperation over competition for biological evolution, the aliveness of the whole Earth as GAIA and the integral relationships of humans to the larger cosmic whole.

As a feminist, philosopher and peace activist, I choose to imagine a global civilization that has matured beyond chronic warfare and competition as primary cultural values, by replacing these with cooperation, pleasure and compassion. I see a civilization that has moved beyond the splits of science and religion, nature and culture, immanent and transcendent religions, becoming a world community that has learned to cherish and care for the living mantle of the Earth Mother and Her offspring, sprung from the regenerative powers of both Earth and Sky. I see a world where women and men live in creative harmony, in a dance of polarity, partnership and diversity, a world that has applied creative human intelligence to the tasks of ending poverty, hunger and social injustice, and has thus created the foundations of enduring peace. All this, in significant ways, is not unlike the memorable lifeways our Old European ancestors once were able to create and enjoy.

Mara Lynn Keller (PhD, Philosophy, Yale University), is
the Director of the Women's Spirituality program in Philosophy and Religion
at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco;
and a Rosen Method Bodywork practitioner.
This article originally appeared in *From the Realm of the Ancestors:*
An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas, Joan Marler, ed.,
Manchester, CT: Knowledge, Ideas & Trends, 1997.

ASHERAH: Goddess of the Israelites

by Fritz Muntean

University of British Columbia

In 1975-76, at Kuntillet 'Ajrud in northern Sinai, an archaeological team from Tel Aviv University uncovered the remains of what is believed to be an early Iron Age religious centre. Inscriptions found on jars at this site contain blessing formulae which include the astounding phrase "Yahweh and his Asherah." A few years earlier, an inscription was found in a burial cave at another site, Khirbet el-Qom, near Hebron, which may also refer to "Yahweh's Asherah" (Judith Hadley, "The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription"; "Some Drawings and Inscriptions of Two Pithoi from Kuntillet 'Ajrud," *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 57, 180). These findings present us with material that dates from around the beginning of the eighth century BCE, well into the monarchical period and after the establishment of the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem, but from sites which were far from the centers of orthodoxy and the watchful eyes of the Jerusalem establishment (William Dever, "Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrud," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 255 (1984): 31). In light of these discoveries, the Israeli historian Amihai Mazar suggests that it might be possible to assume that the two pillars and two altars found in a small temple in the fortress of Arad might reflect a similar theology, the larger standing stone symbolizing "the God of Israel and the smaller one his consort, Asherah" (Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 1990: 496-97). When examined along with the frequent references to Asherah in the Hebrew Bible, these discoveries may throw new light on an hitherto unsuspected aspect of Israelite theology.

Is it possible that the God of Israel, in the popular religion of tribal and monarchical times, had a consort? The Israelite religion unequivocally represents itself as a strict monotheism that began with Yahweh's original revelation to Abraham, although many scholars date the origin of Hebrew monotheism a few centuries later, during the days of the great prophets (Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 1967: 20). In defense of this austere monotheism, the Hebrew Bible contains considerable counsel against the veneration of Canaanite deities; particularly Asherah, whose worship by the Israelites is condemned on forty different occasions. In spite of this, Asherah is often associated (Deut 16:21; Ezek 8:5) with the altar of Yahweh, and a long series of reformations was apparently required to remove her cultic paraphernalia from the Jerusalem Temple (1Kgs 15:13; 2Kgs 18:4; 21:7; 23:4, 6, 7).

In this article we will first identify the goddess Asherah, examining the references to her in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Classical material. We will define her place in the Canaanite pantheon, and attempt to separate her identity from those of other related goddesses. Turning then to the Hebrew Bible, we will chronicle the progress of Asherah among the Children of Israel, comparing prophetic condemnations with archaeological findings. In the light of all this material, we will then return to a closer examination of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom material. Finally, we will attempt to understand the reasons behind both the hostility displayed by the Hebrew Prophets toward the cult of Asherah, and the apparently persistent popularity of her worship among the Israelites.

Asherah first appears in Akkadian cuneiform texts of the second millennium (c 1830-1431) as a goddess named Ashratum, the consort of the chief god Amurra. She bears the titles "bride of the king of heaven" and "mistress of sexual vigor and rejoicing." Another 15th century text in Akkadian cuneiform from Taanach, near Megiddo in northern Palestine, contains a tantalizing reference to a "wizard of Asherah," which calls to mind the prophets of Asherah mentioned in 1Kgs 18:19 in the time of King Ahab (John Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986): 386). Twelve hundred years later, during the Hellenistic period, Asherah is mentioned in the Phoenician History by Philo of Byblos, and she also appears in Lucian's *The Syrian Goddess* as a syncretistic deity named Atargatis who encompasses Astarte, Anath and Asherah (Walter Maier, *Asherah: Extrabiblical Evidence*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, 1986: 68).

By far the largest body of orderly and consistent references we have to Asherah and the other deities of Northwest Semitic religion, which include the Phoenician as well as the Canaanite, are the Ugaritic manuscripts of the mid-second millennium. Ugarit was a thriving Mediterranean port and cosmopolitan trading centre until its destruction in the early 12th century BCE, and it was there that the world's oldest alphabet, a cuneiform alphabetic script, was invented, apparently for the specific purpose of setting ancient religious narratives in writing (Alan Cooper, "Canaanite Religion: An Overview," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1987: 35-36). In Ugaritic mythology, the two preeminent male deities are the remote and transcendent El and his immanent and active son (sometimes nephew), the storm-god Baal. Asherah is the wife of El, and Baal's consort is the goddess Anath.

Anath, who is the daughter of Asherah and El, is by far the most active goddess in the Ugaritic pantheon. Like the Sumerian Inanna and the Akkadian Ishtar, her attributes incorporate many opposites: she is the goddess of love and of war, she is virginal and yet wanton, amorous and yet given to uncontrollable outbursts of rage and appalling acts of cruelty. Anath manifests what are often

cited as the four basic traits of Near Eastern goddesses: chastity and promiscuity, motherliness and bloodthirstiness (Patai 1967: 187). No ancient Near Eastern goddess was more savage and more easily provoked to violence than she. These attributes of Anath, as well as her lineage, will play a part in our subsequent arguments.

Asherah, in the Ugaritic texts, is referred to as *'atrt*, which is assumed to be pronounced Athirat. She bears other titles as well: she is called *'ilt*, pronounced Elat, which literally means “goddess”; and she is referred to as *qnyt 'ilm*,

... Maacah [was deposed] from her exalted position of queen-mother because, according to 1Kgs 15:13, she had “made an obscenity for Asherah.” In the Vulgate Latin translation, “obscenity” reads sacris Priapi, and as such it was understood ... to be a phallic device — apparently one of no small stature, since it had to be hewn down and taken to the Kidron River to be burned.

“Progenitress (or Mother) of the gods” (Day 1986: 387). She was associated with the sea from a very early time and, at her shrines in the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon, Athirat is called *rbt 'atrt ym*, “Lady Athirat of the sea,” and one of her servants is *Qodesh-wa-Amrur*, “the Fisherman of Lady Asherah of the sea” (Maier 1986: 195). Asherah sometimes bears the epithet “*Qudsu*,” which means “holy” or “sanctuary.” This is also the name of a nude female figure wearing a Hathor headdress which is found on Egyptian scarabs of the Second Intermediate Period (Day, “Canaanite Religion,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1990: 831). The figure is often winged, and frequently holds lotus blossoms or a branch in her hands. However, full frontal nudes — especially those of divinities — were almost completely unknown in Egypt, but plaques and figurines of this type have been found in Syria and Palestine from throughout the second millennium (Day 1986: 389). The prayers inscribed on these stelai show that Qudsu was considered to be primarily a goddess of fertility, eroticism and sexual vigor. In a broader and more secondary sense, she was also seen as a welfare- and life-giving goddess, and according to one of the prayers, as a goddess of the dead (Maier 1986: 86).

Already the discerning eye may have noticed some important differences between the Ugaritic Athirat/Elat and the Palestinian Asherah/Qudsu. In 14th

century Canaanite mythology, Athirat is essentially a mother goddess and her daughter Anath is the deity of erotic fertility. Furthermore, in a number of the references to Asherah in the Hebrew Bible, she is associated with Baal. By this line of reasoning, the biblical Asherah might better be equated with the lusty Anath rather than with the nurturing Athirat. On the other hand, Dever points out that at Ugarit, in addition to the epithet “Elat” that she bears as the consort of El, Athirat is also called “Baalat,” and in the Taanach tablets Asherah, not Anath, appears with Baal (Dever 1984: 29). Day states that Athirat is definitely identified in the Ugaritic texts with Qudsu, “a fertility goddess of marked erotic character,” and he further directs our attention to a Hittite myth from the second millennium which shows us that Asertu (Athirat), the consort of Elkunirsa (El), was already attempting to seduce the storm god Baal — the allusions to Asherah alongside Baal in the Hebrew Bible “may imply that she eventually got her man!” (Day 1986: 399).

Further confusion may result from the fact that many of the references to Asherah and Baal in the Hebrew Bible are in the plural, the implication being that they may have been generic terms for a multitude of local pagan deities. However, these passages are clearly polemical in nature, and we should certainly wonder if the Canaanites would themselves have described their deities in the same way. Even writers as early as Philo of Alexandria have noted that, because of its polemic character, biblical witness to Canaanite religion must be considered unreliable. Philo recognized that Canaan was the biblical symbol of ‘vice,’ which the Israelites were naturally bidden to despise. However parochial the biblical writers may have been, it is clear from their accounts of pagan cult among the Israelites that the nature of those practices, as well as the names of the deities worshiped, were many and varied. One theory holds that the “Baals” and the “Asherim” of the Bible refer to the cultic paraphernalia of the local “high places,” or sanctuaries, where the worship of Asherah, combined with that of a Baalized Yahweh, was practiced (see Exod 34:13) from the days of tribal Israel (Day 1990: 835). The evidence for the persistence of such cultic activities is contained in the frequent calls by the Hebrew Prophets for their abrogation.

It is clear from these biblical references that the worship of Asherah had penetrated Jerusalem itself at least by the time of Solomon’s son Rehoboam. His wife Maacah, the daughter of Absalom (2Chr 11:20-21), was the mother of Abijah, Rehoboam’s heir. Maacah apparently used her influence as queen-mother to introduce Asherah, who was already worshiped in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon, into the Temple itself (Patai 1967: 45). Abijah was succeeded by Asa, who after reigning for fifteen years, came under the influence of a prophet named Azariah the son of Oded, at which time (the late 890s) Asa carried out the first religious reform in the history of Jerusalem. Not only did he remove the sacred

male prostitutes and all the idols, altars and images from the Temple, but he deposed Maacah herself from her exalted position of queen-mother because, according to 1Kgs 15:13, she had “made an obscenity for Asherah.” In the Vulgate Latin translation, “obscenity” reads *sacris Priapi*, and as such it was understood, at least by St Jerome, the Vulgate’s translator, to be a phallic device — apparently one of no small stature, since it had to be hewn down and taken to the Kidron River to be burned. The task of removing the Asherim first from Jerusalem and the Temple, and then from all of Judea, was continued into the middle of the ninth century by Asa’s son Jehoshafat. However, since nowhere in the biblical sources do we read of the setting up of these Asherim, this may lead us to the conclusion that this popular form of Asherah worship was a heritage from the pre-monarchic period. Upon the death of Jehoshafat, Asherism was reestablished in Judah (2Chr 21:6). A new reform movement began in 715 under King Hezekiah and the Prophet Isaiah, but Hezekiah’s heir Manasseh allowed the re-establishment of altars for Baal and Asherah, and he is recorded (2Kgs 21:3-7) as having set a carved image of Asherah in the Temple. Manasseh did not reestablish the Brazen Serpent of Moses which his father has removed from the Temple, perhaps because “with the passage of time the worship of a deity symbolized by a serpent had become obsolete. Not so Asherah whose motherly figure must have been dear to many worshippers and whose restoration to her traditional place in the Temple was therefore considered a religious act of great importance” (Patai, 1967: 48).

It seems possible that the veneration of Asherah in the Jerusalem Temple may have been one of the contributory causes for the breakup of David and Solomon’s Kingdom. In 1Kgs 11:29-39, the Prophet Ahijah encourages Jeroboam to rise against Solomon, telling him that Yahweh will “tear the kingdom from Solomon’s hand” because he had forsaken Yahweh to worship “Ashoreth the goddess of the Zidonians.” If Ahijah hoped that splitting the kingdom would allow at least ten of Israel’s tribes to become untainted by Canaanite religious practices, he was badly mistaken — geography conspired against him. From the very beginning of the Northern Kingdom, its survival depended on close political ties with the Phoenicians — ties which finally led to Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon. Although this alliance primarily produced political results, it assured the infiltration into Israel of Phoenician (read High Canaanite) artistic concepts and religious styles as well. Ahab, clearly under the influence of his Phoenician wife, “put up a sacred pole” (1Kgs 16:33) in the capital city of Samaria which continued to be a center of Asherah worship until the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 721.

It is possible that, even though the strict Yahwists considered Baal to be a dangerous rival of Yahweh, the goddess Asherah was regarded as his inevitable, necessary, or at any rate tolerable, female counterpart. 1Kgs 18:19 tells us that 450

prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah ate at the table of Jezebel, but when all 450 prophets of Baal were slaughtered at the River Kishon — and twenty years later when Jehu and the Rechabites slew all the priests and worshippers of Baal in Samaria (2Kgs 10:28-29) — no harm befell the supporters of Asherah, nor was her

It is clear from these accounts of pagan cult among the Israelites that, in spite of the fact that they were attacked by prophets from Azariah to Ezekiel, those who worshiped Asherah in rural groves and high places (or in the Temple itself) surely thought of themselves as loyal members of the Israelite religion, and considered the goddess Asherah to be an important part of their religion.

sacred pillar removed from Samaria. In 2Kgs 13:6, we read that Asherah’s sacred pole, presumably the one erected by Ahab in the 870’s, was still standing in Samaria during the reign of King Jehoahaz (814-798).

In spite of their polemics, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel supply us with the only glimpses we have of the actual details of pagan rites both in the towns and in the Temple. In Jeremiah 7:17-18 the children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women make cakes and pour libations. In Ezekiel 8:1-18, Yahweh takes Ezekiel on a tour of the pagan rituals being performed by “the house of Israel” in Yahweh’s own sanctuary, including women weeping for the Tammuz, men performing obeisance to the rising sun, seventy elders worshipping idols, and the “idol that provokes jealousy” — apparently that image of Asherah which Manasseh had set up in the Temple.

It is clear from these accounts of pagan cult among the Israelites that, in spite of the fact that they were attacked by prophets from Azariah to Ezekiel, those who worshiped Asherah in rural groves and high places (or in the Temple itself) surely thought of themselves as loyal members of the Israelite religion, and considered the goddess Asherah to be an important part of their religion. This may be difficult for us to understand today, when religions are organized by coordinating and sanctifying central authorities, but it is important for us to remember that although Israelite, and later Jewish, religious doctrines and practices have always derived from one ultimate source — the Bible — they have differed greatly over time and from place to place. Lacking a coordinating and sanctifying

central authority, their precise formulation was left to local religious leadership and that except for a brief period when the Great Sanhedrin exercised central authority in Jerusalem, heterodox practices were able to flourish simply because there was no organized religious body from which to secede or which might have cut off the offending limb. For example, "European Jews, in obedience to a certain medieval

There can be no doubt that these figurines played a prominent role in daily religious practice, but it is still an open question as to whether they represented the goddess herself, a priestess of the goddess, a cultic prostitute, or were talismans used in sympathetic magic to stimulate the reproductive processes of nature.

rabbinical authority, accepted the religious ban on marrying two or more wives, while their brethren in the Middle East continued to consider plural marriages legal, and to practice polygyny to the present time" (Patai 1967: 19).

In addition to biblical evidence for the prevalence of goddess worship among the Israelites, further confirmation may be derived from the archaeological data. Hundreds of terra-cotta plaques and figurines of nude female figures have been found throughout Palestine. Some are figures of pregnant women, others are pillar-like figurines showing a female figure from the waist up with a cylindrical base below. Those found in the Northern Kingdom are more naturalistically styled than the ones from Judah, possibly due to the Phoenician artistic influence. In Israel the figure's hands hold her breasts — or sometimes a round object, possibly a tambourine. In Judah the pillar figure, again usually with the hands to the breasts, was more common, and the finest examples of these were found in Jerusalem, dating from the 8th and 7th centuries (Mazar 1990: 501-02). There can be no doubt that these figurines played a prominent role in daily religious practice, but it is still an open question as to whether they represented the goddess herself, a priestess of the goddess, a cultic prostitute, or were talismans used in sympathetic magic to stimulate the reproductive processes of nature. In a 7th century Hebrew incantation, found in Arslan Tash in Upper Syria, the aid of Asherah is sought by a woman in delivery. Such an invocation of Asherah may have been contained in the original form of the exclamation made by Lea (Gen 30:10-13) at the birth of Zilpah's son — whom she named Asher (Patai 1967: 3536).

In the light of this evidence, both biblical and archaeological, for the

persistence of goddess cult in monarchical and, perhaps, tribal Israel, we can now return to a closer examination and evaluation of the material found at Kuntilet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom. Pithos A from 'Ajrud, on which the phrase "Yahweh Lord of Samaria and his Asherah" was found, includes a drawing of three cryptic figures under, and intersecting, the inscription. Two of the figures are standing, while on the right, a smaller seated figure is shown playing the lyre. The two standing figures are both distinguished by large nether appendages which could be taken for tails or exaggerated genitalia. The two standing figures are said to represent the Egyptian ithyphallic dwarf god Bes, an apotropaic figure popularly associated in Palestinian folk religion with the erotic aspects of the Canaanite fertility cults (Pirhiya Beck, "The Drawings from Horvat Teiman (Kuntellet 'Ajrud)," *Tel Aviv* 9 (1982): 28), and Dever identifies the seated lyre player as "Yahweh's Asherah" by the similarity of her garments and coiffure to the almost identically enthroned representations of Canaanite goddesses found on Ugaritic plaques and other examples of well-known Canaanite cultic art (Dever 1984: 25-26).

Both the 'Ajrud and the el-Qom inscriptions refer to "His Asherah" and "Yahweh's Asherah." Is the implication that Asherah belonged to Yahweh in the sense of being his wife or consort? The Hebrew *asherah*, or more commonly the masculine plural *asherim*, can refer to an object associated with the goddess Asherah (W.J. Fulco, "Athirat," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1987: 492). In fact, most of the references in the Deuteronomistic corpus (eg. Deut 16:21-22 and 2Kgs 21:3) imply that the Asherah was a manmade object. Day believes that "the Asherim were wooden poles sacred to the goddess Asherah," but he argues that although it seems clear that they symbolized the goddess, the fact that they are frequently mentioned (Deut 7:4; 2Chron 43:3-4; Mic 5:12-13) alongside "graven images" as being distinct objects may imply that although they were idolatrous, they may not have been actual representational images (Day 1986: 403-04). Given the association of the goddess Asherah with the ubiquitous terra-cotta figurines of the period, it is certainly possible to agree with Fulco and Day that the Asherim were phallic stelae, symbols of human and agricultural fertility.

Many scholars prefer to understand "Yahweh's Asherah" as a wooden image closely associated with the altar of Yahweh (cf. Deut 16:21). Yahweh would then remain the subject of the blessings, but the supplications would have been performed "before the asherah in the shrine," the prayers offered to Yahweh "by means of the asherah," and Yahweh's blessings "carried out by his asherah" (Hadley 1987: 59). Thus although the inscriptions could refer to "his (wife) Asherah," they might be thought of as meaning "his asherah": the wooden image. This understanding fits the inscriptions from Kuntilet 'Ajrud which might then be said to read: "blessed by Yahweh and the wooden symbol of the goddess

Asherah.”

Dever, on the other hand, takes exception to what he refers to as the “minimalist” interpretation of the biblical references to Asherah as a sacred tree or an enigmatic cult-image. He believes that the inscriptions and pictorial representations from ‘Ajrud (and possibly those from el-Qom) clearly identify Asherah as “a hypostatization of the Great Goddess” whose worship in ancient Israel as the consort of Yahweh was more than just a persistence of Canaanite religious practices. According to Dever, both the confusion of Asherah’s names, and the ambiguity in the references to her attributes, are the result of “the near-total suppression of the cult by the 8th-6th century reformers” which resulted — Asherah’s original identity having been forgotten, “not to be recovered until the goddess emerged again in the texts recovered from Ugarit” — in the references to Asherah in the Masoretic text being “misunderstood by later editors” or reinterpreted “to suggest merely the shadowy image of the goddess” (Dever 1984: 21-31).

It is clear that a great deal of prophetic energy was spent in polemic against these predominately material, and thus relatively superficial, aspects of popular Israelite cult activities. To our modern sensibilities, the most significant difference between Yahweh and the other deities of ancient Palestine lay neither in ritual nor in the physical trappings of shrines and altars (almost none of which, Israelite or Canaanite, has survived into our time), but in the “ideology and morality, which was developed in Yahweh’s name by the great Hebrew prophets” (Patai 1967: 37). Far more constructive, in the development of a deity with sufficient staying power to survive into modern times (Nietzsche notwithstanding) are those biblical polemics directed against the characteristically Canaanite idea of a god like Baal, who was by nature primarily immanent in humanity and therefore subject to its flux. In contrast, Yahweh was comfortably assimilated to the more transcendent El, and continued thereafter to develop into an even more consummate deity. Consider 1Kgs 19:12: a god that doesn’t have to shout may be considered to have serious longevity potential.

Why then were the Hebrew Prophets so hostile towards Asherah? Perhaps they considered the worship of Asherah an abomination because, if for no other reason, it was a cult that originated with their Canaanite neighbors, and any and all manifestations of Canaanite religion were, for these stern Yahwists, strictly anathema. Another reason, and one that seems especially unfortunate from our perspective in this age of psychological insight, was that the prophets seemed determined to stamp out those religious practices that involved or implied sexual behaviour. Apparently, ritual license was a common element of Canaanite religious life. We know from the incident of the Golden Calf (Exod 32:6) that sexual rioting was the traditional response to the exhibition of statuary symbolizing Canaanite

deities. Pilgrimages by women to holy places for the purpose of removing the curse of barrenness, a popular biblical activity, seems innocent enough until we read the prophetic condemnation of the *qedeshim*, the sacred male prostitutes belonging to the fertility cult which centered on the goddess Asherah. It certainly seems possible that the services of these *qedeshim* were made use of by childless women who visited their sanctuaries in order to become pregnant (See 1Sam 1:9-20 for a possible example).

... during the 370 years in which the Solomonic Temple stood in Jerusalem, the statue of Asherah was present in the Temple for no less than 236 of those years, “opposed only by a few prophetic voices crying out against it at relatively long intervals.”

Cultural competition and a fear of sexual misbehaviour aside, there may have been a more serious reason for the aversion that the prophets felt toward the cults of Asherah and Baal. The Hebrew Prophets frequently denounced the practitioners of Canaanite religion for sacrificing their own children as votive offerings to their gods. It is certainly possible that these accusations were only an ancient manifestation of the universally persistent, if paranoid, belief that rival societal elements practice inhuman rituals. In fact, no physical evidence of human sacrifice has been found in Palestine, and what actually occurred may have simply been a dedication in fire (M. Weinfeld, “The Worship of Molech and of the Queen of Heaven and Its Background,” *Ugaritic-Forschungen* 4 (1972): 141-42). Biblical references to human sacrifice, among both the Israelites or the Canaanites, are not uncommon. Although Jephthah’s daughter (Judg 11:30-40), was probably not literally sacrificed, but committed to some sort of life-long dedication in the service of Yahweh, we also have the ritual slaying by Samuel of King Agag “before Yahweh at Gilgal” (1Sam 15:33) as an admonishment to Saul, and the sacrifice of the eldest son of the king of Moab upon his city wall in order to turn the tide of battle against the Israelites: “Alarmed at this, the Israelites withdrew” (2Kgs 3:27).

Archaeological findings do exist of votive child sacrifice in the Punic outpost of Phoenician culture in North Africa (Day 1990: 834), and a connection, admittedly tenuous, exists between the cultic practices of Carthage and those of the Canaanite world. That link depends in part on the equation of the Punic goddess

Tannit with the Canaanite goddess Asherah, but the identity of these two deities is far from being universally agreed (Day 1986: 404). Maier, however, does equate Tannit with Asherah. He states unequivocally that Tannit is Asherah/Qdsu and identifies her as a Semitic divinity who is older than Punic civilization (Maier 1986: 115).

Tannit's name is related to the word for "dragon," so that she would be "the One of the dragon" or "the Dragon Lady"; an epithet similar to a meaning of Asherah's title: "the Lady who treads on the sea (dragon)." Because of these

A small remnant of Judah, languishing in exile in Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, delivered the most poignant defense of Asherism recorded in the Hebrew Bible. ... saying that as long as they had offered libations and made cakes for the Queen of Heaven that their lives had been safe and full, but since the rites they celebrated had been outlawed they had been destitute and had "perished either by sword or by famine" (Jmh 44:15-19).

"marine connections" Tannit could be identified with Asherah, "The Lady of the Sea" (John Betlyon, "The Cult of Asherah/Elat at Sidon," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44 (1985): 54). According to Day, however, Tannit has more in common with Astarte than with Asherah, but at least one inscription from Carthage clearly differentiates the two, so Day concludes that Tannit is either "a form of Anath or an independent deity" (Day 1986: 397-98). At any rate, the question of Tannit's equation with Asherah may be moot in this regard because, according to P. Mosca, Tannit's name appears only sporadically in Punic sacrificial inscriptions, and that "It was Baal Hamon who was ... the head of the Punic pantheon, and it was primarily to him that children were sacrificed" (see Maier 1986: 159-60n282). So although it is possible that children were sacrificed to Canaanite deities in ancient Palestine, no supporting archaeological evidence has been found, and the theories of identity that link actual evidence of sacrifice with the goddess Asherah are weak.

In spite of whatever reasons the Yahwists had for condemning her, be it

inter-cultural rivalry, sexual prudery, or the (possibly paranoid) fear of diabolic ritual slaughter, the worship of Asherah, "which had been popular among the Hebrew tribes for three centuries" before the establishment of the monarchy, continued to be celebrated with such persistent enthusiasm that, during the 370 years in which the Solomonic Temple stood in Jerusalem, the statue of Asherah was present in the Temple for no less than 236 of those years, "opposed only by a few prophetic voices crying out against it at relatively long intervals" (Patai 1967: 49-50). Although Athirat/Elat/Asherah had played a relatively minor role in classical Ugaritic mythological texts, she went on to become an extraordinarily popular and durable deity. The diffusion of the cult of Asherah (from Hierapolis and the Near East to Spain) and its endurance (from the second millennium to the Christian Era) are remarkable enough, but even more impressive is its basic consistency over the centuries (Maier 1986).

Whether the Asherah referred to the Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom inscriptions is the consort of Yahweh or a cultic object associated with his worship, it seems clear that, in spite of the intensity and increasing frequency of the prophetic demand for the worship of Yahweh as the one and only god, the Israelites combined the worship of Yahweh with that of Asherah — along with other, originally Canaanite, gods and goddesses — in many places and times from the earliest days of Israel in the land of Canaan down to the destruction of Jerusalem, and thereafter, at least, in Egyptian exile. A small remnant of Judah, languishing in exile in Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, delivered the most poignant defense of Asherism recorded in the Hebrew Bible. When Jeremiah attempted to convince them that the national catastrophe which had befallen them was a punishment for their love of idolatry, and that they would perish in Egypt if they did not repent (Jmh 44:15-19), a great crowd of men and women rejected Jeremiah's admonition, saying that as long as they had offered libations and made cakes for the Queen of Heaven that their lives had been safe and full, but since the rites they celebrated had been outlawed they had been destitute and had "perished either by sword or by famine."

If we are to apply Newman's standard of "chronic vigour" as one of the marks that distinguishes a genuine religious practice from a corruption, the ancient Hebrew veneration of Asherah would certainly pass the test. The recent culture-wide increase in the appreciation of the feminine and the resulting insights have gone a long way to explain the persistence of Asheran devotion in ancient Palestine: the intrinsic value of the feminine in our image of the divine.

Fritz Muntean has an MA in Religious Studies from the University of British Columbia. He is Co-Editor of The Pomegranate.

The Rose Beyond the Grave

by Evan John Johns

When I was discussing ‘clan’ matters with some American visitors a few years ago, we reached a point where, if we were to go on talking, a single red rose would then have to be placed upon the table. This was done, and from that moment on, everyone present was honour-bound never to repeat anything said at that table to any outsider. For what was discussed was now *sub rosa*, literally, “under the rose.”

This equation of the rose with secrecy goes back to Pagan Roman times, supposedly when Cupid gave a rose to Harpocrates, god of silence, to symbolize concealing the secrets of Venus. Hence early Christians rejected the rose as a decorative motif because of its associations with Roman depravity. Yet the rose crept back in, as in the ‘rose windows’ of many medieval churches, not to mention the rose hip’s utility as an inexpensive and ideally shaped material for making rosary beads—reinforcing its name, which comes from the Virgin Mary’s allegorical ‘crown of roses.’

Among occultists, the rose symbolizes secrets of the mysteries. In the case of my own tradition, the Clan of Tubal Cain, it is also associated with the grave. Many of us hope and believe that there is another life beyond the grave. Some Pagans cast their ‘Summerlands’ as merely a more kindly version of this present world. In my tradition, we believe that we are reborn time and time again, each life shaped by the way we lived our past life, until in the end we become spiritually advanced enough not to have to return to this world. Instead, we are absorbed into and become as one with the Godhead that first seeded this earth with fragments of itself, each fragment becoming an individual soul.

Still, no one as yet has offered concrete and irrefutable proof of life after death, such as would stand up in a court of law. No matter our religion, no matter how much we delve into our innermost being to dredge up past-life experiences, in the end all that we have left is our personal belief in the existence of a soul and of a life beyond the grave. Only when we cross from life to death can we find the true answer to the secret that we call ‘The Rose Beyond the Grave.’

If we believe in the existence of an immortal soul, we are faced with the question of what happens to it after death. Since every religion offers its own version of the afterlife, they cannot all be right — or can they? One of my first lessons in the Craft dealt with this very subject. I was told, “For many eons the human spirit had no abode, then finally by desire to survive [it] created the pathway into the Otherworlds. Nothing is got by doing nothing, and whatever we

do now creates the world in which we exist tomorrow. The same applies to death: what we have created in thought, we create in that other reality. We should remember that Desire was the first of all created things.”

If this be true, then there can be as many Otherworld Places of the Dead as there are religions, and each one will be equally valid in its own right without denying or contradicting the validity of others created by the collective minds and desires of a religion’s followers. If a small group of rail enthusiasts believe firmly enough in a heaven where all the trains are steam-powered, run on time, and never have problems with the wrong sort of snow or leaves on the line, then it would exist, because their desires would have brought about its creation. Likewise, because we want to belief in reincarnation, therefore it exists, because we have used our God-given gifts to create our own eternity.

My Craft teacher Robert Cochrane once said, “When I am dead, I shall go to another place that myself and those who have gone before me have created. Without their work it would not exist; it was their faith that built it, and it is my believing in it that will secure my inheritance.” This place is none other than the Castle that spins without motion between two worlds. When we wish to express this graphically, we use the symbol of a castle surrounded by a wreath of red roses.

If you can look out over the ocean towards the setting sun, you may see this place, a place dream-woven by visionaries of old and handed down to us in poetry, there where the sky and water meet — if you have the eyes of a seer, the heart of a poet, and an intense longing in your soul to find it. Sit on a cliff top on a warm summer evening, looking at the clouds low down on the horizon. Gradually out of the haze you see the dark island at the castle’s base begin to form. Then the pinnacles take shape, stained red by the setting sun. For a while the castle hangs there between the twin worlds of heaven and earth, yet joined to neither one; then slowly it fades into the coming night. Others may tell you that you saw only a trick of light playing on a cloud formation, but deep inside you know different. You have seen the place where your soul will journey when it is time for you to “go into the golden sunset and into the golden rest.”

All well and good, but is looking at castles in the clouds of any practical use? It is when combined with the ritual called “The Chapel of the Grave,” a ritual which can produce a different theophany of the castle, which is part of the lifelong work of contributing to the creation of the clan’s Otherworld.

Think of a ruined chapel, long deserted by any congregation, lying abandoned and empty of any spiritual feeling. Your working group will the one to reawaken the latent power within its walls. Inside the chapel, to the left of the building’s east-west centre line, is a shallow open grave, with its head toward the east. This recreated grave will serve as the ritual’s focal point.

But if the “Grave” is an abstract concept, why seek to recreate it? We

You see between the Otherworld trees a pure white light, and in its midst is a naked woman mounted on a horse. What you are seeing is Truth naked and unadorned, manifesting itself as the Lady surrounded by the brilliant light of inspiration. It is then that a voice tells you, "Here comes the lass -- let us worship Her."

within the Clan of Tubal Cain see this effort as part of our clan mythos. Years ago, so the story goes, when the "clan" was a clan, three separate groups within it each had custody of one specific mythically important site: the Cave of the Cauldron, the Chapel of the Grave, and the Stone Stile. I would hesitate to say whether this was literally true or not, but my teacher, Robert Cochrane, was particularly interested in ritual workings done underground in caves. I have many memories of crawling around underground looking for a suitable place.

At the same time, we were also on the lookout for a ruined barn or cottage that we could convert into a 'chapel.' It had to have the remains of four walls but no roof. We knew what we wanted because we had seen it all before as guests of another coven. The 'chapel' exists and the 'grave' exists; and even though there were minor differences between their version of the Rose Beyond the Grave and ours, the basic belief that the Rose is the symbol of what lies beyond this life was the same. In fact, it was at that self-same grave that I first made the statement of belief formulated by Robert Cochrane: "When I am dead, I shall go to another place that myself and those who have gone before me have created. Without their work, it would not exist. It was their faith that built it, and it is my believing in it that will secure my inheritance."

In the rite, the 'grave' is on an East-West axis with its head at the Eastern end. This arrangement shows that only the living can greet the morning sun, while the souls of the dead follow the path of the setting sun into the shadowlands that lie beyond the horizon. So ingrained is this arrangement in most people's minds that a common euphemism for death used to be, "Old So-and-so has gone West."

When the ritual cup is dedicated and the libation poured, it is always to the West and to the Lady of the Castle herself. Unlike those coven rites in which the Guardians of the Quarters are invoked by prayer and supplication, the quarters for this ritual are hallowed by sprinkling each in turn with 'charged' or sanctified water from a bowl, using a lustration brush made up of twigs. First, the Magister

(priest) sprinkles a few drops of water into the grave and then drops in a single red rose with its flower pointing to the head. Then the rest of the gathering step across the open grave and gather round the fire. (Once they have stepped across the grave, they have placed themselves 'under the rose' and are sworn to secrecy about what manifests in the circle.) The quarters of East, South, and West are then hallowed, but North is not included, for when the grave is hallowed, we consider North to have been hallowed as well.

We dedicate the eastern quarter to the Young Horned King of the dawn sunrise, son of the bright morning star and lord of the East. South is dedicated to the Golden-haired Goddess of the corn whose spirit is chased around the field by the reapers until she is at last trapped in the final sheaf to be cut. West, of course, is under the sway of the Prince of the Underworld, the dark lord of the mound through whose realm the 'westbound' soul has to pass on its way to the Castle. Finally, the gathering is sprinkled with a little of the water and the Maid (priestess) pronounces a benediction upon them.

Without breaching the pledge of the rose too much, I can categorically state that one of two things will happen when the group starts pacing a slow, widdershins 'Mill': either nothing, in which case everyone would have had a pleasant but innocuous evening out, or they will hear a newborn baby crying. This crying signifies the waking of the primal spirit from the Great Silence which we see as the beginning of all matters spiritual. Next, everyone becomes aware of the presence of the Old Man himself: he is the messenger of the Goddess, and even though he has the power to take other forms, there is no mistaking the feeling you get in his presence. You know you are definitely seeing the Master. As Cochrane once put in a letter to the ceremonial magician W.G. Gray, "I was hauled out of myself," and this is really what happens. You are hauled out of your body into an Otherworld greenwood and find yourself alongside the Master ready to bend your knee to the Lady. You see between the Otherworld trees a pure white light, and in its midst is a naked woman mounted on a horse. What you are seeing is Truth naked and unadorned, manifesting itself as the Lady surrounded by the brilliant light of inspiration. It is then that a voice tells you, "Here comes the lass — let us worship Her."

Then all of a sudden there is a jerk and a crash, and you find yourself back in your body, still pacing the Mill which of its own accord starts to wind down, leaving all who have seen Her not only physically drained but trembling as well with a combination of awe and fear, for they have seen face to face the cosmic power we call Truth.

The rite's final part turns toward the West. The participants stand on the Eastern side of the fire while the Magister and Maid are in the West. They then dedicate the bread and wine as usual with this difference: they sprinkle the bread

with salt, symbol of human labour, before it is served. After everyone has taken a bite of bread and sip of wine, the Maid fills the cup once more and holds it aloft in dedication to the Lady of the Castle, where we hope one day to find rest before rebirth, and to the souls of those gone before us, who by their actions created this sacred place. She then empties the cup on the ground in libation, after which the Magister calls down a blessing in the Goddess's name. Then everyone, except those whose job it is to retrieve the ritual articles and douse the fire, leaves the circle by recrossing the grave and then gathers at the place where the feast will be held.

The ritual stang used in our clan's rituals represents the single path of enlightenment or death. The promise of the rose then becomes the soul's journey after death. To us, this journey takes the soul along the path through the Underworld to the banks of the timeless river that is the boundary between this world and the next. Wide and slow-flowing, it washes away all earthbound memories and desires, leaving the spirit clean once again. Far out in this river, whose opposite bank can never been seen or reached by us under normal circumstances, is the island on which stands the three-towered castle. Perched on a rocky outcrop with a path snaking up from a desolate plain covered with stunted bushes to its gate, it is what the soul will see as it is carried there by the hooded silent ferryman. Once ashore, the soul starts walking towards the castle. Then the miracle of the Rose occurs; the wastelands start to bloom again with blood-red roses until the castle itself seems to be set in a red sea of flowers, and the soul instinctively knows that the Goddess, true to Her word, has "gathered it up home again."

How can we be so sure of this? I can only state what I was told when I joined the Craft: "For many eons the human spirit had no abode, then finally by desire to survive [it] created the pathway into the Otherworlds. Nothing is got by doing nothing, and whatever we do now creates the world in which we exist tomorrow. The same applies to death: what we have created in thought, we create in that other reality. We should remember that Desire was the first of all created things." It was our desire to live beyond death that created this sanctuary of the soul; and as a way of reinforcing this belief, we use both the symbol and the ritual of the Chapel of the Grave.

During the mid-1960s, Evan John Jones found the coven of Robert Cochrane, a creative figure in British Witchcraft. After Cochrane's death in 1966, Jones and others continued and expanded Cochrane's tradition. He has authored or co-authored three books: Witchcraft: A Tradition Renewed (1990), Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance (1997), and a third now in progress in collaboration with Chas S. Clifton. An earlier version of this article appeared in The Cauldron 78 (1995).

BOOK REVIEWS: Two Roads to Magical Herbalism

A Compendium of Herbal Magick

Paul Beyerl

Custer, WA: Phoenix Publishing, 1998

Paperback, 528 pp, index, B&W illustrations. US \$24.50

Psychedelic Shamanism

Jim DeKorne

Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics, 1994

Paperback, 155 pp, index, color photographs, B&W illustrations. US \$19.95

Reviewed by Chas S. Clifton

University of Southern Colorado

Writers of nonfiction often say that their books are made up of other books. That statement acknowledges the necessity of research. When it comes to herbalism, however, an unfortunate tendency at least three centuries old leads writers to take the saying too literally. Too many Pagan writers just recycle older published material without ever getting their hands dirty in the herb garden — or at least they convey that impression.

Of course, one of the joys of 'magical herbalism' Wicca style is apparently that nothing needs to be tested. A writer can compile all the older material that he or she can lay hands on and produce a work full of "Legend has it ..." and "It is said that ..."

Consider part of Paul Beyerl's entry for basil in his new *Compendium of Herbal Magic*: "It is believed that Solomon chose sweet basil when making his ritual asperger to use in his temple." The writer's use of the passive voice ("It is believed") is a tipoff that he takes no responsibility for the accuracy of his material nor even feels obligated to tell his reader where it came from. Beyerl also refers to his plants as "herbes." Evidently the silent final 'e' is there to make his reader feel Olde English or some such thing. In North America at the close of the twentieth century, who needs this?

In Beyerl's case, he mainly recycles his own *Master Book of Herbalism* (Phoenix 1984) and an even older work, Mary Grieve's *A Modern Herbal*, first published in 1931. Grieve combined plant descriptions, culinary and medical

uses and a bit of folklore for each herb she described in her two-volume work, but her research was state-of-the-art in the 1920s. Herbal knowledge has progressed since then, and older is not necessarily better.

Perhaps we have two adjacent issues here, medicine and magic. If you want to learn the herbal medicine of your region, then start by finding recent, informed books, seminars, and so forth particular to it. For instance, Michael Moore's books and workshops are unsurpassed for the American Southwest and Southern Rocky Mountains. (Visit his Southwest School of Botanical Medicine on the Web at <http://chili.rt66.com/hrbmoore/HOMEPAGE/HomePage.html>) Another good western North American starting point is Gregory L. Tilford's *The EcoHerbalist's Fieldbook: Wildcrafting in the Mountain West* (Mountain Weed Publishing, 1993).

To keep up with current research, consider a subscription to *HerbalGram*, magazine of the American Botanical Council, whose motto is "Educating the public on the use of herbs and phytomedicines." This quarterly magazine costs \$25/year from the American Botanical Council, P.O. Box 201660, Austin, Texas 78720 (www.herbalgram.org).

A good history of herbal medicine is Barbara Griggs' *Green Pharmacy* (1981, 1997) which includes material on the differing legal status of herbal medicine in the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia.

When it comes to magic, however, recycling reigns. Here Beyerl barely improves on Scott Cunningham's sketchy and derivative *Magical Herbalism* (1982) and *Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* (1985). *Magical Herbalism*, for instance, lists basil as having the basic powers of "protection, intellectual, manifestations" and suggests: "Carry the buds to mend a broken heart. Burn to set up a material basis in which spirits may manifest during ceremonies of this kind. Add to love and protection sachets." Cunningham's larger encyclopedia adds instructions for using basil in love divinations and claims that whether a sprig of basil withers in someone's hand tells whether that person is "chaste or promiscuous." It also "is used to keep goats away from your property, to attract scorpions, and to prevent inebriation." (The passive voice again.) Did the late Cunningham ever compare basil's power to a four-foot wire-mesh fence as a goat-stopper? Did he ever desire scorpions in his home? We will never know.

Sadly, Beyerl's and Cunningham's common style is the norm in Pagan writing on magical herbalism. As a reader, I miss one thing: the voice of experience. I would never want to trust any physical ill to a herbal practitioner who had never tried his or her own preparations; likewise, I miss the "I did it and this is what happened" component in books such as *A Compendium of Herbal Magick*. Other writers on herbalism can and do take that step. For an example, read Matthew Woods's *Seven Herbs: Plants as Teachers* (North

Sadly, Beyerl's and Cunningham's common style is the norm in Pagan writing on magical herbalism. As a reader, ... I miss the "I did it and this is what happened" component ...

Atlantic Books, 1986). Woods does not merely copy the words of bygone experts such as Paracelsus and Nicholas Culpeper, but he also tests them against his experience (Is *Artemisia* really an herb of Venus?) and provides case histories of healings. For another approach to learning directly from plants rather than from someone else's books, read Stephen Buhner's *Sacred Plant Medicine* (Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1996).

Good writing on magical herbalism can be found, but it seems to be coming from outside the capital-P Pagan community. Jim DeKorne's *Psychedelic Shamanism* serves as an example. Subtitled "The cultivation, preparation, and shamanic use of psychotropic plants," it was published by Loompanics Unlimited, "sellers of unusual books," (P.O. Box 1197, Port Townsend, Washington 98363).

The way that DeKorne treats the tricky psychotropic Solanaceae (belladonna, datura, and so forth) indicates the depth of his research. Cunningham, after giving an unattributed legend in his *Encyclopedia* about "the priests of Bellona" drinking a belladonna infusion in ancient Rome, goes on to write: "In the past [belladonna] was used to encourage astral projection and to produce visions, but safer alternatives are available today and belladonna is best avoided." He suggests using datura "to break spells by sprinkling it around the home. It also protects against evil spirits. ... A few datura leaves placed on the crown of a hat protects [sic] the wearer from apoplexy as well as sunstroke." His shamanic advice: "Do not eat."

Beyerl skips belladonna altogether. He lists datura (as "jimsonweed") in two long lists of 'Magickal Herbes' and 'Visionary Herbes' but says only this in its individual entry: "In some of the shamanic cultures of northern Mexico and in some of the religious which pay homage to the Universe with peyote, jimsonweed is held in poor esteem, believed to be an herbe which is used by negative practitioners. Established lore does not recommend this herbe for use."

And what is a 'magickal herbe'? To Beyerl, "A Magickal Herbe is one which, well, has magick! ... primarily, a Magickal Herbe is used to bring about change."



Someone wishing to practice shamanic witchcraft might be looking for a little more information than that. They may, like Jim DeKorne, “be interested in the Mystery of consciousness, and ... use shamanic substances and techniques to help [them] access states of awareness that are not easily available by other means.”

Psychedelic Shamanism offers such a reader an entire chapter on the belladonna alkaloids, on top of six preceding chapters discussing shamanic models of reality and the hypothesized existence of plant-based “allies” or teachers, “entities of the imaginal realm.” This, not list-making, is writing about magical herbalism.

DeKorne goes on to suggest the Solanaceae’s association with “aggressive female sexuality, a mystique which, in common with the *femme fatale* and witch archetypes in general, is almost the defining characteristic of the ancient goddess religions,” including, he adds, some of the more violent manifestations of the worship of Kali. “The consistency of these themes suggests that the entities associated with the belladonna alkaloids are primordial earth-forces (always symbolically female) which have been brutally and systematically repressed in human consciousness for literally thousands of years.” Perhaps, he suggests, this explains why most accounts of datura trips by Western male writers are so negative, yet “both female witches and New World shamans maintain a respectful affinity for the plant.” DeKorne goes on to provide cultivation instructions for several *Datura* species and includes descriptions of his own and others’ experience with it — even though he admits that it is a plant agent he normally avoids.

His other chapters discuss in similar detail ayahuasca and similar plant combinations, psilocybin, and various lesser-known “minor psychedelics” obtainable from plants. His references range from famous ethnobotanists such as Richard Schultes to Kabbalists, Gnostics, shamans of various cultures and their anthropological interlocutors, as well as modern advocates of entheogen-based exploration such as Terence McKenna and Alexander Shulgin. I am still waiting for the Wiccan magical herbalists to reach out as far, instead of recycling a narrow Renaissance tradition of plant correspondences. But meanwhile, it’s time to go water the *Datura*.

Chas S. Clifton lives in the Wet Mountains of southern Colorado. He edited Llewellyn Publications’ Witchcraft Today series and co-authored with Evan John Jones a new book, Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance, also from Llewellyn.



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Readers' Forum

*Shakespeare, The 9 Million Women,
Keller on Gimbutas*

2

Jenny Blain

*Sei>r and Sei>rworkers: Recovering
shamanic practice in contemporary Heathenism*

6

Robert J. Wallis

*Journeying the Politics of Ecstasy:
Anthropological Perspectives on Neoshamanism*

20

Richard Smoley

The Old Religion

29

Brian Hayden

*An Archaeological Evaluation
of the Gimbutas Paradigm*

35



The Pomegranate

Copyright

© 1998 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate

is published at the Cross-Quarter Holidays by *The Pomegranate*,
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019.

Subscriptions:

4 issues: \$16US; 8 issues: \$30US
Please send US Cash, US Stamps,
Checks drawn on US banks, or Money
Orders in US funds to the above address.

Deadline:

The Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue. See the inside back cover for our Call for Papers, and send to the above address for our Writers' Guidelines, or to our email address below.

Internet Home Page:

<http://www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/>
(email: antech@teleport.com)

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

Co-Editors:

Fritz Muntean,
Diana Tracy

Associate Editor:

Chas S. Clifton

Editorial Board:

Maggie Carew,
Stephen McManus

Editorial Assistants:

Angeline Kantola,
Melissa Hope

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

Even before *The Pomegranate* began publishing, we were receiving requests for articles which addressed the wider interests of the broader Neopagan community. We are pleased to present two such offerings in this issue. The first is by Jenny Blain, from Canada's Dalhousie University, and deals with an exciting oracular element as it appears in both modern Heathen practice and its related history. The second, by England's Robert Wallis, has been adapted from a paper he presented at last year's Anthropology of Consciousness conference in Portland, Oregon. This controversial piece represents its author's evaluation of the current relationship between native shamans, Neoshamanic practitioners, and the interest taken by the academic community in both.

We are also delighted to be able to reprint an article, "The Old Religion", which originally appeared as the introduction to *Gnosis* magazine's recent issue on Neopaganism. In our editorial opinion, *Gnosis* magazine, from its beginning in 1985, has always stood head-and-shoulders above those current alternative religions publications which are aimed at the broader reading public. *Pom* readers are encouraged to check out its early issues, particularly #9: "Northern Mysteries" and #13: "Goddesses". We especially recommend the recent issue #48: "Witchcraft & Paganism" (in which this article appeared) and the subsequent #49: "The New Age?" (especially those Letters to the Editor addressing issues raised in the previous issue) as required reading for all those interested in continuing to push the edges of the Neopagan envelope.

We are also pleased to present yet another article on the Gimbutas paradigm, this one original to *The Pom*, written from the point of view of academic archaeology.

And speaking of Letters to the Editor, we would like to thank all our subscribers who contributed to the Readers' Forum — which we are happy to reinstate in this issue. Because of space constraints we were only able to publish a fraction of the many letters we received. We hope that this enthusiastic engagement with the process of scholarly dialogue on the part of our readers in not a one-time event. Keep up the good work, and keep those cards and letters coming! We hope, by the next issue, to be able to continue our 'Workings' and 'Book Review' sections, to which we encourage our readers to contribute.

Persephone's Hard-working Minions

The Pomegranate READERS' FORUM

We are pleased to be able to resume publication of our Readers' Forum. Please contribute so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Deletions are indicated by ellipses (...) and the full text will always be made available upon request. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended by one or two issues.

Chas Clifton writes:

Maggie Carew's excellent piece in *The Pomegranate* #4, with its thesis that William Shakespeare had some knowledge of ceremonial magic, is intriguing and provocative. I wish to point out one misreading of his text, however.

Shakespeare, as Carew rightly said, preferred to elevate ordinary language rather than write some artificially latinate tongue. So he would not have gone to Classical mythology for "eyas/Aias/Ajax" in the lines, "... an aery of children/little eyases, that cry out on top of the question ..."

An eyas is a young hawk or falcon, and the image is one of a nest full of hungry little birds, mouths gaping, up in an "aerie" or "eyrie" or "aery" or however you wish to spell it — a place where raptors nest.

Although falconry tended to be an upper-class recreation, perhaps he thought his audience would have some passing knowledge of it, the sort that we might have about yacht racing from watching footage of the America's Cup races. And the wealthier of them might well have gone hawking themselves.

If you know falconers, when they get going with the Anglo-Norman technical jargon, it's like a quick trip back to the late fifteenth century, let alone Shakespeare's era!

Maggie Carew replies:

I am grateful to Chas Clifton for pointing this out to me. The whole point of The Pomegranate is that we should learn from it — contributors as well as readers. We always learn from our mistakes. However, I have no excuse for a second mistake in the essay, this one made not from ignorance but from carelessness. It was Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, who died in 1609; his wife outlived him and inherited the 'second-best bed'. Documents exist which show that Shakespeare was good to his mother and provided well for her after she was widowed, so he must have loved her, and her death might well have affected him in the way I suggested.

Carmella Huggins writes:

Thank you very much for Jenny Gibbon's excellent article on the Great European Witch Hunt. I especially enjoyed the "Burning Times Quiz." My husband, who is not a Pagan but is a lawyer, took the quiz and scored 9 out of 10! "Of course," he said, "trial by neighbors is going to be a bloodbath. Of course things like this happen when central authority breaks down. Of course the Inquisition refused to persecute witchcraft and protected the accused whenever it could. Don't you people know any European history?"

I would like to ask one question, however. The article never mentions the actual source of the preposterous (and embarrassing) figure of 'Nine Million Women.' The first record I know of it was as a dedication at the entrance to Old Gerald's Witchcraft Museum on the Isle of Man. Did Gardner simply make it up, or was he quoting an existing source?

Jenny Gibbons replies:

Matilda Gage is the person originally responsible for the estimate that there were 9,000,000 deaths in the Great European Witch Hunt. Gage was a suffragist and an early feminist writer. The figure first appears in her book Women, Church, and State (1893). If I remember her book correctly, she was describing how the Church had oppressed women throughout time. Since at that point the Great Hunt was generally blamed on the Catholic Church, I believe Gage created the figure to emphasize the enormity of the Church's "crimes against women".

Gage offered no evidence to support this number, and there was no reliable information available to her: at the time, no one had counted the trials of any country. And although she wrote when estimates were at their absolute highest, her figure was still uniquely enormous. The highest estimates of the time generally fell into the one to three million range.

From Gage, the figure entered popular history in two ways. First, as Ronald Hutton noted in Enchante, Gerald Gardner used the number in his witchcraft museum and in The Meaning of Witchcraft. Gardner didn't credit Gage or cite her directly, though she appears to be his source.

Second, Mary Daly used this estimate in her book Gyn-Ecology. Unlike Gardner, Daly did credit Gage. Many authors picked the number up from Daly's influential book and repeated it, usually without crediting (or questioning) its source. It quickly became "common knowledge": a "fact" everyone knew, but no one could explain.

Cat Chapin-Bishop writes:

I'm writing to tell you of my disappointment with Mara Keller's article,

“The Interface of Archaeology and Mythology: A Philosophical Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm.”

I have always loved the implications of Marija Gimbutas’ work. I had never seriously thought about women as important in prehistory before I read her stuff, and I have found it continuing to liberate my imagination even as, through wider reading, I’ve come to see more and more of her ideas as resting on less and less of a foundation ... Keller wants me to take Gimbutas’ “methodology of archeomythology” seriously (and I want to, Goddess knows!) but she doesn’t give me much in the way of reasons for it: there is very little examination of the details of the interpretations Gimbutas makes, and virtually no attempt made to define “archeomythology”, let alone defend it. ... And she goes into great detail to explain the theory of knowledge held by Plato, I suppose in order to support the suggestion that Gimbutas’ work ought properly to be evaluated according to the rules for *noesis*, or “mystical intuition” as opposed to — what? — critical thinking, such as ordinary and less loveable theories are subjected to?

Frankly, this seems like smoke and mirrors to me — or maybe just a plain old-fashioned appeal to authority sort of argument: “Marija Gimbutas (who is smarter than you because she spoke twenty languages) and Plato (who is smarter than you because he’s a famous dead philosopher) both thought this kind of argument made sense. So who are you to question it? ... To me, this is less a “feminist epistemological critique of modern science” then it is an almost insulting disdain for my ability to think for myself when given evidence to consider. ...

*Cat Chapin-Bishop holds an MSW from the University of Illinois,
and has a private practice in psychotherapy.
She is also a Wiccan High Priestess and longtime feminist and gadfly.*

Jenny Blain writes:

... I’m sure others will raise questions of interpretation of the archaeological data, which I’ll refer to here only briefly. Suffice it to say the old concepts of both peaceful “Old Europeans” and warlike “Indo-European speaking invaders” have been challenged on the basis of what is found in their burial or dwelling sites (as well as on theoretical grounds).

How about the “Kurgan” invasions, and the changes they wrought in society? Surely they occurred — doesn’t the Cavalli-Sforza article demonstrate this? The answer, I’m afraid, has to be “No”. Cavalli-Sforza *et al* (*Science*, 259: 639-646, 1993) are displaying a principal components mapping of present-day population data. To illustrate their technique and its results they give maps of Europe showing the values of the first to fourth principal components from

Keller wants me to take Gimbutas’ “methodology of archeomythology” seriously (and I want to, Goddess knows!) but she doesn’t give me much in the way of reasons for it ... virtually no attempt is made to define “archeomythology”, let alone defend it.

statistical analysis of gene frequencies, based on 95 genetic markers. Frequencies for the third principal component for Europe, responsible for about 10 percent of the measured genetic variation, are on a gradient from approximately south-east to north-west. This map is “data in search of a theory”, and could be explained by Gimbutas’ postulated rapid expansions of bronze-age warriors, [however] Cavalli-Sforza *et al*, [invoke] Renfrew’s theory of an earlier, slower, spread of neolithic farming people, bringing with them their language — which would make the “Old Europe” neolithic dwellers speakers of Indo-European languages. Indeed, say Cavalli-Sforza *et al*, it may be that both, together with some much later “expansions of, for example, the Scythians and of barbarians who infiltrated or conquered the Roman Empire before and after its fall” may be responsible, so that “a sharp distinction may require better genetic and archeological data” (p.642-3). Other events have been proposed to account for the map — such as Jonathan Adams’ and Marcel Otte’s suggestion of an earlier (~9,000 b.p.) rapid expansion of a particular Mesolithic gatherer-hunter population (Current Anthropology: in press. See <http://www.esd.ornl.gov/projects/qen/Indo2.html>). Adams and Otte conclude that from the Cavalli-Sforza data there is no way to evaluate the “truth” of these competing hypotheses.

Next, the uniqueness of Gimbutas’ vision of a Goddess-worshipping, matrifocal Old Europe. The concept of a Great Goddess, whose culture was destroyed by invaders, can be traced back at least 150 years, and its roots lie deeper. (See e.g. Ronald Hutton, 1997, “The Neolithic great goddess: a study in modern tradition”, *Antiquity* 71 (1997) 91-9). Gimbutas’ work, and methods of interpretation, took this concept out of the realms of romanticism and into those of feminist discourse, but she did not create the concept. Indeed, Gimbutas’ narrative of the Great Goddess and her civilization, demolished by warlike Indo-Europeans, is merely the other side of the coin of earlier stories of these noble Indo-Europeans bronze age warriors who brought their “superior” qualities as overlords to an “inferior” people. Both are sweeping simplifications, both read

continued on page 47

SEIDHR AND SEIDHRWORKERS: Recovering shamanic practice in contemporary Heathenism

by Jenny Blain
Dalhousie University

The Saga of Eirik the Red describes the visit of a *spákona*, a seeress, to a Greenland farm, one thousand years ago. Her clothing and shoes, her staff and cloak, are detailed. She is asked to predict the progress of the community; she eats a meal of the hearts of the farm animals, and the next day a “high seat” is made ready for her, where she will sit to foretell. She engages in ritual practices known as *seidhr*; which requires a special song to be sung to “the powers” in order that she may gain their knowledge, in trance.

Within the community of those following Norse Heathen practices today, people are making attempts to reclaim practices of *seidhr*. They rely on accounts from the sagas and Eddas, scholars’ analyses of this literature, and parallels with shamanic practices elsewhere, using these within a framework of Norse cosmology and beliefs about soul, afterlife, and the nine-worlds. Seidhr-workers engage in faring-forth, trance-journeying, for a variety of ends, including healing and divination.

This article discusses *seidhr* as sets of practice informed by shamanism within a non-shamanic community, both today and in the past. It indicates some of the ambiguities inherent in early descriptions and how those affect present-day understandings of *seidhr* and its practitioners, and examines how today’s workers are reconstructing *seidhr* along with its dilemmas and contradictions, as shamanic practice within late-twentieth-century Heathenism.

fiorbjörg the Greenland seeress

An increasing number of people within today’s Heathenry, and more generally within paganism, are developing an interest in the practices known as *seidhr*; which some consider represent the remnants of shamanic tradition among the Scandinavian peoples of Northern Europe. In this article I will attempt to outline something of how these are being developed by some groups in North America today. Many diverse interpretations of *seidhr* are possible, and the term does not imply the same practices to all people. Let it be clear from the outset that what I am describing is how some groups do *seidhr*; and in particular “high-seat” or “oracular” *seidhr*. Neither I nor these groups claim to have uncovered the ultimate or only meaning of the term.

As part of my task, I indicate the sources from which reconstructions commence, and some of the debates, or arguments around *seidhr*-practice, today or in the past. As today’s Heathens are well aware, the past shapes the present, with actions

or thoughts long within Wyrd’s Well forming part of the weaving of present-day Earth-religion.

So I will begin with the most complete account of the phenomenon known as *oracular seidhr*: the visit of the *spákona*, fiorbjörg, to that Greenland farm, one thousand years ago, as described in the Saga of Eirik the Red. She wears a hood of lambskin lined with catskin, and has white catskin gloves. Her gown is girdled with a belt of touchwood, from which hangs a bag to hold magical items. Her cloak is blue, fastened with straps and adorned with stones, and stones stud the head of her staff. Her calfskin shoes are tied with thick laces, with tin buttons on their ends. The next day she sits in the high seat, on a cushion stuffed with hen’s feathers, to make her predictions.

The description continues:

A high-seat was prepared for her and a cushion laid under her; ... at sunset, she made the preparations which she needed to have to carry out *seidhr*. She also asked for those women who knew the wisdom (chant) which was necessary for *seidhr* and [who were] called Vardhlokur. But those women could not be found. Then the folk dwelling there were asked if anyone knew it. Then Gudhríðr said, ‘I am neither magically skilled nor a wise-woman, but Halldis, my foster-mother, taught me that chant in Iceland which she called Vardhlokur’...The women made a ring around the seat, and fiorbjörg sat up on it. Then Gudhríðr recited the chant so fairly and well, that it seemed to no one that they had heard the chant spoken with a fairer voice than was here. The spae-wife thanked her for the recital and said (that) many of the powers were now satisfied and thought it fair to hear when the chant was recited so well... “And now many of those things are shown to me which I was denied before, and many others”. (*Eiríks saga raudha* 4. From the translation used by Kveldúlfur Gundarsson, in “Spacraft, Seidhr and Shamanism,” I, *Idunna* 25, December 1994, p.33.)

The song Gudhríðr sang is, unfortunately, not given us.

The account of fiorbjörg the seeress, is the basis for today’s practice of *oracular seidhr*; also known as *high-seat seidhr* or spae-working. In this article I intend first to look at the construction of high-seat or oracular *seidhr*; then refer to other uses and “ways of knowing” related to *seidhr*; and finally touch briefly on some of the contradictions and ambiguities, including ambiguity involving gender. However, the relation of *seidhr* and gender is complex, with a basis in how the gender practices of one thousand years ago were themselves constructed and how they are echoed in the present. The details of that story are for another day.

Seidhr in today’s Ásatrú practice

I have observed a number of high-seat *seidhr* rituals conducted by practitioners of Ásatrú or Heathenism, a religion reconstructed from the extant material on Norse and Germanic pre-Christian practices, and participated in these on a variety of levels. Within North America, a school of practice is emerging, based on the work done by the Californian group known as Hrafnar (the Ravens), and particularly the author Diana Paxson, to reconstruct oracular *seidhr*. Hrafnar began its reconstruction with the

account of *fiorbjörg*, quoted above, using such details as were available: the seeress needed first to familiarize herself with the community and its energies, she then sat on a high seat and a special song was sung to ‘the powers’ that enabled her to gain her knowledge — or ‘the powers’ to give it to her. The word ‘powers’ (*náttúru*; from latin *natura*, nature, in plural meaning spirits, rather than an Old Icelandic word) is uncertain: it may refer to ancestral spirits, elves (*álfar*) or other wights, or deities. The mechanism of how the seeress entered the trance in which she was able to acquire knowledge, or the process of questioning her, has not been handed down in the account. *Hrafnar* have therefore gone to other sources to find details of how a *seidhr* trance might be conducted.

Their main resources have been the Eddic poems *Völuspá*, *Baldrs draumr*, and *Völuspá in skamma* (the shorter *Völuspá*, forming a part of the poem *Hyndluljóð*). Each of these appears to show part of a question-and-answer process, in which one who knows, a seeress, a *Völva*, is asked to reveal her knowledge. In *Völuspá* the seeress speaks in answer to Óðinn, the god/magician; in *Baldrs draumr* Óðinn travels to a grave-mound, just outside Hela’s realm, and there raises the dead *Völva* to answer his questions. In *Hyndluljóð*, the giantess/seeress *Hyndla* is speaking to *Freya* and her follower *Ottar* about *Ottar*’s ancestry, when (in the portion known as The Shorter *Völuspá*) she starts of foretell the coming of *Ragnarok* and the fates of the Gods. From *Baldrs draumr* *Hrafnar* has taken the calling of the seeress:

Way-tame is my name, the son of Slaughter-tame,
Tell me the news from Hel — I know what’s happening in the world:
For whom are the benches decked with arm-rings,
The dais so fairly strewn with gold?
(*Baldrs Draumar* 6, *Poetic Edda*. 244)

From *Völuspá* and the Shorter *Völuspá* comes the pattern of question and seeress’s answer.

Much we have told you, we will tell you more,
It’s important that you know it, do you want to know more?
 (“Song of *Hyndla*”, *Poetic Edda*. 258.)

or more simply:

Do you understand yet, or what more?
(“*Voluspa*”, *Poetic Edda*. 7.)

Diana Paxson has described the construction of the high-seat *seidhr* ritual in The Return of the *Völva*, an article written for a Heathen journal, Mountain Thunder, and available through the world wide web at <http://vinland.org/heathen/hrafnar/seidh.html>. Drumming and singing accompany and facilitate the induction of the trance state. The guide narrates a meditative journey whereby all present, seers and questioners alike, travel through a tunnel of trees, down to the plain of *Midhgardhr* and the great tree *Yggdrasill*, then below one of its roots past

As today's Heathens are well aware, the past shapes the present, with actions or thoughts long within Wyrd's Well forming part of the weaving of present-day Earth-religion.

Urdh’s well and through caverns of Earth, across the echoing bridge with its guardian maiden *Móðgudhr* to the gates of *Hela*’s realm, the abode of the dead, for in Old Norse tradition wisdom comes from the dead, the ancestors. There the audience participants remain, in a light trance state, while the *seidhr*worker enters deep trance and journeys on her or his own, assisted by her or his spirit allies or “power animals”. One participant will act as *seidhr*-guide, singing the seeress through *Hela*’s gates, and calling to other participants to ask their questions, and the seeress to answer.

A *seidhmadhr*, *Jordsvin*, describes the journey and what he finds there.

... there’s a guided journey down to *Helheim*. The people that are doing the public oracular *seidhr* go with me, they stop at the gate. We stress stay with the group, don’t go runnin’ off and stirring up the *totnar*, you can mess yourself up. This is real stuff, you’re dealing with real beings, it can have real results. ... I go down, I go through *Hela*’s gate ... I see a lake, an island and a torch burning on it. It lights up, the torch and the lake light up the area enough to actually see the dead people. And I walk down there and they tend to gather round, and I’ll say, would those who need to speak with me or speak with the people I’m here representing please come forward. ... I’ve never seen anything scary, they look like people, the ones that have been there are passing on I guess to another life or whatever they’re going to do, sometimes they’re just like shadows, some look like living men and women, some are somewhere in between. Of course there’s many, many many of them. They ask me questions, sometimes they’ll speak. Sometimes I’ll be in trance to where I’m answering the questioner, and the voice that’s coming out of my mouth is, the intonation’s different, the accent’s a little different ... Sometimes I hear voices, sometimes I see pictures, impressions, feelings, I have my eyes closed physically, and I’m in a trance, and I got a shawl over my head, sometimes it’s almost like pictures on the back of my eyelids ...
(Interview, 1996)

Not all *seidhr*-workers see what *Jordsvin* sees. Even within *Hrafnar*’s scenario, each worker faces the task of seeking knowledge in their own way, within the trance. For *Winifred* — another seeress who has received training from *Hrafnar* — a large part of her work is in making contact with deities, and attempting to place other people, her *seidhr* clients, in a relationship with them.

(One of the reasons that I love the *seidhr* work is that due to people’s questions I have the chance to see their relationships with the deities that are, for example *Sif* comes often for a friend of mine, whom I do seings for...

And one of the most interesting seings that I had was for a young man, and *Heimdall* came for him. I’m trying to bring people closer to the gods and to their own souls...
(Interview, 1996)

In Völuspá the seeress speaks in answer to Óðhinn, the god/magician; in Baldrs draumr Óðhinn travels to a grave-mound, just outside Hela's realm, and there raises the dead Völva to answer his questions.

Another seidhrworker known as RavenHorn traces his seeings to varying sources depending on the questioner: after passing Hela's gates, he often journeys on a ship, which transports him to where the answer to the question can be found. At other times he travels in the form of a raven, seeing the countryside below him. Sometimes a question brings contact with a deity, particularly Heimdallr, Freyja, or Óðhinn. My own experiences as a seidhrworker usually involve being in darkness within a mound, solitary, and called forth by the seidhr-guide; visions, sounds, sensory experiences then arise in response to the questions that are asked, and these may involve people, animals, birds or trees, specific scenes or objects, sometimes music.

Hrafnar has now trained several people in their methods, and these people are training others, so that a fellowship of seeresses, and seers, all working in similar ways and following broadly similar methods, is emerging across North America. However not all *seidhr* workers follow this method, and even for those who do, not all seidhr-workings are oracular. Jordsvin uses similar methods of trance-journeying to dispell ghosts and finds himself called upon by people outside his religion to "unhaunt houses". Some have derived their practices independently of Hrafnar. Bil Linzie's work is chiefly in healing and soul-retrieval, and in dealing with death. He terms himself "seidman" and "wholemaker" his task is to make others whole. (See web pages at <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman/index.html>, *The Seidman Rants*.) Again, he finds himself called upon, as a shaman, by people outside his religion.

The seer/ess as shaman

It should be stated at once that Norse culture of 1000 years ago was not "shamanic": we do not find a shamanic complex of activities, no shaman is described as central to community life. There are kings and queens and battle-leaders, godhar associated with different deities, and in Iceland the emergence of a representative system of godhar, as regional administrators, coordinated by a "lawspeaker" — and no shamans, only occasional seidhrworkers, and other magic practitioners. Rather, it seems likely that oracular *seidhr* and other magical practices may form part of the rather scattered remnants of shamanic techniques in Norse culture, related to the shamanic practices of other cultures. Stephan Grundy points out (1995: 220) that "The only figures in Germanic culture which we can point to as bearing significant resemblance to the 'professional shaman'... are the seeresses who occupy a position of respect based on their visionary capabilities" though they do not demonstrate other shamanic techniques

or activities. These seeresses often are said to have been trained by "the Finns", which probably refers to the nomadic Saami, a truly "shamanic" people.

These seeresses enter again and again into the Icelandic poems and sagas. Katherine Morris has catalogued some of their activities. For instance:

Heidh, the sibyl of Hrólfs saga Kraka 3, was also treated hospitably and then asked to prophesy ... King Frodi asked her to make use of her talents, prepared a feast for her, and set her on platform for her spell-making. She then opened her mouth, yawned, cast a spell and chanted a verse ... (Morris 1991:45).

fiórdís, the seeress of Kormáks saga and Vatnsdæla saga, was "held in great esteem and knew many things", and the hill behind her dwelling was named after her Spákonufell, the mountain of the seeress. These women, and others, such as Oddbjörg of Víga-Glúms saga, Kjannok of Heidharvíga saga, Heimlaug of Gull-fióris saga, are woven into the fabric of the family sagas, the stories of everyday life, written by Icelanders two or three hundred years after Christianization to tell of the lives of their ancestors who settled the country. They can be seen as semi-historic; they, and others like them, lived and had their being within a cultural framework in which trance, magic and prophesy were possibilities for women: to the extent that in the later legendary sagas and short stories (told for entertainment value), the seeing-women appear once again.

In the fláttir of Norna-Gest, it is told that three wise women came to the house of Norna-Gest's parents, at his birth, and foretold his future: a lack of attention to the youngest norn caused her to attempt to countermand the great prophesies of her elders, stating that the boy's life would be no longer than that of the candle burning beside him. The eldest norn extinguished the candle and gave it to the boy's mother to preserve. Three hundred years later, so goes to story, Norna-Gest related his story to the king of Norway, accepted Christian baptism, and had the candle lit, dying as the flame expired. Arrow-Odd, the hero of (the late and fantastical) Örvar-odds saga, likewise had an extended life, of 300 years, and both this life and the strange death that ended it were predicted by a *seidhkona* known as Heidhr.

Seeing might be only one component of what one who was *fjölkyngi* — possessing much (magical) knowledge — could do. A number of accounts refer to people who change shape, to avoid enemies, to seek knowledge, or to cause trouble. In sagas and in today's folktales, it is told of how people would discover that their problems were associated with the appearance of a particular animal. When this animal was wounded or killed, a woman would have a similar wound. For instance, the in Saga of Kormák the Skáld, when Kormák and his brother set off in a ship, a walrus appears close by. Kormák aims a spear at it, striking it, and it disappear and does not come up again. The walrus had the eyes of the woman Thorveig, described in the saga as *fjölkuniga*. "fióttust menn flar kenna augu fiórveigar." (Men thought they recognized Thorveig's eyes.) Thorveig was reported as dying from this wound.

(Icelandic courtesy of “Netútgáfan”, <http://www.snerpa.is/net/netut-e.htm>, Kormák’s saga, 18.)

At other times the metamorphosis was made for protection, as in accounts of swan-maidens who guarded chosen warriors. The shapeshifter is *hamhleypa*, one who is *hamrammr*; shape-strong. Another example from Kormák’s saga is Vigi, who is both *fjölunnigr* and *hamrammr*; he sleeps by the door of the hall, and knows the business of everyone who enters or leaves.

As Bil Linzie points out, in the old material there is no overall word for shaman, but many words for the components of shamanic practice. This may be evidence that by the time of the composition of the sagas, two hundred years post-Christianization, the practices were in decline. And it is from these doubtful remembrances, this fragmentation, that today’s practitioners are attempting to work to construct *seidhr*; not as an individual technique in itself, but as part of a developing complex of beliefs about soul and self, person and community, within community relationships that involve people with other beings, Wights of land and sea or stream, deities known to Heathens as their Elder Kin. All these beings, like people, form part of the fabric of Wyrd, the destiny which people and deities make together, and which will form part of their lives, woven by the Norns, Urdh, Verdhandi and Skuld, who are invoked within Hrafnar’s *seidhr* ritual, as they sit by Urdharbrunn, Urdh’s Well, at the root of the Ash Yggdrasil.

Bil Linzie himself works within a community. His work, as he describes it, is about transformation, death, life, and is focused externally to himself, on those others for whom he does his work. A requirement for practice, he says, is to lose one’s ego: he emphasizes that his work is for the community, not for personal development. As “wholemaker” his task is to make others whole. In pursuit of wholeness, he uses the techniques of trance and journeying to effect healing which is spiritual, emotional, physical, or all of these.

He points out that “wholeness” is not the same thing as physical “normalcy”. Being whole is:

for the average person, a friend tried and true. For the musician it is a tune well turned. For the artist, it is just the right color in just the right spot... it’s when things just seem to go smooth.

He is seeking to find ways of encouraging wholeness. One such is expression of self. He says “Expression is a method, a technique, for attaining Wholeness,” and compares the human organism with a mill-stream which can be blocked upriver from the millpond, in which case the pond dries up and the mill-wheel disintegrates, or down-river, in which case the water becomes stagnant and the mill-wheel rots. The first he sees as akin to lack of *impression*, lack of imagination: the second to lack of *expression*, or outlets for that imagination, as he explains in his webpages at <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman/index.html>:

In Old Norse tradition wisdom comes from the dead, the ancestors.

The form of expression of the Whole-maker is to see how he or she can assist in bringing other beings into their full form of expression. The Whole-maker shows the sick individual the way to access impression and expression most completely and efficiently. There is much talk about something called balance. Balance, however, relies on comparison to some sort of standard. But what is the standard for a person dying from Alzheimer’s? What is the standard for a schizophrenic? What is the standard for one suffering from depression?... The Whole-maker, rather than looking for what is normal or what the standard is, expresses himself by helping others to open up the mill pond of their lives. That is his art.

Seidhr as evil magic?

Most of those whom I have quoted as today’s practitioners —the Hrafnar group, Bil, RavenHorn — use the word “*seidhr*” for what they do, and this is also used by others whom I have not directly quoted in this paper, whether they work as community-diviners using oracular *seidhr*; or seek private knowledge through techniques of “sitting out for wisdom”. However, some prefer to use another term, well-attested in the sagas for those who speak with foreknowledge. Thus Winifred is a *spákona*, Jordsvin a *spámadhr*. *Spá* refers to foretelling, or prophesying. These words, *spá* (or *spae*, as in the Scottish “spae-wife”) and *seidhr* have differing implications within the old literature — the *spákona* or *spámadhr* is spoken of with respect, for the most part, whereas the practitioner of *seidhr* (*seidhkona* or *seidhmadhr*) is often regarded rather negatively. *Seidhr* may imply not only trance-divination, but what Jordsvin calls “messing with people’s minds” (this is not, he emphasizes, what he does, whatever people call it); or using shapeshifting to journey in this world, not the spirit world, and use the knowledge gained to the detriment of others, and influencing or affecting other people’s behaviour by means of the journey.

An example from the old literature is from *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. Egill is in the power of his enemies, in York, England, attempting to write a poem which will save his life. He cannot concentrate for the twittering of a swallow — all night long — by his window. His friend goes up onto the roof, and sees the bird flying off. The implication is that the bird is his arch-enemy Gunnhildr — Queen at York, and later of Norway — who is attempting to prevent his composition and thereby cause his death. Gunnhildr is spoken of negatively, in this saga and in others, as a sorceress, who was taught *seidhr* and shapeshifting by “Finns” (usually meaning Saami), and used these skills to further her own ends; and in the passage referred to, as *hamhleypa*, a shape-shifter. Previously the saga informs us that “*Svo er sagt, adh Gunnhildur lét seidh efla og lét fladh seidha, adh Egill Skalla-Grimsson skyldi aldrei ró bídha á Íslandi, fyrr en hún seí hamm.*” (“It is said, that Gunnhild worked spells [*seidhr*] and spelled out this

*Norse culture of 1000 years ago was not
“shamanic”: we do not find a shamanic
complex of activities, no shaman is described
as central to community life.*

[did seidr], that Egil Skalla-Grimson should never know peace in Iceland until she had set eyes on him”: Fell 1975:103). Icelandic from “Netútgáfan”, <http://www.snerpa.is/net/netut-e.htm>.) The first mention of Gunnhildr is that “of all women she was the loveliest and wisest, and had considerable knowledge of magic” (p.53). (*Gunnhildur var allra kvenna vænst og vitrust og fjölkunnug mjög*.)

This leads to another important point about the old literature. It deals in seeresses and *fordædha*, female practitioners. Most accounts of seidr are of women. The seidr-workers of saga-times appear to have been mostly female: male practitioners — in the late, christian accounts that we have — were deemed to be “ergi”, un-masculine, possibly crossing gender barriers in ways not then acceptable. It is unclear at what time this negativity spread to include *seidhkonur* (seidr-women), or how the spread of Christianity affected how seidr-workers were regarded.

Another word is *útisetá*, and this is how some men — including leaders, kings — are spoken of in the sagas as gaining knowledge, *seta úti til fróðhleiks* (sitting out for wisdom). A variant of this may be going “under the cloak” as it is said did *fiórgeirr* the lawspeaker of the Icelandic Alþingi, prior to taking to the decision to have Iceland formally convert to Christianity (Blain, 1998). The knowledge gained through sitting out would be used by the out-sitter, or revealed at a later stage, rather than narrated in trance. Sitting out typically involved sitting on a gravemound or at a crossroads, going under the cloak could be done wherever one was, but both implied a distancing of oneself from the other human members of the community. The one who was sitting out was not to be disturbed, and in particular their name should not be mentioned. (Adhalsteinsson 1978). *Útiseta* also became problematic, proscribed in Iceland in the laws of the 13th century, which remained in place until the 19th, in terms that name “... *fordædhúskap ok spáfara allra ok útisetá at vekja tröll upp ok fremja heidhni*,” “sorcery and spae-working (foretelling) and sitting out to wake up trolls and practising heathenism”, a wording which associated *útisetá* with gaining knowledge from other beings or spirits (we can treat the term “trolls” as a derogatory re-working during Christian times). Referring to this law, Hastrup comments that “By the act of sitting out, which was a metaphor for leaving the ordinary social space, it was possible to invoke supernatural beings.” While the penalty was death, no-one was convicted until Iceland’s small witch-craze in the 17th century (Hastrup 1990:391. The translation of the OI law is mine.)

As with *seidr*, members of today’s Heathen community are attempting to

rediscover techniques of *útisetá*, seeing it as a solitary practice, whereas oracular *seidr* is a community ritual.

Men (and some women) appear also as practitioners of *galdr*, sung or spoken spells, which do not involve the shapeshifting, journeying or other shamanic/ecstatic components (and which together with knowledge of runes in the early modern period formed the basis of the few witchcraft accusations and convictions in Iceland, according to Hastrup). However, that men could perform *seidr* is evident. Snorri’s history of the Kings of Norway recounts how Haraldr Finehair (who became king of all Norway in the 9th century C.E.), and his son Eiríkr called Bloodaxe, were responsible for the death of Eirík’s brother Rögnvaldr rettilbeini, a *seidhmadhr*; and the troop of 80 *seidhmenn* with whom he was associated, seemingly because Eiríkr and his father did not like “magic” or *seidr*. (*Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, ch 36. See e.g. Monsen 1932.) If political motivations were involved, Snorri does not recount those.

One of the best-known accounts of any type of *seidr* work is by a male: in this case, Óðinn, euhemerised by Snorri Sturluson in his *Ynglingasaga*, written approximately 1225, as an invading king and master magician, and described here (in Samuel Laing’s 1844 translation) as both shapeshifter and seidr-worker:

Odin could transform his shape: his body would lie as if dead, or asleep; but then he would be in shape of a fish, or worm, or bird, or beast, and be off in a twinkling to distant lands upon his own or other people’s business. With words alone he could quench fire, still the ocean in tempest, and turn the wind to any quarter he pleased ... Sometimes even he called the dead out of the earth, or set himself beside the burial-mounds; whence he was called the ghost-sovereign, and lord of the mounds... Odin understood also the art in which the greatest power is lodged, and which he himself practiced; namely, what is called magic [*seidr*]. By means of this he could know beforehand the predestined fate of men, or their not yet completed lot; and also bring on the death, ill-luck, or bad health of people, and take the strength or wit from one person and give it to another. But after such witchcraft followed such weakness and anxiety [*ergi*], that it was not thought respectable for men to practice it; and therefore the priestesses were brought up in this art (Online Medieval and Classical Library Release #15b, <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Heimskringla/ynlinga.html>.)

For the words given in parentheses, the translation is particularly problematic. This extract implies that seidr-practice was valued differently in men and in women. The word *ergi*, translated into this 19th century discourse as “weakness and anxiety”, might be more accurately glossed as “demasculinization”. There is considerable debate over this word, within the Heathen community and among researchers, though this debate is outside the scope of the present article. A man who was “ergi” may have been either a receptive partner in male homosexuality, or engaging in some other activity viewed as appropriate for women but not men. Seidr-work is associated elsewhere with Óðinn, in a poem which states “Yggr performed *seidr* at Rind” and another, *Locasenna*, 24 from the *Poetic Edda*, where Loki raises the accusation of “ergi” against Óðinn.

Enn flíc seidha kóðho Sámseyo í
 oc draptu á vétt sem völor;
 vitka líki förtu verftíóðh yfir,
 oc hugdha ec flat args adhal.

(“Locasenna,” 24, Kuhn and Neckel 1962:101.)

But you once practiced *seidhr* on Samsey
 and you beat on the drum as seeresses do (*völor*; *volvas*)
 in the likeness of a *vitki* you journeyed among people
 and I thought that showed an *ergi* nature.

(“Loki’s Quarrel,” 24, Larrington’s translation, p 89, modified to give more precision
 in words relating to *seidhr*.)

In the passage from *Ynglingasaga* quoted above, it is clear that Óðinn’s practice of *seidhr* does not only relate to fore-knowing and fore-telling the fates of people’s lives, but to magically influencing these fates: he could “bring on the death, ill-luck, or bad health of people, and take the strength or wit from one person and give it to another.” Within the Heathen community, Kveldúlfur Gundarsson has claimed that *seidhr* is always used to denote negative practices — and does not relate specifically to foretelling, but rather to contacting spirits for that purpose or for purposes of ill-wishing, “messing with people’s minds”, affecting motivation or intention, courage or concentration — whereas *spá*, referring to foretelling, was viewed positively in the old literature. The word *völva* related to a woman who had knowledge.

Gundarsson draws on the old material to suggest that for both men and women *seidhr* was viewed as negative, even evil. He would apparently name today’s practices *spá* and *útiseti*, not *seidhr*. Some *seidhr*-workers disagree, pointing out that the term may have become increasingly negative due to Christianization, and draw on the work of, for instance, Jenny Jochens (1996) who suggests from a study of terms used in the sagas and in law codes that magical practice (*ffjölkyngi*) was originally a complex of female skills, which became taken over by male practitioners, with some of these skills then viewed very negatively, others (*spá*) positively. Even the (negative) term *fordædha*, originally used of women, became a term used only for men, as an insult for which full compensation was demanded in law!

Jochens suggests that “Rooted deep in paganism, the oldest magical figure in the north was not the skilled male magician but the female diviner,” (1996:130).

Conventional scholarship has it that *seidhr* was women’s magic, and was evil: men who took to performing it were therefore seen as evil also, and terms such as *ergi* applied. It may be, however, that women’s magic was only seen as “evil” depending on the observer’s point of view. A woman or man who uses knowledge for protection may be seen as “evil” working against an aggressor — from the aggressor’s point of view. In any case, we have one word — *fordædha* — referring to a woman (originally) who engages in deeds against the community, regardless of whether these are magical —

Seeing might be only one component of what one who was fjölkyngi — possessing much (magical) knowledge — could do. A number of accounts refer to people who change shape, to avoid enemies, to seek knowledge, or to cause trouble.

and many words which refer to techniques or knowledge gained, *spákona*, *seidhkona*, *ffjölkyngi*. The second woman magic-worker from *Kormáks Saga*, *fiórdís*, is termed both *spákona* and *fordædha*. The distinction seems to depend on who she is working for at the time, and whose point of view is expressed in the saga, with *spákona* as a term of respect for her knowledge, for the most part, *fordædha* a term of abuse. *Seidhr* performed by men, or by large numbers of either females or males, may have been politically threatening; also, with increasing Christian influence, gender categories seem to have become much more rigid so that the charge of *ergi*, for men performing activities otherwise associated with women, may have become increasingly important over time.

Conclusion: *seidhr* and its valuation today

Jochens tells us that “Although the word *völva* never appeared in the law codes, the practice of divination and prophesy continued.” (1996:129) To her, this indicates that these were being performed increasingly by men, including churchmen, who took over the practice of *spá*, and to a large extent rune-work. And this divination became increasingly problematic. However, the fact that the word *völva* never appeared and that male practice was increasingly targeted as unlawful does not necessarily mean that women ceased practicing, only that they were less targeted. Katherine Morris (1991) appears to suggest that “seeking for knowledge” in Iceland remained part of the complex of activities that were appropriate for women: it became problematic only when men practiced it, possibly (in my conjecture) for political reasons.

Iceland’s current *Allsherjargodhi*, Jörmundur Ingi, believes that women in Iceland have maintained some of the practices associated with *seidhr*; often unthinkingly, as everyday activities, simply things that women do in their households and kitchens:

I remember when I was a little kid living out in the country, there’s always something that the women would close themselves into the kitchen, to, ah, to do some things that they were whispering about, and the men would simply keep away ... and we were just little kids, we sometimes stayed in there, they didn’t bother with us. They were doing some sort of little magic tricks which we didn’t know was magic and probably they didn’t know either ... from some signs or whatever, usually you know, whom they should marry or how things

The seiðr-workers of saga-times appear to have been mostly female: male practitioners — in the late, Christian accounts that we have — were deemed to be “ergi”, un-masculine, possibly crossing gender barriers in ways not then acceptable.

should go and so on, and so they have been doing it all the time.

The extent to which these activities would be considered *seiðhr* is of course debatable. The word seems to cover a range of meanings, not necessarily the same as those of the Heathen period. However Jörmundur's point is that practice of “magic” by women was continued, as part of everyday life. On occasion this practice, and possible links with *seiðhr* or *spá*, could become more evident, as with the coming of the “spiritualism” movement to Iceland, in the 19th century:

... while this movement was sort of a fringe movement everywhere else, it was here part of, ah, high society. It was introduced into Iceland mostly by priests and lawyers ... so right from the start, it got a socially accepted stamp on it, it was the in thing, to be an adherent of this, and very strangely what happened was that women would flock to this, and all of a sudden, you would have mediums, women, everywhere, and the most astounding thing about that was that they way they were conducting these seances, what they were doing of course, was that you can read the story of the *Völva*, in the saga of Eric the Red, and they held the ceremony exactly. So I have the theory that women were doing this all through the Christian era, they were simply having little ceremonies like that without even realizing that this was religion, this was just something that women did, and men didn't interfere in (Interview, 1997).

Elsewhere *seiðhr* is being revived, as stated at the beginning of this paper, in association with the reconstruction of Heathenism, as a specific set of skills. By whatever means the 10th-century gendering of *seiðhr* came about, in today's Ásatrú in North America the majority of *seiðhr*-workers are female, with a number of gay men, and fewer heterosexual men, among the best-known practitioners. Women and gay men have held marginal positions in North American society within recent history, and gay men are still marginalized in popular discourses to which some Ásatrú followers subscribe. However, high-seat *seiðhr*-working is now coming to be an expected part of larger-scale Heathen gatherings, though its techniques are still regarded with some suspicion and its rituals viewed by some as marginal to the “main purpose” of the gathering. Other members of Earth Religions are also coming into contact with oracular *seiðhr*; at festivals or local events.

How *seiðhr*, *spá*, or shamanic journeying is viewed within Heathenism, or Ásatrú, depends very much on which group one focuses on. Many people are

enthusiastic about the techniques, and about their potential for use in healing and alternative medicine, as well as divination. They also see journeying and *útiseti* as a way to gain personal knowledge of deities and other wights, and so to explore the possibilities of the religion together with conceptions of self and spirit. Others cling to an image of Ásatrú as a religion of viking warriors, and reject signs of “weakness” (including *seiðhr*; women's magic, and gay men). The position of *seiðhr* is being played out against a background of debate on who or what Ásatrú or Heathenism is. Though some conventional scholarship still associates *seiðhr* with evil, scholars within Heathenism and Earth Religions generally are raising questions and exploring possibilities raised by different definitions. My hope is that this article contributes to that debate, as well as to an examination of how today's workers are reconstructing *seiðhr* along with some of its dilemmas and contradictions, as shamanic practice within late-twentieth-century Heathenism.

This article has its basis in a paper given at the Conference on Shamanism in Contemporary Society, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, June 1998. The author may be reached at jenny.blain@dal.ca.

Works Cited:

- Adhalsteinsson, Jón Hnefill. 1978. “Under the Cloak.” *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis* 4. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Blain, Jenny. 1998. “Seidhr as women's magic: Shamanism, journeying and healing in Norse Heathenism.” Canadian Anthropology Society, annual meeting, Toronto, May 1998.
- Fell, Christine (ed. and trans.) 1975. *Egils Saga*. London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd.
- Grundy, Stephan Scott. 1995. “The Cult of Odhinn, God of Death.” Ph.D. Cambridge.
- Hastrup, Kirsten. 1990. “Iceland: Sorcerers and Paganism.” *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*. Ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Jochens, Jenny. 1996. *Old Norse Images of Women*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.
- Kuhn, Hans, and Gustav Neckel, ed. 1962. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius (V1. Text)*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- Larrington, Carolyne, ed. 1996. *The Poetic Edda*. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lieberman, Anatoly. 1996. “Ten Scandinavian and North English Etymologies,” *Allvissmál* 6: 63-98.
- Monsen, 1932 (ed. and trans.) *Heimskringla, or The Lives of the Norse Kings, by Snorre Sturlason*. Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd.
- Morris, Katherine. 1991. *Sorceress or Witch? The Image of Gender in Medieval Iceland and Northern Europe*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.

JOURNEYING THE POLITICS OF ECSTASY: Anthropological Perspectives on Neoshamanism

by Robert J. Wallis
University of Southampton

In anthropology, archaeology and popular culture, 'Shamanism' may be one of the most used, abused and misunderstood terms to date. Researchers are increasingly recognising the socio-political roles of altered states of consciousness and shamanism in past and present societies, yet the rise of 'Neoshamanism' and its implications for academics and their subjects of study is consistently neglected. Moreover, many academics marginalise neoshamans and, as a result, neoshamanic interaction with anthropology, archaeology and indigenous peoples is often regarded as neocolonialism. To complicate the matter, indigenous peoples express multivocal opinions of Neoshamanism, from blatant condemnation to active encouragement. I first trace the roots of Neoshamanism in order to compare neoshamanic and academic approaches. Criticisms of Neoshamanism as expressed by academic and native critics are presented and I suggest these conflicting views are potentially reconcilable. Crucially, post-processualist praxis should be practically implemented via programmes of research and communication.

The terms Neoshamanism and shamanism are used here to differentiate 'Western' shamanism from its more 'traditional' counterpart. The distinction does not intend to privilege one over the other, nor is it exclusive; frequently the practitioners blend so that definition is difficult. Indeed, defining shamanism is intrinsically problematic, mainly because, as this paper suggests, it is a Western construction. In this sense, a pristine form of 'classic' shamanism has never existed, the idea is a fabrication.

Comparing Academic and Neoshamanism

Origins of Neoshamanism stem from use of the term 'shamanism' in 18th century ethnographic and antiquarian texts. The 'sam-n' were originally Siberian Tungouse practitioners of altered states of consciousness encountered by German explorers. But, by the end of the 18th century, 'shamanism' had become the generic term used to describe similar forms of ecstatic religion (Flaherty 1992). Essentially then, shamanism is an academic construct, a word for the West, its meaning inevitably universalised, repeatedly re-fabricated, its definition contested. Fascinated by its titillating bizarreness, people romanticised shamanism, associated themselves with the 'noble savage' and became neoshamans. Goethe, for instance, probably

styled Faust as a shaman, (Flaherty 1989) thereby paving the way for 'the artist as the shaman of higher civilisation' (Flaherty 1988). Neoshamanism and academic study of shamanism essentially emerge at the same time then, both approaching indigenous peoples, past and present, in ways which are politically sensitive.

Criticisms of Neoshamanism

Neoshamanism today describes a spiritual path for personal empowerment utilising altered states of consciousness and the shaman's world-view. A primary source text is Michael Harner's *The Way of the Shaman* (1980). Once Professor of anthropology, Harner and colleagues at the Foundation for Shamanic Studies currently teach courses in experiential shamanism throughout the Western world. In The Basic Workshop, participants are taught that anyone can enter an altered state of consciousness or trance, which Harner names the 'shamanic state of consciousness' (SSC). During shamanic experience people lie down and relax with their eyes closed or covered. The 'journey', accompanied by monotonous drumming, begins by entering the earth at a place well known in the physical world such as a cave, and the experient then travels down a tunnel, into a spirit world. Here, the aspirant meets and interacts with spirit helpers and power animals and, as he or she becomes more adept, learns divination and to heal sickness. These 'Core Shamanism', 'Harner Method' techniques are probably the most widely known and practised in the West, and have come under the closest criticism (see, for example Johnson 1995, Harvey 1997).

For instance, during his publishing career Johnson believes Harner shifts "from the particular to the universal, from the locative to the utopian" (Johnson 1995:171). 'Core shamanism' is described as being universal to shamanism across space and time, thus decontextualising aspects of shamanism from its original 'owners'. Furthermore, Harner's techniques are held to be safe but this is in sharp contrast with many shamanic traditions which can be dangerous and potentially life-threatening. According to Brown (1989) neoshamans avoid this 'dark side of the shaman', such as death threats and battling with malevolent spirits.

Neoshamanism is also portrayed as something available for everyone. Westerners can choose shamanism as a spiritual way of life. This is in contrast to many 'traditional' shamans whose roles are viewed with a healthy fear in their societies. Shamanic trance is often described as being painful, can kill as well as heal, and characteristically, the spirits choose the shaman, not the other way round. In another instance, Harner is accused of decontextualising when selling Western orientated 'rapid results', in terms of spiritual development and healing (see, for example, Atkinson 1992: 322). In contrast, the 'traditional' shamanic path is not a psychological tool for self-discovery or empowerment which can be used for a few minutes with dramatic results. In my view, Harner erroneously privileges the

shaman's altered state of consciousness then, when stating that what a shaman can do in a few minutes takes a yogi many years (Harner 1980:xiii).

Johnson suggests an inevitable 'individualising' inherent in Neoshamanism: "a plurality of religions ... leads to ... a focus on individual agency, choice, 'needs' and preference in the religious 'marketplace' ... an obsession with the 'self' ... individuals are free and capable of converting to any religious system in any place and at any time" (Johnson 1995:174). Emphasis on the individual inner journey, personal psychology and explanations according to Jungian archetypes, suggests to Johnson that Neoshamanism psychologises the world of the 'traditional' shaman leaving itself open to "the risk of solipsism" (Johnson 1995:175).

'Appropriation' (indeed misappropriation) is not too harsh a charge in some instances where Neoshamanism interacts with 'traditional' shamanism, even perpetuating racist stereotypes of indigenous peoples. Early ethnographic notions of 'Indians' as *Naturvölker* (natural peoples) and medicine 'men' who work a spirit world in harmony with nature, inaugurated the Western masculinist primitive premise (Kehoe 1990). Kehoe describes how inauthentic 'plastic medicine men' such as Hungry Wolf reinforce these stereotypes in their 'teachings' of native spirituality. Rather than actually promoting respect and sensitivity towards native peoples as intended, these authors paradoxically portray mistaken and outmoded ideas, while believing they are getting closer to the native shaman's viewpoint. As Harvey points out, "some Pagans appropriate shamanic techniques without returning any benefit to the 'donors', they appear to be 'playing Indians' and some even insult the 'Indians' by continuing to use the derogatory term 'Red Man'" (Harvey 1997:120). Clearly, as Kehoe suggests, many neo-shamanic writers adopt imperialist approaches, "defining for themselves the mission of bringing their 'knowledge' of American Indian spirituality to the peoples of modern Europe and America" (Kehoe 1990:195).

This neo-colonial attitude perhaps affects Harner's Foundation for Shamanic Studies which appears somewhat naive in Johnson's description, when it:

... awards monetary contributions to those they designate 'Living Treasures of Shamanism', such as Wangchuk, a 68-year-old Tibetan shaman living in exile in Nepal. While the award serves the admirable goals of enabling the shaman to continue to practise his 'traditional' form and preserving the rituals on tape for archives both in Tibet and at the Foundation, it also, in an ironic twist, promotes itself to arbiter and authority over who is and who is not a 'true shaman' (Johnson 1995:172).

Indigenous Perspectives: Neoshamanism as Spiritual Genocide?

Many native critics compare neoshamans and anthropologists in terms of cultural imperialism. Hobson, a Cherokee critic, coined the term 'whiteshaman

... shamanism is an academic construct, a word for the West, its meaning inevitably universalised, repeatedly re-fabricated, its definition contested. Fascinated by its titillating bizarreness, people romanticised shamanism, associated themselves with the 'noble savage' and became neoshamans.

movement' to describe white poets who assume the persona of Native American shamans in their writings (Hobson 1978). 'Whiteshamans' compare the poet's vocation with the shaman's in order to add authenticity to their work, but Native Americans strongly criticise them (see comments by Rose 1992) because they do not make their actual ethnicity plain. Andy Smith (Cherokee member of Women of all Red Nations) suggests: "the New Age movement is part of a very old story of white racism and genocide against the Indian people" (Smith 1994:168). According to these writers, cultural imperialism continues, with the spiritual persona of indigenous peoples now up for grabs (Kehoe 1990), by 'Wannabee Indians' (Green 1988).

Castile (1996) considers this a 'Commodification of Indian Identity' and suggests it creates a market for Indian teachers: "The audience of these teachers is not the Indian communities they claim to represent, but the book-, lecture-, and even ordeal-buying public — the litterateurs of dominance" (Castile 1996:745). In response, 'real' Indians endeavour to expose "the falsity of the unreal" (Castile 1996:745), the "Great Pretenders" (Rose 1992). Of concern then, is the legitimacy of shamanistic teachers and teachings (see, for example, Joralemon 1990). For example, 'women's mysteries' are in vogue at present and a concomitant surge of female neoshamans has emerged (for example, the 'female Castaneda' Lynn Andrews). But, were women in Native American and other shamanic traditions afforded the attentions Western women are now afforded?

'Native American' Teachers

The diversity of opinions becomes more complicated when 'genuine' native shamans encourage neoshamans and teach them their practices. Peruvian shaman Eduardo Calderûn, for instance, publicised by anthropologist Douglas Sharon, promoted by Alberto Villoldo (Joralemon 1990). Black Elk published his Ogala Sioux medicine practices via Neihardt (1932), and clearly meant his visions and life story to be read by both natives and Westerners. Similar divulgence of previously 'secret' knowledge has been given by many Native Americans, including Leonard Crow Dog, Lame Deer and Brooke Medicine Eagle. The idea of 'mixed

Neoshamanism's interactions with native shamans can be seen as a positive force for indigenous peoples; ideologically and financially supporting, publicising and drawing considerable attention to, the rights and acts of cultures formerly and currently suppressed.

blood, mixed ethnicity, shamanic paths' however, highlights the problems of authenticity and legitimacy which concern some critics of Neoshamanism.

For instance, popular use of the Lakota sweat lodge ceremony by neoshamans, has recently been condemned by some Native Americans elders: they state the ceremony is not to be enacted by non-Natives. Fulfilling the (mainly) Lakota elders' request is not a simple matter however. What of 'mixed bloods'; to what extent does 'tradition' belong to them? And, where natives, mixed bloods and neoshamans are encouraged to meet in sweat lodge ceremonies, it is impossible to discriminate according to blood-lines alone. Indeed, the one-quarter blood denoting genuine Indians is a problematic concept (Castile 1996:744), and determining where genuine 'culture' or 'tradition' begins and ends is a matter of opinion.

Kehoe is damning of Sun Bear and his 'Bear Tribe', perceiving an easy to consume spirituality, purely for profit making (Kehoe 1990:199-200). She suggests the 'Medicine Wheel' teachings used by Sun Bear and popularised by Hyemeyohsts Storm were simply of utilitarian value in Cheyenne society (Kehoe 1990:200; see also Rose 1992). Storm's Native American ancestry is questionable according to Kehoe however, as is that of other popular so called 'Native American' teachers. Storm, alongside Carlos Castaneda and Lynn Andrews is immensely popular; their books on shamanism are unquestionably the most widely read and the Medicine Wheel teachings are particularly well known. Yet, the 'authenticity' of Castaneda's and Andrews' teachings is hotly disputed.

The issue of payment for teaching provides another reason for people to slander Neoshamanism. Kehoe criticises Wallace Black Elk who is genuine Lakota and charges for shamanic seminars and workshops. And Smith states: "True spiritual leaders do not make a profit from their teachings, whether its through selling books, workshops, sweat lodges, or otherwise. Spiritual leaders teach the people because it is their responsibility to pass what they have learned from their elders to the younger generations. They do not charge for their services" (Smith 1994:168).

"Seeing" toward 'Extra Pay'

This discussion shows how Neoshamanism is strongly criticised by

academics and native peoples. In some respects however, Neoshamanism compares with traditional shamanism and benefits the cultures 'borrowed' from: what Harvey calls giving 'extra pay' to shamanism (Harvey 1997). For instance, many neo-shaman's describe experiences which are anything but safe. Howard Charing, co-founder of Eagle's Wing for Contemporary Shamanism, UK, told me that a near-fatal and almost disabling lift crash lead to communication with spirits and subsequent healing (personal comm.). Only later did he come to call these practices 'shamanism'. Another informant, explained that while conventional medicine was unable to help a psychopathological condition, communication with spirits allowed a self-healing; in retrospect he understands his experiences as 'shamanic'. Furthermore, Wiger (Bend & Wiger 1987) reports how sex and drug abuse, prostitution and multiple personality disorder were overcome with shamanic techniques which she now teaches.

In these examples, the individuals did not 'choose' shamanism and their descriptions parallel the 'calling', 'initiatory sickness' and self-healing of shamans world-wide; they are 'wounded healers' (Halifax 1982). Furthermore, many neoshamans express beliefs in spirit worlds and spirits outside themselves. These testimonies exemplify Harvey's idea that some neoshamans substantially change their views beyond safe and acceptable Jungian (and other) psychological models.

Neoshamanism's interactions with native shamans can be seen as a positive force for indigenous peoples, ideologically and financially supporting, publicising and drawing considerable attention to, the rights and acts of cultures formerly and currently suppressed. Harner, for instance, does emphasise the complexity of shamanic cultures (they are not evolutionarily simple) and the value of their modes of awareness (altered states are not just for 'hippies' and the 'insane'). The 'Living Treasures' award, though viewed with scepticism by some, suggests Neoshamanism is giving back to the cultures it has 'borrowed' from.

Indeed, where Neoshamanism is active in environmental education for instance, it "moves towards being properly shamanic ... the word is paid extra: it is honoured as a force for change, an imperative in the growth and evolution of Paganism" (Harvey 1997:117). The socio-political context for Neoshamanism and its benefits is becoming evident; indeed, in the context of Paganism, Neoshamanism "becomes an important part of the postmodern critique of modern society" (Harvey 1997:122), not simply a symptom of modernity, of neo-liberalism.

Interestingly, representatives from Native American, Sami and Inuit groups have approached Harner, requesting that he teach 'core shamanism' to restore their sacred knowledge which was lost due to conquest and missionisation (Harner personal comm.). Perhaps this is another example of Neoshamanism's benefits, although indigenous critics may instead see a white shaman returning stolen shamanism in a revamped format to aboriginal owners. It is pertinent to note

however, that most criticisms surround Harner's basic workshop and its methods. The less publicised, more advanced training programmes, certainly contain aspects which require considerable skill and strength on the part of the practitioner (Harner personal comm.), and compare more suitably with traditional shamanisms.

'Extra pay' may also be given in use of the term shaman itself. Neoshamans tend to find the prefix 'Neo-' offensive; to themselves, they are shamanic practitioners. There is also a general consensus that to call oneself a shaman is inflated, at least a little suspect, and to an extent disrespectful to 'traditional' shamans. Harner's workshops in particular promote this perspective. In this instance the term becomes honorific: you don't call yourself a shaman, but other people do; neoshamans in this case, honour 'traditional' shamans by using the term sensitively.

Conclusion

This paper has presented various criticisms and benefits of the Neoshamanism movement. Perspectives among all the interest groups are extremely diverse, often deeply personalised and politically motivated; it is therefore unrealistic to suggest there is a single 'right' view. At the individual level, it is possible to single out certain charlatans, or 'well-rounded' practitioners, even extremist voices; yet all are likely to conflict in some way. As with 'traditional' shamanism, Neoshamanism is not an homogenous entity. Simply put, and from my own perspective, Neoshamanism has its good and bad points and too many voices downplay opposing views.

By focusing on criticisms, many academics neglect positive aspects of Neoshamanism, which merely legitimates avoidance of its impact on their subjects of study. Furthermore, academics are reticent to recognise benefits of the shamanistic approach in recent studies. In all, they are 'shamanophobic' (Dowson 1996) and aim to strengthen this position with 'neo-shamanophobia'. Paradoxically though, I have shown how academic and neo-shamanic approaches are intrinsically comparable, indeed they are historically related.

Following a circular argument then, academics, when they do examine shamanism, tend to universalise it. They then criticise neo-shamanic universalising and decontextualising, actually reproduced from academic publications! Similarly, as Atkinson states: "The romanticisation of shamanism by its current Euroamerican promoters is also unsettling for anthropologists (despite — or perhaps because of — their own familiarity with romantic tropes)" (Atkinson 1992:323).

Crucial, I think, to both shamanism studies and when approaching Neoshamanism, is socio-political context. The perspectives presented here show all too clearly the 'politics of ecstasy'. Exploring shamanism world-wide, past and present, in Western and non-Western societies, need not denote a metanarrative.

Dowson's 'elements of shamanism' (Dowson, in press) suggest: shamans enter an altered state of consciousness, interact with a spirit world and have their role sanctioned by the community. This approach promotes cross-cultural studies of shamanism in terms of certain features, but stresses the importance of cultural context in order to embrace diversity. Apart from enabling a better approach to shamanism, emphasising socio-political specificity facilitates appreciation of Neoshamanism as an embodiment and expression of the contemporary West, a consciousness and culture we are all inseparable from. When considered in this light, Neoshamanism cannot be ignored.

As an archaeologist, I believe that archaeology is a discipline which has ignored neoshamans, their views and practices, without recognising their intellectual and experiential impact on our subjects of study (Wallis 1998). Future research will suggest guidelines and potential action which should reciprocally benefit all interest groups. For instance, while current academics can revise the work of their forebears, it is also vital to express current ideas in the popular realm so that stereotypes embedded in the public imagination can be changed. Furthermore, indigenous critics draw attention to manifestly negative aspects of Neoshamanism, but have yet to discuss the issues with neoshamans directly in what may be a productive dialogue.

I think the at face-value conflicting modes of consciousness expressed by the groups concerned, are potentially reconcilable, via informed research and much needed communication. Academics and indigenous people are embarking on productive dialogues which look towards mutual benefit and understanding. Similarly, people involved with shamanism and Neoshamanism must be encouraged to develop forums for meeting, and ways of communicating and understanding each other's perspective. This consideration seems timely, for if avoidance of Neoshamanism continues, an hitherto neglected contemporary shamanic agenda for the archaeological past and ethnographic present will compromise curators into increasingly difficult positions.

This is a revised version of a paper presented as 'Altered States, Conflicting Cultures: Shamans, Neoshamans and Academics,' at the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness Spring Conference 1998, Portland Oregon.

This article will be re-published in expanded form, with a more comprehensive bibliography, in the AOC Journal. Mr Wallis may be reached at <R.J.Wallis@soton.ac.uk>.

Works Cited:

- Atkinson, J. M. "Shamanisms Today." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 1992; 21: 307-330.
Bend, C.; Wiger, T. *Birth of a Modern Shaman*. Minnesota: Llewellyn; 1987.
Brown, M. F. "Dark Side of the Shaman." *Natural History*. 1989; November: 8-10.
Castile, G. P. "The Commodification of Indian Identity." *American Anthropologist*. 1996;

98(4): 743-749.

- Dowson, T. A. Review of Garlake, P. 1995. "The Hunter's Vision: The Prehistoric Rock Art of Zimbabwe." *Antiquity*. 1996B; 70: 468- 469.
- Dowson, T. A. *Shamanism and Diversity of Interpretation in Rock Art Studies*.; In Press.
- Flaherty G. "The Performing Artist as the Shaman of Higher Civilisation." *Modern Language*. 1988; 103(3): 519-539.
- Flaherty, G. "Goethe and Shamanism." *Modern Language*. 1989; 104(3): 580-596.
- Flaherty, G. *Shamanism and the Eighteenth Century*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press; 1992.
- Green, R. "The Tribe Called Wannabee." *Folklore*. 1988; 99(1): 30- 55.
- Halifax, J. *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives*. London: Penguin: Arkana; 1979.
- Harner, M. *The Way of the Shaman*. London: Harper Collins; 1980.
- Harvey, G. *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism*. London: Hurst & Co; 1997.
- Hobson, G. "The Rise of the White Shaman as a New Version of Cultural Imperialism." in: Hobson, G., ed. *The Remembered Earth*. Albuquerque, NM: Red Earth Press; 1978: 100-108.
- Johnson, P. C. "Shamanism from Ecuador to Chicago: A Case Study in Ritual Appropriation." *Religion*. 1995; 25: 163-178.
- Joralemon, D. "The Selling of the Shaman and the Problem of Informant Legitimacy." *Journal of Anthropological Research*. 1990; 46(2): 105-118.
- Kehoe, A. B. "Primal Gaia: Primitivists and Plastic Medicine Men." in: Clifton, J., ed. *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies*. New Brunswick: Transaction; 1990: 193-209.
- Neihardt, R. *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Ogala Sioux*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; 1932.
- Rose, W. "The Great Pretenders: Further Reflections on White Shamanism." in: Jaimes, M. A., ed. *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonisation and Resistance*. Boston: South End; 1992: 403-421.
- Smith, A. "For All Those Who Were Indian in a Former life." in: Adams, C., ed. *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. New York: Continuum; 1994: 168-171.
- Wallis, R.J. "Drumming Home the Polemics of Neoshamanism': Conflicting Views and Contested Monuments in the Southwest United States." Paper presented at the Contemporary Shamanism Conference June 1998, University of Newcastle; 1998.

Robert J. Wallis is studying for a PhD in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Southampton in England, where he received his BA and an MA in Rock Art. His research interests focus on archaeological and anthropological theory and the inherently political nature of these disciplines. Robert practices shamanism in the Heathen tradition.

THE OLD RELIGION

by Richard Smoley
Editor, *Gnosis Magazine*

The theme of this article is a movement that has been called the fastest-growing religion in the US. Nobody knows exactly how many Americans identify themselves as Witches, Wiccans, and Neopagans. The number has been estimated as anywhere from 200,000 to 500,000, but there are no hard statistics and few formal organizations. Besides, religious prejudice still makes it expedient for many of today's Pagans to keep quiet about their preferences.

The first question, of course, is just what Neopaganism is. Many of its adherents say it's an attempt to return to the polytheistic faith that prevailed in Europe before Christianity. And while the word "witchcraft" used to be applied to any form of attempted sorcery or enchantment, modern Witches see the matter differently. Many of them regard themselves as the heirs of a specific form of this ancient faith. They call it "the Old Religion."

They draw their inspiration from Margaret Murray, an early 20th century scholar who investigated the witch hunts that seized Europe sporadically between 1450 and 1750. Before Murray's time, historians had assumed that the witch hunts were a form of mass psychosis projected onto some unfortunate individuals (chiefly women). But in books like *The Witch-Cult in Northern Europe* (1921) and *The God of the Witches* (1931), Murray contended that there were witches, and that they were really adherents of the Old Religion who had been driven underground. They met in covens of thirteen members each, and they worshipped a deity known as the Horned God, whom the Christians equated with the Devil.

Murray's theories were endorsed by Gerald Gardner, a retired customs official who happened upon what he claimed was a practicing coven in England's New Forest in the late 1930s. In a number of books including *Witchcraft Today* (1955), Gardner set out the theory and practice of this religion, which he called Wicca. (This word is used today as an abstract noun more or less equivalent to "Witchcraft," but actually it's an Old English word meaning "male witch"; the feminine equivalent is *wicce*). Gardnerian Wicca is still practiced today throughout the English-speaking world.

Both Murray and Gardner said the Old Religion worshipped the deity in a dual aspect — the Horned God, or Cernunnos, and the Great Goddess, known as Diana, Herodias, or Aradia. Today many Witches and Neopagans focus their

rites around the central mystery of this divine union of male and female. In recent years, however, for many Neopagans the Goddess has come to be seen as the more important figure (Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 1989:22-23).

Again scholarship has played its role in this development. As early as 1861, a Swiss jurist named J.J. Bachofen was arguing that before the male-dominated social system that we know from written history, humanity had had a phase when it was matriarchal: women were socially dominant and descent was traced through female lines.

Bachofen's theory proved highly influential. A version of it resurfaced in *The White Goddess* by the poet Robert Graves, published in 1948, in which Graves argued from his own rather idiosyncratic use of evidence that Europe had in prehistoric times worshipped the goddess of the moon — the White Goddess of his title.

Graves admitted that he had written his book in a kind of Muse-inspired frenzy, but that didn't keep it from being taken as history. Archaeologist James Mellaart's excavations at Çatal Hüyük in Asia Minor seemed to corroborate the existence of this matrifocal phase of civilization. The Lithuanian archaeologist Marija Gimbutas took up this theme and developed it further in books like *The Language of the Goddess* (1989). Together with Murray's and Gardner's ideas, these theories have been woven into a kind of foundation myth for today's Neopaganism.

According to this view, in the Neolithic era people throughout most of Europe lived in a peaceful, egalitarian society that was ruled by women (to the extent that it was ruled at all). It was this phase of civilization that produced the enormous numbers of figurines that have been found of rotund, obese, often pregnant female figures. These were images of the Great Goddess.

This peaceful culture was destroyed by the coming of the Indo-Europeans, a war-like, patriarchal race that swept in from the steppes on horseback and crushed "Old Europe," setting up a belligerent, hierarchical, male-ruled society. We are the descendants of that culture.

The patriarchy reached its zenith — or nadir, depending on your point of view — with Christianity, which, after it came to power, systematically attempted to extirpate the old Pagan religion. The new, upstart faith was very much focused on the transcendent. Unlike the Old Religion, it taught people to hate their bodies and to hate the earth, laying the ground for today's sexual hang-ups and the ecological crisis.

The process of conversion to Christianity took centuries; the witch hunts of the early modern era were the last phase of warfare against the Old Religion. And it was a true holocaust: according to a frequently cited figure, nine million Witches were killed during these centuries, nearly all of them women (eg,

Graves admitted that he had written his book in a kind of Muse-inspired frenzy, but that didn't keep it from being taken as history. Archaeologist James Mellaart's excavations at Çatal Hüyük in Asia Minor seemed to corroborate the existence of this matrifocal phase of civilization. ... Marija Gimbutas took up this theme and developed it further ... Together with Murray's and Gardner's ideas, these theories have been woven into a kind of foundation myth for today's Neopaganism.

Gardner 1955:35 *et passim*; Starhawk 1989:20). The Old Religion went into hiding for centuries, and resurfaced only in the mid-20th century when the Christian establishment had lost its power.

This is an extremely compelling myth: you will find it stated over and over again in countless Neopagan books and magazines. Many Wiccans and Neopagans seem to regard it as a matter of historical fact. Unfortunately, according to most scholars today, nearly every detail of this picture is wrong.

The concept of a Goddess civilization today is a minority view among scholars, most of whom regard Gimbutas' views as highly speculative and as taking excessive liberties with the evidence; Emory University historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese dismissed them as little more than "absurdities" (Osborne 1998:52).

Adherents of Gimbutas' theories regard such criticisms as evidence of an entrenched patriarchal mind-set (eg, see the interview with Starhawk and Carol Christ in *Gnosis*, Summer 1998:29-34). But the evidence is considerably more moot than many of today's Neopagans believe. Just to take one example: "Male figurines constitute only 2 or 3 percent of all Old European figurines," Gimbutas contended (1989:175). But Lotte Motz, in her book *The Faces of the Goddess*, argues that "images of men and animals are just as numerous as those of women" (Osborne 1998:53). Moreover, as more than one scholar has pointed out, there is nothing in the female figures themselves that indicates that they are necessarily images of a deity (Hutton 1991:4).

Until recently Çatal Hüyük was considered to be the one incontrovertible site of a matrifocal society. But now scholars aren't even sure of that. Ronald Hutton, a British historian not unsympathetic to Paganism, writes, "We cannot tell ... whether the women of Çatal Hüyük were powerful, feared, and honored, or suspected, feared, and constrained" (1991:42). As for the Indo-

This is an extremely compelling myth: you will find it stated over and over again in countless Neopagan books and magazines. Many Wiccans and Neopagans seem to regard it as a matter of historical fact.

Unfortunately, according to most scholars today, nearly every detail of this picture is wrong.

European invaders, our picture of them has been complicated by the fact that, to judge from some archaeological evidence, women were warriors and leaders in this supposedly patriarchal culture (Osborne 1998:51-53). Were the warlike Indo-Europeans more egalitarian and feminist than the peaceful people of Old Europe? We really don't know.

We don't even know if the people of Old Europe *were* peaceful. Carol Christ says that mainstream academe refuses to admit that there was a phase of history when war was unknown. One archaeologist found exactly the opposite. Lawrence H. Keeley, a professor at the University of Chicago, wanted to get a grant to investigate an Early Neolithic fortification in Belgium dating to c.5000 BCE. He couldn't get the grant because the prevailing academic opinion was that Neolithic societies were peaceful, therefore they couldn't have fortifications. Keeley had to rewrite his grant leaving out the term 'fortification' before he could get any money. Once he did, he investigated the sites and found they were in fact fortified. The experience led him to write a book about prehistoric warfare and why scholars have so much trouble accepting it.

This is not to say that Gimbutas' theory is totally without merit. I personally find it interesting, much as I find the theories of Graham Hancock and Zecharia Sitchin interesting; they suggest that prehistory is far from clear-cut and may differ radically from what the textbooks say. But many adherents of Gimbutas' view not only seem to regard it as incontrovertibly proven, but are even irate about these events that may or may not have happened six or eight thousand years ago. And this strikes me as going far beyond what is justified by our present knowledge.

The witch hunts provide a similar situation. Most Wiccans and Neopagans gingerly admit that there was no such thing as an organized Old Religion in Murray's sense, but many still believe the witch hunts were an organized effort to suppress Pagan survivals such as the 'cunning men' and women, the folk healers and wizards of the villages of Western Europe. (The commonly cited figure of nine million victims, by the way, is generally thought to be ridiculously inflated; more sober estimates say that the witch hunts claimed

40,000-50,000 lives over three centuries, about 75% women. See Briggs 1996:8).

Even this picture is more complicated than you might think. The 'wise women' and 'cunning men' often bore the brunt of witch accusation, it is true, but they also created a lot of them. A contemporary account described the process thus: "A man is taken lame; he suspecteth that he is bewitched; he sendeth to the cunning man; he demandeth whom they suspect, and then sheweth the image of the party in a glass" (Thomas 1971:549).

Today the standard academic view has reverted to the idea that the witch hunts were not the persecution of the 'Old Religion' but were a delusion chiefly generated by fears and suspicions rampant in the era, which were themselves fueled by a social and economic crisis. The British historian Robin Briggs observes. "Virtually everywhere it was the half-century between 1580 and 1630 which included the great majority of all [witch] trials; ... it is hard to avoid the ... inference that a simultaneous sharp decline in living standards and individual security played a large part in this" (1996:292).

By this view, witch persecutions were a matter more of neighbor pitted against neighbor than of the schemings of the Inquisition. Certainly the Catholic Church fueled the witch-hunt craze at its outset, with a 1484 bull by Pope Innocent VIII declaring witchcraft a heresy (the Church had previously taught that it did not exist) and with the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* ("The Hammer of the Witches"), a lurid antiwitch text, in 1486.

On the other hand, over the next two centuries the officials of the Inquisition became increasingly skeptical of witchcraft claims. Strange as it may sound, the Inquisition often exercised a moderating influence on rabid witch hunters in local courts. The countries where Inquisition was the strongest — Spain and Italy — had very few witch trials (Briggs 1996:327, 335-36).

The history of Gardner's own influences is equally vexed. The most ardent Gardnerians seem to believe that his coven's rites and doctrines can be traced in an virtually pure form back to the pre-Christian era. But again, most credible researchers don't buy this. They have found many 20th-century influences on Gardner: Aleister Crowley; Charles Godfrey Leland, an American who wrote a book called *Aradia* about his encounters with the Witches of Tuscany; even Woodcraft, a movement started by the Canadian writer Ernest Thompson Seton. For my self, I think it likely that Gardner's coven may have had ancient roots but felt free to create and adapt new rituals and prayers, much as Neopagans do today.

This is far too short a space in which to try to argue these points in detail; I can only refer the reader to the works I've cited. My central point, though, is this: Paganism is a legitimate religious impulse. To connect with the divine through nature, through the feminine, and through the multiplicity of the

world is honorable and necessary, But if Neopaganism is to take its place among the great religions, it has to come to terms with its own history.

Here Neopaganism is in a sense in an opposite position from much of mainstream Christianity, which, obsessed with an elusive chimera known as the 'historical Jesus,' has come more and more to cut itself off from spiritual experience. Neopaganism, by contrast, with its abundance of rituals and invocations, has plenty of room for experience but needs to deal more forthrightly with its own past. If it does, it will probably find that it is the 'Old Religion' not in a literalistic sense but in recapturing some of the deepest and most ancient aspects of the spiritual impulse.

In an attempt to help advance this process, here is an "Alternate Reading List" on Pagan history. These books and articles are all intelligent, well-researched, and often dense. But if you're interested in contemporary scholarship about the Goddess, the witch hunts, or ancient Paganism, they're well worth the effort.

Briggs, Robin. *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*. New York: Viking, 1996.

Burkert, Walter. *Greek Religion*. J. Raffan, trans., Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985.

Fox, Robin Lane. *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1987.

Hutton, Ronald. *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Keeley, Lawrence H. *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.

MacMullen, Ramsey. *Christianity and Paganism in the 4th to 8th Centuries*. New Haven, Yale UP, 1997.

Osborne, Lawrence. "The Women Warriors" in *Lingua Franca* (Jan 1998).

Thomas, Keith. *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971.

Richard Smoley is the editor of
GNOSIS: A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions,
which we recommend wholeheartedly and unequivocally to our own readers.
This article originally appeared as the introduction to a recent issue of Gnosis
on the theme "Witchcraft and Paganism" (#48, Summer 1998).
Gnosis magazine is published quarterly. For information about
subscriptions and back issues write PO Box 14217, San Francisco, CA 94114.

An Archaeological Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm

by Brian Hayden
Simon Fraser University

As an archaeologist, I found Mara Keller's assessment of the discipline and Marija Gimbutas' contributions to it in the August 1998 issue of *The Pomegranate* both inaccurate and disturbing. Keller's portrayal of archaeologists is a parody of the discipline a half century ago, while she uncritically accepts Gimbutas' interpretations which are fraught with very real problems.

Archaeology

While there undoubtedly still are a few narrow empirical archaeologists who hold positions such as Keller describes (uninterested in anything else beside the artifacts themselves), the vast majority of archaeologists today are keenly interested in cultural meaning, ritual, symbolism, myth, social structure, politics and issues of gender. In fact, archaeologists have *always* been interested in these topics. The discoveries of Middle and Upper Paleolithic burials at the beginning of this century immediately gave rise to involved discussions of Paleolithic notions of the afterlife, religion, and rituals by Bouyssonie and others. The documentation of incontestable Paleolithic cave art in 1895, and the recognition of Paleolithic sculptured art some decades before broadened and enriched the scope of inquiry into the realms of sociopolitics and the supernatural. Similarly, discoveries of Maya ruins, early Mesopotamian temples and palaces such as those at Ur, megalithic monuments, and the Minoan centers have engendered queries about political organization, religion, and women's roles in societies long before Gimbutas began studying archaeology. Even the "overly empiricist" New Archaeology had as its goal the reconstruction and understanding of *all* aspects of past cultures. As Lewis Binford, the archdeacon of archaeological empiricists, stated it in 1962: "The formal structure of artifact assemblages together with the between element contextual relationships should and do present a systematic and understandable picture of *the total extinct* cultural system (the emphasis is his)." Walter Taylor made essentially the same arguments in 1948 and tried to show how this might be done for some parts of past cultures.

The problem in wrestling with such issues as religion, mythology, and gender, however, has always been how to evaluate the many conflicting ideas and claims on these subjects, claims that range from extra-terrestrial origins, to creationist accounts, to lost tribes from Israel, to diffusing influences from Egypt, to

cultural evolution. The best scientists in *all* disciplines are always willing to consider all the possibilities and to evaluate and re-evaluate them on their relative merits.

In archaeology, the problem has never been a lack of interest in these topics, but rather the difficulty of using archaeological evidence in evaluating claims and counter claims pertaining to these areas of interest. For example, it has never been clear how gender-related activities or roles could be inferred from stone tools, bone refuse, or pot shards. Burials can offer some insights, but they are often ambiguous as Howard Winters discovered in his attempts in the 1960s to deal with this issue. While archaeologists have made great strides in developing new approaches for understanding gender roles, political organization, social structures, and religious behavior (see Renfrew and Bahn 1996), the process is far from complete and there are still many contentious issues and problems. Nevertheless, some things can be, and have been, established as reliable and realistic.

Keller also misrepresents archaeologists' views on specific topics. Contrary to her claims, most archaeologists readily accept the close integration of economic, social, and ritual spheres of activity in traditional societies. Archaeologists were keenly interested in using myths to help locate sites and reconstruct past societies. In fact, Henrich Schliemann used myths to locate and excavate Troy in the mid-nineteenth century. Since then, many archaeological projects have followed his example. Dumézil (1952, 1958), Littleton (1973), and others developed the study of comparative mythology to study the religious, social, and political organization of specific prehistoric cultures like the Proto Indo-Europeans. In his well-known studies in the 1960s, Andre Leroi-Gourhan also used cave art to elucidate prehistoric mythology and successfully demonstrated some of its basic components. For the past two decades, Jacques Cauvin has been continuing this tradition in his analysis of Near Eastern Neolithic ideologies as well. Thus the use and study of mythology is nothing new to archaeology. Keller's arguments that Gimbutas was a revolutionary that tried to introduce studies of mythology but was spurned by archaeologists because they were hostile to dealing with such topics is simply untrue.

Keller also portrays archaeologists as rejecting Gimbutas' model of a Bronze Age, war-like, patriarchal Indo-European culture which invaded Old Europe. Yet, up until Renfrew's proposed alternative model of a Neolithic Indo-European expansion, Gimbutas' model was, and may still be, the most widely accepted one. The relative merits of the two models are still being actively debated as is normal in scientific inquiry. Similarly, archaeologists have not generally been blinded by their cultural values of an "exclusively male-centered concept of divinity." The great goddesses of Sumerian city states, such as Inanna, and the very prominent role of goddesses in Minoan Crete and other Neolithic cultures have long been recognized by leading scholars such as Noah Kramer, Arthur Evans, and James Mellaart. Keller similarly misrepresents archaeologists' views on the origin of European civilization

... Gimbutas completely ignores the overwhelming importance of the bull as the main masculine element in Neolithic religion ... As the dominant ideological symbol of the Neolithic, the bull represented the antithesis of a peacefully sedentary society or one in harmonious equilibrium [and] seems to have established the tradition of warrior sky-god dominated pantheons long before the advent of the Bronze Age warrior gods like Zeus, who, incidentally, also took the form of a bull.

and seems to misunderstand the technical definition of this term (equivalent to a state with at least three levels of political hierarchy). She is also oblivious to any notion of incremental cultural evolution involving complexity, inequality, and political control through tribal, chiefdom and state levels.

In a broader context, she characterizes scientists, including archaeologists, as divorced from the use of intuition. This, too, is patently erroneous as any reading of the great physicists' ideas on nature and reality clearly shows (see especially Wilber 1984, a book of essays by the leading physicists of this century). As in the preceding examples, Keller seems to be misrepresenting archaeology as a discipline so that she can sustain her thesis that Gimbutas' ideas about the existence of Neolithic matrifocal societies have not gained any acceptance because of the narrow, conspiratorial attitudes of archaeologists (and scientists in general) rather than the actual merits of Gimbutas' ideas. This is a ploy which simply cannot be sustained in this case. What the great thinkers of science do maintain is that before accepting ideas or statements about the world as reliable or true, whether they derive from intuition, logic, or other sources, they must undergo rigorous reality testing. Without such a step, no real progress in understanding can be made. Remains from the past constitute our primary means of testing our ideas about the past. So, let us see how Gimbutas' notions stack up against the physical remains.

Archaeological Evidence

Accepting Gimbutas' interpretations at face value, Keller makes a number of claims about Old European Neolithic society, and by extension, the Near Eastern Neolithic culture from which it was derived. Keller claims there is no evidence of war (no fortifications, no weapon caches), no warrior or father gods, no evidence of hierarchies or dominant males, but abundant evidence for goddess worship and artistic creations. Such an assessment has been contested by numerous archaeologists of both sexes and diverse theoretical schools (see the articles cited by

... there is recurring evidence of human sacrifice both in the PPNB cultures of the Middle East and in the heart of the Old European cultures. Surely this is the ultimate expression of power and forced submission typical of aggressive and dominating elites. It is utterly unknown among truly egalitarian people.

Keller as well as Anthony's critiques [1995] and Hutton's overview [1991]). The major critiques have been about Gimbutas' slipshod and highly subjective analyses and her tendency to ignore or blatantly manipulate data that does not conform to her ideas.

Gimbutas claims to have identified 30,000 goddess representations from southeastern Europe, yet this data has never been presented in any form remotely like a full analysis and many of the examples that she does illustrate are of indeterminate sex or portray a wide range of animals and symbols that Gimbutas *assumes* to represent a universal goddess. These symbols encompass a wide range of phenomena, including: oblique parallel lines, horizontal parallel lines, vertical parallel lines, chevrons, lozenges, zigzags, wavy lines, meanders, circles, ovals, spirals, dots, crescents, U's, crosses, swirls, caterpillars, double axes, chrysalises, horns, butterflies, birds, eggs, fish, rain, cows, dogs, does, stags, snakes, toads, turtles, hedgehogs, bees, bulls, bears, goats, pigs, pillars, and sexless linear or masked figures. One wonders what is left. Over 10 years ago, I drew attention to this deficiency in methodology (Hayden 1986) and to the fact that at least some of these forms are more generally associated with male deities (pillars, stags, bulls, snakes). Given this poor quality foundation of the basic data, it is difficult to take Gimbutas' subsequent claims very seriously.

Moreover, in adhering to her *idee fixe* approach to the archaeological data in order to prove her ideas about goddess dominated cultures, Gimbutas completely ignores the overwhelming importance of the bull as the main masculine element in Neolithic religion — a role acknowledged by most archaeologists. Phalluses also constitute an abundant Neolithic type of ritual artifact that has been generally ignored by most prehistorians (Hutton 1991:42). As well, representations of bulls are probably far more common than of goddesses, and bull representations are sometimes prominently juxtaposed with goddess representations such as those in the Neolithic shrines of Çatal Hüyük and in Minoan buildings. Cauvin (1994: 166, 176), in his thorough synthesis of the Neolithic expansion from the Near East has even termed the Neolithic the "People of the Bull" culture. According to Cauvin, the bull is *the* major ideological theme in this culture, although goddess figures are also prominent. He notes that the wild bull was a terrifying animal for prehistoric people,

an animal that symbolized brute instinctual force, violence, great power, great virility, and great ferociousness. As the dominant ideological symbol of the Neolithic, the bull represented the *antithesis* of a peacefully sedentary society or one in harmonious equilibrium. The bull was later explicitly associated with Near Eastern solar images such as the Bull of Heaven, and this association probably existed in Neolithic times. Cauvin thinks that the bull was revered by the expanding Neolithic peoples as a supernatural warrior patron similar to the eagle and jaguar patrons of Aztec warriors. Cauvin argues that the bull, therefore, seems to have established the tradition of warrior sky-god dominated pantheons long before the advent of the Bronze Age warrior gods like Zeus, who, incidentally, also took the form of a bull.

What other evidence exists to support Cauvin's views of the Neolithic? First of all, he notes that the very fact that Near Eastern Pre-pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) culture expanded at the rate of one kilometer per year from the Near East to the farthest reaches of Europe is a strong indication by itself that Neolithic cultures were not peaceful, especially since the indigenous cultures were generally *replaced* rather than assimilated. It is naive to think that all the cultures in this expansion area would politely vacate their traditional lands upon request of foreigners.

Secondly, there is a strong emphasis on prestige items including carefully made arrowheads that proliferate to a far greater extent than might be expected in stock raising societies *versus* those that hunt wild game. This indicates that arrows were being used for war and that war was a prestige activity (Cauvin 1994:168). Similar observations have been made in western and northern Europe (Keeley 1997: 309).

Thirdly, there are many indications of fortified, palisaded, walled Neolithic sites from early to late Neolithic times, from southeastern Europe (sites such as Dimini in Greece) to northeastern Europe, including ones with mass graves in the bottoms of encircling ditches. These are described in most standard works on the Neolithic (see Scarre 1984; Milisauskas 1986: 787; Webster 1990: 343; Evans and Rasson 1984: 720). Gimbutas dismisses the fortified character of these sites on the basis that many of them are on open plains. However, except in the most extreme combat situations, most ethnographic tribal communities that are fortified against attack are located close to their fields and on floodplains where the best soils occur, rather than on remote hilltops. Similarly, while it is true that caches of weapons from the Neolithic are rare, weapons caches do not really characterize any warring tribal societies or most chiefdom societies, such as those of the Northwest Coast where violence related mortality afflicted 20-30% of everyone buried in cemeteries. Weapons caches only became common when state level societies evolved with standing armies financed by the state. Despite this general pattern, there are still

many sanctuaries in Minoan Crete, in the heart of Gimbutas' "peaceful" Old Europe, where the primary figures are male and weapons offerings are common (Marinatos 1993:125).

Fourthly, over the past two decades there has been mounting evidence for mass killings during the Neolithic. While it is true that a half century ago archaeologists thought of the European Neolithic as being peaceful, egalitarian, and non-hierarchical in general, this view has undergone an almost complete transformation with new evidence that has come to light. Earlier scholars also seemed to ignore the considerable evidence that did exist at the time for fortified sites. At Roaix, in southern France, there were 700 Neolithic skeletons stacked on top of each other, some with arrowheads embedded in the bones clearly indicating a war grave (Mills 1984). At Talheim in Germany, there is a mass Neolithic grave with 35 skulls fractured by adzes being used as maces (Wahl and König 1987), and Keeley (1997, 1996) reports many other similar occurrences such as at Schletz, Asparn, Tiefenellen, and others. There are also occurrences of war trophy heads and skull caps at places like Herxhiem where up to 1,000 homicidal deaths are probably represented. Of special interest is the use of the adze as a weapon of war which probably explains its high prestige value and elaboration of form and materials in some Neolithic cultures. There are also the ubiquitous arrowheads and maces, the latter being used exclusively as a weapon of war. Finally, warriors are portrayed in Minoan frescoes on Crete and Thera, some clearly going off for conquest (Marinatos 1993:59,244).

Thus, as was the case of the Maya, who scholars 50 years ago also believed were a peaceful society of intellectuals and artistic craftsmen, there is now abundant graphic and gruesome evidence that both the Maya in Mesoamerica and the Neolithic societies in Europe were strongly immersed in warfare on a regular basis. In Europe, the evidence extends from the beginning of the Neolithic to its end. On the other hand, there can be little doubt that the incoming Bronze Age Indo-Europeans took warfare and combat to new heights and intensities generally not witnessed by many Neolithic communities.

Keller's discussion of hierarchies is somewhat similar to her treatment of warfare. A half century ago, it may have been more fashionable to imagine Maya and European Neolithic society as embodying idyllic, egalitarian, non-hierarchical ways of life. The intervening years have made it abundantly clear, however, that increasing social complexity and craft specialization are based upon, and intimately linked to the development of social, political, and economic hierarchies involving major inequalities. The beautifully crafted objects of art that Gimbutas and Keller dote upon as expressions of an artist-oriented society should be more realistically viewed as expressions of powerful and wealthy elites. Do they really believe that the abundant gold ornaments accompanying select Old European burials (see Renfrew

... there is no theoretical or empirical support for the idea of non-hierarchical, egalitarian, peaceful chiefdoms or states in the European Neolithic, and no support for colonies of artists producing art for art's sake.

and Bahn 1996:387) were acquired by egalitarian, non-hierarchical means? The idea that people can or should produce great art (art that is exceedingly expensive and time consuming to make) simply to satisfy personal inner needs (art for art's sake) is a very unusual notion that is only found in the modern industrial world. It is a completely foreign and bizarre notion in traditional non-industrial societies where great art is used exclusively for rituals or to display wealth (Dissanayake 1988). Moreover, the specialized ceramic production centers of the Tripolye region in the heartland of Gimbutas' Old Europe are more indicative of something approaching a market economy rather than individual artisans producing for their self-fulfillment (Anthony 1995).

Civilizations and even chiefdoms simply cannot and do not function in an egalitarian fashion. Hierarchical control is their *defining* feature and no amount of philosophical or idyllic reverie seems capable of changing this characteristic in the real world. The topic is too vast to deal with in detail here, but I know of no ethnographic or archaeological examples where any credible claim of a non-hierarchical chiefdom or state exists. In the European Neolithic, fortified sites were often at the top of local settlement hierarchies indicating at the very least the existence of political hierarchies, while their sheer size (up to 300 hectares) and complexity indicates centralized political control by elites (Scarre 1984: 242, 335; Milisauskas and Kruk 1989; Anthony 1995; Demoule and Perles 1993). On the basis of community sizes, settlement hierarchies, wealth discrepancies, and craft specializations, archaeologists do not hesitate to ascribe a chiefdom status to the most important Old European sites described by Gimbutas, and a state level of organization to the major centers on Minoan Crete. These are some of the most certain conclusions archaeologists have established in the past half century. Describing Neolithic Old Europe as egalitarian and non-hierarchical is simply inconsistent with all the current ethnographic and archaeological data. For an archaeologist, maintaining that complex societies can develop without socioeconomic inequalities or hierarchies or heterarchies is on a par with arguing that the earth is flat or arguing that the world was created without the process of evolution.

In addition to these general indications, there is recurring evidence of human sacrifice both in the *PPNB* cultures of the Middle East and in the heart of the Old European cultures (Cauvin 1994: 120-2; Marinatos 1993: 102, 136; Sakellarakis

... feel good methods are disturbing and dangerous because ... these are the methods used by fundamentalists and totalitarian movements to obscure reality and truth. ... maintaining that complex societies can develop without socioeconomic inequalities or hierarchies or heterarchies is on a par with arguing that the earth is flat or arguing that the world was created without the process of evolution.

and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1981). Surely this is the ultimate expression of power and forced submission typical of aggressive and dominating elites. It is utterly unknown among truly egalitarian people.

Hierarchies are also apparent in the Old European Neolithic cemeteries such as at Nitra in Czechoslovakia and Tiszapolgar in Hungary where most burials contain no grave goods, but a few contain important items of value such as axes, adzes, copper bracelets, daggers, and shell ornaments. At Varna, in Bulgaria, and Durankulak, wealth differences reached extreme forms with remarkable amounts of gold interred with some individuals. Contrary to Gimbutas' and Keller's portrayal of burials and relative gender roles, the burials at many of these sites show an impoverished, almost non-existent material wealth status for women in contrast to the obvious prestige objects buried with men, such as objects frequently associated with war (daggers, axes, adzes, and maces). At Varna and Durankulak, the richest sexable graves are those of males (Anthony 1995; Chapman 1991). The high status male buried with the most remarkable amount of gold held a war adze or mace and wore a gold penis sheath (Renfrew and Bahn 1996:387). In the Neolithic of Central Europe, Larry Keeley (1997) noted a similar pattern of high prestige weapons being buried with men, especially older men who, given their age, would have been at the top of the socioeconomic hierarchies. In fact, in Europe, as in ethnographic New Guinea, stone adzes and axes were often made exclusively out of prestige materials and in prestige dimensions. The same pattern has been documented for the megalithic cultures of western Europe, and for Minoan Crete in Gimbutas' Old Europe, where weapons were used as symbols of high status (Marinatos 1993:125).

While some cemeteries and burials and frescoes do demonstrate that women could attain relatively high status, there are no indications that they were in charge of Old European society or even surpassed men in power. In fact, world ethnographic surveys by Marxist and feminist scholars have shown that such cases do not occur anywhere in the world, and that literal matriarchies are non-existent (see Hayden 1993: 350-353 for references and further data). In Near Eastern and

European Neolithic societies, males rather typically seem to have controlled the weapons of war and used them in aggressive fashions, emphasizing aggressive iconographies like the wild bull to energize their expansions and personal ambitions.

In short, there is no theoretical or empirical support for the idea of non-hierarchical, egalitarian, peaceful chiefdoms or states in the European Neolithic, and no support for colonies of artists producing art for art's sake. Given the above evidence, especially the very rich male burials with weapons at Varna, Keller's statement that privileged males burials with weapons and extraordinary wealth was a phenomenon introduced by Indo-Europeans into Old Europe is simply erroneous. Nor was human sacrifice introduced to Europe by Indo-Europeans. It was there all along. Nor did the incoming Indo-Europeans simply destroy all the beautiful Old European art. The incoming Indo-European warrior elites appropriated and employed resident Old European artists to make traditional prestige objects as well as new forms such as the magnificent inlaid Mycenaean bronze daggers. In western Europe, the incoming Bronze Age Indo-Europeans also appropriated, rather than destroyed, the major megalithic monuments such as Stonehenge and Avebury (and probably much of their associated rituals). The Indo-Europeans carried on the development of these monuments to far greater pinnacles of expression than these monuments reached in Neolithic times. They are the forms we see today.

Feel Good Epistemology

Thus, Keller's and Gimbutas' views of Old European matrifocal societies simply do not hold up under any degree of reality testing, which is why no reputable archaeologist has ever endorsed them and why they have been severely criticized. In order to hide such deficiencies, Keller and Gimbutas declare that archaeologists and scientists are narrow minded people, prejudiced by male dominated values, scientific conceptual constraints, and narrow empiricism. Instead of rigorously scrutinizing their ideas in the bright light of reality, Keller proposes that we should adopt a "feel good" method of evaluating competing theories. She wants readers to open themselves to her vision of the source of all life as though beholding the brilliance of the sun and then ask which proposals we would like to believe: ones that make her (and if we open ourselves the right way, us) feel good, or ones that make her feel not-so-good. Whichever interpretation of the past makes us feel the best should be adopted as true and reliable as long as we can find some empirical support for it. But 'some' empirical support can be found for almost any proposition on earth.

This approach leads too easily to gross distortions of facts and interpretations, and to self-delusion. Choosing between alternative explanations on the basis of "What if ..." hypothetical questions, which may only be delusions, is to reduce real inquiry to absurdity. Nor should the relevance for today's social problems be a factor in assessing the relative merits of ideas about the past.

Relevance can certainly be a criterion for choosing our initial research questions, but should never enter into the evaluation of our models of the past. Nor is there any reason to think that whatever Plato conceived as a (very speculative) highest level of truth has any relation to reality. In fact, given the wide range of opinions, mind games, and arguments among philosophers today and in the past, is there any reason to assume that anything has been established with certainty after 3,000 years of inquiry using their methods? We are all interested in finding the real principles that govern the universe. That is the ultimate goal of scientists, philosophers, mystics, and many others. But how do we do that with any confidence? There have been countless visionaries who have seen “the light” that gave them ecstatic experiences and the feeling of great intuitive insights: endless millenarian cults that proclaimed the end of the world or contact with comets or aliens, political adherents to ideologically dominated movements like Communism and Fascism, and there have also been people with golden tablets that would save the world. How do we separate the delusional enlightenments from those with genuine insights? The only method that has so far proved to be of any reliable value is the scientific method.

In archaeology, while we may not have the answers to all the questions viewed as important, we have been able to at least establish some major milestones of understanding with relative certainty using the reality-testing methods of science. We have established the time scale of human existence, the overall physical and cultural evolution of humans, criteria for recognizing and charting warfare as well as social and political complexity and social inequality. We are still working on refining many of these conclusions and we are still trying to usefully describe and understand other phenomena such as ritual behavior and gender roles, but the essential framework is in place and is solid.

Rejecting or minimizing methods that adhere closely to reality testing in favor of politically correct or feel good methods is disturbing and dangerous because, as Marvin Harris notes, these are the methods used by fundamentalists and totalitarian movements to obscure reality and truth. In this respect, Keller’s constant use of terms exhorting readers to “believe,” “accept,” “embrace,” “open your mind” to “radiance” and “vision,” and avoid “resistance” to Gimbutas’ semi-mystical methods have an unsettling evangelical fundamentalist ring to them. According to Keller, people who do not believe that an illuminating experience of the essential nature of reality is possible cannot use Gimbutas’ method. What is the difference between this and ‘born again’ fundamentalism?

In closing, I would like to iterate that I am not against the use of intuition in helping to understand our universe. In fact, I view ecstatic experiences as one of the most unique aspects of the human emotional makeup in the animal kingdom (Hayden 1987). I have proposed that near death experiences, and the ecstatic states that probably derive from them, may be our best approximation of contact with

How do we separate the delusional enlightenments from those with genuine insights? ... Ecstatic experiences should be highly valued and sought out; and, in some situations, they may provide real insights into spiritual dimensions of the universe. However, they are not automatically reliable or realistic representations of the universe.

transcendent realms. Ecstatic experiences should be highly valued and sought out; and, in some situations, they may provide real insights into spiritual dimensions of the universe. However, they are *not* automatically reliable or realistic representations of the universe. Therefore, I insist upon rigorous evaluation of such insights before I will accept them as real, especially where they purport to say something about verifiable domains of inquiry like prehistory. Nor am I saying that we can know nothing about past religions or rituals. I think we can know a great deal; but given the many different views on this topic, all ideas must be carefully scrutinized and evaluated on the basis of real evidence. In this respect, Gimbutas’ views about Old European Neolithic society simply do not stand up to testing. Other ideas, such as those of Cauvin and Marinatos, stand up far better, and it is here that we should begin our modeling of past Neolithic religions and societies. There is a long and strong tradition in archaeology of dealing with social, political, religious, and mythological aspects of culture as they evolved through time. I am happy to be part of that tradition, for archaeologists have many very significant things to say about these issues, but a full discussion of them is a far larger undertaking than space permits here.

Works Cited

- Anthony, D. 1995. “Nazi and eco-feminist prehistories: ideology and empiricism in Indo-European archaeology.” in P. Kohl and C Fawcett (eds.), *The nationalism, politics, and practice of archaeology*. Cambridge UP.
- Cauvin, Jacques. 1994. *Naissance des divinités, naissance de l’agriculture*. Paris: CNRS Editions.
- Chapman, J. 1991. “The creation of social arenas in Varna.” in P. Garwood (ed.), *Sacred and profane*. Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, Monograph 32: 152-171.
- Demoule, J., and C. Perles. 1993. “The Greek Neolithic: A new review.” *Journal of World Prehistory* 7: 355-416.
- Dissanayake, Ellen. 1988. *What is art for?* Seattle: UW Press.
- Dumézil, Georges. 1952. *Les dieux des indo-européens*. Paris: Galliard.

- DumÉzil, Georges. 1958. *L'idÉologie tri-partie des indo-europÉens*. Brussels: Latomus.
- Evans, Robert, and Judith Rasson. 1984. "Ex Balcanis lux? Recent developments in Neolithic and Chalcolithic research in Southeast Europe." *American Antiquity* 49: 713-741.
- Hayden, Brian. 1986. "Old Europe: Sacred matriarchy or complementary opposition?" in A. Bonanno (ed.), *Archaeology and fertility cult in the ancient Mediterranean*. Amsterdam: Gruner, 17-30.
- Hayden, Brian. 1987. "Alliances and ritual ecstasy: Human responses to resource stress." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26(1): 81-91.
- Hutton, Ronald. 1991. *The pagan religions of the ancient British Isles*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Keeley, Lawrence. 1996. *War before civilization: The myth of the pacific past*. Oxford UP.
- Keeley, Lawrence. 1997. "Frontier warfare in the early Neolithic." in Debra Martin and David Frayer (eds.), *Troubled Times: Violence and warfare in the past*. Australia: Gordon and Breach. 303-319.
- Littleton, C. Scott. 1973. *The new comparative mythology*. Berkeley: UC Press.
- Marinatos, Nanno. 1993. *Minoan religion*. U of South Carolina Press.
- Milisauskas, Sarunas. 1986. "Selective survey of archaeological research in eastern Europe." *American Antiquity* 51: 779-798.
- Milisauskas, Sarunas, and Janusz Kruk. 1989. "Neolithic economy in central Europe." *Journal of World Prehistory* 3: 403-446.
- Mills, Nigel. 1984. "The Neolithic of southern France." in Christopher Scarre (ed.), *Ancient France*. Edinburgh UP. 91-145.
- Renfrew, Colin, and Paul Bahn. 1996. *Archaeology: theories, methods, and practice*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Sakellarakis, Yannis and Efi Sapouna-Sakellarakis. 1981. "Drama of death in a Minoan temple." *National Geographic* 159(2): 205-222.
- Wahl, J., and H. Konig. 1987. "Anthropologisch-traumatologische Untersuchung der menschlichen Skelettreste aus dem bandkeramischen Massengrab bei Talheim, Kreis Hilbronn." *Fundberichte aus Baden-Wurtemberg*, Band 12: 65-194.
- Webster, Gary. 1990. "Labor control and emergent stratification in prehistoric Europe." *Current Anthropology* 31: 337-355.
- Wilber, Ken (ed.). 1984. *Quantum Questions*. Boulder: Shambala.

Brian Hayden obtained his PhD in Archaeology from the University of Toronto and currently teaches archaeology at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia. He has conducted ethnographic and archaeological fieldwork in Australia, Guatemala, Mexico, Tunisia, Lebanon, France, Ontario, British Columbia, Colorado, Thailand, and Vietnam. He has a longstanding research (and personal) interest in the social, economic and religious aspects of past and contemporary traditional cultures. Among the courses he teaches at SFU is a course on prehistoric and traditional religion.

READERS' FORUM

continued from page 5

the ideologies of their times into the data, and both are reliant on an opposition of two cultures, conceived as essentially static and homogeneous, despite the length of time and breadth of geography involved. Can these be the two "competing theories" that Keller refers to? They hardly define the field, and they are equally outdated.

The rest of Keller's article deals with the myth of the Civilization of the Great Goddess, in the present day, and seems to focus on whether archaeologists (or presumably other social scientists) "accept" it and what may be causing them difficulty. The attempt here seems to be to incorporate spiritual and artistic components, in order to create a successor science, a replacement paradigm which will give a women-centered account convincing enough to be accepted as a better approximation to What Really Happened™ in prehistory. Apply the right method, i.e. Gimbutas' method, to "the empirical data", and truth will emerge. But within any such attempt, founded in a realist approach to scientific endeavour, the data become the crucial test — and here, surely, in the neolithic figurines we have an outstanding example of how "the data" in themselves have no meaning until they are interpreted ...

As I see it, Keller's article is founded on a paradox. She seeks a way to see "clearly into the radiant, vibratory nature of reality" (p.33) but which, or whose, reality? The methods of Gimbutas, within realist science, are so far foundering on the test of "empirical data". The search for The Truth of past or present requires proof. So Keller speaks of Gimbutas' work as in line with the "more post-modern expansion of human knowledge", a "New Science" that does not seek "absolute certainty" (p. 35). Here, Gimbutas' interpretations become part of the multiplicity of meanings I referred to already — and what is most meaningful becomes the construction and use of the paradigm in its own day and for today's women and men. In short, the kind of truth claims made by Keller do not seem, to me, compatible with a postmodern approach. And Gimbutas' own methodology can hardly be described as postmodern, surely, dealing with, as Meskell, says "the 'establishment' epistemological framework of polar opposites, rigid gender roles, barbarian invaders and cultural stages" (Meskell 1995, Goddesses, Gimbutas and 'New Age' archaeology, *Antiquity* 69: 74-86, p.82).

But today's world is where Keller's vision applies, and here, at least, I can have some agreement with her. It is clearly, even obviously, more possible to create a world in which peace and cooperation are centrally valued, if we see such a world as possible and these values as centrally human. But that is not to say that such a world would look like any of our imaginings, or that it need have happened that way before, especially on a large-scale, intersocietal, level. Keller's

... the kind of truth claims made by Keller do not seem,
to me, compatible with a postmodern approach. And
Gimbutas' own methodology can hardly be described as
postmodern, surely, dealing with ... the 'establishment'
epistemological framework of polar opposites, rigid
gender roles, barbarian invaders and cultural stages...

article frames her vision in terms of a return to the Mother Goddess, but it is today's women and men who have seen the pictures of the big blue marble, the third planet hanging in space like a jewel, and speak of Earth as one, fragile and precious, so that the concept of an Earth Mother takes on new layers of meaning. And fortunately the ability to speak of Goddess, or Goddesses, and ally ourselves with Earth, does not require a belief in Kurgan invasions. For today's feminists, Gimbutas' work provides a challenge indeed — to explore further the shifting dimensions of meaning in both present and past, to find ways to articulate visions like those of Keller without requiring certainty and conversion, without claiming ownership of the True Version of the past, while yet to retain multiple voices without falling into the trap of postmodern incomprehensibility.

While writing this comment, I was preparing to talk to graduate students about research methods, and simultaneously planning an equinox ritual to my own Harvest Lady, working with yet another set of meanings around earth and concepts of Goddess; and my mind was drawn back to a recent time when women from my community came together to nurture a need, displaying all the compassion and cooperation that Keller might wish. Did they hold a belief in the Civilization of the Goddess? Some, perhaps. Did I? Not as such. But as we danced, we created our own meanings of mind, body and spirit, Goddess within and without, to give strength to all to return to the workings of our everyday lives, and to create changes where we could.

And so I end this comment with what I wrote then, as an offering to uncertain interpretations, and to whichever Goddesses are listening to this debate:

last night I danced with the women
to earth's drum beat, bare
feet on dust and stone,
brown needles on the thirsty soil;
around, children of earth, small
creatures of the forest, scuttling beetles,
birds, squirrels, web-weavers,
predators and prey, above, within,

beneath deep-rooted trees where met
earth and sky, a turning moment,
dark and bright together, growth and death

as a wolf runs in the forest, and stands
in starlight, and howls her song,
feeling the pulse of earth beneath her feet.

Jenny Blain is an Assistant Professor in the School of Occupational Therapy, Dalhousie University, with a PhD from Dalhousie in Educational Foundations, who considers herself as an anthropologist, more or less. Her current research is on identity and construction of meaning within nature-religions, with a particular focus on women's spirituality, Heathenism, and shamanism.

Rita Rippetoe writes:

This letter will address two of the areas of discussion I would like to open in regards to Keller's article. Primarily, Keller's association of Gimbutas' theories with Socratic philosophy seems problematic to me. First we might note that, from what I know of his philosophy, Socrates himself displayed little concern with mythology or history. His methods of inquiry were designed to determine the nature of, and lead to the practice of, virtue: the ethical requirements for social life. His method was also based on the belief that ideas precede their material manifestations and exist in a realm accessible only to the philosopher. The dialectical method helps us "remember" what our souls know from having resided in the realm of ideas prior to birth. It is difficult for me to see how such a disputed philosophical position on the very nature of knowledge can contribute to an understanding of the facts of human history. I include emotions and beliefs in my definition of facts. It may not be as easy to determine whether a culture believes in the Christian Trinity, or uses the color red to symbolize danger, for example, as whether it's members customarily wear nose rings or eat beef — but all four conditions are susceptible of proof. Unless I have misunderstood Socrates or Keller's use of Socratic theory I would hesitate to employ this approach to Gimbutas or to any other theory about history.

While Gimbutas, as Keller notes, believes that the society of Old Europe was transformed by invasion, Colin Renfrew theorizes that the changes came from within the culture. I would like to clarify why this is an important controversy.

Briefly, if hierarchy, patriarchy, and war-focused cultures evolve independently in different areas it can be claimed that such structures are necessary stages through which all cultures must move — and even that they are

beneficial, with hierarchy and wealth accumulation through war causing specialization and advances in technology and the arts. War, slavery, female submission, etc. can be portrayed as minor prices to have paid for the glories of civilization. But, if these developments were imposed on a previously peaceful and egalitarian culture (*ie*, Old Europe), which appeared to be developing the variety and plenty associated with historical civilizations, either by conquest or by the need to resist conquest (*ie*, we must have war leaders to fight *their* war leaders, so even if never conquered we become like our enemy) then it can be argued that the new traits are caused by accidents of history rather than necessities of cultural evolution. Thus, the argument that civilization has always required inequality and must, because of human nature, require it in the future, is attacked at its root.

This explanation has led me to ... my perception that Keller thinks we should believe the theories of Gimbutas because such belief would be good for us as a culture. Keller explicitly ties her vision of a future global civilization to the ability to question “the inevitability of warfare, economic hierarchies of dominance ... and the exclusively male centered concept of divinity” (34). This ability seems tied in her mind to acceptance of the Gimbutas theory of Old Europe. But what if the truth of Gimbutas’ views can never be established? What if she is wrong? What if Western culture has always depended on the pain and poverty of many for the pleasure and riches of a few; is there still hope? Can there be reform? I personally believe that much of Gimbutas’ work will be confirmed by other scholars and that as new generations learn a different view of the human past their dreams of future possibilities will be enlarged. Such a shift in consciousness ... will be very helpful in building a better society. However I hope that it is not essential. I am leery of relying for future reform on a view of past accomplishments which could be dismissed as wishful thinking based on a discredited theory.

Rita Rippetoe holds a BA in cultural anthropology from U. California, Davis (1970), a MA in English from Calif. State U. at Sacramento (1993), and is currently a PhD candidate in English at U. Nevada, Reno.

Nancy Ramsey writes:

... The main criticism I have of the article lies in the conclusion. Keller states, quite accurately, that new paradigms often meet with resistance due to the emotional investment tied into old paradigms. Keller seems to suggest that we should choose to believe the new Gimbutas paradigm because it leads to the idea of the possibility of a “kinder, gentler world.” I agree. The idea that once things were different, that “good old days” actually existed and can exist again is a

... what if the truth of Gimbutas’ views can never be established? What if she is wrong? What if Western culture has always depended on the pain and poverty of many for the pleasure and riches of a few; is there still hope? Can there be reform? ... I am leery of relying for future reform on a view of past accomplishments which could be dismissed as wishful thinking ...

longing that has no doubt held humanity’s imagination since the “good old days” when we no doubt regretted leaving the trees for the savannas.

Gimbutas does present an attractive past, perhaps a bit too forcefully. This can lead to dangerous extremes. I would like to believe that as a species we were incapable of enslaving each other, stealing entire continents from their indigenous populations, genocide, war, flagrant disregard for the earth and the other beings that dwell here, and a million other petty cruelties that seem part of the package of human life and being. But to choose to believe a paradigm because it makes us feel good about ourselves does not lead to good archaeology or history. Love is blind and this sometimes goes for the love of a theory or idea as well. The tendency exists to cut data to size so that it fits our beloved theories. And that can lead to the silencing of voices we need to hear, both from our past, our present, and our future ...

Nancy Ramsey is a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at UC Santa Barbara. She has an MA in Religious Studies and another in Sociology from the U of South Florida. Her main area of research is Wicca, Neopaganism and other assorted Goddess and nature religions.

Ann-Marie Gallagher writes:

The Interface of Archaeology and Mythology: A Philosophical Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm by Mara Keller: A Response

Having read Mara Keller’s article carefully, particularly her conclusions in relation to the entrenched rejections of Marija Gimbutas’s work, I agree with her proffered suggestion that: ‘resistance to her discoveries stems more from the investment individuals have in the paradigm of civilization that is constructed in accord with the prevailing gender, race and class hierarchies etc.’ ...

Mara Keller’s description of the tautologies of positivist frameworks is a veritable paean to the efficacy of post-modernist approaches when put to useful purpose — and as an arch-materialist, I have little enough occasion to see post-

... to choose to believe a paradigm because it makes us feel good about ourselves does not lead to good archaeology or history. Love is blind and this sometimes goes for the love of a theory or idea as well. The tendency exists to cut data to size so that it fits our beloved theories. And that can lead to the silencing of voices we need to hear, both from our past, our present, and our future ...

modernism as an 'efficient cause'. She is right when she stresses the importance of multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to reconstructions of the past, and recognizes that intersubjectivity is even finding its way into the sciences. ... However, given the impact that feminist research methodologies have had in the academy in the past twenty years, Plato (and his noetic insights) is hardly the first natural port of call for a shift from the thought-paradigm his reasoning demonstrates par excellence.

... Marija Gimbutas's work primarily recommends itself to students not because of her painstaking empirical research, nor even via her frankly valid and proper challenges to the patriarchal assumptions underpinning and framing much archaeological research: rather its main attraction is that it imports an unreconstructed twentieth-century essentialist paradigm into an historical period beginning some 8500 years ago in a huge land-mass extending throughout what is now Southeastern Europe and ending around 5,000 years ago and posits within that period first the existence and then the overthrow of a matrilinear and therefore peaceful civilization. However it is on two counts other than ahistoricism that I wish to raise issues that were absent from Mara Keller's argument.

Firstly, the issue of intersubjectivity. Part of the problem of Marija Gimbutas's archaeomythology is the absence of hermeneutically-aware acknowledgement of the interpreter's interests — the question is begged, and begged loudly 'whose mythology'? In this respect it is not worse than some of Gimbutas's most vociferous detractors, who assume that the paradigm within which they operate is somehow neutral, objective. However, it is certainly no better. ... In short, if we are to attend to the intersubjective within the research paradigm, it is imperative that the researching subject is as interrogative of herself and her status within the research as she is the subjects whose lives she seeks to study and discover. ... Both Marija Gimbutas and Mara Keller appear to be proponents of a worldview which is itself significantly gendered and unproblematized, and here I come to the second point, which is to raise the

possibility that Marija Gimbutas's theory may be interpreted as being seriously in conflict with feminism rather than of a piece with it.

Without wishing to detract from the very valuable points that both Marija Gimbutas and Mara Keller make in relation to the resistance of the academy to feminist incursions regarding the underpinnings of the relevant disciplines, I am nonetheless concerned to find the vocabulary of gender being so unproblematically deployed in the interests of revisionism. When Mara Keller uses the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' to describe the processes of logic and analogy, the alarm bells immediately ring: is this not the language of dualism, of polarity which also underpins and supports an emphatically patriarchal worldview? And this is pivotal flaw in both Marija Gimbutas's theory and Mara Keller's support of it; that it is the story of the overthrow of the 'feminine' by the 'masculine', and that because the purported civilization was matrifocal that it was also peaceful. The theory itself is soaked in the type of gendered essentialism that feminism in the 1990s continues to challenge. It is the vocabulary that, as part of what Karen J. Warren has called a 'logic of domination', has kept women, people of colour and the labouring classes in a position of subordination within capital patriarchy. Essentialism as a force for matriarchy does not travel towards the shifts in worldview envisaged so inspiringly and movingly by Keller in her concluding wishes.

As a feminist, I would be far more interested in a starting-point which proceeded to investigate the preponderance of female imagery in a given geographical location within a given historical period, and which acknowledged the avowed unconscious mental habits of the period from which we investigate: this to incorporate in particular the point from which the researcher herself begins. In this way, a preponderance of female imagery, rather than leading to the conclusion that women in the producing society were held in higher esteem, might be the subject of discussion in relation to contemporary understandings of the presence/absence of prehistorical female figures to better frame our interpretations. The meaning of the high presence of female imagery can then be discussed in terms of a number of available possibilities other than that which would be the natural result of imposing contemporary gendered ideologies onto past, and perhaps lost, mentalities. The contemporary relevance of Marija Gimbutas's work in terms of its applications both inside and outside of the academy, in short, is not as straightforward as 'masculine' enclaves resisting 'feminine' incursion; the resistance is far more complex, as complex, perhaps as the lives of our Neolithic ancestors may have been.

Ann-Marie Gallagher is the course leader of Women's Studies at the University of Central Lancashire in the U.K.

She writes and publishes on feminist pedagogy, women and spirituality, paganism and as a historian (recovering). She is currently editing a book on women and history titled Changing the Past: Women, History and Representation, which is scheduled to be published in 2000.

Wendy Griffin writes:

Gimbutas and the Goddess: An Evaluation from the Social Sciences

In her article on Marija Gimbutas, Mara Keller chose an interesting approach. It certainly is one that allows us to envision a future where we might want our children to raise their children. But regardless how useful a thing may be for the future, it doesn't mean it is accurate ... [Gimbutas'] theories tend to be judged as either absolutely true or absolutely false, and both are positions that lean more toward the political than the scholarly. Scholarship today indicates that her conclusions were true in some places — some times. There is good evidence that matrifocal villages in Old Europe and parts of the Mediterranean were indeed invaded by aggressive patriarchal outsiders. There is also excellent evidence that in Mesopotamia, for example, internal not external developments created male dominance.

Why and how did male dominance develop originally and why did it succeed? It seems fairly logical to most of us today that there is no biological mandate for patriarchy. It's doubtful if our species would have survived the early millennia if we had wasted female productivity, intelligence, and creativity the way patriarchal societies have always done. We know that there was a sexual division of labor during this time, and it was almost certainly interdependent and complimentary.

Gimbutas doesn't address these questions of why and how, but the social sciences argue that patriarchy grows out of the material conditions of people's lives. Anthropologist Peggy Sanday has demonstrated that where the physical environment and climate are beneficial, women and men tend to work together and relations between them appear to be fairly egalitarian and interdependent. Men join in primary childcare and societies develop religious symbol systems that include either a primary female divinity or a female creator who is equal to the male. Where the physical environment is harsh, nature is defined as hostile, or the culture revolves around hunting or herding, the sexes tend to separate from each other. Men are removed from childcare responsibilities, the creative powers are viewed as male, and male dominance and violence are not uncommon. In her study of tribal societies, Sanday further showed that the roles we play as women and men reflect the images the cultures use to understand the Divine. Religion tells us how and where we fit in the world and makes that meaningful for us.

But with rapid change, such as that which can occur in time of war, the

I am . . . concerned to find the vocabulary of gender being so unproblematically deployed in the interests of revisionism. . . . this is a pivotal flaw in both Marija Gimbutas's theory and Mara Keller's support of it; that it is the story of the overthrow of the 'feminine' by the 'masculine', and that because the purported civilization was matrifocal that it was also peaceful. The theory itself is soaked in the type of gendered essentialism that feminism in the 1990s continues to challenge.

invention of some revolutionary technology, or the dramatic climatic changes Keller discussed in her article, the meanings that religion gives us may not make as much sense as they once did. It's important to note that significant material and technological changes always go hand in hand with changes in symbols and religious thought. We see that happening today. Gimbutas argues convincingly that warfare didn't exist in Neolithic society, at least not organized warfare, and certainly nothing like what we see beginning in the 3rd millennium. Religious scholar Rita Gross wonders if perhaps warfare was an effect of rather than the cause of change.

In Mesopotamia, along with the invention of the plow and the accumulation of agricultural surpluses, came labor-intensive grain crops and an increased demand on women for more children. At the same time, the increased food supply permitted a bigger population to survive. Specialization emerged and, with it, some measure of hierarchy. Population density resulted in internal and external threats that were met with the rise of a 'warrior class' and the removal of young men from childcare responsibilities. These social changes were reflected in cultures' religious symbols. If the Neolithic Goddesses were autonomous, their Bronze Age descendants were not. Inanna got her power from her father. Isis ruled with Osiris and Horus at her side. Women's roles had changed with or without the arrival of the Kurdish hordes.

Marija Gimbutas was an extraordinary woman and scholar. But the ease and absolute certainty with which she drew conclusions about extremely detailed myths and rituals from very limited materials is disturbing. The reconstruction of ideas from 8,000 years ago is wide open to wishful thinking. We bring ourselves to our research, even when we believe we are being objective.

Every religion mythologizes its own origins. As such, it isn't the truth of sacred history that I'm challenging, though I certainly can't teach it as history to my students. I do tell them, however, that the proliferation of Neolithic female



Marija Gimbutas was an extraordinary woman and scholar. But the ease and absolute certainty with which she drew conclusions about extremely detailed myths and rituals from very limited materials is disturbing. The reconstruction of ideas from 8,000 years ago is wide open to wishful thinking.

figures and the places where they were discovered suggests an appreciation of female Divinity, and I discuss Gimbutas' contributions. These may have provided a catalyst for contemporary Goddess Spirituality. But the material conditions of today and tomorrow will shape our future social relations as well as our understanding of the Divine. No Neolithic nor Bronze Age Goddess will serve us well today.

She is still and always in the state of becoming.

Wendy Griffin is presently an Associate Professor of Women's Studies at California State University in Long Beach. She received her PhD in the interdisciplinary social sciences with an emphasis on the sociology of sex and gender from UC Irvine. Besides publishing academic articles on women in Goddess Spirituality, she recently completed Daughters of Gaia: Healing and Identity in Goddess Spirituality, an edited collection of research by academics and nonacademic scholar/practitioners. The book will be released in April 1999 by AltaMira Press. Her relevant scholarly articles can be read at: <http://www.csulb.edu/~wgriffin/publications/publications.html>

The Pomegranate would like to thank Dana Kramer-Rolls for guest-editing this issue's Readers' Forum. Ms Kramer-Rolls hold an MA in Systematic Theology from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley where she is now a PhD Candidate. Her dissertation topic is "Morphology of Medieval Marian Miracle Tales", an interdisciplinary study utilizing folkloric and anthropological methodology on hagiographic literary material. She has been a practicing Wiccan for over twenty-five years, is a science-fiction and fantasy author, and is a supporter of animal rights issues.



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Readers' Forum

Keller on Gimbutas and her critics

2

Jeffrey Kaplan

Savitri Devi and the
National Socialist Religion of Nature

4

Michael McNierney

The Stoic Way of Nature:
A Pagan Spiritual Path

13

Gus diZerega

Love, Suffering and Evil:
A Neopagan View

28

Book Reviews

Hekate the Salvatrix in Late Antiquity
Kate Slater

44

New Ethnicities,
Paganisms and English Law
Peter W. Edge

47



The Pomegranate

Editorial Staff

Maggie Carew, Stephen McManus, Fritz Muntean, Diana Tracy

Copyright

© 1997 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate

is published four times a year at the Cross-Quarter Holidays by *The Pomegranate*, 501 NE Thompson Mill Rd, Corbett, OR 97019.

Deadline:

The Solstice or Equinox preceeding each issue. See the inside back cover for our Call for Papers, and send to the above address for our Writers' Guidelines, or to our email address below.

Internet Home Page:

<http://www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/>
(email: antech@teleport.com)

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monodfield
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within the Craft. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included. In the interests of promoting lively discussion, we encourage both our writers and our readers to keep an open mind, and to be ready to explore a wide variety of outlooks.

Notes from the Underground

It may be true, as one of our New Age acquaintances recently advised us, that 1999 is the first year of the rest of the Millennium, but it is certainly the last year we'll ever see with quite so many 9s in it. In any case, we minions of Persephone have chosen to celebrate this event by gracing *The Pomegranate* with a new format. By using a more delicate typeface we've been able to increase our content by 15% without adding extra pages. We all hope that our readers will find this new look easier to read and more esthetically pleasing.

Never being the sort to flinch from controversy, we begin this issue with an article by Jeffrey Kaplan, whose recent writings on the Neonazi influences within today's Odinist communities have caused such a stir. This article takes the form of a biographic sketch of Savitri Devi, a National Socialist theoretician who has been called 'Hitler's Priestess,' and explores her concept of Nazism as a 'Nature Religion.'

For those of you who sometimes wonder if we Neopagans are reclaiming anything from pagan antiquity other than the names of some deities, we present an article by Michael McNierney on the philosophical principles of Roman Stoicism and how these might prove useful to those of us who wish to broaden the spiritual aspects of our lives. This article was originally written for *Gnosis* magazine, which we enthusiastically recommend to our readers. How many noticed that the most recent issue of *Gnosis* (#50, Winter 1999)

included an expanded version of Jenny Gibbons' "The Great Burning Times Quiz" which first appeared in our 5th issue?

Readers will find our third article quite a bit more philosophical and theological than anything we've offered so far. Gus diZerega is currently writing a book entitled *Pagans and Christians in the New Millennium* as his contribution to an intelligent and respectful interfaith dialogue, and this article is condensed from his chapter on Good and Evil. We're very impressed with what we've seen of this book so far, and encourage our readers to share their impressions with us.

Our first Book Review looks at an interesting new work about Hekate and the intercessional role she played in Late Antiquity among the ceremonialists of the day. The second is part of an ongoing debate among legal experts in the UK about protection of the rights of Neopagans. Although some may find this review a bit technical, most of our readers will hopefully be interested to know that our legal interests are being championed on a level other than the militant and confrontational.

To the delight of those of us who enjoy (at least observing) a good fight, we continue to be blessed with more dialogue about the theories of M Gimbutas and her followers. This issue's offerings also include several interesting suggestions about how these arguments might proceed. Once again, let us encourage our readers to contribute their own observations on this and (hopefully) other subjects.

Persephone's hard-working minions.

The Pomegranate Reader's Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended by one or two issues.

Mara Keller writes:

Dear Pomegranate Readers,

I am grateful for the thoughtful responses to my article defending Marija Gimbutas' theory on the cultural origins of Europe, as I see some progress in the debate of issues around whether or not Europeans have ancestors who were goddess- and god-revering, relatively sex-egalitarian, without exploitative economic class hierarchies, matristic, and relatively peaceful. When I was in college in the 1960s, the very idea of this was dismissed as a joke beneath discussion. Now, while it is faddish in academia to dismiss Gimbutas with ridicule and vehemence, at least some of her opponents are coming forward with detailed criticism, which I welcome. I believe the on-going dialogue is very important. I want to respond to readers' interesting charges of gendered essentialism, incompatibility with postmodern criticism, manipulation of data to fit the theory, and "feel-good" epistemology.

To start, I want to dispel some misconceptions. Neither Gimbutas nor I claim there

were matriarchies in Old Europe where women dominated men and artists produced art for art's sake; nor that because the cultures were relatively peaceful, there was no inter-human violence. Some critics extrapolate her views to the Near and Middle East and inappropriately challenge her theory with data from those other regions. Others grossly oversimplify the complexity of her theory as if they had never read it to begin with. The warfare, fortifications, mass graves, economic stratification and male dominance that coincided with the appearance of Proto-Indo-Europeans in Old Europe did not totally destroy but dominated and subsumed the more peaceful, egalitarian and primarily goddess-revering matrifocal cultures that preceded their arrival. European history can be read as the dynamic conflict and wary, wearying accommodations of these two cultures up until this day.

Gimbutas' interdisciplinary methodology of archaeomythology develops a cogent explanation of the internal coherence of symbols expressed in the material cultural database of Old Europe. While not brand new, her emphasis on combining archaeological science with the disciplines of mythology, history of religion, folklore, linguistics, and other disciplines is a very significant contribution. It came forward in 1974 at a time when the field of archaeology was dominated by the overly empiricist school of New Archaeology that emerged in reaction to what was seen as the overly speculative approach preceding it. The New Archaeology way has paid theoretical lip service to understanding religious ideology, but in practice was far more interested in material culture. Gimbutas not only took the religious life of Old Europe seriously when it was unfashionable to do so, she also took

seriously the flourishing expression of female imagery she thought was best characterized as representing ideas of divinity. Some of her critics seem especially disturbed by the idea of the sacredness of female imagery.

I see Gimbutas' interdisciplinary methodology as more subtle and multi-dimensional than that of the empiricist school, more engendered than that of the cognitive school, and more interested in the roles of women and goddesses as symbolic of sacred feminine energies of the universe than the emerging feminist school of archaeology, where the works of some of her younger feminist colleagues are fortunately taking up the slow and arduous task of engendering their male-dominated discipline. I laud current attempts toward an engendered archaeology that seriously considers the probable mental and spiritual beliefs of European prehistoric societies. However, I want to emphasize that this has only come to the fore in the 1990s. Gimbutas was already pioneering this approach in the 1970s and 1980s (albeit without a formal feminist theory). While her colleagues are revising the history of archaeology, why is Gimbutas not given the credit she deserves for bringing the issue of gender center stage and stimulating the renewed consideration of religion? It seems to me that the engendering of archaeology or the interpretation of religious symbolism is only accorded professional respect if it doesn't ruffle the feathers of putative male superiority.

If honoring "sacred feminine" and "sacred masculine" energies in the universe—as sometimes appear in experiences of sexual love and pleasure or sexual procreation—makes me a gender-essentialist, then I am happy to say I do not object to the

label. I do see significant biological and hormonal differences between men and women, but I do not think they are absolutely dichotomous, eternal or unchanging. Gimbutas discusses the long tradition of bi-valent sculptures in Old Europe combining male and female sexual attributes, and interprets them as the artists' expression of human wholeness. I would like to shift the rather stagnant feminist debate of social constructionism v. essentialism to a more fruitful plane, and assert there is some truth in both views; moreover, the self-aware self plays an important role as a third actor. In addition to on-going debates about "masculine" v. "feminine," nature v. nurture, and biological determinism v. cultural constructionism, there are also the random-chance-darwinism v. absolute-male-god-ism, and scientism v. holy-warrior-mysticism debates. I hope these will become leavened with more nature-based, goddess- and god-balanced, animistic/pantheistic/pan-entheistic spiritual-religious perspectives, along with more scientific human self-consciousness involving intuitive insight and even mystical understanding—to liven up the conversations.

The implications of Gimbutas' theory of European origins are synergistic with reconstructive (not merely deconstructive) postmodern thought. My understanding of postmodern discourse is (to simplify) that on the one hand it wants to challenge, deconstruct, and unfound any and all assumptions or assertions as

continued on page 51

Savitri Devi and the National Socialist Religion of Nature

by Jeffrey Kaplan
University of Helsinki

Nature, in American nature religion, is a reference point with which to think history. Its sacrality masks — and often quite explicitly reveals — a passionate concern for place and mastery in society (Catherine Albanese).¹

Thou shalt love God in all things, animals and plants (Alfred Rosenberg).²

THE quote from Prof Albanese which opens this paper perfectly captures the dominion imperative of Genesis 1:26; a pervasive force in the history of American religion, and a significant element in the American religion of nature.³ Yet American religion, like the American project itself, has ever been an optimistic enterprise, and the religion of nature as described in *Nature Religion in America* is remarkably benign.

This paper argues however, that nature religiosity can have its dark side, for National Socialism too was a religion of nature which was built upon the rock of selected streams of nineteenth century German romantic and occult philosophy. Indeed, German National Socialism provides the master case for the proposition that the sacrality of a religion of nature “masks—and often quite explicitly reveals—a passionate concern for place and mastery in society.” To illustrate this thesis, we

will first look briefly at the philosophical roots of German National Socialism. The bulk of our discussion however, will be devoted to the work of Savitri Devi, a National Socialist true believer of the 1930s whose post-War writings laid the groundwork for the modern National Socialist nature religion—a religion in which the impulse to control the natural world is explicitly disavowed. Finally, this paper will suggest that Devi’s work may act as a bridge for the convergence of the adherents of National Socialist beliefs with the strongly anti-racist world of deep ecology and animal liberation.⁴

Roots of the National Socialist Religion of Nature

By replacing the worship of God with the worship of nature, and by its combining the Darwinian model of natural selection with an organic conception of the ‘volk’ soul of the German nation, the 19th century school of German romantic philosophy made an enormous contribution to the creation of German National Socialism. In this process, the work of Johann Herder, Johann Fichte, and later, Ernst Haeckel was seminal in the creation of the National Socialist religion of nature.⁵ The writings of Haeckel are of particular influence, for it was Haeckel’s explicit rejection of the Christian conception of God, his concentration on the sacrality of German blood and his concomitant taxonomy of the races which would be of key importance in the creation of National Socialist philosophy. Indeed, Haeckel went further, creating an explicit nature religion, the German Monist League, which over time developed a set of rituals based on an imaginative revival of German pagan practices—including explicit sun worship—which anticipated the post-War revival of what Jung referred to as Wotanism.⁶

... nature religiosity can have its dark side, for National Socialism too was a religion of nature which was built upon the rock of selected streams of nineteenth century German romantic and occult philosophy.

According to Edvard Lind:

Haeckel’s writings were widely distributed and would have a great influence. Monism spread to the radical non-Christian, pagan and proto-Nazi groups that also shared the desire for a new Germanic faith for the German people. Important occultists such as Guido von List and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfelds were influenced by the concept of biological struggle and the need to purify the race to avoid the deterioration of the German race ...⁷

German National Socialism accepted Haeckel’s views, but added an intense emphasis on anti-Semitism.⁸ For the Nazis, National Socialism was the highest expression of natural law. Life was a struggle between races and peoples for survival, and the Jews were posited in starkly manichean terms as the superhuman force which had to be crushed to assure the survival of the German people and the Aryan race.⁹ To this philosophical base was added Hitler’s own solicitude toward animals and his reported desire to eventually adopt for himself—and for the German nation—a vegetarian diet. In a diary entry dated 26 April 1942, Dr. Josef Goebbels wrote:

An extended chapter of our talk was devoted by the Führer to the vegetarian question. He believes more than ever that meat eating is wrong. Of course, he knows that during the war we cannot completely upset our food system. After the war, however, he intends to tackle this problem also. Maybe he is right. Certainly the

arguments that he adduces in favour of his standpoint are compelling.¹⁰

As National Socialism was held to be in accord with the law of nature, and as National Socialist actions and ideology were aimed at seizing control of German destiny, the National Socialist religion of nature constituted the ultimate expression of sacrality masking “a passionate concern for place and mastery in society.”

Savitri Devi and the National Socialist Religion of Nature

Nicholas Goodrick-Clark has observed with some justification that Savitri Devi liked animals a good deal more than she liked people.¹¹ At the same time however, Savitri Devi’s powerful vision of a National Socialist religion of nature serves not only as a plea for humanity to move beyond the conception of dominion over nature, but as a bridge between the worlds of deep ecology and animal liberation and the adherents of racist neo-Nazi beliefs.

In fact, Devi’s work is undergoing a considerable revival in the contemporary National Socialist subculture. Her books have not only begun to reappear, as in the Noontide Press edition of the *Impeachment of Man*, but works which originally appeared in the early 1960s issues of the *National Socialist World* are being reprinted and redistributed by several National Socialist publishing houses. Indeed,

“The world that exalts Pasteur and Pavlov, and countless other tormentors of innocent creatures, in the name of the so-called ‘interest of mankind,’ while branding as ‘war criminals’ men who have not shrunk from acts of violence upon hostile human elements ... a civilization that makes such a ridiculous fuss about alleged ‘war crimes’—acts of violence against the actual or potential enemies of one’s cause—and tolerates slaughterhouses and vivisection laboratories, and circuses and the fur industry ... does not deserve to live.” (Savitri Devi)

the forthcoming issue of the British National Socialist publication *Column* 88 will be dedicated to Devi and will reprint excerpts of several of her works.¹² It would seem only a matter of time before, in accord with Colin Campbell’s cultic milieu theory, denizens of the National Socialist subculture begin to enter the more militant sectors of the ecology movement. There is some anecdotal evidence of precisely this scenario unfolding in the British and Swedish animal liberation subcultures.¹³

Savitri Devi, whose birth name was Maximiani Portas, was born on September 30, 1905, of Greek and British parents. A French citizen, Devi earned a masters’ level degree in philosophy and, in 1931, a Ph.D. in chemistry. Science, however, held less allure to her than ancient religion and contemporary politics.

Even as a young girl, she was much attracted to the German philosophical and intellectual traditions. Appalled by the betrayal of Germany at Versailles following

the First World War, as well as the treatment of Greek refugees in the same period, Devi determined to learn more of what she instinctively felt were the deeper realities which determined the seemingly chaotic course of world events. It was during this youthful quest for hidden and suppressed knowledge that Devi acquired her life-long aversion to Judaism.

Devi’s anti-Semitism was fed by several currents. First, there was the Old Testament which she felt was rife with examples of Jewish perfidy. This feeling would be considerably reinforced by reports of Zionist actions in Palestine in the 1920s. In 1929—the year of Arab riots and the killing of a number of Jews in Hebron—she visited Palestine and confirmed for herself the truth of these reports. Back in France, her studies brought her into contact with the intellectual anti-Semitism of Ernst Renan. Of considerable importance too was what she perceived to be the malign role of the Jews in the defeat of Germany in the First World War. Devi, in fact, seems to have

been one of the select few to actually read Alfred Rosenberg’s verbose and turgid 1930 opus *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*. Even the Führer would confide that, although he displayed this book prominently on his bedside table, he found it unreadable.¹⁴ Devi, however, was enchanted.

In the 1930s Devi moved to India, learned contemporary Hindi and ancient Sanskrit, and undertook what would prove to be a lifelong study of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. From these sources, and from their contemporary manifestations in the caste system, Devi felt that she had found the true sources of the once and future greatness of the Aryan race. In 1940, Devi married a pro-Nazi Indian nationalist named A.K. Mukherji.

Following the Nazi defeat, she returned to Europe in 1945, settling in England where her book on the religious heritage of Ancient Egypt, *A Son of God*, was published and well received in British intellectual and occult circles. It was the work that followed, however, the *Impeachment of Man*, which was finished in London and published in 1946, that stands as a classic in the current world of National Socialism. Radical environmentalism, amounting indeed to a religion of nature, has always been strong in National Socialist thought, and with the wartime defeat, became as much a trademark of the movement as anti-Semitism. The *Impeachment of Man* remains the strongest statement of the National Socialist nature religion available today.

The *Impeachment of Man* is a passionate treatise on the rights of animals and of plants, as contrasted with man’s egocentric consumption and destruction of the natural world. The argument is couched in religious terms and the proof texts are drawn from wildly eclectic sources in both the Eastern and Western religious traditions. In this book, ostensibly a plea

for animal rights, Devi presents in full flower her religion of nature. That religion is composed of a bricolage of elements: National Socialism and its nineteenth century German philosophical precursors, the Egyptian pharaoh Akhnaton whom she sees as the first to create a “life-centered” religion, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, the Buddhism of the historical Buddha and of the Indian Buddhist king Asoka and, remarkably, elements of Jewish eschatology in her positing of Adolf Hitler as the messiah ben Joseph whose fall was simply the necessary precondition for the future National Socialist avatar who will carry Hitler’s work to completion. In Devi’s words:

[a life-centered philosophy] implies no fundamental difference in the treatment of men and of animals. To superior individuals, such as Asoka and Harshavardhana, or Lord Buddha himself, it inspires loving kindness toward both.¹⁵

Yet despite this assertion of evenhandedness, for Devi kindness to humanity was never as pressing as kindness toward animals. Thus, although she had no doubts as to the veracity of the reports of the Holocaust which were emerging as the *Impeachment of Man* was being written, she remains unmoved:

The one thing this propaganda did—instead of stirring in me the slightest indignation against the supposed-to-be “war criminals”—was to rouse my hatred against the hypocrisy and cowardice underlying the man-centered attitude; to harden me in my bitter contempt for “man” in general; and to prompt me to write this book: the answer to it, a spirit which could be summed up in a few lines: a civilization that makes such a ridiculous fuss about alleged “war crimes”—acts of violence against the actual or potential enemies of one’s cause—and tolerates slaughterhouses and vivisection laboratories, and circuses and the fur industry (infliction of pain on crea-

tures who can never be for or against any cause), does not deserve to live. Out with it! Blessed the day it will destroy itself, so that a healthy, hard, frank and brave, nature-loving and truth-loving élite of supermen with a life centered faith, a natural human aristocracy, as beautiful, on its own higher level, as the four legged kings of the jungle—might again rise and rule upon its ruins for ever!¹⁶

Devi in fact goes on in this vein for much of the book, and the contradictions in her philosophy multiply. But it is to this central theme of cruelty to animals as the greater sin than the barbarities of war to which she always returns:

We flatly refuse to condemn war, be it a thousand times a war “of aggression”—as long as mankind at large persists in its callous attitude towards animal (and tree) life. And as long as torture is inflicted by man on a single living creature, in the name of scientific research, of luxury, or of gluttony, we systematically refuse our support to any campaign exploiting public sympathy for tortured human beings—unless the latter be, of course, such ones as we look upon as our brothers in race and faith, or perhaps near and dear to these. The world that exalts Pasteur and Pavlov, and countless other tormentors of innocent creatures, in the name of the so-called “interest of mankind,” while branding as “war criminals” men who have not shrunk from acts of violence upon hostile human elements, when such was their duty in the service of higher mankind and in the interest of all life, does not deserve to live.¹⁷

In 1946, Devi moved from England to Iceland. There, the ancient Norse pantheon joined the ancient Indian gods as sources for Aryan religiosity. Here too Devi anticipated by decades Odinism’s popularization of the Norse/Germanic pantheon as a fitting Aryan racial religion in the post-War movement.

Two years later, Devi undertook a more

open pro-Nazi course of activism, traveling to occupied Germany and distributing propaganda leaflets. This resulted in her incarceration in 1949. While in jail, Devi expanded one of her leaflets into the book which she considered her magnum opus, *Gold in the Furnace*. *Gold in the Furnace* is at once an auto-biography and a dreamy meditation on what could have been. The autobiographical *Defiance* appeared in 1950. Devi’s example served as an inspiration to a new generation of National Socialists when a portion of the book was published in the Winter 1968 edition of the American Nazi Party’s intellectual journal, the *National Socialist World*, edited by the American Nazi Party’s sole intellectual, William Pierce. *Gold in the Furnace* came out in 1952, followed by another memoir, *Pilgrimage* in 1958 (although some sources place the publication date as early as 1953).

Her most important work, *The Lightning and the Sun*, appeared in 1956 and a condensed version was published in the premier edition (Spring 1966) of the *National Socialist World*. *The Lightning and the Sun* is a remarkable exposition of occult National Socialism which explicitly deifies Hitler as the savior of the Aryan people. The first words of the book read:

To the godlike individual of our times; the Man against time; the greatest European of all times; both Sun and Lightning: ADOLF HITLER.¹⁸

The Lightning and the Sun ranges through the ages, suggesting a religious and political history in which the Third Reich is the apex and the natural culmination of Aryan development. The book ends with at once a cry of despair and an affirmation of hope:

Kalki will lead them through the flames of the great end, and into the sunshine of the new Golden Age.

[Devi’s book] Impeachment of Man is a passionate treatise on the rights of animals and of plants, as contrasted with man’s egocentric consumption and destruction of the natural world. The argument is couched in religious terms and the proof texts are drawn from wildly eclectic sources in both the Eastern and Western religious traditions.

We like to hope that the memory of the one-before-the-last and most heroic of all our men against time—Adolf Hitler—will survive at least in songs and symbols. We like to hope that the lords of the age, men of his own blood and faith, will render him divine honors, through rites full of meaning and full of potency, in the cool shade of the endless regrown forests, on the beaches, or upon inviolate mountain peaks, facing the rising sun.¹⁹

As if to belie the heroic tones of her National Socialist dream, the 1950s was an empty time for Devi. While she could escape into the world of her literary dreams, and while she traveled intensively in these years, there remained a terrible void in her life. The man against time and his iron heroes were gone—many were dead, others living in hiding, still others brought to the bar of Allied justice. It was not until the 1960s that Devi could, for a moment, allow her hopes of a National Socialist revival to again flicker to life.

The vehicle for these hopes was the World Union of National Socialists which she helped to found in 1962. But the group was a fiasco, and Devi’s remaining years were bleak. Much of this time was spent back in mother India with her husband, writing, corresponding and

marking the days. She was an early convert to the field of holocaust denial, and it was under her influence that such well-known holocaust revisionists of the present day as Ernst Zundel were introduced to the faith.²⁰ Indeed, in the 1970s, Devi’s chief contributions to the movement to which she had dedicated her life was through her tireless correspondence with true believers throughout the world. Her personal circumstances did not fare well, however, and she died in poverty in 1982.

In the course of her life, Devi’s achievements, if measured on the scale of her dream of a National Socialist revival and the institution of her Aryan religion of nature, were meager. At her death, the world of explicit National Socialism was, if anything, more fragmented and powerless than ever. But her writings, and the powerful dream of the National Socialist religion of nature which they convey, are having a powerful impact on the movement. While overly pessimistic in his analysis of biocentrism and pagan spirituality, Nicholas Goodrick-Clark’s warning of the existence of a darker side to nature spirituality should not be ignored:

Deep ecology, biocentrism, nature worship and New Age paganism reflect a hostility toward Christianity, rationalism and liberalism in

modern society. Although these radical movements have their roots in left-wing dissent, their increasing tendency towards myth and despair indicate their susceptibility to millenarian and mystical ideas on the far right. Neo-Nazi and fascist activists now actively seek to infiltrate the ecological and esoteric scene. The cybernetic encirclement of man and his complete divorce from nature could well foster a more fundamental alienation. In a congested and automated world, Savitri Devi's sentimental love of animals and hatred of the masses may find new followers. The pessimism of the Kali Yuga [Hindu period of degeneration] and her vision of a pristine new Aryan order possess a perennial appeal in times of uncertainty and change.²¹

Notes:

1. Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 8
2. Quoted in Savitri Devi, *Impeachment of Man* (Costa Mesa, CA: Noontide Press, 1991), frontpiece. Devi attributes the quote to: Alfred Rosenberg, Instructions discussed at the Nuremberg trial, 1945-1946, as quoted in Maurice Bardèche, *Nuremberg II ou les Faux Monnayeurs*, p. 88.
3. Gen 1:26 KJV states: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."
4. This argument follows Colin Campbell's cultic milieu theory. See Colin Campbell, "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization," in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5 (1972), 119-36. For applications of the theory, see Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Löw, eds., *Cult, Anti-Cult and the Cultic Milieu: A Re-Examination* (Swedish National Council of Crime Prevention [BRÅ], forthcoming 1998).
5. This section is based on the research of Edvard Lind of Stockholm University. See Edvard Lind, "Religion of Nature," in Jeffrey Kaplan, *Encyclopedia of White Power* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO, forthcoming).
6. C.G. Jung, "Wotan," in C.G. Jung, *The Collected Works*, v10, Bollingen Series XX (New York: Pantheon, 1964). Cf. Nicholas Goodrick-Clark, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (NY: New York University Press, 1985).
7. Edvard Lind, "Religion of Nature."

8. This argument follows that of Robert A. Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (London: Croom Helm, 1986). Cf. Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Roots of National Socialism* (New York: American Elsevier Inc., 1971).
9. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), esp. bk. 1, ch. 10, "Nation and Race," and bk. 2, ch. 1, "Philosophy and Party."
10. Savitri Devi, *Impeachment of Man*, frontpiece.
11. Nicholas Goodrick-Clark, *Hitler's Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Occult Neo-Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, forthcoming 1998).
12. Letter to author from Tony Williams, publisher of *Column* 88, dated 31 July 1998.
13. On the British connection, see Jonathan Cotter, "Sounds of Hate: The Roll of White Power Rock and Roll in the Development and Diffusion of the Neo-Nazi Skinhead Subculture," *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence* (forthcoming), n. 27.
14. Fritz Nova, *Alfred Rosenberg: Nazi Theorist of the Holocaust* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1986).
15. Savitri Devi, *Impeachment of Man*, p. 20.
16. *Ibid.*, p. x.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
18. Savitri Devi, "The Lightning and the Sun (A New Edition)," *National Socialist World* 1 (Spring 1966).
19. *Ibid.*
20. Nicholas Goodrick-Clark, *Hitler's Priestess*.
21. *Ibid.*

This paper was originally presented as part of a panel session on "Nature Religion as a Theoretical Construct: Reflections from an Emerging Field" for a joint session of the Comparative Studies in Religion Section and the New Religious Movements Group at the November, 1998, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida.

Author's Comments:

My AAR paper on Savitri Devi is of a piece with much of my research into what some at the AAR called the shadow side of nature religiosity. By whatever name, it is true that my research tends to demonstrate to me

Devi ... may be of some interest to feminist scholarship in that it is with her that the 'passion for control' of nature in National Socialist writings seems to have been relinquished. Instead, a desire to live as an integral part of the natural world—admittedly a sacrilized and violently purified natural world—was posited ...

that every religious, social or political belief system, while seemingly benign, does harbor the potential for abuse, for misuse, or at the extreme, for violence.

My research focuses primarily in the shadowy areas where faith and violence converge. No human belief system in my experience is immune to the failings of human nature. I suspect that the Dead Kennedys may not have been so far wrong years ago when they cynically noted with regard to Jerry Brown's administration in California:

Zen fascists will control you 100% natural
You will jog for the master race
And always wear the happy face ...
And your kids will meditate in school
California, uber ales ...

I suspect as well that the Dead Kennedys would have been in sympathy with Catherine Albanese's observation that was the starting point for this paper.

A biographic essay on Devi was an accessible way to present the immensely complex case for German National Socialism as the exemplar par excellence of the potential violence that can dwell in the shadows of nature religiosity. Devi too was chosen because she may be of some interest to feminist scholarship in that it is with her that the 'passion for

control' of nature in National Socialist writings seems to have been relinquished. Instead, a desire to live as an integral part of the natural world—admittedly a sacrilized and violently purified natural world—was posited, perhaps for the first time in the post-War world.

It is this diminution of the "a passionate concern for place and mastery in society" that I wanted to stress in this article. My work, and the Devi piece in particular, does tend to point to the existence of a shadow side in the world of nature religiosity, and because so few scholars are working in this area, my work may be misread as putting too great an emphasis on these dangers. These are areas that many simply do not want to recognize, or to accept.

But just as there is a darker side to the religion of nature, nature spirituality too can be a critical force in bringing people, to strain the manichaeon metaphor even more, into the light. This was brought home just today in a message from a very well known British National Socialist figure who, after many years in the movement, has quietly accepted Islam and denounced racism in all its forms.

(I anticipate here that many readers will utter a collective groan, but I don't want to

start discussion on Islam in any way. Suffice here to say that most Nazis are true seekers, and in my fieldwork experience, true seekers whose quest brings them into a prolonged sojourn in the world of the far right, or of other absolutist belief structures, and into that netherworld where faith and violence intersect, have as the object of their quest a definitive answer to their questions; a single way in which to order their lives and the world around them. For reasons others may be far better qualified than I to explain, such personality types are unlikely to find answers in belief systems such as paganism. Rather, they require a text, a dogma, and a more or less absolutist set of truth claims. Born-again Christianity in America has been one faith community which welcomes such seekers while absolving them of their past and offering the benefits of a supportive community of fellow-seekers, and I suspect that as multiculturalism becomes more the European norm, Islam will come to serve much the same role in Europe.)

In any case, among the reasons this seeker gave for his acceptance of Islam and his rejection of his National Socialist past was this:

"Then, I started a new job, working long hours on a farm, often by myself. The close contact with Nature, the toil of manual labour, really did restore my soul, my humanity, and I became really aware of the Oneness of the Cosmos and of how I was but part of this wonderful Order which God had created. In my heart and in my mind I was convinced that this Order had not arisen by chance—it was created, as I myself was created for a purpose. It was as if my true nature had fought a long battle with Shaitan, who had deceived me, but who could deceive me no more. I felt the truth of the one and only Creator in my heart and in my mind. For the first time in my life, I felt truly humble."

Readers of Albanese, of the Transcendentalists, and indeed of many another text associated with the religion of nature will recognize the sentiments expressed.

And this, I suppose, is my point. The Devi piece had as an implicit agenda to warn of the dark underside inherent in nature religiosity. Some observers such as a scholar I very much admire, and whose words I quote in the conclusion of the article, Nicholas Goodrich-Clark, see this underside and find it to be inevitable. For my part, I am not so pessimistic. But to ignore this potential for "Zen fascism" is, in my view, dangerous. And it was for this reason that I wrote the Savitri Devi article.

Jeffrey Kaplan is the 1998-1999 Fulbright Bicentennial Professor of American Studies at the Renvall Institute of the University of Helsinki. He is the author of Radical Religion in America: Millenarian Movements From the Far Right to the Children of Noah (Syracuse University Press, 1997); The Emergence of an Euro-American Radical Right (Co-authored with Leonard Weinberg, Rutgers University Press, 1998); and co-editor of Nation and Race: The Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture (Northeastern University Press, 1998). He has published a number of articles on subjects ranging from Ásatrú to the anti-abortion movement, and on a number of topics not beginning with the letter 'A' as well. These have appeared in such journals as Terrorism and Political Violence, Christian Century, Nova Religio and Theod, and in a several anthologies. He is currently the book review editor of Nova Religio, and with Bron Taylor is co-General Editor of the projected Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature.

The Stoic Way of Nature: A Pagan Spiritual Path

by Michael McNierney
University of Colorado

An earlier version of this article was published in GNOSIS: A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions, No. 37 (Fall 1995)

Stoicism doesn't have all the answers. It doesn't even have all the questions. But it has some very good answers to some important questions—sensible answers to questions people still ask today, in spite of two thousand years of Christianity and a century of psychotherapy. Like most Pagan and polytheistic world views, Stoicism, as developed by the ancient Romans, does not claim to be the only true path or to be suitable for everyone. Nor does it claim to be an easy path. It does not require a doctorate in philosophy or years of immersion in the obscurities of an esoteric system. It simply claims to be a sensible path for active people in everyday life. I believe that it is a spiritual path particularly suited to modern Pagans.

With its keen understanding of psychology, somewhat rare in the ancient world, Stoicism is a hard-headed, practical view of how to live. It is concerned with the acceptance of things as they are, not as they were or might be. This practicality is both grounded and given a rich spiritual dimension by the Stoics' pro-

found intuitive grasp of Nature and her eternal cycles. The ideal of the Stoic path is to live in harmony with the Universe and thereby maintain one's soul or deeper self in a calm state of grace regardless of circumstances.

"Nature is sacred—that is, from nature we draw our inspiration, our teachings, and our deepest sense of connection." This statement reflects the core of ancient Stoic belief and practice, yet it comes from a recent Pagan book (Starhawk, et al. 1997: 6). "I am the soul of nature that gives life to the universe. From Me all things proceed and unto Me they must return." Every Pagan will recognize that these words are from a version of the Charge of the Goddess, but they could have been spoken by the Divine Fire—one of the many names by which the Stoics knew the Ultimate Reality. In our age of spiritual turmoil and change—which mirrors the syncretistic religious development in the later Roman Empire—the Roman Stoics speak to modern Pagans across the millennia with a clear and relevant voice.

Although Stoicism is a creation of the Graeco-Roman world and largely unknown to most people today, the Stoic approach to life and some of its ideas will have a familiar feel to contemporary readers. This is not surprising since Stoic thought has probably had a more powerful and lasting influence on the way people live their lives than any other philosophy in western culture (Dilthey 1975: 7). It is only in our own century that this influence has been forgotten.

In an article of this length, it is impractical to do more than point out a few places in the fabric of our culture where

Stoicism has some affinity with several eastern spiritual paths—particularly with Taoism and Zen... Ideas such as following Nature and living in the present are now commonplace in our culture. Stoicism offers some of the things we have found appealing and fruitful in the East without requiring the radical abandonment of familiar and useful western assumptions about reality that is often necessary to wholeheartedly follow an eastern path ...

Stoic threads can be found. The most important patch of the fabric is Christianity. As the religion spread outside of Palestine and early church writers developed a Christian theology in the successful attempt to appeal to educated Pagans, they borrowed liberally from Stoic thought. These Stoic strands are still with us, woven into Christian scripture and dogma. As one example among many possible ones, the cosmic “Word” of the Prologue to the Gospel of John was adapted by its philosophically minded author from the first principle of Stoicism, the *Logos*. We shall see later that “word” is only one of the many possible translations of *Logos*. In fact, it is this translation that makes the Prologue so mysterious, and once its Stoic context is understood it becomes less enigmatic, though no less profound.

Elements of Stoicism are embedded in many contemporary psychological and self-help regimes. The widespread Twelve-Step programs have many Stoic ideas at their core. Reinhold Niebuhr’s

famous Serenity Prayer: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference”, for example, which is recited at virtually every Twelve Step meeting, is pure Stoicism. Cognitive therapy, a highly successful treatment for depression popularized by Dr. David Burns in a best-selling book, appears to be based on the Stoic principle of *apatheia*. Burns’ statement that “your emotions result entirely from the way you look at things” is not a bad beginning at a definition of *apatheia* (Burns 1980: 29).

“Basing our happiness on our ability to control everything is futile,” says Stephen Covey in his time-management book. “While we do control our choice of action, we cannot control the consequences of our choices. Universal laws or principles do. Thus, we are not in control of our lives; principles are” (Covey, et al. 1994: 13). Substitute fortune or the gods for principles, and you have a statement

that no Stoic would repudiate. Exactly how Stoic ideas have turned up in self-help and time-management books in the late 20th century I do not know, especially as I find no evidence that the authors have read or even heard of Stoicism. It is perhaps the ultimate tribute to the influence of Stoicism that many of its ideas have simply become part of the *Zeitgeist* of our times. It would be an interesting exercise in the history of ideas to trace the development of certain Stoic concepts from the ancient world to our own popular culture.

Since I am interested in Stoicism as a western, Pagan, spiritual path, another very different reason for Stoic ideas being familiar to contemporary readers is more important than the issue of influence. This is that Stoicism has some affinity with several eastern spiritual paths—particularly with Taoism and Zen—that westerners are likely to be familiar with and perhaps have also practiced. Ideas such as following Nature and living in the present are now commonplace in our culture. We have brought these and other powerful ideas home from the East, yet they have been present in our own western spiritual tradition for over two thousand years.

Here at home, however, these insights are allied with a respect for and faith in the power of our minds to find truth and happiness without eschewing reason as does Taoism and without requiring years of practice in meditative techniques as does Zen. This is not to say that intuition plays no part in Stoicism or that meditation is incompatible with it. It is simply that Stoicism offers some of the things we have found appealing and fruitful in the East without requiring the radical abandonment of familiar and useful western

assumptions about reality that is often necessary to wholeheartedly follow an eastern path—and that is often the cause of westerners turning back disillusioned from the East.

I have learned much from the East and plan to continue doing so. But exclusive concentration on eastern thought and practices leaves me feeling rootless, homeless, ungrounded, and disoriented (pun intended). C.G. Jung asked of what use are the insights and wisdom of the East to us “... if we desert the foundations of our own culture as though they were errors outlived and, like homeless pirates, settle with thievish intent on foreign shores?” (Jung 1962: 114). I believe that my true Self or Soul is somehow part of a community of spiritual brothers and sisters, extended back in time rather than space, and if I turn my back on the West, on my home, I cut connections with this community and am worse off for it.

Gnosis editor, Richard Smoley, wrote in an editorial (Winter 1994) that “today we assume we must seek truth as far afield as possible” and reminded us that “teachers with real insight” often urge us to “recognize and develop the strengths of our own traditions.” But this can be difficult, since outside the institutional monotheistic religions and Native religions (which are often inaccessible to outsiders), teachers to pass on traditions are few and far between. People exploring western spirituality outside the mainstream seldom have a living link with the past, so they turn to books to find, recreate, or create traditions. As poet Gary Snyder writes, “In this huge old occidental culture our teaching elders are books. Books are our grandparents!” (Snyder

1990: 61). We are fortunate to have such grandparents as the works of the Roman Stoics.

The adjective “stoic” elicits in most people’s minds the idea of simply not showing one’s emotions. This attitude is unappealing to people in our age who have been constantly enjoined to “get in touch with your feelings,” and it is downright politically incorrect if you are a male. But this usage does not do justice even to the dictionary meaning: “indifferent to or unaffected by pleasure or pain; impassive; enduring; brave,” which itself barely hints at the richness of ancient Stoic thought.

Misuse of the word is one reason why Stoicism is little known today. Another is an understandable misapprehension of its true nature as a spiritual path. The best-known ancient Stoic today is Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (121-180 CE). His *Meditations* have been in print since the 17th century, and most educated people today have heard of him, yet few have read him. The problem is that in libraries and bookstores his book will be found under the heading of “philosophy,” and that word drives people away with its connotation of ivory-tower, logic-chopping irrelevancy or intimidates them with the idea that, even if it is relevant, it is too difficult to understand. A recent paperback edition of the *Meditations* carries the information on the front cover that this “is the book on President Clinton’s bedside table.” Perhaps Clinton will do for Marcus what a former president did for Tom Clancy. Or, even better, perhaps Marcus will do for Clinton what Stoicism did for Marcus.

But philosophy to the Romans meant something very different from what it means today. For them it had a meaning much closer to what we think of as religion. They even spoke of being “converted” to a particular philosophy. Most of the things we moderns turn to religion for—spiritual practice, moral guidance, comfort, insight, and encouragement in time of suffering—educated Pagan Romans found in philosophy, not religion. “Philosophy!” Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) exclaims, “the guide of our lives! Had it not been for your guidance, what would I ever have amounted to?” (*Tusculan Disputations* 5:2). Marcus Aurelius writes: “Where, then, can man find the power to guide and guard his steps? In one thing and one alone: Philosophy. To be a philosopher is to keep unsullied and unscathed the divine spirit [*daimon*] within him” (*Meditations* 2.17). And Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4-65 CE) writes to his friend, “Without it [philosophy] no one can live with courage or serenity” (*Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, 3 vols., Harvard UP, 1917: 25; all translations from Seneca are mine unless otherwise noted).

To literate Romans, “religion” was synonymous with ritual that one performed out of patriotism and respect for tradition. It had little to do with ethics or the soul. Divinity and one’s personal, as opposed to public, relationship to it—whether in the form of gods and goddesses, a philosophical One, or one’s personal *daimon*—was a matter of philosophy.

Earlier, in the more circumvented world of the city states of Classical Greece (5th and 4th centuries BCE),

... philosophy to the Romans meant something very different from what it means today. For them it had a meaning much closer to what we think of as religion. They even spoke of being “converted” to a particular philosophy. ... Most of the things we moderns turn to religion for—spiritual practice, moral guidance, comfort, insight, and encouragement in time of suffering—educated Pagan Romans found in philosophy, not religion.

philosophy had had a broader meaning. Plato and Aristotle, while never forgetting that philosophy meant “love of wisdom” which included guidance on how to live, also developed speculation on the nature of reality into elaborate systems of metaphysics, ethics, politics, and natural science.

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE and the division of his empire into the smaller, warring empires of his successors, the world changed radically. This new Hellenistic world was now much larger and more diverse and in an almost constant state of political and social upheaval. Life became profoundly disorienting.

Both individual freedom and responsibility were undermined by the massiveness and confusion of the new political world. Personal destinies appeared to be determined more by large impersonal forces than by individual volition. The old clarity no longer seemed available, and many felt they had lost their bearings. (Tarnas 1991: 75)

Although Plato and Aristotle were still

studied, the times demanded something different and more down-to-earth. New philosophical schools arose, whose inspiration “arose less from the passion to comprehend the world in its mystery and magnitude, and more from the need to give human beings some stable belief system and inner peace in the face of a hostile and chaotic environment” (Tarnas 76). If philosophy originally began in wonder, as Aristotle said (*Metaphysics* 982b.12), these new Hellenistic philosophies surely began in confusion and suffering.

Among them was Stoicism, founded by Zeno of Citium in Cyprus (335-263 BCE). Zeno (not to be confused with Zeno of Elea, author of the famous paradox bearing his name) taught in Athens at a well-known site, the *stoa poikile*, the painted colonnade or porch—hence the name of his school. We could perhaps translate the name of this school as Porchism and refer to its followers as Porchers, but somehow these words don’t quite have the proper ring of dignity. He and his successors as

The end of human life for the Stoics ... is happiness. (Eudaimonia, the Greek word for happiness, literally means "blessed with a good daimon, or inner god." Hence the English, "to be in good spirits.") Happiness is to be found in virtue (virtus in Latin, aretê in Greek), and virtue for the Stoics means living courageously in harmony with Nature.

head of the school, Cleanthes (*fl.* c. 263 BCE) and Chrysippus (*fl.* c. 233 BCE), taught a stern ethic proclaiming absolute virtue as the only way to happiness. They also apparently developed theories of logic and cosmology, but so little of their work survives that reconstructing their systems is largely speculation.

The later Stoics modified and softened the early dogma and were much more interested in practical applications of Stoic ideas than in systematic philosophy. They never ceased, however, to speculate and wonder about the universe. While Stoicism maintained a continuous tradition from Zeno onwards through the Hellenistic period, the Roman Republic, and into the Empire, when it was the dominant philosophy of educated people, it is three Stoics of the first two centuries CE who are most important today: Lucius Annaeus Seneca, a politician and virtual head of the Roman state during Nero's youth; Epictetus (55-135), a freed Greek slave; and Marcus Aurelius, an emperor and general.

Since I am more interested in showing the relevance of the Stoics to people today

than in providing a balanced history of Stoicism and do not have the space to consider all three in equal depth, I will concentrate on one philosopher—Marcus Aurelius. This is to some degree an arbitrary choice reflecting my personal taste; I don't mean to slight Epictetus and Seneca. Far from it. They are both worth repeated reading and study, and both have been more important than Marcus in transmitting Stoic ideas to later centuries. But there are practical reasons for this choice also. Marcus' *Meditations* is much more easily available in translation than any other Stoic work. It is a short and compact book that bears repeated reading and can serve as the Pagan equivalent of Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, to which it has often been compared. Epictetus' ideas are often reflected accurately in Marcus, since the emperor considered the former slave his spiritual master. Touching only lightly on him will not, therefore, distort the picture of Roman Stoicism unduly. Some consideration of Seneca, however, is indispensable, even though his work is uneven and scattered among numerous essays and plays and 124 letters. His Stoicism is

warmer and more poetic than that of the emperor and contains some profound insights into social psychology. He is useful as a balance to the austerity and solitariness of Marcus. A portion of Epictetus' work is available in *The Enchiridion*, T.W. Higginson, trans. (Macmillan, 1948). A selection of Seneca's letters can be found in *Letters From a Stoic*, R.C. Campbell, trans. (Penguin, 1969).

Marcus Aurelius wrote, as far as we know, only one literary work, his *Meditations*, although some of his correspondence has also survived. And he wrote only for himself. The *Meditations* are apparently a personal, undated journal he kept with no idea of its ever being made public. The title is not his but was added later. The readers' attention is directed to *Marcus Aurelius: A Biography*, by Anthony Birley (Yale UP, 1987). Emperor from 161 to 180, Marcus spent most of his time away from Rome defending the Danubian frontier against various Germanic tribes in the Marcomannic wars, which have been compared for their horror and barbarity to the First World War in the same area. Compared to most Roman emperors, Marcus lived a life of hardship and extreme stress. There can be no doubt that he followed his principles. He felt it was his sacred duty to personally supervise the defense of the empire, although he could have, as many emperors did, sit in luxury in Rome and delegate the dirty work to someone else. At the age of 59, he virtually died in the saddle, worn out by the rigors of almost constant campaigning.

If you live with Marcus and his thoughts for a period of time, you begin to

feel a kinship and even friendship with him as a living spirit—an uncle, say, or grandfather, who always has a word of counsel when it's needed. He is not a remote mind delivering the word of god or some other form of putative absolute truth. He is a human being with his own doubts and failings as well as virtues. Marcus can sometimes be depressingly melancholy and annoyingly inconsistent, but his courage, wisdom, and humanity shine through every page.

*E*n archê ên ho logos. "In the beginning was the Logos." Thus begins the Gospel of John, and thus begins Stoicism also. The word *logos* is untranslatable by any one English word. "Word" is only the commonest of its meanings. It also denotes universal mind, explanation, meaning, measure, universal reason, purpose, plan, providence, inner structure, divine law, divine archetype. It is a vague, encompassing, and powerful word, sometimes seeming to carry an even mystical weight. One thing that can be said with certainty about it is that it is the opposite of randomness and chaos, and that it is the ground of all being. Perhaps it is best thought of as the divine archetype of the universe, both the plan, the creation, and the substance of things together. A suggestive and fruitful analogy is the equally untranslatable Chinese word *Tao*. Logos is probably the closest word in a western language to Tao. Tao is often translated as "way," and it is suggestive that Christ, who is the Logos in the Gospel of John (14:6), says "I am the way and the truth and the life."

Marcus sometimes uses Logos interchangeably with the words god, the gods,

Nature, the Universe, Fate, Necessity, and even Zeus. For modern Pagans, as I will discuss later, there is no inconsistency in adding Goddess to the list. The most important thing to bear in mind is that the word "God" has none of the connotations of the word in monotheistic religions: "If Greek philosophers speak of 'god' in the masculine singular, this is generally to indicate everything encompassed by the divine or to distinguish a supreme god from lesser divinities; no formal commitment to monotheism is implied" (Long 1989: 136). (Although the word is capitalized in all the translations, I will use it in lower case to attenuate this association.) To us his most exotic term for this primordial creative principle is "Mind-Fire" or "Active Fire" (*pyr technikon*), a concept going back to Heraclitus (c. 500 BCE). To the Stoics, the Logos or Mind-Fire or god is both the creator and the substance of the universe. It is in everything, and everything is in it, and everything is destined to return to it.

The Stoics are technically classified as materialists, since they believed that the Logos, and therefore everything else, is ultimately made of "matter." But *hylê* (matter) has such a rarefied meaning by the time of the late Stoics, that translating it by the English word "matter" is gravely misleading. Matter to us means something that solidly fills space, can be touched, has weight and mass, etc. We will be much closer to the Stoic understanding of the word if we think of the fundamental substance of the universe as energy. (After Einstein, of course, we realize that matter is energy in frozen form.)

Each human soul is a particle of the Logos. "Sunlight is all one, even when it

is broken up by walls, mountains, and a host of other things. Soul is all one, even when it is distributed among countless natures of every kind in countless differing proportions" (12.30). This concept implies a deep interconnectedness of everything in the Universe, and although the Stoics only occasionally express a passionate relationship with the deity, their "deepest religious intuitions are founded on their doctrine that the human mind, in all its functions—reflecting, sensing, desiring, and initiating action—is part and partner of god" (Long 1989: 149). This relationship points the way to right action for each human being.

The end of human life for the Stoics as for most ancient philosophers is happiness. (*Eudaimonia*, the Greek word for happiness, literally means "blessed with a good daimon, or inner god." Hence the English, "to be in good spirits.") Happiness is to be found in virtue (*virtus* in Latin, *aretê* in Greek), and virtue for the Stoics means living courageously in harmony with Nature. This does not necessarily mean living in Nature, retiring to a Roman Walden Pond for instance, although something like that was often a dream or fantasy of many Romans, including Marcus (4.3), Seneca (Ep. 28), and Horace (Odes 3.29). Cicero, like other wealthy Romans, had his country estate as well as his house in Rome. (I am indebted to Richard Smoley for pointing this out to me.) Living according to Nature first of all entails realizing that one is as much a part of Nature as wild animals or the wind. God or the Logos is present in everything in the Universe. In life as a whole it is manifest not only in the turn of the seasons or the march of the

In life as a whole [the Logos] is manifest not only in the turn of the seasons or the march of the years but also in the actual course of events, the way things happen, the way things are here and now on both a personal and impersonal level. What is, is God or Logos or Nature. There is no recourse to a Platonic realm of ideas or a Christian afterlife.

years but also in the actual course of events, the way things happen, the way things are here and now on both a personal and impersonal level.

What is, is God or Logos or Nature. There is no recourse to a Platonic realm of ideas or a Christian afterlife. As historian of philosophy Frederick Copleston says, "The Stoics rejected not only the Platonic doctrine of the transcendental universal, but also Aristotle's doctrine of the concrete universal. Only the individual exists and our knowledge is knowledge of particular objects" (Copleston 1962: 386).

"[T]he interest of every creature lies in conformity with its own constitution and nature," writes Marcus (6.44). Trees, lions, and people all have their place in the great woven fabric of Nature. Our place and purpose are determined by the form the Logos takes in us: a rational soul. Reason had a much broader meaning in antiquity than it does now. The Stoics' "commitment to rationality as the essence of what is divine and good includes the love of wisdom, *philosophia* ... The Stoics did not, as is frequently supposed, set up as their ideal one whose wisdom excludes

all emotion or feeling. Rather, they extended the notion of rationality so that it included desires and 'good feelings' (*eupatheiai*), in contrast to the passions and mental perturbations that characterize a soul whose reasoning faculty is disordered" (Long 1989: 146).

Since the seventeenth century, we have split off our reasoning capacity from our emotional capacity, seeing them even as warring opposites. It's notable that recently even empirical science is beginning to recognize that this is a dangerous error: the "absence of emotion appears to be at least as pernicious for rationality as excessive emotion. It certainly does not seem true that reason stands to gain from operating without the leverage of emotion. Emotion may well be the support system without which the edifice of reason cannot function properly and may even collapse" (Damasio 1994: 144). The more holistic view of the ancients is being confirmed by neurobiology.

Marcus says that the qualities of the rational soul include "love of neighbors, truthfulness, modesty, and a reverence for herself before all else" (11.1). If my soul and your soul are ultimately the

Stoic self-reliance and the serenity or happiness that follows from it derive from a total acceptance of things as they are. Pain, loss, and death itself are all as natural as the change of the seasons. To resist or resent them is as futile as trying to stop a hailstorm.

same, then it follows that self-love (not selfishness) leads directly to love of all humankind. Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, and Epictetus proclaim the doctrine of “love thy neighbor as thyself” so often that it is superfluous to cite specific examples. It’s not difficult to see why the Church Fathers found such useful allies in the Stoics. This strain is strongest in Seneca, which explains why, if not how, the legend of his correspondence with St. Paul arose.

Living in conformity with one’s own true constitution, which is the same as following the Way of Nature, leads to the state of *autarkia*—self-reliance. Self-reliance brings inner freedom when one realizes that one can only truly rely on oneself when that self is recognized and felt to be part of and in harmony with the universal whole. Stoic self-reliance and the serenity or happiness that follows from it derive from a total acceptance of things as they are. Pain, loss, and death itself are all as natural as the change of the seasons. To resist or resent them is as futile as trying to stop a hailstorm. Everything is in constant change. “We shrink from change,” Marcus writes to himself, “yet is there anything than can come into being without it?” (7.18) Change is Nature’s way, the

only way. “Out of the universal substance, as out of wax, Nature fashions a colt, then breaks him up and uses the material to form a tree” (7.23, 25).

Fortuna, Imperatrix Mundi, Fortune, Empress of the World, seems to dispense her goods and ills without regard for a person’s character. Often, the just suffer, and the unjust prosper. In the parlance of a modern best seller, why do “bad things happen to good people?” Every philosophy and religion must ultimately come to terms with this problem of theodicy, defined by the dictionary as “the vindication of divine justice in the face of the existence of evil.” For a monotheistic theology that holds that there is one transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient, and good God, the problem is simply insoluble. Augustine spent much of his life in the unsuccessful attempt to prove that evil doesn’t really exist in and of itself but is merely a lack of good.

The Stoic, like the Taoist, sees the question differently. Neither falls into dualism: the practice of seeing good and evil as separate entities at war with each other. Both, being followers of the Way of Nature, see them as opposite but complementary, each necessary for the other’s existence, like day and night, summer and winter, life and death. The universe could

not exist without these contraries. Alan Watts’ description of the Taoist yin-yang principle could have been written about the Stoic Logos or World-Fire: “being and nonbeing are mutually generative and mutually supportive the somethings and the nothings, the ons and offs, the solids and the spaces, as well as the wakings and the sleepings and alternations of existing and not existing, are mutually necessary” (Watts 1975: 23-25).

As far back as Chrysippus, the Stoics had maintained that one of a pair of contraries cannot exist without the other. If any twentieth-century person knows what the Universe and the World Fire is like at the most fundamental level, it must be a quantum physicist. One of the greatest, Niels Bohr, had emblazoned on his coat of arms the motto: “*Contraria non contradictoria sed complementa sunt.*” Opposites are complementary not contradictory. Seneca would have agreed: “Eternity consists of opposites. To this law our souls must adjust themselves” (Ep. 107.8-9).

“The picture, then, is of a world in which everything ultimately fits together according to a divine pattern” (Long 1989: 148). Following nature “involves contemplation of nature’s ways, recognition of their fitness, and perception that all of them are ‘good’ in the sense of being essential to the pattern as a whole” (Blofeld 1978: 10).

If you realize this in your bones, you will be able to “keep a straight course and follow your own nature and the World-Nature (and the way of these two is one)” (5.3), and you will find “peace of mind under the visitations of a destiny you cannot control” (3.5). Stoic happiness lies

in accepting and flowing with things as they are, not wasting energy fighting against things you can’t control, and realizing that you are usually powerless to change people, places, and things. What the Serenity Prayer requests, the Stoic strives for: “the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Although we cannot control most external events, we can decide what our attitude toward them will be. From this insight rises the infamous Stoic virtue of *apatheia*, which does not mean apathy or not feeling, but rather not being thrown about and controlled by our emotions, either positive or negative. The Stoic does not deny or suppress the emotions but recognizes them as reactions to external events and not as parts of the essential self and also as not necessarily accurate evaluations of the external world.

“If you are distressed by anything external,” Marcus says, “the pain is not due to the thing itself but to your own estimate of it; and that you have the power to revoke at any moment” (8.47). “Subtract your own notions of what you imagine to be painful, and then your self stands invulnerable” (8.40). “[T]hings can never touch the soul, but stand inert outside it, so that disquiet can arise only from fancies from within” (4.3). Seneca tells his friend Lucilius that once he has tested his powers of *apatheia* by dealing with the whims of Fortune he will know that “true spirit will never allow itself to come under the authority of anything outside ourselves” (Ep. 13.1). Epictetus enjoins us, when faced with something unpleasant, “to examine it by those rules which

you have; and first and chiefly by this: whether it concerns the things which are within our power or those which are not; and if it concerns anything beyond our power, be prepared to say that it is nothing to you" (Enchiridion, I).

Copleston concisely describes the rewards of *apatheia*: "happiness depends on that which alone is in our power and independent of external conditions—namely our will, our ideas concerning things, and the use we make of our ideas" (Copleston 1962: 435). In this insight lies the Stoics' greatest contribution to psychology (Peters & Mace 1967: 7:4), one of the things that makes their philosophy directly relevant to active existence today.

Love and respect for all fellow human beings as well as other creatures follows from the premise that we are all part of the same unity. There is no doubt that the Stoics tried to practice as well as preach this truth. Marcus Aurelius seems to have had a particular problem with impatience and anger, compounded by his position as Emperor. He had the power to do a great deal of damage to a great number of people, but he was aware of the temptation and constantly admonishes himself to remember "the closeness of man's brotherhood with his kind; a brotherhood not of blood or human seed [a tacit acknowledgment of class differences] but of a common intelligence; and that this intelligence in every man is God, an emanation from the deity" (12.26).

Seneca wrote passionately against the stupid cruelty of gladiatorial games (Ep. 7) and the degradation of drunkenness to

which the Romans were particularly susceptible [he was a teetotaler] (Ep. 88). Incredibly, and as far as I know, uniquely in the ancient world, Seneca also proclaimed the equality of the sexes and demanded that conjugal faithfulness in a husband be interpreted every bit as strictly as the honor of the wife (Ep. 94).

He is especially passionate on the subject of slavery: "'They are slaves.' No! They are human beings. 'They are slaves.' No! They are comrades. 'They are slaves.' No! They are unassuming friends" (47.1). "We treat them not as human beings but use and abuse them as if they were beasts of burden" (47.5). "I'd like you to think of this, that the one you call your slave comes from the same human stock as you, has the same skies above him, breathes, lives, and dies exactly the same as you" (47.10). Seneca's influence led directly to the improvement of the legal status of slaves in the Roman Empire.

Nature, the Universe, and the gods were not just abstractions to the Stoics. Although they used these and many other words almost interchangeably, this was a matter of mood, of context, or perhaps of recent personal experience. When writing in a mode of logic, they may reduce all spiritual reality to the One—the Mind-Fire or god—but Stoicism was not a systematic philosophy nor a doctrinaire religion. The gods may ultimately be manifestations of the unity of the Universe—just as you and I are—but that does not make them any less real. The Stoics were polytheists with all the tolerance, open-mindedness, and acceptance of ambivalence that makes Paganism increasingly appealing to spiritual searchers today. I can make an offer-

Nature, the Universe, and the gods were not just abstractions to the Stoics. ... The gods may ultimately be manifestations of the unity of the Universe—just as you and I are—but that does not make them any less real. The Stoics were polytheists with all the tolerance, open-mindedness, and acceptance of ambivalence that makes Paganism increasingly appealing to spiritual searchers today.

ing to Hekate at a shrine in the woods and still be a Stoic. Like Taoism and Zen, it is compatible with other spiritual beliefs and practices. I can do *zazen* on my cushion everyday and still be a Stoic.

No one reading the Stoics carefully can doubt that much of what they write is based on personal spiritual experience, not just ideas. Listen as Seneca, in his famous forty-first letter, describes just such experiences:

If you have ever come on a dense wood of ancient trees that have risen to an exceptional height, shutting out all sight of the sky with one thick screen of branches upon another, the loftiness of the forest, the seclusion of the spot, your sense of wonderment at finding so deep and unbroken a gloom out of doors, will persuade you of the presence of a deity. Any cave in which rocks have eroded deep into the mountain resting on it, its hollowing out into a cavern of impressive extent not produced by the labors of man but the result of processes of nature, will strike into your soul some kind of inkling of the divine. We venerate the sources of important streams; places where

a mighty river bursts suddenly from hiding are provided with altars; hot springs are objects of worship; the darkness or unfathomable depth of pools has made their waters sacred.

How many readers have felt something like this? I know I have. Unmistakable experience of the Holy in dark, quiet places in the Rocky Mountains was one of the things that led me away from Christianity as a teenager and into Paganism as an adult.

If they can overlook the fact that the ancient Stoics—from the slave Epictetus to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius—were born, lived their lives, and died in a patriarchal society, and that they were all, through no fault of their own, members of the much maligned society of DWMs (Dead White Males), modern Pagans or Neo-Pagans may find in them congenial spiritual ancestors.

Starhawk, probably the best-known modern Pagan writer, says in *The Spiral Dance*: "The Goddess does not rule the world; She is the world. Manifest in each of us, She can be known internally by

every individual, in all her magnificent diversity.” And further, that:

... all things are swirls of energy, vortexes of moving forces, currents in an ever-changing sea. Underlying the appearance of separateness, of fixed objects within a linear stream of time, reality is a field of energies that congeal, temporarily, into forms. In time, all ‘fixed’ things dissolve, only to coalesce again into new forms, new vehicles (Starhawk 1989: 23, 32).

Since I have taken the liberty of adding the Goddess as one of the names and forms of the Stoic Universe or Mind-Fire, I find these words of Starhawk’s completely compatible with Stoicism. There is nothing in them with which Marcus or Seneca would disagree, and perhaps they wouldn’t even object to my addition of the Goddess. Men of their time also worshipped the Goddess. Although he was a Platonist, not a Stoic, Apuleius (c. 123-? CE) wrote in his *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass*, a beautiful and powerful prayer to the Goddess in the form of Isis, of which this is a small part: “Neither day nor any quiet time of night, nor indeed any moment passes by that is not occupied by your good deeds. You roll the globe, you light the sun, you rule the world the stars answer to you, the seasons return, the godheads rejoice, the elements serve you. At your nod, breezes blow, clouds nourish, seeds germinate, seedlings grow” (*Metamorphoses* 11.25). As a Platonist, Apuleius would not of course identify the Goddess with the world as would pantheistic Stoics and modern Pagans, but his delight at and reverence for the connection between divinity and the natural world is common to both.

Stoicism is an ancient spiritual path that can help us on our journey today. This is not an empty statement. As an instructor of humanities, I have had the privilege of teaching the *Enchiridion* to university students and have heard from several that studying Epictetus changed their lives. The man who was Ross Perot’s running mate in 1992 is a Stoic. Vice-Admiral James Stockdale was a prisoner of war in Hanoi for eight years during the Vietnam War. What kept him and many of the men for whom he was responsible alive was Stoicism. He had previously found Epictetus so appealing that he had memorized much of the philosopher’s work. From the moment he was captured, he began to apply his internalized Stoicism and thereby saved his sanity and his life under some of the worst conditions and treatment imaginable (Stockdale 1993).

Stoicism is western and thus lies at the roots of our culture and traditions, yet it offers wisdom that many have struggled through the esotericism of the East to find. It offers in concentrated form psychological insights that can lead to a life of serenity, insights that are scattered throughout much modern psychological literature but without the deep spiritual dimension of Stoicism. Above all, it is a way of Nature and wholeness, a way of realizing our unity with all living things and with the Universe itself.

Every day I pray—and try to live up to the courage it requires—a passionate, beautiful prayer written for himself by Marcus Aurelius Antoninus seventeen centuries ago:

All is in harmony with me that is in harmony with you, O Universe. Nothing is too

early or too late if it is in due season for you. All that your seasons yield is fruit for me. You are all things, all things are in you, and to you all things return. (384.23. My translation).

Works Cited:

- Blofeld, John. *Taoism: The Road to Immortality*. Boulder: Shambala, 1978.
- Burns, David D. *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*. New York: New American Library, 1980.
- Cicero. *Tuscan Disputations*. M. Grant, trans. Penguin, 1971.
- Copleston, Frederick A. *History of Philosophy, Vol. 1: Greece and Rome*. New York: Doubleday, 1962.
- Covey, Stephen R, Merrill, A. Roger and Merrill, Rebecca R. *First Things First: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- Damasio, Antonio R. “Descartes’ Error and the Future of Human Life,” *Scientific American* 271:4 (October 1994).
- Dilthey, Wilhelm. quoted in F.H. Sandbach, *The Stoics*. New York: Norton, 1975.
- Jung, C.G. *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. trans. Richard Wilhelm. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1962.
- Long, A.A. “Epicureans and Stoics” in A.H. Armstrong, ed. *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality*. New York: Crossroad, 1989.
- Marcus Aurelius. *Meditations*. M. Staniforth, trans. Viking Penguin, 1964.
- Peters, R.S. and Mace, C.A. “Psychology,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan, 1967.
- Seneca. *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*. Harvard UP, 1917.
- Snyder, Gary. *The Practice of the Wild*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990.
- Starhawk, M. Macha NightMare, and The Reclaiming Collective. *The Pagan Book Of Living And Dying: Practical Rituals, Prayers, Blessings, And Meditations On Crossing Over*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).
- Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, 2nd ed. HarperSanFrancisco, 1989).
- Stockdale, James Bond. *Courage Under Fire: Testing*

Epictetus’s Doctrines in a Laboratory of Human Behavior. Stanford: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1993.

Tarnas, Richard. *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View*. New York: Ballantine, 1991.

Watts, Alan. *Tao: The Watercourse Way*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975.

Michael McNierney, MA, is Lecturer in Humanities at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he teaches Russian literature and philosophy. He has published numerous articles on Roman religion, Buddhism, and the history of astronomy and physics. His poetry has been published in journals in the US, Canada, Great Britain, and Japan. Before assuming his present teaching post, he worked as a photo-journalist, and a trip to Russia and the Mongolian Republic (Outer Mongolia) resulted in a series of articles on the revival of Buddhism and the survival of Pagan Mongolian religion in southern Siberia and Mongolia. He is currently writing a book (to be published in 2000) on the planetary deities of the Roman Empire.

Love, Suffering and Evil: A Neopagan View

by Gus diZerega

This article is condensed from Chapter 3 of Pagans and Christians in the New Millennium, now seeking a friendly publisher. This book discusses the character of Paganism as a specific kind of religion, Traditional Wicca as an instance of Pagan religion, similarities and differences between Pagan and Christian religion, and the strengths and insights Pagan spirituality brings to contemporary American life. It is not a "Wicca 101" book.

No one born in the 20th century can have missed the challenge to spiritual worldviews raised by the carnage of its wars and massacres, as well as the suffering caused by disease, natural disasters and general hard knocks of everyday life. So much pain! So much unhappiness! Neopagan religion celebrates and honors all basic dimensions of existence, but in light of so much suffering, some critics ask whether in doing so we demonstrate a naive or even willful blindness to evil and the omnipresent nature of human affliction.

It is correct that Neopagan religion does not focus on evil, spiritual or otherwise. But this lack of emphasis is no failing. Our understanding of the relationship of good and evil is different, reflecting the different dimension of spiritual reality upon which we focus. Our

view of suffering is in broad agreement with that of Pagan spirituality in general, emphasizing healing our relationships and restoring harmony within the world. Our world is neither perfect nor fallen, but it is sacred. We see around us beauty and folly, wisdom and suffering, life and death, acceptance and transcendence.

In our clearer, stronger moments, we accept and embrace it all, as ultimately good, no matter how well disguised. At the core of our worldview is "perfect trust" in the "perfect love" of our Gods. But if our world is the sacred manifestation of a loving Source, indeed a perfectly loving Source, why does it contain so much suffering, and why does so much of this suffering seem gratuitous? Even beginning to answer these questions raises fundamental theological issues. If the world is an artifact, produced by a Master Potter, it may make sense to combine all suffering into a single category of transcendent malignity. But this approach is certainly alien to a Pagan perspective which delights in the diversity as well as the ultimate goodness of the world. This indiscriminate amalgamation of everything harmful—from tornadoes to cancer to serial killers—into a single category hampers our capacity to come to terms with them.

I would divide the suffering we encounter in life into three broad, and distinct, groups: 1) suffering which is the natural result of embodied existence, 2) accidental suffering which is the result of unintended human actions, and 3) deliberately inflicted suffering, both human and spiritually caused. None are ultimately in conflict with the basic idea that the Source of all and the world which is its manifestation are absolutely good.

Embodied existence necessarily brings suffering in its wake. Disease, drought, earthquakes, floods, the pain and decrepitude aris-

ing from our aging, and other natural calamities, all cause human suffering. Neopagans may not consider death and illness to be an evil, resulting from human sin, but we deeply mourn the passing of our loved ones, and in the midst of sickness and pain we sometimes doubt whether our world is in fact a truly good place. Our approach to these issues necessarily combines personal spiritual experience and insight with efforts by the broader spiritual community to answer these questions, since among today's Pagans, spiritual understanding is as much based on personal experience as on philosophy or theology.

A Mystical Experience

The event that proved most pivotal to my understanding of suffering occurred during a "dark night of the soul" where everything in my life seemed jinxed, and my strongest efforts to accomplish any important goals appeared utterly in vain. I was depressed, frequently in despair, and painfully aware of my own shortcomings. What hope I felt drew upon my earlier experiences of the Goddess and Her unconditional love. It seemed to me that if I could cultivate that feeling within my own heart, I would be less vulnerable to the pain arising out of continual disappointments.

One morning, while driving from the country to the city where I was moving, I was suddenly surrounded by a Presence of perfect love. Unlike my previous experiences with the divine, no other qualities were present. I sensed neither maleness nor femaleness, neither a feeling of the natural world nor of an ethereal realm. This loving Presence was neither personal nor impersonal; rather, it was completely personal but without the limita-

tions we associate with personhood. In trying to describe this experience such limiting terms fail. There was nothing but love and perfect understanding for all things, everywhere. This Presence poured forth an immensity of care for each unique and individual being. The insight accompanying my experience indicated this was the fundamental quality of All that Is, the Godhead, the Source from which all Gods and Goddesses and everything else manifests. In Traditional Wiccan terms, this Source is known as the Dryghton.

Within the context of this outpouring of love, all suffering and misfortune acquired a context that redeemed them. At the deepest level it was clear that everything was as it should be—all beings were loved, none were truly alone, and all were of consequence. Lilies of the field, falling sparrows, and despairing Pagans were not living futile lives, nor was the meaning of their lives located solely in the part they played in a larger drama whose nature and outcome they could not grasp, although that was also true. In addition, each being was personally important and protected at a spiritual level. As with similar reports from others so blessed, this experience passed all too quickly. But my memory of it, and ability to recall the love and beauty which characterized it, decisively changed my view of life. Unconditional divine love embraces all beings and permeates everything.

Despite powerful similarities, many spiritual traditions describe this encounter with the Ultimate in different ways. Most important, some depict their experiences in personal terms, others in impersonal ones. All describe what happened to them in the context of their own spiritual traditions, using concepts familiar to their audience. Usually

Neopagan religion celebrates and honors all basic dimensions of existence, but in light of so much suffering, some critics ask whether in doing so we demonstrate a naive or even willful blindness to evil and the omnipresent nature of human affliction.

left unaddressed are the efforts of modern theologians to make something important out of these terminological difference. On the other hand, reports of these encounters almost always say that no words are adequate to the experience, so it may be best to avoid unnecessary precision when describing the transcendent. I am not suggesting all mystical experiences are the same. But mystical accounts from many traditions of which I have knowledge do appear to share the view that perfect and unconditional love, not suffering, is fundamental to reality.

Those beings whom I term the “high Gods” partake of this same loving quality, but in a more individualized way. The Goddess, for example, is feminine and, as She has manifested to me, carries a sense of nature, of sun and shade-dappled meadows, dark groves of trees, merry brooks and brilliant flowers. By virtue of possessing these characteristics She does not possess others, for example, the masculine. She is therefore a more limited expression of that ultimate Divinity which is beyond limits.

Love and Reciprocity

If Ultimate Divinity is best described as perfect love, why would it manifest, or be manifested in, a world where we love imperfectly, suffer greatly, and then die? Why do

limited, fallible, suffering beings exist at all: what’s the point? At best we can speculate. If love cares for nothing so much as the beloved, then the more perfect the love, the greater the understanding and treasuring of the beloved. There is no greater nor more perfect love than that of the Ultimate. From this, everything flows.

This view can be challenged. Because the Divine is beyond human understanding, some argue no terms adequately describe It/Him/Her. In one sense I agree. Even the experience I had was beyond the power of words to describe, and my experience was limited by my humanity. But if the Divine were totally other we would not only be unable to describe it even imperfectly, we would have no reason to worship or honor it. It may be that love, which we first learn about in a human context, is only a metaphor for how we experience the Divine, but it is universally recognized as the best metaphor. As love, it connects with a human capacity, but it encompasses complete understanding and universal unconditional acceptance which human love does not.

A perfect and limitless love would desire the existence of an enormous variety of beings manifesting every way in which a good life can potentially be lived. Each being would be treasured and cherished, regardless of whether that love was returned, because

Divine love is unconditional. Individuality brings variety, both of beings and of how they act. For choices to be genuine some must be better than others. Meaningful choice implies the possibility of error. In addition, given the assumption of Divine perfection, individuality can arise only if Divinity in some way limits itself.

The material world is limited. When matter exists, boundaries exist. In manifesting itself in the material world, the Divine necessarily individuates. Self-aware material beings are particularly aware of boundaries, and with this awareness comes the recognition of individuality.

Every limitation creates the possibility of new individuality, and a new way of manifesting Divine love. That this limitation is self-chosen by the Divine is evidenced by Its capacity to manifest in the awareness of people through mystical experience. If such love is part of perfection. Therefore, being influenced by others is part of perfection. Each of us loves uniquely, and is loved uniquely. In this relationship something genuinely new is created, something that depends upon a change in the relationship of the beloved to the lover.

Because the Divine is aware of everything, its existence is enriched without thereby implying it was previously impoverished. Here, perhaps, is the ultimate meaning behind the phrase “to him who has is given.” Love is only genuine when given freely. Free beings, particularly ones limited in knowledge and wisdom, expand their capacity to love in different ways and at different times. Each takes its own path. Each will be uniquely itself.

Because the Ultimate is aware of everything, when we become more loving towards one another, the well being of both the Divine

and the other is enhanced. Believing otherwise may thus be seen as an error of the ancients.

From fullness comes even greater fullness. Hartshorne quotes Jules Lequier as saying, truly, that “God, who sees things change, changes also in beholding them, or else does not perceive that they change” (Hartshorne 1984: v). The world of freedom is a world where each of us, slowly, hesitantly, often fearfully (and perhaps over lifetimes), grows in our capacity to love and care. In doing so we enrich ourselves and All That Is. Along the way many of us take plenty of detours, and given our limitations, make plenty of errors.

Spirit and Matter

Many classical Pagan philosophers considered matter to be the “densest” manifestation of Spirit, or as that dimension of Spirit farthest from the Source of ultimate Goodness and Love. Often the words of Classical philosophers such as Porphyry seemed almost to condemn the existence of the physical world every bit as much as did the ancient Gnostics, who considered the world the creation of an evil god who used it to trap souls into material bodies. Classical Pagan philosophy was well aware of the difference between spiritual love and material life as most of them experienced it. As a result, it was often critical of the material world, although it rarely condemned matter because physicality was thought to be a manifestation of God and so worthy of regard.

It is obvious that I take a happier view of the matter of matter. I think this difference is two-fold. First, the place and time in which I live enables most people to live in at least modest prosperity and freedom. Our times

are not unique in this regard. Apparently hunting and gathering peoples rarely found the world a bad place to live. This unhappy condition came later with the advent of slavery, despotism, and mass poverty. Observers from those less fortunate times can be forgiven their jaundiced conclusions about life. The liberal democratic transformation has finally enabled the mass of people to again enjoy modest security and prosperity. The poor are now a minority group. Second, I reject the error of equating perfection and the Ultimate with imperviousness to change, a position which necessarily devaluates matter.

Yet there is a sense in which our ancestors were correct. Embodiment situates us in a world permeated by need. All living things live in a state of need. Physical embodiment requires us to seek physical sustenance. We must take in energy to survive. We need food, water, safety, shelter, and more. Much of physical life is oriented towards satisfying those needs or suffering in the absence of their satisfaction. Consequently, material existence seemingly stands in stark tension with our experience of the Ultimate, which manifests perfect and unconditional love while being itself perfectly fulfilled. As physical beings we are always subject to need, and therefore to the possibility of deprivation. From this possibility comes a consequent fear of doing without, and the suffering it causes. I think that most human suffering has its deepest roots in the ubiquity of need, and our fearful response to deprivation.

Individual awareness in our world is mediated through physical structure. Every individual of every species is characterized by the limitations and possibilities inherent in its physical nature. Every being is powerfully shaped by the forces which influence how it survives and reproduces. This is so even if the

core of all awareness is perfect love—for physical structures shape and allow awareness to manifest and act in material form.

Throughout most of life's history on earth, natural selection was the ultimate editor determining which forms flourished and which did not. If life is free to develop in all directions, learning how to acquire energy, survive and thrive in a material world, ultimately some beings will begin to explore the possibilities of living at the expense of others. If other beings can provide more readily accessible energy than could non-living processes such as sunlight, the path to greater complexity of living beings expand considerably. This expansion began with the first munching of a plant and accelerated enormously when an early muncher was, itself, munched.

Less-aware forms of life seek sustenance with no concern other than acquiring enough to maintain their existence, and to multiply. A very rich and diverse world must have arisen before a physical organism could become complex enough to manifest individuated self-awareness. The shape of our bodies, and the complexity of our brains, are the result of millions of years where natural selection edited what was viable in this world, and what was to be cast aside. A consciousness such as our own could only exist because beings were continually subject to pressures to change and adapt, gradually enriching and diversifying the forms life takes. For physical consciousness to evolve to the point where it could act with self-aware loving-kindness, it had to evolve through many less-aware levels, taking advantage of whatever opportunities existed to obtain the energy needed to survive and prosper.

Our genes and DNA are the record of our inheritance, and our kinship with all life. And

... mystical accounts from many traditions of which I have knowledge do appear to share the view that perfect and unconditional love, not suffering, is fundamental to reality.

so our awareness is involved, on one hand in meeting the needs for physical survival, and on the other with comprehending values far beyond personal utility. In an important sense, the physical world is complete and sacred in its own right. It manifests peace and beauty, marvelous variety and the many delights apparent to the senses. We make contact with this perfection when we contemplate nature without judgment.

There is no real need to subjectively import beauty into nature. It is there, and we discover it. Robinson Jeffers caught this point when he wrote of the natural world: "the human sense of beauty is our metaphor for their excellence" (1977: 2nd 57). I suspect this is why so many meditative traditions maintain that, in order to experience our deepest and most fundamental state of being, we must quiet the part of our minds involved in everyday awareness—a self-awareness shaped by the requirements of survival in a world of need—and that when we accomplish this, what is revealed is indescribably good.

Until we finally develop our capacity for genuine love, Nature will remain that manifestation of Spirit which is most fulfilling for us, precisely because in itself it is complete, and we are still incomplete. Even so, there are additional possibilities for Spirit to manifest physically, possibilities that require self-aware consciousness in order to arise. But because our existence is rooted in need, our

obsession with meeting needs and avoiding fears can cause us to lose sight of both the perfection of nature and of our own inherent possibilities. As more complex beings than our less self-conscious relations, we are also more prone than they to error. We are capable of making all the mistakes other kinds of life can make, plus many more they cannot.

To flourish, human beings depend upon physical and emotional intimacy and affection. Infants deprived of loving human contact rarely survive. Nor does this appear true of human babies alone. The experience of gentleness, care, and intimacy appears to be necessary for living beings whose awareness has developed beyond a certain threshold. And the more self-aware the being, the more it needs and desires trust, affection, and delight in the affectionate reciprocation of others. In its absence such beings often die, and those that survive are scarred. This is what we would expect to find if full awareness is love, and if we are the most self-aware of material beings. In our self-awareness we are separated from most animals and, without long and disciplined effort, from their ability to focus on the moment. But that very self-awareness which so easily separates us from living in the beauty of the moment also deepens our capacity for love. If self-awareness was our peculiarly human Fall, it is also our Glory. Self-awareness is a necessary element in the development of loving awareness. It makes possible a differentiated and recipro-

... the physical world is complete and sacred in its own right. It manifests peace and beauty, marvelous variety and the many delights apparent to the senses. We make contact with this perfection when we contemplate nature without judgment.

cated love between individuated beings. Such love need not be limited but, among human beings who are dominated by their fears and needs, it often is.

Rooting our capacity for love in self-awareness seems paradoxical. Only self-aware beings can be selfish. But this commonplace only scratches the surface of what it is to be self-aware. To act in my own interest requires me to have a conception of my future self, a self which does not yet exist. My capacity for empathy enables me to identify with this future self because from my present perspective this future self is an "other"—a hypothetical other. Without my capacity to put myself in the place of an other I could never overcome the temptation to seek immediate gratification at the expense of my long term well-being. If I empathize with my future self, putting its happiness ahead of my immediate gratification, I can refrain from that temptation. The same empathetic capacity that helps me act for my own long term well-being enables me to identify with other selves and act in their interest.

Implicit in human nature is the capacity to love in ever-widening circles of inclusion, and the more we develop our humanity, the more inclusive those circles become. It is this capacity for expanding that which we love which appears most truly unique to human beings among the life forms on this planet.

The American ecologist Aldo Leopold captured this insight when he wrote that while we can mourn the extinction of the passenger pigeon, whose flocks once numbered in the millions before being destroyed by market hunters, no passenger pigeon would have mourned our passing had it been we who disappeared instead. He concluded that "For one species to mourn the death of another is a new thing under the sun" (1966: 117). It is this quality of unselfish care, care that blossoms into love, that we can bring into the world. It is our most unique gift to life.

Death

But what about the abundant suffering we all experience? The same world which makes our physical existence possible also makes that existence necessarily brief. Death may not be the greatest source of suffering, but we often fear our own passing and are deeply pained by the passing of loved ones, especially the young and innocent. How may death and suffering be made to harmonize with the idea of perfect love? Is death the sad tax we must pay so that the Ultimate can love us, or is there more to the matter? Nothing seems more directly to undercut the value of individuality than the death which destroys our physical existence.

Individuals are filled with extraordinary

potential, and death brings it to an end, often in ways that appear very premature. On a billboard in the town in which I live is the photo of a happy young boy. It reminds us that he was killed by a drunken driver. How can a young child, with almost all his life ahead of him, be killed by a drunk driver in a good world? Yet if the world is good, death is too central a feature to our existence to be no more than a sign of worldly imperfection or a sad necessity for physical embodiment.

We can take two approaches in trying to come to terms with death, and both are valid. We can ask what role death plays in the existence of those conscious beings for whom we care, and we can ask why death exists at all.

The first question is the easiest. Christian and Pagan alike agree that consciousness is not dependent upon physical bodies. Destruction of a body need not imply the destruction of awareness. This is a commonplace for any spiritual practice which encourages, and even teaches, its adherents how to have contact with the world of spirits, as does Traditional Wicca and much of Neopaganism in general. What is really at stake here is not whether departed loved ones no longer exist, and most Pagans agree there is no compelling reason to believe this is the case. From a Pagan perspective death appears to be a moving on, a shedding of one's skin, a change of abode to a new dimension of existence.

If the Source of All is supremely good, and the universe is its expression and receives divine love without condition, then only our partial vision makes death appear to be an evil cutting down of vital, loving and beautiful beings. We are not aware of the true context in which a being dies. Our perspective is inevitably limited and to an unavoidable extent, self-centered. But by itself this answer is unsatisfactory. If life is a blessing, why

move on? Why experience death at all? If we simply reincarnate, why ever leave? Ultimately, of course, the answer to this question remains a mystery. But reasonable speculation helps give us confidence that the ultimate truth is in harmony with our spiritual experience. An analogy I have long liked may help us to understand this.

Each time I backpacked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and out again, at some point I questioned why I was doing it. Sore and blistered feet, the fatigue of carrying a heavy pack back up 5000 feet of trail to the rim, and the relentless draining heat of the desert sun are no fun. Once one of my knees went out at its very bottom, just after crossing the Colorado River on a suspension bridge. I could not bend my leg without excruciating pain. It was a very long hike out. But even when my knees were fine, more than once I have wondered why I was doing this. More than once I have thought of nothing but the restaurant on top, with its comfortable chairs, good food, air conditioning, great views, and table service. And when I get to the top, I go there. And I enjoy that restaurant immensely.

But, and this is my point, I am also very grateful to have been at the Grand Canyon, to have backpacked into its immensity, to have experienced its beauty and peace in ways unavailable to those viewing it from its rim or by airplane, unavailable even to those who take a mule to the bottom. Trips such as I have taken are transformative in ways less challenging ventures are not. I and the others who do these things are enriched in ways in which those who settle for a view from a restaurant are not, no matter how good the wine, the service, and the food. And once I have been away for a while, I am ready for another trip. These trips inevitably entail suf-

fering. And there have been times when my physical suffering was far the greater part of what I experienced. However, the suffering is the price of the experience, and in my view one well worth paying. Abstracted from the experience as a whole, of course, the pain is not worth while. But the pain is not abstracted. It is part of the package. I can reduce my suffering through wise preparation, or make it worse (or even terminal) through foolishness or bad luck, but it is an unavoidable part of the trip.

In some ways I think life is like a backpack into beautiful but challenging country. It is strenuous and tiring, but it is also enriching in ways unavailable without the experience, and in this context death may be viewed as a time of relaxation. Our religions and our philosophies are trail maps, hopefully good ones, guiding us into and through terrain far beyond our ken. But if the world and its Source are good, there should be no ultimate cause for worry. This faith-as-confidence is in harmony with Pagan spirituality because it is grounded in spiritual experience, not dogma written by another.

There may be other reasons for death. To manifest and develop our own capacities we may need to live more than once. For example, to be a man or a woman leads in many respects to very different ways of living. Perhaps we need to live at least once in each role. As a rule our individual gifts and talents vastly exceed the opportunities available to us to develop them in a single lifetime. Our lives are continually filled with fateful choices. We take one path rather than another, becoming different people than we otherwise would have been. Our world offers far more ways to live in fulfilling ways than can be grasped in a single lifetime. Perhaps we need many lives—to backpack not just into canyons, but

high into mountains and exploring coasts and valleys and forests and plains as well.

This view is strengthened by those of a Pagan culture of great antiquity. In South Asia we commonly think people regard rebirth as a misfortune. The reality is more complex. From the time of the early Upanishads until the present, their spiritual traditions have acknowledged that some will wish to get off life's wheel, others to return again (Doniger 1998:28). And for those we most love, is there not a special blessing in loving them in many ways over many lifetimes—as lover and as friend, as parent and as child? The myriad ways we can live may constitute a vital part of this process of developing our capacity to love. As a Traditional Wiccan teaching puts it, “to fulfill love you must return again at the same time and place as the loved one, and you must remember and love them again” (Farrar 1984:30).

For those of us who love life, and one another, reincarnation is a blessing. It is yet another trip into the sacred beauty of the Grand Canyon. Death also appears to be a necessary accompaniment to physical growth. Only a form of life which no longer reproduced itself would need to be freed from the hand of death. Immortal material forms that reproduced would sooner or later fill up all available space. The worst predictions of the pessimistic English clergyman, Thomas Malthus, would come true. And as I emphasized, complex forms such as ourselves arose from the process of natural selection, with death the final editor. If physical life is good, it is appropriate for other beings also to have the experience of living. Part of life, and certainly part of love, is sharing. Divine love includes unconditional respect, concern and regard for and delight in others. We who do not fully embody this quality nevertheless

... life is like a backpack into beautiful but challenging country. It is strenuous and tiring, but it is also enriching in ways unavailable without the experience ... These trips inevitably entail suffering. ... the suffering is the price of the experience, and in my view one well worth paying.

find ourselves in a world where each life-form cannot help but provide for the existence of others.

The attitude with which we confront this truth is important. Concern for the well-being of generations to come, human and otherwise, is perhaps the most unselfish type of love we can easily practice. From a Neopagan perspective, part of life is learning to be in harmony with the sacred rhythms that make embodiment possible, including living in harmony with death. When we see death as sacramental, and acknowledge the dependence of virtually all living things on other living things, the modern tendency to over-sentimentalize life, and be offended by its reality, can be healed. So long as we deny the sacredness of death, we cannot truly embrace life.

Our society's denial of death's sacramental character takes many forms. Disapproval of death motivates those who attach a deep moral significance to vegetarianism. There are good reasons for some people being vegetarians, but refraining from killing is not one of them. Human beings cannot avoid killing—or at least delegating that task to others on whom we depend, so it is done out of our sight. This is as true for vegetarians as anyone else. To grow crops a farmer must

displace countless animals from their homes as he or she prepares fields for sowing. More animals, gophers and rabbits, crows and sparrows, and countless insects, may be killed so that the crops can be preserved and harvested for our use. The best farmers minimize killing, but few can eliminate it. Some vegetarians feel more virtuous than omnivores because they do not eat animal food, but they miss the point. There is plenty of blood hidden in a plate of spinach.

To live well, life requires us to integrate a paradox. In unconditionally accepting life's value and beauty, we must also accept death, which appears to be its negation. How we accomplish this acceptance is one of the challenges facing all spiritual paths. Neopagan theology provides a way to embrace both poles of the paradox within an unconditional affirmation of life. I believe this is one of the gifts Pagan spirituality can offer—an acceptance of death as part of a world that is good. Not finding death to be evil does not lead us to devalue life, or fail to treat others well. For example, my criticisms of self-righteousness in some vegetarians in no way justifies contemporary factory farming, where chickens, pigs, and other animals are confined to simplified mechanical environments, and treated as protein producing machines. Neither ani-

When we see death as sacramental, and acknowledge the dependence of virtually all living things on other living things, the modern tendency to over-sentimentalize life, and be offended by its reality, can be healed. So long as we deny the sacredness of death, we cannot truly embrace life.

mals, nor anything else, are simply objects to be shoved and manipulated for human ends. Animals are worthy of respect, and in a factory farm there is no respect for life.

But when we fear death as the greatest of evils, we desperately utilize any and all things in a futile attempt to prevent it. In doing so we devalue the world around us. Physicality itself becomes an enemy we need to conquer in order to preserve what?—our physicality! Another paradox, but this is a harmful one. In honoring death we embrace life more fully. In rejecting death we retreat from life itself. The physical world is always in a state of change. Things come into being, manifest, and then pass away. In seeking to arrest that change we try to make the physical world something it is not. To preserve our physical existence against all change, we find ourselves unable to truly accept or appreciate it. We act not so much from a love of life as from a fear of death, thereby committing a double error. For life should be loved and death should not be feared. To do less with either is not truly to trust the Divine nor to act with gratitude for the life we are given.

Neopagans honor death as a necessary part of life. Traditional Wiccans invite its presence at Samhain. It is not that we seek to die. But we know that for each of us our time

will come, and we seek to grow in wisdom and insight to the point that when it does come, we will pass that way without fear, saying, as would the wisest of the Plains Indians, “Today is a good day to die.”

Physicality and Suffering

Arguments such as these demonstrate there is no necessary reason to believe death is in any way evidence of spiritual fallenness or failure. But, important as they are, these considerations only begin to address the issue of suffering. Why does so much suffering exist if the world is at bottom holy and sacred? Granted some death and attendant suffering may be unavoidable. Why is there so much of it? Why does the sum total of suffering that we see around us appear so much greater than a reasonable minimum? A world of change and creativity will of necessity also be a world where anything in material form is subject to decline. All change is a passing away as well as a coming into being. In the world we experience, everything changes. At the peak of physical vitality the seed of decline sprouts. A world of freedom and creativity seems to require a process like this. We commemorate this world with our ritual cycle of the Wheel of the Year.

A good model of this dimension to physical reality is a kaleidoscope, or perhaps a sunset. Each moment of beauty must pass if new beauty is to arise, and the full cycle of such a process far surpasses that available in any freeze frame, for change is part of the beauty. To enjoy a kaleidoscope or a sunset we do not fixate on a single moment, allowing ourselves to become enchanted by the beauty of the changing patterns. The same is true for life itself.

From this perspective there is no contradiction underlying the tension between spirit and matter. For living matter to exist a tension between need and sufficiency naturally arises. Only through incorporating this tension into the heart of existence can new and deeper ways of loving emerge, or at least emerge into physical reality. The pull of our material needs can, and usually does, get in the way of our awareness of Spirit, yet our physicality simultaneously provides the means by which beings such as ourselves would exist in the first place. And in overcoming the tension between the two through embracing it, we develop powers of wisdom and depths of love and compassion far more deeply than would otherwise be the case.

Spirit as it manifests in matter uses need to create a beautiful world which is complete in itself, but which also creates the preconditions for even more inclusive and varied manifestations of love to arise. What might be seen as imperfections in a world created once and for all by a master craftsman are not necessarily imperfections when the same phenomena are understood as moments within a pattern of change in which Spirit gradually expands the reality of love into the material realm. The orthodox Christian “Divine Potter theology” necessitates criticizing the world as we encounter it. Pagan process theology

does not. From our perspective what appear to be the world’s “imperfections” take on added dimensions of meaning, fulfilling them and raising them to blessings. Great music is always more beautiful than even the purest note repeated over and over again even if, for music to exist, that note must “die.”

Suffering as a Blessing

There is still another dimension to consider. While we rightly do not want to contribute to the suffering of others, it does not follow that their suffering is an unalloyed misfortune, a tragically high price for mere existence. So much depends on context. The natural world provides many examples enabling us to see how that which superficially appears to be suffering and struggle are often essential for the well-being of the individual beings so “afflicted”. Helping a butterfly struggling to emerge from its chrysalis means its wings will not develop. The butterfly will be crippled, never to fly and soon to die. The butterfly’s long and exhausting struggle is essential to its becoming a strong and beautiful being. Perhaps in an analogous way, the insights we gain from accepting and overcoming suffering in our own lives helps us find its deeper significance—even in suffering from which it may seem we cannot recover, or in observing the apparently pointless suffering of others.

Experientially, I know for myself that suffering can ultimately be a blessing. My own experience has shown me that, once worked through, suffering leaves me better off than before. Some whom I know to have life-threatening diseases have also told me their illnesses were good for them in very profound ways. So I hesitate to judge suffering as simply bad, much as I also try to avoid it.

In rejecting death we retreat from life itself. The physical world is always in a state of change. Things come into being, manifest, and then pass away. In seeking to arrest that change we try to make the physical world something it is not. To preserve our physical existence against all change, we find ourselves unable to truly accept or appreciate it.

For suffering to be to the ultimate benefit of those who suffer, it must help create qualities which would not otherwise arise. Otherwise it is needless. Occasions for suffering are so many, and in some cases apparently go uncompensated, that any analysis here must be very tentative, for how can a human being know what qualities will arise from suffering that he or she has not undergone? Yet general patterns do arise.

Genuine care for others often seems to arise from our suffering, either directly or by empathic identification with the suffering of others. Often it first ignites the fire of care in our hearts. Until that fire is lit, we possess only the seed of a human spirit, closed in upon itself, without depth of understanding of either ourselves or others. The fire of care warms and softens that seed, enabling it to sprout. If I had never suffered, I doubt that I would either understand compassion or practice it to the limited extent that I do. It is our compassion that opens us up to loving others for themselves, fulfilling our humanity. I am not suggesting that what appears bad to us is not really bad. It is sometimes very bad. A compassionate person will regret former actions which hurt others. If those others are able ultimately to turn those actions to a good

end, the person who caused the pain will still rightfully regret having caused that suffering. But while bad things do happen they are not meaningless, ultimately gratuitous, or cosmically bad. They do not leave irreducible stains on the fabric of existence.

Suffering is often, though not always, evidence of mistakes by ourselves or others. Every time a misstep occurs, an opportunity arises to take the dance into new directions of grace and beauty. If we fail, it is often because we do not know the steps. We stumble a lot. At least I do. But over time we become more sure-footed. Practice makes us into better dancers, each with our unique steps.

My argument is subject to a serious misinterpretation. Neither I nor anyone else can appropriately approach someone suffering a great evil, such as the murder of a loved one, and say that this was for their own or the victim's ultimate good. If I do not know what that greater good is I have no right to say such a thing, and I feel some trepidation in even discussing this issue abstractly. I know my argument has proven true for me, so far, and also for many others. But I would never tell someone who just suffered a great tragedy that this was a blessing. The event itself is

still bad and those responsible deserve no thanks. The redeeming context has yet to make itself known. It is the worst kind of arrogance to volunteer these judgments to others, particularly concerning suffering we ourselves have not experienced.

My encounter with Divine love convinces me that somehow, and ultimately, good will come of any misfortune, but identification of that good is beyond my knowledge. I am not wise enough to grasp the greater pattern to which so much suffering by human and other beings contributes. I am happy enough occasionally to grasp the pattern of spiritual growth that suffering helps create in my own life. At the level of action, the suffering of others offers us an opportunity to act with love, wisdom, and compassion. At such times that is all that is truly appropriate because that is all that is truly in keeping with our understanding.

On Suffering as the Result of Malice

What of suffering deliberately caused by other human beings? If evil is anything at all, it is malice, a desire to cause suffering in others. But why does malice exist? In my

experience, malice is perhaps the most powerful and painful result of ignorance. Errors of judgment by free beings are inevitable. Their existence makes it possible for malice to arise. Many of us have found our anger towards another suddenly evaporate when we learn we had been misinformed, or had misunderstood that person's actions. What if we had not learned we were wrong? In such cases, our anger could fester and grow. If in consequence we struck out at another verbally or in other ways, that person might strike back, confirming our opinion of their nastiness. The more we distance ourselves from others, the easier it becomes to treat them as alien to us. Psychologically, we do this even to our own selves.

Until our attitudes have been adjusted, our eyes and hearts opened, it is all too easy to feel resentment and anger. If we wallow in it, our comprehension of things can become so distorted that we can give ourselves up to malice. I know. I have done so myself. Many Pagans, myself among them, would say that some spirit entities apparently act from malice. There is no reason to believe that just because a being exists in a non-material way it must therefore be spiritually wise. When I die, why should that make me spiritually

Genuine care for others often seems to arise from our suffering, either directly or by empathic identification with the suffering of others. Often it first ignites the fire of care in our hearts. Until that fire is lit, we possess only the seed of a human spirit, closed in upon itself, without depth of understanding of either ourselves or others.

wiser than I am now? It may. It may not.

Furthermore, many Pagans believe that mind creates, or at least shapes, energy, and energy so influenced reflects the quality of mind which shaped it. We do not need bad spirits for very unpleasant things to manifest and happen on non-material levels. But the existence of malevolent humans and spirits is not evidence of a deep flaw in existence or of an ultimately demonic spiritual principle. We can follow how evil can arise from non-evil sources without outside intervention. All that is required is enough ignorance.

Conclusion

From a Pagan perspective we can now conclude that much suffering is unnecessary, in the sense that wise beings would neither inflict it nor suffer it. But there is still an irreducible core of suffering inherent to physical existence as such. This irreducible core stems from our existing as mortal material beings who must meet our physical and psychological needs in order to live, and who have limited understandings about how to do so, and therefore cannot help but make mistakes. Some people may regard these conditions as signs of fallenness. They are in fact necessary aspects of being a human being in this beautiful world, and the price is worthwhile.

Suffering is not evidence of radical failure. It goes with the package of life—and on balance the package is good. Indeed, often it is in confronting opposition and trouble that we develop genuine spiritual strength, depth, and beauty. And it is in this sense that our world is truly harmonious—with perfect love, perfect goodness, and perfect wisdom.

Bibliography

At the editor's suggestion, along with the sources cited in this text, I have culled several additional titles from the bibliography of Pagans and Christians in the New Millennium which I believe contribute in an important way to developing a solid philosophical and theological foundation for Pagan religion in the modern world. I have focused on books with which many readers may be unacquainted.

- Abram, David. 1996. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Pantheon.
- Armstrong, A. H. (ed.) 1989. *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality, Egyptian, Greek, Roman*. New York: Crossroad.
- Buber, Martin. 1970. *I and Thou*. (trans.) Walter Kaufmann. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Chuvin, Pierre. 1990. *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Danielou, Alain. 1985. *The Gods of India*. New York: Inner Traditions.
- Dodds, E. R. 1951. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Doniger, Wendy. 1998. "Who Lives, Who Survives?" *Parabola* 23:4
- Farrar, Janet and Stewart. 1984. *The Witches' Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft*. London: Robert Hale.
- Hadot, Pierre. 1995. *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Hartshorne, Charles. 1984. *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Jeffers, Robinson. 1977. "The Inhumanist." *The Double Axe*. New York: Liveright.
- Julian. 1809. *The Arguments of the Emperor Julian Against the Christians*. Chicago: Hermetic Publishing.
- LaChapelle, Dolores. 1988. *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex: Rapture of the Deep*. Silverton, CO: Finn Hill Arts.
- Leopold, Aldo. 1996. *A Sand County Almanac*. New York: Ballentine.
- Martin, Luther H. 1987. *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nisbet, Robert. 1980. *History of the Idea of Progress*. New York: Basic Books.

Plotinus, 1991. *The Enneads*. (trans.) Stephen MacKenna. London: Penguin.

Shlain, Leonard. 1998. *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*. NY: Viking.

Smith, John Holland. 1976. *The Death of Classical Paganism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

My favorite proverb is from Africa: "I am because we are." Certainly this article reflects the wisdom and creativity of more people than myself alone.

It exists because we are. I would like to thank Kim Atkinson, Richard Ely, Rowan Fairgrove, Anastasia Fischer, D. H. Frew, Anodea Judith, and Anna Korn. To all of them my most sincere gratitude.

Gus diZerega is a 3rd Degree Gardnerian Elder, studied many years with a Brazilian shaman and with other teachers in Native American and Afro-Brazilian traditions. In his other life he holds a Ph.D. in Political Theory, publishing on democratic politics and ecological theory and policy while trying to figure out how all this fits together. Gus lives in Northern California, and may be reached at <gusdz@sonic.net>.

Hekate the Salvatrix in Late Antiquity

Hekate Soteira, A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature. by Sarah Iles Johnston. America Philological Association Classical Studies 21, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1990, ISBN 1-55540-426-X hc, 1-55540-427-8 pb

This book is a revision of a dissertation by Sarah Iles Johnston, written while she taught in the Princeton Department of Classics. It is likely to intrigue persons interested in Hekate, in the development of late-stage Mediterranean magic and paganism, or in the Neoplatonic ideas of cosmic spheres and ensoulment

Gods and peoples do not give each other up without a struggle. During the thousand years following the temples and plays of Classical Greece, when the Gods slept no further away than Olympus, inclination toward Neoplatonic philosophy made those Gods that survived transcendent, removing them to the celestial sphere above the moon. Hekate was a survivor. In the minds of many ordinary people, she always remained the chthonic goddess of the crossroads and source-protector for witches; but to a select cadre of philosophers and theurgist-magicians, she became the intercessor between the celestial deities and the world of man, and furthermore, the Cosmic Soul from which each human's soul flowed.

From a complex field covering Neoplatonic and Middle Platonic concepts and a

... in Classical times Hekate acted as an escort and mediator between the world of man and the Underworld realms reached after death. She was favoured by the Orphics as the companion of Persephone. She might be petitioned for acts of magic and she controlled the chthonic daemons who did the magician's work ... She dealt with the liminal gateways and carried their key.

subset of religious philosophy labelled Chaldean by its first writings, Sarah Iles Johnston has selected the parts describing Hekate's transformation, the world view of this group, her identification with the Cosmic Soul, and the Oracles attributed to her. Johnston then follows the development of the Chaldean doctrine. To relate Johnston's work to historical, Neoplatonic, and magical thought, one might wish to consult writings such as the Greek magical papyri and a copy of the full collection of 226 fragmentary Chaldean Oracles, of which Johnston uses 95.

The Oracles may have been written—or collected—by Julian the Theurgist, who was reputed to have taken part in the campaigns of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius *ca.* 172 AD and said to have used magic against the enemy. He was the son of Julian the Chaldean, who may also have written part of the Oracles. Johnston avoids this argument, stating, “use of the name ‘Julian(s)’ indicates my agreement only with the premise that the Oracles emerged during the mid to late 2nd century and not necessarily with the premise that they were composed by one or both of the Julians.”

Julian claimed that the doctrines contained within the Oracles were handed down directly by “the god” or “the Gods”. Hekate and Apollo were the two deities usually credited. Hekate is named five times and may speak directly in up to 11 fragments. Hekate/Soul is discussed in 66 fragments. Other deities named are Eros (2x), Zeus (2x), Rhea, the nymphs, and Helios, once each. Unlike surviving oracles from Delphian Apollo, which often concern economic and political matters, Hekate's oracles seem largely advice encouraging the spiritual and theurgical progress of the believer.

The word and concept of “theurgy” emerged at this time, meaning something different from magic (*goeteia*). Theurgy required proper piety and intention, designed to purify and prepare the soul of the theurgist in a way that ordinary magic did not. The pious theurgist subordinated himself to the gods, allowing them to work upon him; the traditional magician attempted to work upon the gods. The theurgist approached the divine through sacred names and tools directly given by the gods in oracles or “planted” to be discovered by the believer. He was enjoined to avoid divination by phys-

ical means such as bird flight and to open his mind to the messages of the gods, delivered through speaking statues, mediums speaking with the deities' voices, or direct epiphanies of the gods.

Chaldea was located in southern Babylonia near the mouths of the Tigris and Euphrates. The Chaldeans were a seminomadic people from Arabia whose city was Ur. In 720 BC they briefly held the throne of Babylon and under Nebuchadnezzar II they captured Judaea. The Persian invasion of 539 BC ended their dynasty. In the Book of Daniel and by many writers of antiquity the name “Chaldean” was applied to legendary Babylonian magi learned in astronomy, astrology and magic. It was a name of power given to a doctrine developed seven centuries later: no more direct relationship has been implied.

The Neoplatonist and Chaldean systems modelled their cosmos on Plato's 3rd century BC writings, especially *Timaeus*, *Philebus* and *Laws*. Johnston extends her research through the commentaries of Porphyry, Plotinus, Psellus, Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascius.

How, then, did Hekate change? Even in Classical times Hekate acted as an escort and mediator between the world of man and the Underworld realms reached after death. She was favoured by the Orphics as the companion of Persephone. She might be petitioned for acts of magic and she controlled the chthonic daemons who did the magician's work. Three-faced, she guarded the chaotic space of the triple crossroad, where travellers had to decide between two alternatives in order to continue their journey. She dealt with the liminal gateways and carried their key.

The Neoplatonists divided the cosmos into two realms: the divine celestial, which

existed outward from the moon's orbit, and the worldly one of man, which lay beneath the moon. Since they were fond of tripartite systems, the Moon became the third, intermediary part. It became the location of Elysium and was identified with Hekate. Johnston says that verifiable associations between the Moon and Hekate do not survive from earlier than the first century, about two centuries after the evidence in which Moon is associated with Artemis. Hekate became two-faced instead of three. She looked upward and down, herself being the third part.

Above was the divine Father, who generated Ideas. His name is never given. Hekate's role was three-fold: through her womb she transmitted his Ideas and thereby structure to the physical world; she was both division and bond between the “Intelligible” and “Sensible” worlds above and below; and as the Cosmic Soul, she was the source of individual souls and enlivener of the physical world of man. Of the few traditional deities retained, she was the most accessible mediator between the increasingly transcendent male divinity and humans. The daemons or angels had moved up to the celestial realms—to control them, she must follow. But still she guided man through the uncertain journeys of dying and being born. Psellus said that she had the middle place among the gods and was the center of all power, also the source of dreams.

The second part of Johnston's book deals with Hekate's connection with the individual theurgist and also the role in the cosmogony for “angel”, “iynx” and “daemon”. The use of a top or iynx wheel, seeming to be a symbolic counterpart of the whirling iynx energy (the Idea of the Father God) is debated. There is also an Oracle in which Hekate gives

directions for making her telestika/statue, containing small lizards and wild rue. Finally, some Platonists divided the Cosmic Soul into two, creating a lower, irrational soul called Physis whose source was still Hekate and who carried her previous bad traits. Physis was associated with daemon-dogs capable of distracting the theurgist from his work.

Instructing the theurgist to recognize her epiphany, Hekate speaks:

If you say this to me many times,
 you will observe all things growing dark,
 For the curved bulk of the heavens disappears
 and the stars do not shine;
 The light of the Moon is hidden
 and the Earth does not stand steady.
 All things are revealed in lightning.
 Having spoken these things,
 you will behold a fire leaping skittishly
 like a child over the aery waves;
 Or a fire without form,
 from which a voice emerges;
 Or a rich light,
 whirring around the field in a spiral.
 But [it is possible] that you will see a horse
 flashing more brightly than light,
 Or a child
 mounted on the swift back of a horse,
 a fiery child or a child covered with gold,
 or yet again a naked child;
 Or even a child shooting arrows,
 standing on a horse's back.
 But when you see the sacred fire without form,
 shining skittishly
 throughout the depths of the Cosmos,
 Listen to the voice of the fire.

Review by Kate Slater

*In the opinion of the Pom editors, Ms Slater is
 a Canadian National Treasure.*

Mything in action: new ethnicities, paganisms and English law.

Ethnicity, Law and Human Rights. by S. Poulter. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1998. hb, 391pp + bibliography, index, tables. ISBN 0-19-825773-2.

In this text Poulter considers the way in which the English legal system engages with a variety of ethnic groups, concentrating on a number of case studies. Although the focus of the work is ethnicity, rather than religious identity and practices, the case studies, as I shall discuss below, make this an important work for any student of the interaction between the law and religion in the United Kingdom jurisdictions. In this narrow review I wish to discuss some problems arising from Poulter's definition of ethnicity, in particular the problems his analysis poses to Pagans in the United Kingdom.

A concept of ethnicity is central to Poulter's discussion, but in developing it he departs from two obvious foundations for his discussion. At the very start of the text, he makes it clear that he favours legal analysis for its "clarity and precision of exposition in a subject often bedevilled by obfuscating sociological jargon, impenetrable to all save specialists in the subject" (p.1). His engagement with non-legal sources on ethnicity, accordingly, is fairly limited. He also departs from obvious legal sources on how to define ethnicity and ethnic groups, particularly the jurispru-

dence on the racial discrimination legislation. Instead, he favours a broader definition of an ethnic group as "a group of people differentiated from the rest of the community by racial origins or cultural background" (quoted on p.6). He relegates racial origins to the status of "merely ... the colour of their skin" (p.15), and clearly sees ethnicity as being a matter of cultural background. His emphasis on shared culture, and a common cultural heritage, leads him to discount the interests of groups, and hence of individuals, which do not possess these elements. This is particularly to be noted in relation to non-Gypsy travellers, although a brief reference to Paganism *per se* also needs to be discussed.

The only case-study which does not deal with a community clearly defined largely by a shared religion is that discussing "Gypsies: The Pursuit of a Nomadic Lifestyle" (ch. 5). To clarify this, the other case studies deal with Jews and ritual slaughter; Muslims and family law derived from *shari'ah*; Hindus and the Bhaktivedanta Manor Temple; Sikhs, beards and turbans; and Rastafarians, dreadlocks and cannabis. Although all of these deal with elements of ethnicity which are as much cultural as religious—if that is a sensible distinction—the importance of the shared religion is clear. The discussion of the importance of nomadic lifestyle to Gypsies does not share this characteristic. It is in this case-study that the interests of groups Poulter is prepared to exclude from ethnicity are most clearly compromised.

In his discussion of "attitudes of the majority community" (p.150), Poulter notes "Conflict between gypsies and the settled population appeared to grow during

the 1980s and early 1990s, perhaps accentuated by the adverse publicity attracted by the antics of 'New Age Travellers' who were often mistakenly linked in the public mind with ethnic gypsies." (p.152). In a later discussion of the government reactions of the 1980s, he returns to this theme—"in 1986 the law of trespass was strengthened, following the antics of a convoy of 'hippies' who were attempting to make a pilgrimage to Stonehenge ... although this new statutory offence was aimed directly at bands of 'hippies' rather than at gypsies, it was clearly liable to be used against the latter in suitable circumstances" (p.166-7). In discussing a shift in government policy in the 1990s he stresses that "the advent of significant numbers of 'New Age Travellers' had complicated the problem" (p.173), in particular because members of the majority community tended to "attribute the behaviour of one group to the other ... Certainly, 'New Age Travellers' have a very tarnished image among Conservative voters in rural areas and their antics must have contributed to pressure on the Government for decisive action to be taken to curb unlawful encampments" (p. 174).

There is a tension between the discussion Poulter gives these two nomadic groups, and he seeks to resolve it, in passing, by a strong assertion. "While 'New Age Travellers' and 'hippies' also seek to follow a different pattern of life from that of the bulk of the majority population, they do not constitute an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority group. Hence, while their preference for a nomadic existence is certainly entitled to respect in a democratic society, specific differential treatment in law to preserve a distinctive cultural tra-

... there seem to be strong connections between conceptual problems posed by Rastafarians and Pagans to the legal system. As Poulter notes "to describe Rastafarianism as a religion when it is of such an amorphous nature and lacks any authoritative doctrine or controlling institutional framework may ... give rise to practical difficulties of formal recognition" (p.341-2). In the case of Rastafarianism, Poulter does not see these problems as being insurmountable ...

dition is not required in their case, as it is for gypsies" (p.192).

There are two important elements to draw out from this defence. Firstly, Poulter's approach towards ethnicity allows him to blur "religious minority group" and "distinctive cultural tradition". Although in this quote being a religious minority group can show possession of a distinctive cultural tradition, is there not a danger that the absence of a cultural tradition might impact adversely on the treatment of a religious minority? I return to this point below. Secondly, while I would agree that New Age Travellers and hippies do not constitute a religious minority group, I would argue that Poulter is asking the wrong question.

An analogy might be drawn between a nomadic lifestyle and the consumption of wine. If we pose the question whether "those who consume wine" are a religious minority, the answer would seem to be no. A wide variety of people consume wine for a wide variety of purposes, including

social and recreational ones. Dealing with this question might lead us to consider that prohibition of wine would not raise any questions relating to religious minorities. If the question we pose, however, is whether one particular, specific, group of those who consume wine, for instance Catholics in communion, constitute a religious minority, the answer would seem to be yes. Thus, prohibition of wine would raise questions relating to a religious minority. Poulter asks the general question, rather than unpacking the different individuals, and groups of individuals, he treats under this term. I would not argue that all 'New Age Travellers' adopt a nomadic lifestyle as part of their religious practices and identities; I would not argue that all 'New Age Travellers' who actually identify with a New Age spirituality, a Pagan spirituality, or both, adopt a nomadic lifestyle as part of their religious practices and identities. I would argue that Poulter has neglected the possibility that at least some of this group treat their nomadic life as as cen-

tral to their religious life, as some Gypsies to their cultural life. In the quote above, some of the 'New Age Travellers' may well have been on a religious journey to Stonehenge.

Paganisms are dealt with extremely briefly in the chapter dealing with Rastafarians, which is unfortunate, as there seem to be strong connections between conceptual problems posed by Rastafarians and Pagans to the legal system. As Poulter notes "to describe Rastafarianism as a religion when it is of such an amorphous nature and lacks any authoritative doctrine or controlling institutional framework may, as we shall see, give rise to practical difficulties of formal recognition by the state and its bureaucracy" (p.341-2). In the case of Rastafarianism, Poulter does not see these problems as being insurmountable in recognising them as a group entitled to consideration as such. Additionally, he rejects judicial opinion suggesting that Rastafarianism lacks sufficient shared history to be an ethnic group — "To regard a sixty year history as insufficient for the construction of an ethnic group is to disregard modern anthropological perceptions of ethnicity and ethnic identity as concepts which can be fashioned, moulded, and even invented to suit particular social circumstances" (p.354). The application of this approach to Paganisms seems clear. Unfortunately, the only reference to Paganisms in this chapter, and indeed the text as a whole, is at best ambiguous. In discussing religious identities and practises of prisoners, he notes "There is sufficient evidence of the usual attributes of a religion, including reverence for a deity, to warrant such recognition, and even Pagan prisoners are now permitted to record their religion officially"

(p.364). It may be that Poulter implicitly recognises that some of the structural aspects of Rastafarianism which pose problems to the legal system are even more pronounced in Paganism. This is a preferable reading to a suggestion that Rastafarianism is a more authentic religion than Paganism.

In conclusion, I would suggest that a number of problems are demonstrated by Poulter's discussion of ethnicity. Firstly, ethnicity might seem an attractive concept with which to secure fundamental human rights for minorities within the United Kingdom jurisdictions. As it has been read by Poulter, who it should be noted takes a considerably more liberal view of the term than the courts, it may encompass some religious communities, but exclude others. The protection of the rights of minority ethnic groups is important, but it is not synonymous with the protection of religious rights. Secondly, even as thoughtful a writer as Poulter, well aware of the dangers of structural and doctrinal demands imported from well-established religious systems, can be led into discounting individual rights through too broad a focus on the religious community and the religious organisation. Both of these problems are of general importance, but particularly acute when considering the position of Pagans within the United Kingdom.

It may be hoped that the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into United Kingdom law will enhance the protection of individual religious rights, and avoid the problems flowing from an ethnicity analysis of this type. Certainly, the jurisprudence on the religious liberty guarantees of the Convention holds out some hope. But it should be

noted that, even in the act of incorporation, the United Kingdom legal system stresses organisational and group religious rights. The probable final draft of the instrument incorporating the ECHR into United Kingdom law provides that "if a court's determination of any question arising under this Act might effect the exercise by a religious organisation (itself or its members collectively) of the Convention right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion, it must have particular regard to the importance of that right" (Human Rights Bill, clause 13). It is to be hoped that legal protection of the rights of religious organisations, and religious communities, will not eclipse protection of the rights of the individual religious believer.

Review by Peter W. Edge

Professor Edge is the Senior Lecturer in Law and researches law at the University of Central Lancashire, in the UK. His main interests are the interaction of law and religion in the UK, and under pan-European bodies such as the European Convention on Human Rights. He has published a number of articles on the topic, including a piece dealing with Paganisms in the Journal of Civil Liberties. He is currently working on a book in the area, due for release by Kluwer in 2000.

READERS' FORUM

continued from page 3

to the nature of any and all reality as being nothing more nor less than human subjective self-expression and projection. And on the other hand, in some more progressive pockets of postmodern thought, one finds a renewed appreciation of the co-participation of ecological and cosmological elements. The new physics, for example, instructs us that what we discover depends on where and when and how we look; that there is something else out there beyond human discourse. How does this relate to the questions of being self-aware about our own theoretical assumptions, and the manipulations of data to fit pre-conceived theories? How do we shift this debate beyond the overly deconstructionist claim there is no there there, and the overly empiricist claim that the scientific method produces objective data that are value-free?

Philosophers of science advise us, "all data are theory-laden." I doubt anyone ever has absolute truth; neither humans nor human institutions are infallible; and we need to keep open minds. I also think we can settle into probable conclusions that are subject to later amendment or refutation. The significant question for truth-seekers then becomes how do we constitute shared thresholds of plausibility and probability? I want to not just debate facts with archaeologists, but to dialogue about theoretical frameworks and primary assumptions. To some extent, all humans "manipulate" or rather construct data within theoretical and philosophical frameworks. But what allows us to change our *systems of thought* to see reality in a clearer way?

Contrary to what some of Gimbutas' crit-

ics contend, she did not practice archaeology self-identified as a feminist but as a scientist. She was not a goddess-worshipper seeking evidence for her contemporary beliefs. She became an expert in studies of the European bronze age typified by bronze weapons, mass graves and other evidence of widespread warfare. The contrasting material from Neolithic excavations surprised her, and she had no explanation for it. After years of carefully studying over 30,000 artifacts from 3,000 Neolithic sites (she did not claim all the artifacts were female, but that there was a preponderance of female and animal images; Gimbutas 1974:11; 1989:175), she became especially intrigued by the symbolic markings. Instead of dismissing them as random scribbles or arbitrary decorations, she began to notice correlations among the distinctive signs and kinds of objects they inscribed. She sought some explanation for the correlations of signs with figurines, while recognizing the importance of context for interpretation. She gradually began to formulate her view of this proto-writing as sacred script, the stylized female sculptures as goddesses, and the artistic, relatively peaceful pre-Indo-European societies as a goddess civilization. She acknowledged male gods. She saw the bull and the snake as polyvalent symbols carrying multiple meanings, including both male and manifestations occur as a gift of grace, I suspect it is because a limited awareness cannot on its own encounter the unlimited. In such experiences we directly experience the context within which we exist, a context which is perfect and loving. The Divine takes joy in loving. The more beings to love, the greater the joy.

Classical philosophers would challenge such a statement as supposedly implying an

incompleteness on the part of the Ultimate. They assumed that all possible value can be actualized in an ultimate being all by itself. Not only does this view beg the question of why anything else exists, it also implies that perfect love is uninvolved with its beloved. But Charles Hartshorne, among others, has persuasively argued this is an error (1984: 27-32). Unconditional love is most fulfilled when the beloved is also fulfilled. To care about another is to be changed by that other. The more the beloved is fulfilled in love, the more delight to the lover. So it makes little sense to argue a perfect being is less perfect because its perception of its well-being can be influenced by the circumstances of others. To female connotations of divinity.

Given the enormity of her research and analyses, I say Gimbutas deserves to have her interpretations and theory critiqued within an atmosphere of collegial respect, and not disdainfully dismissed as "highly subjective speculation." Are we conversely supposed to think of J. Couvin's theory characterizing Neolithic populations as "people of the bull" as objective and not biased toward male dominance and aggression? Gimbutas' explanation of the data seems plausible and acceptable to me, not simply on the basis of her prodigious intellectual knowledge and methodology of archaeom mythology, but by appeal to another epistemology from my own field of philosophy—the Socratic dialectic method of truth-seeking, which is not, as caricatured, a "feel-good epistemology"—although I might want to argue another time it is in part an erotic epistemology. Socratic dialogue is a means for mutually respecting truth-seekers to engage in a conversation that moves them from the initial level of mere opinion (usually under-informed and prone

to biased misinformation), to a careful consideration of empirical data, to the level of theoretical explanation, to the level of dialectical debate about primary theoretical assumptions, and beyond this to a place of intuition (deep mind) or visionary experience where one senses an apprehension of primal reality (although not in absolute terms). What is the universe and what does it mean in relation to us, and we in relation to it, and what does this have to do with the particular questions we are asking? At this point, one is not yet finished. The dialogue-in-process then returns from a sense of universal reality to engage in further discussion of first principles, then again to a comparison of theories, then again to facts, before rendering a standpoint.

I addressed my comments about Gimbutas to archaeologists because I was hoping to engage more scientifically minded colleagues in a conversation about the epistemological factors of how we claim to know what we eventually choose to claim to know. I brought in the Socratic dialectic not because I believe it is the only way or necessarily the best way of knowing, but because it is a good way to move the complex question of truth-seeking beyond the simply opinionated and empirical levels. If I could continue in direct dialogue with Gimbutas' critics, we might point out to each other some of the specific ways the other side may misread fact to fit theory. Some distortions might simply be the result of insufficient information. I probably do not know the history of the discipline of archaeology as closely as Brian Hayden. But my view parallels the criticism of Greek archaeologist Nanno Marinatos who writes, "there has been a tendency to marginalize religion by the positivistic school of New Archaeology

... [I]f we reduce the study of culture to pottery classification and data quantification (with some spice from the socioeconomic sphere) the scope of the humanist may be lost to that of the pseudo-scientist" (1993: 10). I know the technical archaeological definitions of cultural evolution and civilization; and I still think Gimbutas' theory of European origins and her (yes, revolutionary) re-definition of civilization provide us with information about a different kind of civilization and pattern of cultural evolution than the technical ones currently prevailing, which are worth considering fairly. Neolithic and bronze age Crete prior to the Mycenaean invasions of 1450 BC, for example, show us the possibility of another way to understand cultural evolutionary stages, and how to live in an advanced, complex and more balanced society with hierarchies of actualization, not domination (Eisler 1987).

Some disputes regarding empirical facts are not simply amenable to further discussion of facts alone. For example, Hayden argues for the presence of male dominance by referring to the notable male with the gold penis cup. But without more discussion of theories of sex and gender past and present, how would we know if it is more plausible to interpret him as a dominant male, or perhaps as an early example of male homosexuality instead? One needs to move beyond the level of fact to the larger level of theory. Gimbutas did not ignore the evidence of warfare, fortifications, and chieftain graves with sacrificed women, children and animals, but came to believe they were more plausibly explained by a theory of incursions of Proto-Indo-Europeans rather than by a theory of internal cultural change.

As a feminist, I am especially interested in dialogue about what different theories of

After years of carefully studying over 30,000 artifacts from 3,000 Neolithic sites ... [Gimbutas] became especially intrigued by the symbolic markings. Instead of dismissing them as random scribbles or arbitrary decorations ... She gradually began to formulate her view of this proto-writing as sacred script, the stylized female sculptures as goddesses, and the artistic, relatively peaceful pre-Indo-European societies as a goddess civilization. She acknowledged male gods. She saw the bull and the snake as polyvalent symbols carrying multiple meanings, including both male and female connotations of divinity.

gender might be involved in the controversy around Gimbutas' work. Why do scholars like Hayden, Ruth Tringham ("Households with Faces: The Challenge of Gender in Prehistoric Architectural Remains" in: *Engendered Archaeology*, eds. Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey, Cambridge USA, 1991: 13), or Larry Osborne ("The Women Warriors" in: *Lingua Franca*, Jan. 1998) assume Gimbutas claims women in Old Europe dominated men—despite her assertions to the contrary that Old Europe was egalitarian and not a matriarchy? Is the "alternative" list Richard Smoley recommends really so alternative, or just more about the men-have-always-and-everywhere-been-dominant-and-warlike? From my vantage point, some of the authors he mentions, while interesting in respect to detail, represent the same old story when it

comes to gender frameworks. To me, C. Christ's *Rebirth of the Goddess*, G. Lerner's *Creation of Patriarchy*, H. Haarman's *Early Civilization and Literacy in Europe*, R. Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade* and *Sacred Pleasure*, J. Marler's *From the Realm of the Ancestors*, and Starhawk's *Truth or Dare* are of more value both in regard to detail and the reframing of gender relationships.

I find it ironic to be charged with fundamentalism, when it seems opponents of Gimbutas are even more attached to their deeply held beliefs as the one and only way. For example, Hayden's comment that "the only method that has so far proved to be of any reliable value is the scientific method." Gimbutas' intuitive ability to discover an internal coherence in the symbol system and spiritual ideology of the peoples of Old

Is the “alternative” list Richard Smoley recommends really so alternative, or just more about the men-have-always-and-everywhere-been-dominant-and-warlike? From my vantage point, some of the authors he mentions, while interesting in respect to detail, represent the same old story when it comes to gender frameworks. To me, C. Christ’s *Rebirth of the Goddess*, G. Lerner’s *Creation of Patriarchy*, H. Haarman’s *Early Civilization and Literacy in Europe*, R. Eisler’s *The Chalice and the Blade* and *Sacred Pleasure*, J. Marler’s *From the Realm of the Ancestors*, and Starhawk’s *Truth or Dare* are of more value both in regard to detail and the reframing of gender relationships.

Europe is neither mere speculation nor a projection of wishfulness. Her theory was formulated in reference to the data and their interconnections that persisted through millennia and across vast geographical regions. She herself only later came to appreciate its greater significance for our own time.

My desire for a more gender-balanced, nature-balanced, peaceful, prosperous and artistic future does not depend on the acceptance or rejection of Gimbutas’ theory of European origins. Never the less, like so many others, I draw inspiration from the artifacts of Old European art with their wonderful images of women and goddesses, men and gods, and shamanic zoomorphs, as well as from the relatively peaceful, egalitarian, nature-embedded and spiritual ways of life

manifested there. We also draw inspiration from Gimbutas’ multi-dimensional approach and discoveries which can help us to resacralize both women and men, to honor our interconnectedness with the rest of nature, and to choose cooperation instead of aggression as our primary and preferred means of interaction.

I wish I could address more of the points raised, but this must suffice for now. In the spring I will be team-teaching a course with Joan Marler that carefully addresses the controversy surrounding Gimbutas’ work. For more discussion of these issues, please check the California Institute of Integral Studies’ website, Women’s Spirituality page, at www.ciis.edu; or email me at marak@ciis.edu. Blessings!

Jenny Blain replies:

Thanks to Mara Keller for her responsiveness regarding the Gimbutas article. I found some of her clarifications very helpful in appreciating her position. However, there are a couple of issues over which I feel rather uneasy.

I’m not an archaeologist. The points I’m addressing concern the positioning of Gimbutas and her work as (a) pioneering but disregarded, and (b) postmodernist. The first I mentioned briefly earlier and, as I said, Hutton deals with it in more detail in his 1997 *Antiquity* paper. Brian Hayden in his article noted that Gimbutas’ construction of ‘Old Europe’ and Kurgan invaders was for some time, and may, he says, still be, the predominant view. As for the second—it seems to me that central to postmodernist thinking is the distrust of metanarratives that Lyotard speaks of. Yet what is Gimbutas’ construction of Old Europe and its overthrow by bloodthirsty invaders—which has become a central tenet of some forms of feminist goddess spirituality—if not a metanarrative? This is why I maintain that Keller’s claims based on Gimbutas, and Gimbutas’ method of comparative analysis, really cannot be seen as allied to a postmodern understanding.

However, the concept of applying gendered goddess-centred interpretations is very much compatible as an experimental/intuitive interpretation within specific contexts, but not as ‘Truth,’ not as metanarrative. Acknowledging gender is crucially important—and so is acknowledging that today’s gender processes are not hard and fast, are culturally and sociohistorically arising, and that our interpretations are formed from these processes of today, one

way of another. So for me, a postmodernist understanding would put the emphasis on the multiple ways that we see and use the material now and how diverse interpretations form part of that. As far as I can see as a non-archaeologist, there’s quite a lot of this going on, and while this is indeed contested terrain we’re not exactly still in the 1970s. (And even then there were alternative voices.)

How would Keller view the work of (for instance) Ian Hodder, who admits outright that among the hardest aspects of his work were recognizing and jettisoning both his own double standard (that elaborate female symbolism constituted a problem to be explained either in terms of women having power or women being powerless, whereas elaborate male symbolism was unproblematic), and a (residual, positivist) desire for certainty about these gender questions. He speaks of adoption of a feminist critique leading to a recognition of complex interrelationships between people, gender, relations of production, with the intervention of cultural values and representational systems, themselves constructed historically and specifically. From this he concluded that he “needed to return to the Neolithic example and start again by not assuming that there was one type of power. I needed to accept that there were different types of power in society, many cross-cutting and multivalent—to approach the question of the subordination of women in the Neolithic by realizing, first that the question was complex and multivalent and, second, by trying to understand the representation of men and women as contextually constructed and contextually meaningful” (Ian Hodder, *Theory and Practice in Archaeology*, London: Routledge, 1992: 259).

So, rather than this debate of letters

which is heading into the 'Is so!' 'Is not!' realms, wouldn't it be nice to see people writing about some of these specific, contextualized interpretations, and how they can open new directions for our understandings of our own practices?

In faith, Jenny Blain.

Kate Slater comments:

After my frustrated mumbling from the other side of the Rockies about the endless nature of this debate, the Pom editors asked, "How much is enough?" and my answer is, "Take it further if the discussion is constructive, stop it if it's not." Constructive means that people on different sides of the various facets of argument are acknowledging and responding to specific items of interpretation. The biggest problem is apples and oranges—a controversy originating mostly between people in different disciplines who do not speak each other's language, practice each other's skills, or respect the sources that each other quote.

My personal response to all this is frustration because neither side is saying things I find specific enough to allow me a sense of "Here is some truth." My own field of science—geology—allows me to go to cliffs and decide for myself if I see what others have described there. Endless debates from diametrically opposed viewpoints leave me cold, but the core of my frustration is that I don't think, in my heart, that the matters debated are diametrically and immutably opposed.

What I would value more might look like this: Experts would choose three specific sites where they differ on interpretation of specific items found—perhaps material from a graveyard in one place, a midden in

another, habitations in a third. They would evaluate the same items according to contemporary science and present their interpretations in an atmosphere of mutual courtesy. Perhaps each side might come some percentage of the way toward understanding the alternate interpretation. And perhaps observers like myself could get their own sense of what might be real and what is ideology.

I see in Dr Keller's letter a strong plea for continuing dialogue between archeologist and philosopher about interpretation. She says, "Some distortions might simply be the result of insufficient information." I think this is a pretty leafy olive branch. It would be nice to see something equally civil coming from the other side.

But if there is no hope for understanding, let it end. Keeping on is sado-equine necrophilia—beating a dead horse.

Kate Slater.

*Pom readers who came in late
may be interested in reading
"The Neolithic Great Goddess" by
Ronald Hutton in issue #2; the
response by Mara Keller in #5; and
the variety of replies to Prof Keller in
#6.*



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Readers' Forum

*Chaldean Oracles, Archaeology
Conference, National Socialism*

2

Jone Salomonsen

Methods of Compassion or Pretension?

*Anthropological Fieldwork
in Modern Magical Communities*

4

Adrian Ivakhiv

Whose 'Nature'?

*The Transcendental Signified
of an Emerging Field*

14

Bron Taylor

Nature & Supernature—Harmony & Mastery:

*Irony and Evolution in
Contemporary Nature Religion*

21

Workings

Meeting Amaterasu (and Oya, too)

Mira Zussman

28

Book Reviews

Four New Books about Goddesses

Reviews by Asphodel Long

Daniel Cohen

Jennifer Gibbons

38



The Pomegranate

Copyright

© 1999 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate
is published four times a year
at the Cross-Quarters.

Subscriptions:

4 issues: \$16US — 8 issues: \$30US
by surface mail anywhere.
Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds,
or Checks drawn on US banks to
The Pomegranate
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019
email: antech@teleport.com

Deadline:

The Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.
Editorial email: fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca
See the inside back cover for our Call for
Papers. Send to the above address for our
Writers' Guidelines,
or read it on our website:
www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

Co-Editors:

Fritz Muntean
Diana Tracy

Associate Editor:
Chas S. Clifton

Editorial Board:
Maggie Carew
Stephen McManus

Editorial Assistance:
Melissa Hope
Siân Reid
Angeline Kantola

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

When we changed the typeface and the layout of *The Pom* last issue, we expected that we'd receive compliments or complaints. But we weren't expecting nothing at all—which is what we got. We can either assume that everyone is completely happy with the magazine's new look or that nobody cares. If you do care, or (better yet) if you have suggestions or comments, please let us hear from you.

The first of our feature articles is by Jone Salomonsen, of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo. She addresses the methodological problems facing scholars who do their research within magical communities, in this case San Francisco's Reclaiming Collective. Prof Salomonsen's observations may prove useful (especially in the wake of the controversies surrounding works such as Tanya Luhrmann's *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*) to scholars who are planning research, as well as to the subjects of these studies.

Since 1967, when *Science* magazine published an article by Lynn White suggesting a link between mainstream religion and environmental degradation, there has also been increasing interest in those non-traditional religions which take nature as their sacred or symbolic center. The publication, in 1990, of Catherine Albanese's *Nature Religion in America* has precipitated considerable scholarly discussion of nature religions, including, but by no means limited to, Neopaganism. At last winter's Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, several scholars presented papers in response to Prof

Albanese's book in a session entitled "Nature Religion as a Theoretical Construct: Reflections from an Emerging Field." *The Pom* published one of these papers in our previous issue: Jeffrey Kaplan's biographic sketch of Savitri Devi. In this issue we offer our readers two more, and we hope that both of these articles will spark as much interest and controversy as did Prof Kaplan's article.

The Pom Sells Out

That's right, at least one of our back issues (#3) has completely sold out, and #4 and 5 are in short supply. Reprinting is expensive and storage space is at a premium, so we're currently favouring the idea of making the entire text of 'sold out' issues available for downloading from our website. Unless we hear objections to this plan, it will most likely be implemented sometime between May and August.

And speaking of selling out, until now *The Pom* has resisted the siren song of the market place by not accepting advertisements. Several of our more experienced colleagues, however, have pointed out that other serious academic journals *do* take ads—from book publishers! So on the last page of this issue you'll see our first ad ever, from Phoenix Publishing, for their landmark new edition of Leland's *Aradia*. Hermes willing, our next issue will include a review of this book by Sabina Magliocco, herself the editor of the recent special issue of *Ethnologies* on Wicca. This magazine, by the way, contains the long-awaited critique by Don Frew of the research of Aidan Kelly and

continued on page 56

The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas.

Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended by one or two issues

Don Frew writes:

Dear Pomegranate,

I was pleased to see Kate Slater's review of Sarah Iles Johnston's *Hekate Soteira* in *The Pom* #7. My own book on Craft origins is looking to the Hermetic and Neoplatonic theurgists of late antiquity, both Roman and Arab, and I have long felt that this area has been strangely ignored by today's Neopagans. As worshippers of the Gods, how can we ignore such striking and inspirational texts as the *Hermetica* and the *Chaldean Oracles*, texts that were believed to be from the Gods' own mouths?

One problem, I think, has been a perception of patriarchal sexism in the texts. Slater alluded to this in her references to the "divine Father" and "transcendent male divinity" in her explanation of the cosmology of the *Chaldean Oracles*. Such language can be very off-putting to modern Neopagans. However, such language is often an artifact of the biases of the translators, rather than of the original authors. For example, in the Brian Copen-

haver translation of the *Hermetica* (Cambridge, 1992), the translator notes that the texts almost exclusively use the Greek word *anthropos* (meaning "all human beings of either gender") to refer to the "Primal Man", while only rarely using the word *aner* (meaning "male persons") (p. 107). At the same time, the texts say of the "Primal Man", "He is androgyne because he comes from an androgyne father..." (p. 3). This would certainly suggest an ambiguity (or inclusivity) regarding the gender of the Divine that is rarely well-communicated in the English translations, which tend to persist in the convention of translating androgynous terms as "man" and "father" and "god". A more enlightened view (to modern sensitivities) is expressed throughout the *Hermetica*, but one has to "dig" a bit to find it. Witness "Asclepius 21" (p. 79):

Do you say that god is of both sexes,
Trismegistus?
Not only god, Asclepius, but all things
ensouled and soulless...

Unfortunately, a tendency on the part of modern translators to favor male nouns and pronouns has made such texts as the *Hermetica* and the *Chaldean Oracles* less accessible to modern Neopagans than they should be.

Slater's explanation of Chaldean cosmology struck me as being a bit jumbled and I couldn't help but wonder if it had been edited somewhat for length. Hermeticism and Neoplatonism are rather exotic to many modern readers and it can be quite difficult to compress a coherent summary down to the length of a book review. Even so, I thought she did an admirable job. I would like to suggest a few places for enthused readers to continue following

this thread.

The first stop would be the *Chaldean Oracles* themselves. An excellent translation by Ruth Majercik is available from E.J. Brill (1989). This edition also includes a very helpful introduction explaining the Chaldean theurgical system and was used by Johnston in writing *Hekate Soteira*. Next, I would recommend *The Goddess Hekate*, edited by Stephen Ronan (Chthonios Books, 1992). This is actually an anthology, reprinting many hard-to-find articles on Hekate (and related entities like Gorgo, Mormo, and Baubo), but the bulk of the book is a long essay by Ronan titled "Chaldean Hekate". Written after the publication of both Johnston's and Majercik's books, it references both and serves as an excellent supplement since Ronan includes fragments of the Oracles that Majercik left out. Ronan also includes new translations of several Hymns to Hekate.

There is a real wealth of amazing material becoming available on the Pagan religions of late antiquity. Johnston's book is a great place to start. Thank you, Kate Slater, for turning folks on to it.

Blessed Be,

Don Frew
Berkeley, California

Ken Lymer writes:

Dear Pomegranate,

I would like to invite you and your readers to attend our conference entitled: New Approaches to the Archaeology of Art, Religion and Folklore—'A Permeability Of Boundaries?'

We postgraduates in the Department of Archaeology, Southampton University (UK), are holding a two-day conference on

the 11th and 12th (Sat-Sun) of December 1999. This will provide a forum for post-graduates to present their research to a wider audience. But in the spirit of its title, the conference welcomes papers from other interest groups including established academics, non-academic researchers and followers of different paths. It is our intention to explore the diverse territory between the boundaries of archaeology, art, religion and folklore. In recent years these themes have become more prominent and their boundaries more permeable. Our conference will provide the opportunity for the exploration of these boundaries.

We will explore these themes in four sessions entitled: 1) rock art; 2) archaeology and art theory; 3) images through time; 4) art, religion and magic. We will also have a keynote address by Professor Richard Bradley (noted archaeologist and author of several papers on the cup and ring marks of Britain). The conference will close with an evening debate that will speculate on 'alternative archaeology' and has it truly happened?

Southampton is located in the county of Hampshire. An optional post-conference trip is offered on Monday to the archaeological sites of Hampshire. For those looking to continue on a pilgrimage of 'Merry Olde England', Southampton is not far from Stonehenge, Avebury and King Arthur's round table in Winchester. Southampton is also where the Titanic made its fateful departure from. It is also worth noting,

continued on page 51

Methods of Compassion or Pretension? Conducting Anthropological Fieldwork in Modern Magical Communities.

by Jone Salomonsen

This article was originally presented as a paper for a round-table discussion at the 97th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Philadelphia December 2-6, 1998.

Some of the paradoxes of cultural anthropology revolve around whether to take 'indigenous' beliefs seriously or not, and if so, to what extent. I encountered this dilemma during my studies of feminist Witches. On the one hand, there is an ideal that an anthropologist should study her ethnographic field horizontally and from the inside, with an empirical, inductive approach. On the other hand, there is still a fear within the discipline of scholars 'going native', that is, adopting the values, practices and beliefs of those studies to such an extent that one loses the ability to be reflexive about them. Also, to complicate matters, when it comes to religion, the anthropologist should pay homage to the lineage of Feuerbach and deductive, philosophical claims that religion is *only* a human, social construction. Working from and

with several academic and religious traditions simultaneously (anthropology, feminist theology, Witchcraft) I will argue in favor of an alternative *compassionate* methodological approach.

Let me first summarize how I encountered the paradoxes of anthropology through my own studies and fieldwork experiences. In August 1984, I came to Berkeley and the Graduate Theological Union to study pagan goddess spirituality for my Masters Degree. I was a student of theology, enrolled in a Divinity school program at the University of Oslo, but goddess religion was not yet manifesting in Norway. I therefore had to travel to the US.

The community I came to study was the Reclaiming Collective of San Francisco, a well-known feminist Witchcraft community founded in 1979 by Starhawk and her coven-sisters. By 1984 they offered classes, workshops, Witchcamps and public rituals. Many were also active in direct political action, some form of social work and experimental, collective living. However, as a theologian, I had no methodological or theoretical training in studying Witchcraft as a 'lived religion'. I only knew about texts, piled up in libraries and bookstores, waiting to be picked out as precious objects of study. I knew how to study 'this book thing', an object I could hold between my two hands. I did not know how to study people—their various beliefs, ritualizations or claims of personal transformation. Consequently, I was only looking for a consistent narrative, a general belief system that could be represented and

made accessible to some kind of semi-otic analysis. Everything I learned and experienced with the Witches was therefore reduced and converted into 'text', understood as a symbolic system of meaning.

I developed a general narrative of Reclaiming which, I claimed, contained two systems of meaning: feminist *symbols of belief* on one hand and *ritual symbolism* on the other. I perceived these systems to be in ideological conflict. The ritual symbolism and magical practices used by Reclaiming derived more or less from the occult heritage of male secret societies around the turn of the century. Not very feminist, not very progressive. Indeed, I argued, feminist Witches were perpetuating the heavy patriarchal burden of romantic gender essentialism, reducing 'woman' and 'goddess' into feminine counter-images of the essential masculine. My studies were *deductive*: I already had a constructionist, feminist theory at hand and, as I read Reclaiming, I applied theory to the representations made.

In the summer of 1985, I enthusiastically put forth the preliminary results of my research for a group of Reclaiming people. They were eager to hear, some even brought tape recorders so that those absent could also have a part in the sharing. I summarized my deductive research, spelled out the tacit patriarchal notions of European occultism inherent in their symbol system, and stated that Reclaiming Witches were not as radical as they claimed to be. In fact, to a large extent they were only replacing one patriarchal tradition (Judeo-Christian

religion) with another (Western occultism).

When I finished, there was complete silence. Nobody shared my enthusiasm. They were just staring at me, confused and sad. Finally, one male member began to talk. He said that my analysis sounded great, logical and convincing, except that it made him completely depressed. A woman agreed with him and asked: How could it be that feminist Witchcraft was only a reproduction of patriarchal trends in Western esotericism and spirituality when in fact this religious path had changed her life and given a completely new meaning to what it meant to be religious and what it meant to be a woman and have 'a life'? I was struck by her question, because the truth was that Witchcraft had effected not only her life, but mine as well. I was in the process of being religiously recycled.

What was the revitalizing power of feminist Witchcraft that I was not able to catch with my symbolic, textual analysis? It had something to do with the transformative potentials of ritual and the way in which the self was respected and integrated in the community. To focus my study upon the reinvention of feminine and magical symbols was missing the point, although 'goddess' and 'magic' were the headlines through which feminist Witchcraft often drew new people.

To this day, I claim that feminist Witchcraft, in terms of its favorite symbols, is burdened with heavy biological essentialism. But this observation only holds a partial truth. If we are concerned with understanding the

... American anthropologist Katherine Ewing claims that anthropology participates in an “atheist hegemonic discourse.” This theoretical position prevents the anthropologist from effectively utilizing an inductive analytical approach when confronting magical religion.

... Anthropology has an archaeological interest in magic, but, as a normative discipline it represents modern secular thought. Sociologist Peter Berger asserts that this stream of thought has sought to invalidate the reality of any magico-religious view of the world ...

modus operandi of this religion and why it continues to appeal and ‘change people’s lives’, we must enter its study from a somewhat different angle. A feminist theologian and theoretician must become an anthropologist (and vice versa) and be willing to study this phenomenon from the inside—not from the inside of books but from the inside of lived reality. I had, of course, already touched upon this profound aspect of Witchcraft, but had not used it to elicit knowledge and deep understanding.

This was my pledge when I, in 1988, was admitted to the PhD program at the University of Oslo. I wanted to learn the skills of an anthropologist and return to Reclaiming for a new period, with the intent of conducting fieldwork. I also wanted to conform to the empirical aim in anthropology of interpreting a phenomenon horizontally, in solidarity

with the indigenous points of view and conceptual frameworks, and not from *à priori* theoretical assumptions or philosophies. In other words, I wanted to use an *inductive* methodological strategy, consistent with a hermeneutical approach to reading. This approach moves from text to theory and back to text, assuming that careful reading and listening will eventually disclose from the text its implicit theory about itself: how it is ‘asked’ to be read to make sense. Also, having ‘indulged’ in ethnographic material it becomes less interesting to ‘apply’ external theoretical models—models established on the basis of having read ‘another text’—to explain textual meaning in ‘our text’. It becomes more interesting to ‘extract’ implicit ‘theory’ and ‘models’ from the data itself.

It was then that I confronted the para-

doxical strictures of anthropology. First, a serious student of anthropology must subscribe to the empirical aim of interpreting ethnographic phenomena horizontally, from the inside out. Second, she must agree with the prohibition against indulging the inside too much and promise not to ‘go native’. Third, she must recognize that, in terms of religion, the *à priori* theoretical assumption of her field is that religion is a human projection onto the supernatural of originally social and perfectly natural phenomena. Religion is not also a symbolization of ‘spiritual phenomena’ but always of something else. Religious beliefs are therefore inferior, cognitive representations which, in the era of modernity, both can and should be substituted for superior ones. By subscribing to this thesis, American anthropologist Katherine P. Ewing claims that anthropology participates in an “atheist hegemonic discourse” (Ewing 1994). This theoretical position prevents the anthropologist from effectively utilizing an inductive analytical approach when confronting magical religion.

Thus, anthropologists are permitted to ‘go native’ behaviorally (‘participant observation’), even emotionally (‘empathy’), but not cognitively. This prohibition cannot be explained merely by reference to the necessity for analytical distance from the object studied. The prohibition itself has a normative foundation because the anthropologist is already a native: she has been socialized into the dominant values and cognitive worldviews of Western, scientific culture. As a *descriptive* discipline, anthropology has an archaeological

interest in magic, but, as a *normative* discipline it represents the modern secular thought. Sociologist Peter Berger asserts that this stream of thought has sought to invalidate the reality of any magico-religious view of the world, including that of Witches (Berger 1980:x). A scholar who takes belief seriously and acknowledges that the people studied may know something about the human condition that might be personally valid also for the anthropologist, runs the risk of going native, and thereby the risk of abandonment by the scientific community.

More and more sociologists and anthropologists are opposing this insider-outsider dualism and various other rituals of scholarly detachment, arguing that their only function is to reinforce the dishonest illusion of objectivity. Instead, it is said, we must acknowledge the unavoidability of subjectivity, narrative and emotion when studying ‘other’ human fellows (Rosaldo 1980, Lewis 1980, Daniel 1984, Jackson 1989, Csordas 1994, Foltz & Griffin 1996, Ramsey 1998). I will not object to these more or less post-modernist statements, but point out that we are, again, dealing with the general, with the *à priori*, which only has transformed the scope of the general 180 degrees. For the post-modernist argument is not raised primarily out of *empirical* concerns, from an urge to improve the research process, but rather on the philosophical and epistemological premises that scientific objectivity is a fallacy.

Coming from a field where the presumption is that all scholars are also ‘natives’, which is the case with theology, the question was if I should take

Wiccan beliefs seriously or not in a cognitive, personal sense. It was taken for granted that I would, just as it was expected that I would close my inquiry with some kind of evaluation of their contribution or non-contribution to contemporary, modern theology. In theology, it is not regarded as a fundamental methodological problem to gain personal insights from the phenomenon studied. An insider position does not necessarily blur the objectivity of the descriptions. The situation is rather the opposite; first hand experience may open the possibility to deep insight and the best description possible. Questioning the positivist and conflictual ideology of observer-observed is an inherent part of the discipline of theology. The art or craft of theology is to evolve and deepen religious understanding and compassion in the student, at the same time as she learns the skills of critical analysis and acquires the ability to criticize exactly the same phenomenon that triggers her interest. Thus, if Wiccan beliefs and practices had not triggered any personal interest in me, I would never have chosen them as subject for my studies. From a theological perspective, such a choice would have been a waste of time—unless I wanted to become a religious studies scholar instead, changing my scope and field.

So, when I decided to change my methods from textual to ethnographic studies, and redefine my angle of approach from deductive to inductive, my motivation was not meta-theoretical or post-modernist. I was not motivated by a desire to persuade the academic community of the epistemological errors of the

insider-outsider conflict. No, the methodological calling came from my data, not from my soul or my theoretical positioning. I approached anthropology precisely because I had experienced the inadequacies of my earlier methods: they did not do justice to the material. As a theologian, I had taken Wiccan beliefs seriously in a cognitive sense all along, but not yet in an emotional or experiential sense. It was in order to do so that I embarked upon anthropology and the methods implied by 'participant observation' and 'fieldwork'. As it turned out, however, in order to really gain access to feminist Witchcraft as a lived religion, I also needed to revise the anthropological methods available to me.

Reclaiming Witches identify as modern mystics. Mysticism can be approached textually but, according to Witches, this is not enough. In order to really grasp their beliefs, they insist that the scholar engage in ritual, magic, and trance work as well. The problem is that the notion of 'participant observation' in anthropology does not specify accurately the kind of participation required. The 'social interaction' of this method is often conditioned, and its requested 'direct observation' may easily resemble 'pretension'. Such an attitude obviously belongs to the outsider, to one who enters in order to gather data, but whose first article of belief is a commitment to not 'going native'.

Yet, the main reason it is not enough to conduct fieldwork from

In theology, it is not regarded as a fundamental methodological problem to gain personal insights from the phenomenon studied. ... I therefore had to put myself in the position of an apprentice, taking my own experiences seriously, observing the development of my own 'insight', presumably determined by my willingness to put myself under the discipline of magical training ...

such a normatively chosen 'outside' position is that, in Witches' rituals, covens and classes, there is no 'outside' where an observer can literally put herself. In the practice of modern mystery religions, you are either in, or you are not there at all. In my doctoral studies of feminist Witches, I therefore had to put myself in the position of an apprentice, taking my own experiences seriously, observing the development of my own 'insight', presumably determined by my willingness to put myself under the discipline of magical training and by my abilities for religious imagination, theologizing and engagement in general. Along with, and in parallel to, my redefined studies of Witches, I also became my own informant.

The obvious demands for involvement and subjective experience required from a student of Witchcraft have led to my deliberate choice of the label 'method of compassion' in order to designate this approach. 'Compassion' in this context does not refer to a wholesale positive embracement,

nor to passionate criticisms and arguing, but to something in between: to honesty. It designates an attitude of *embodiment*, in contrast to *disengagement*, and of 'taking belief seriously', both existentially and emotionally. This means leaving behind the anthropological 'method of pretension', which is mainly used in order to gain 'access', be it to rituals, secret knowledge or initiations, and instead take on the attitude that "the subjects of one's research might actually know something... that is personally valid for the anthropologist", as suggested by Katherine P. Ewing (1994:571). On the other hand, when something is taken seriously in a cognitive sense, it may also turn out that the informants do not know something which can be personally valid. A method of compassion is necessarily 'critical', in the sense of being reflexive, since it cannot be effective without continual assessments and evaluations.

The implicit demand for subjective experience and embodied, critical thought in the 'method of compassion', ideally requires a contin-

To accept those symbols as 'sacred' that to my taste were vulgar, to play with pagan names as if they were 'real names' for divine reality, to let go of criticism and be open to the 'ecstasy' of ritual, to meditate on certain symbols 'until they revealed their esoteric knowledge,' and to grant exception to the belief that this really was impossible— when taken altogether, these are what have been difficult, challenging and rewarding.

uous going in and out; being merged and being distant, being joined and being separate or, in cultural anthropologist and ritual scholar Ronald L. Grimes' terminology, "a movement between reverence and iconoclasm" (Grimes 1990:137). The 'method of compassion' also means respect for the integrity of the people studied and for myself as well. Anthropologists may, for example, be eager to gain access to esoteric traditions and learn the knowledge of the initiates. But, if religious initiation is accepted entirely against one's own beliefs or solely in order to publish secret knowledge, the acts are incompatible with the ethical agenda of 'integrity'.

My suggested 'method of compassion' for the study of contemporary mystery religions demands that we enter its mystical path as apprentices, experiencing it as real *but without ever forgetting that we are scholars*. By this last point I mean two things. First, we must abandon the luxury of

engaging in only those aspects of the religion which are immediately attractive or intelligible to us. We must dive as deeply into the religion as possible and relinquish the desire to choose from its well only what may suit our own biases. Second, we as scholars are indeed permitted spiritual and personal development from our work, but we may not end up as scholarly converts and proselytizers. Proselytizing and sound academic analysis are two different genres.

The benefits and challenges of becoming my own informant, of simultaneously exercising engagement (vivid participation) and holding a general view (distant observation), applies in particular to the study of ritual. In terms of magical rituals, engagement is important to *understand*, while distance is important to *record* (observe details and remember). Since one of the goals of ritual is to alter the consciousness of *all* the participants through trance work, engagement and distance

are counterproductive. To the extent that I have managed to be involved all through the ritual, I will also come out with an altered consciousness. Engagement is more than participation, and something other than pretending. To allow oneself to become engaged is to take the intent of ritual seriously. It is to be willing to let the trance induction take you into trance, to be willing to be emotionally moved as is intended by certain ritual elements, and go with what then happens. Distance, on the other hand, means observation, remembering the lyrics and symbols used in trance induction, remembering the ritual proceedings step by step, seeing what happens to the other participants, noticing the social interaction, the symbolism, the artifacts, and the movements.

A scholar who wants to be her own informant must be a master of both positions. In practice, this can be attained through repeated participation in the same type of ritual. Through repetition, the skills and competence to participate and be distant at one and the same time are acquired. Ronald L. Grimes argues that it is crucial for any serious student of ritual, not only for students of modern mystery religions, to learn this method. However, this very subjective element marks a limit as to how deeply into a religion of this kind one can get. There is also the uncertainty about where a scholarly project like this will lead, because an innate part of becoming a member of a mystery religion is to make a contract with yourself to change.

The necessity of studying mysticism from a position within is not only part of feminist or theological rhetoric. It was,

for example, argued by a professor in Asian studies at UC Berkeley, Frits Staal, in his book *Exploring Mysticism* (1975). Considering the superficial knowledge one gets from studying yoga when not entering the experience of actually learning yoga, Staal suggests that the academic student of yoga learn it from a guru, but without going native. The way to keep the awareness of being a scholar throughout the period of learning, is—according to Staal—to remember that we have entered the path of yoga to leave it when our learning is completed. We cannot enter it to stay. After leaving the path, Staal designs one of the scholars' tasks to be the development of a language to describe mystical yoga.

I agree that we, as scholars, must enter the path of mysticism in order to develop a descriptive terminology. Nevertheless, Staal's scientific belief in the possibilities of learning to be a mystic by the same will and mental equipment one uses to learn to ski is put forward by an outsider. He does not consider what compassion and the contract to be willing to change—which both are required conditions to actually be able to learn—will actually do to him and his study. Neither does he contemplate how the entrance onto the path of mysticism challenges the ideology of observer-observed and highlights the ethical dilemmas and co-responsibilities of any researcher in regard to actual happenings and processes among the people being studied.

My own experience, when studying the mystery religion of feminist Witchcraft, cannot report on the problems proposed by Frits Staal, namely the

supposed dilemma of moving back and forth between inside and outside and the temptation to 'go native'. To move back and forth between compassion and analysis is not at all the difficult part. But to stay in touch with 'the native's affirmative compassion' is indeed difficult. To accept those symbols as 'sacred' that to my taste were vulgar, to play with pagan names as if they were 'real names' for divine reality, to let go of criticism and be open to the 'ecstasy' of ritual, to meditate on certain symbols 'until they revealed their esoteric knowledge', and to grant exception to the belief that this really was impossible—when taken altogether, these are what have been difficult, challenging and rewarding.

No academic discipline has yet developed an adequate methodology for the study of modern mystery religions because such a task requires a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach. In my case, anthropology has contributed the basic qualitative tools: the tradition of doing field work; participant observation; and the skills of actively listening to 'the other'—including that which we do not like to hear. Theology has contributed with the training of being in two mindsets simultaneously, which means being able to engage in the phenomenon studied, as well as being critical and analytic.

As merely a sociologist or anthropologist, I would never have been admitted to Reclaiming's inner circles. But as a theologian and feminist, I was regarded as a religious being with a personally motivated interest in the subject of my study and, therefore, possessing the necessary qualifications both to understand

and to learn Witchcraft. Without being a co-participant guided by empathy and compassion I would not have been able to conduct my doctoral studies. It is, therefore, my opinion that both theology and anthropology are being challenged by new religious phenomena to radically develop, each in its own terms, as interdisciplinary disciplines.

Works cited:

- Berger, Peter. 1980. *The Heretical Imperative*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Csordas T. J. 1994. *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. Cambridge UP.
- Daniel, E. Valiente. 1984. *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*. Berkeley: UC Press.
- Ewing, Katherine P. 1994. "Dreams From a Saint: Anthropological Atheism and the Temptation to Believe." *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 96 (3).
- Foltz, Tanice G. & Wendy Griffin. 1996. "'She Changes Everything She Touches': Ethnographic Journeys of Self-Discovery." *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner (eds.), Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.
- Grimes, Ronald L. 1990. *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Jackson, Michael. 1989. *Paths Toward a Clearing*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- Lewis, Gilbert. 1980. *Day of Shining Red*. Cambridge UP.
- Ramsey, Nancy. 1998. "Remembering Who You are and Whom You Represent: Researching Wicca as a Scholar and a Witch." *Circle Network News*. Summer 98, Issue 68.
- Rosaldo, Michelle Z. 1980. *Knowledge and Passion*. Cambridge UP.
- Staal, Fritz. 1975. *Exploring Mysticism*. Berkeley: UC Press.

Author's Comments:

Regarding the conflict between symbols of belief and ritual symbolism, between the feminist *symbols of belief* on one hand and *ritual symbolism* on the

other, which I mention briefly at the beginning of this paper: it is not resolved, not in Reclaiming, not in any other Neopagan traditions. I believe that it is part of the contradictions embedded in the enterprise of mixing modern and premodern, mixing the consciousness of human rights and its gospel of social constructionism with the belief in a classical model of the nature of magic (for example, as put forth in the pre-Hellenistic, Ionian philosophy of Empedokles and copied by pagan writers and practitioners) that magical powers reveal themselves for real, are real, and determine the nature of reality.

These kinds of conflicts are common to all religions. In my dissertation, I both discuss and disregard these conflicts by emphasizing something else, namely 'the self' in the context of ritual, community, coven(ant) and friendship. Love, affirmation and the ritualized possibilities for creativity, meditation and growth is what changes people's lives—not necessarily the symbols of Goddess and God, nor traditional magical practices, nor worship of the original pagan notions of the nature of reality: the so-called 'nature' of the natural world.

Jone Salomonsen obtained her PhD in Theology and Cultural Anthropology in 1996 from the University in Oslo, where she teaches in the Faculty of Theology. She holds a three year post doctorate grant from the Norwegian Research Council to research confirmation and initiation rituals for young people. Presently she is a research fellow both at Yale Divinity School and

the Center for the Humanities at Wesleyan University. Salomonsen writes and publishes in the areas of feminist spirituality, contemporary Witchcraft and Paganism, ritual studies, Christian theology and feminist theory.

She has published in Norwegian on feminist Witchcraft, Neoshamanism and men's mythopoesis, as well as a forthcoming book on rites of passage in the combined contexts of Pagan reinvention, Nordic mythology and liberal Norwegian Lutheranism.

Watch for Salomonsen's first book in English, to be published in the Spring of 2000 by Routledge as part of their new 'Gender and Religion' series. A version of her PhD dissertation, Enchanted

Feminism: Gender, Identity and Ritual in a Community of Witches (working title) is a combined anthropological and theological study of San Francisco's Reclaiming Community.

WHOSE 'NATURE'?

Reflections on the Transcendental Signified of an Emerging Field

by Adrian Ivakhiv
York University

Invited comments for a panel on "‘Nature Religion’ as a Theoretical Construct,” American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, Orlando, Florida, November 1998

ABSTRACT

Practitioners of ‘nature religion(s)’ and ‘earth spirituality’ often assume that their beliefs and practices bring them into closer alignment with nature and with the rhythms, seasons, forces and/or divinities of the earth. But what exactly is the ‘nature’ that acts as a ‘transcendental signified’ (in Jacques Derrida’s terms) for these forms of religiosity? Recent debates within environmental thought and social/cultural theory, in the broader environmental activist movement, and even in scientific ecology, have shown that the idea of ‘nature’ is a much more diffuse, fractured, and contested site than has previously been assumed. If our concepts of nature are social constructs, as many argue—constructs which have always been defined within and shaped by relations of power among contending social groups, classes, genders, and so on—then to what does the ‘nature’ in ‘nature religion’ (or the ‘earth’ in ‘earth spirituality’) refer?

The category ‘nature religion,’ defined rather loosely, refers to forms of religious practice which are based on a celebration or worship of ‘nature’ and/or those which are aimed at bringing their practitioners in closer alignment with ‘nature’ and with the rhythms, seasons, forces and/or divinities of the ‘earth.’ As such, ‘nature religion’ is frequently presumed, at least by its practitioners, to be a more ecologically and environmentally benign form of religious practice, and therefore a natural ally of the popular environmental movement.

But environmental thought and scholarship has recently been grappling with a series of questions opened up by poststructuralist, feminist, and postcolonial forms of scholarship; by the emergence of Third World environmentalism and ‘environmental justice’ movements; and by recent developments in ecological science, developments which have questioned earlier concepts of ‘nature’ as balanced and harmonious in favour of a new view that sees nature as dynamic and unpredictable. I will look at the issues raised by each of these developments.

In a sense, the question I intend to raise—in the hope that our consideration of it will enrich our thinking about the category of ‘nature religion’—is, *whose* ‘nature’ is being referred to in the term ‘nature religion’?

‘Nature’ in general

In his historical overview of the meanings of ‘nature,’ Raymond Williams calls it “perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language” (1976:219). He traces out three general “areas of meaning” of the word: nature as “(i) the essential quality

... environmental thought and scholarship have recently been grappling with a series of questions opened up by poststructuralist, feminist, and postcolonial forms of scholarship; by the emergence of Third World environmentalism and ‘environmental justice’ movements; and by recent developments in ecological science, developments which have questioned earlier concepts of ‘nature’ as balanced and harmonious in favour of a new view that sees nature as dynamic and unpredictable.

and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings” (1976:219). Each of these meanings, or at least the first two, convey the sense that ‘nature’ is a kind of organizing category, referring to something *essential* or *foundational*; and this alone makes its continued currency, in our skeptical and anti-foundational times, something that should interest social scientists. As Neil Evernden argues in *The Social Creation of Nature* (1992:20-21), once we have articulated a concept of ‘nature’ as distinct from ‘all things’ or ‘the world as a whole,’ it becomes possible to speak of some things as *belonging to* nature or being *natural*, and of other things as being *unnatural* (or *supernatural*). ‘Nature’ has therefore come to function as a boundary term demarcating a *primary* realm (which can consequently be elevated

or downgraded) from a *secondary* realm of the ‘human,’ ‘cultural’ or ‘unnatural.’

A genealogy of western concepts of ‘nature’¹ would have to include reference to several distinct models or metaphors that have functioned as images or stand-ins for this idea. Nature has been conceived as a divinely ordained system of norms and rules, rights and obligations; a book to be read, divined, and studied; a motherly female, nurturing and providing for the needs of her children; a body-like organism, whose features mirror those of the human body; a clock-like object or machine, to be studied dispassionately, taken apart, and manipulated for human benefit; a ruthless and harsh kingdom, ‘red in tooth and claw,’ from which humans should distance ourselves through the ‘social contract’ of civilization; a flourishing web of life; a store-house of resources; an Edenic Garden that should be set aside in protected areas, to be visited periodi-

cally for the replenishment of one's soul; a museum or theme park for curiosity seekers, or an open-air gymnasium for trials of masculinity; a cybernetic system or databank of circulating information; a spirit or divinity, or a locus for the residence of many spirits; and an avenging angel, capriciously and unpredictably meting out its inhuman justice to a humanity that has transgressed its natural order.

Each of these images carries its own assumptions and histories of social interests and uses. And each leads to divergent understandings of what kinds of action are considered appropriate in relation to nature—ranging from subjugation and domination, classification, measurement, prediction, and management, through to aesthetic appreciation and contemplation, segregation and protection, public 'consciousness raising' and active resistance to or interference with inappropriate activities, and 'letting nature be.'

All of this leads us to ask *which* of these 'natures' is being invoked in the term 'nature religion'—either as it is used by practitioners of or by scholars describing (and, in the process, legitimizing) the said phenomenon? Is it, for instance, the European Romantics' idea of nature as a source of healing, wholeness, purity—the same (more or less) idea that spawned the original nature preservation movement of John Muir? Close scrutiny of the conservation and preservation movements' usage of terms such as 'nature,' 'wilderness,' 'pristine,' 'primeval,' 'virgin' and 'ancient forests,' and the like, has shown that these have all been implicated within social and political agendas, enmeshed within relations of power/knowledge.² If 'nature' is motherly and feminine, for instance, does

this not presuppose certain ideas of what women are or should be like? If natural wilderness is to be preserved as a remnant of an 'Edenic garden' from which we have 'fallen,' who is to have access to that wilderness? Are all social groups positioned equally in relation to it? Or are there clear differences, as Giovanna di Chiro (1995:311) suggests, with indigenous peoples and Third World natives (and women) identified as *closer* to it—and therefore expected to behave that way—while 'poor communities of color living in contaminated and blighted inner cities or in the surrounding rural wastelands' are classified as people who are 'anti-nature, impure, and even toxic'?

Apart from such clearly cultural uses of nature imagery, popular environmentalism has drawn on the science of ecology to articulate its ideas of nature. Specifically, since at least the 1960s, environmentalists have made good use of the ecological idea that nature, when left to its own devices, tends towards exhibiting a dynamic balance or equilibrium among species, ideally manifesting in 'climax ecosystems' of maximum diversity (for a given climate), harmony, and stability. From this it has been easy to presume that humans, in an ideal, primordial or 'primal' state, lived in a way that conformed to the lawful regularities of a given ecosystem. Unfortunately, this image of nature has been all but rejected within the ecological science of the last twenty-five years: instead of a 'balance of nature,' the natural world is now seen as a profoundly unstable and nonlinear one, characterized by a ceaseless movement of individual organisms, species and communities, whose overall trajectory is directionless and, in fundamental ways,

unpredictable and 'chaotic.' Even tropical ecosystems—the paragons of nature's flourishing and harmonious 'balance'—have been shown to have undergone extensive climatic and ecological change and to have been influenced for millennia by human beings through hunting and fire.³ If nature, as ecologists like Daniel Botkin (1990) point out, is always changing and always being re-made by human activities, then how can it function as a 'transcendental signified'—a source of values, direction, and religious inspiration or guidance?

'Nature' in its specificity

The risks of speaking of 'nature' in such generalized abstractions can be minimized if we consider it not as some overarching category, but as the more-than-human life that lives and expresses itself locally, in specific places, in ways we can come to know in our everyday lives. We don't, after all, need an airtight definition of 'nature' to know that certain things (plants, trees, wolves, blood) are more natural than others (cars, cell phones, the Weather Channel). Or that certain ecosystems (such as the Carolinian forest in southern Ontario or the mangrove forests, everglades, and other

subtropical forests and wetlands of Florida) are more 'natural' than skyscrapers, bank towers, and Walt Disney World; that native plants are preferable over 'foreign invaders' like purple loosestrife or Norway maple; and biodiverse wetlands or permaculture farms are better than monocultural crop plantations and endless lawns of Kentucky bluegrass.

The difficulties start to pile up, of course, when we include people among the animals and plants that might constitute our ideas of local, bioregional 'nature.' One of the dilemmas for neopagans and 'nature religionists' has been the question of whether to look to their own (generally European) traditions for guidance on how to practice nature religion in North America, or to look to Native Americans—a solution fraught with its own highly charged cultural politics. In a recent article in *Gnosis* magazine, Chas Clifton proposes a laudable solution to this dilemma—one that has often been suggested by environmental philosophers and deep ecology advocates—which is that of coming to know the ecological features of our own bioregions and watersheds, and making

If 'nature' is motherly and feminine ... does this not presuppose certain ideas of what women are or should be like? ... Are all social groups positioned equally in relation to it? Or are there clear differences ... with indigenous peoples and Third World natives (and women) identified as closer to it—and therefore expected to behave that way ...

**The line between uprooting
[foreign or exotic] species and uprooting
peoples is, of course, one that few would
suggest crossing (except racists on the far
right), but it is a line made thin both by certain
environmentalist arguments which would
extend human rights or responsibilities to the
nonhuman world, and by the rather different
social-constructionist arguments of those who
question 'nature's' self-evident 'reality.'**

these central to the practice of nature spirituality.

But even this solution is more complicated than it at first appears. To the extent that contemporary North Americans can, as Clifton advises, come to “feel” the “tides” and learn “the flow of water, the songs of birds, and the needs of grasses” of our ecological communities, such a bioregional solution is eminently practical. But when it comes to making actual decisions about what to do, how to shape and design a landscape, we would have to grapple with the dilemmas regularly faced by ecological restorationists in their attempts to ‘restore’ ‘damaged’ ecosystems back to a semblance of their ‘original’ character. The question is: *which original* are they restoring them to? That of a hundred years ago, or two hundred (often quite different)? The time of the arrival of Europeans? A thousand years ago? The peak of the last glacial era? Which foreign and exotic species should be uprooted, and which left in place? Should we even try to ‘restore,’ or should we ‘let it grow wild’ (in which case

the results will be entirely different from how they looked when Europeans arrived)? The line between uprooting species and uprooting peoples is, of course, one that few would suggest crossing (except racists on the far right), but it is a line made thin both by certain environmentalist arguments which would extend human rights or responsibilities to the nonhuman world, and by the rather different social-constructionist arguments of those who question ‘nature’s’ self-evident ‘reality.’

A common way of thinking about North American wilderness—and what sets the Americas apart from much of the rest of the world in this sense—is the historical line demarcated by Columbus’s arrival. ‘Wilderness’ areas are supposedly those areas which most closely resemble pre-Columbian environments—purified, alas, of their Native American inhabitants. But even those pre-Columbian environments have been shown to have been managed and shaped, sometimes extensively, by cultural traditions involving the use of fire, hunting of certain animals (occasionally to

the point of extinction), and so on. And furthermore, Native groups rarely have clearcut claims to being the *only* pre-Columbian representatives of a given place or bioregion—social groups, after all, moved around, came into contact with each other, and changed. So even a local concept of ‘nature,’ through all this questioning, becomes a somewhat amorphous and problematic category: we know what we mean by it, up to a degree, but things start to get messy when we begin asking who it is that ‘we’ are, what the history of ‘our’ relationship to a given place may be, and—if not ours, then *whose history* and *whose nature*’ should we be invoking?

Concluding thoughts and un/natural hesitations

In a recent overview of the debate on the ‘social construction of nature,’ Kate Soper eloquently argues that the ‘nature-endorsing’ views of environmentalists and the ‘nature-skeptical’ views of critical social theorists and cultural activists need not be mutually exclusive, but that they can inform each other in a rich and rewarding dialectic. Our ideas of ‘nature’ are social constructions, in other words, and we need to be careful in deploying them, but that does not mean we cannot come to *some* general agreement about what sort of thing we mean when we say ‘nature’—and what we want to protect when we fight to save a rainforest from clear-cutting, or lobby for restrictions on the production of greenhouse gases.

For scholars of ‘nature religion,’ I assume that our concern is not with *nature itself*, but with those expressions of religiosity that focus on or derive their primary values from *someone’s particular*

idea of ‘nature.’ We may need to ask whether we should rely on our own judgments or on those of our subjects in determining whether something qualifies as ‘nature religion.’ One argument *against* the use of the term ‘nature religion’ is that there may be certain streams of religiosity falling within our purview which share family traits, but which diverge on their respective concepts of ‘nature.’ Where, for instance, does ‘techno-’ or ‘cyber-paganism’ fall within the broader spectrum of neopagan nature religions? In this case it would seem awkward to impose the label of ‘nature religion’ on the latter but not on the former, or to separate the two for analytical purposes when their boundary may be more fluid in reality.

The place of ‘techno-paganism’ within (neo-)paganism more generally can be compared to the place of Donna Haraway’s famous (or infamous) ‘cyborg theory’ within the broader discourse of ecofeminist theory. Haraway’s work has crucially contributed to the broadening of ecofeminist discourse beyond its earlier identification with ‘spiritual feminism’ or ‘women’s spirituality’ to questions of citizenship, technological embodiment, and related issues. In a similar way, techno-paganism may be contributing a distinctly ‘nature-skeptical’ voice—one that is open, for instance, to the idea of seeing computer networks as ‘natural’ and even ‘sacred’—to the broad spectrum of contemporary pagan and nature spiritualities. Recent work in chaos and complexity theory has also been taken up in some quarters (including among techno-pagans) to blur the distinction between natural, social, and technological systems. So the category of ‘nature religion’ may be a risky one to

introduce in an era when definitions of 'nature' are being revised, extended, blurred, and even discarded.

In conclusion, then, the usefulness of 'nature religion' as an analytical category may ultimately be limited by the stability of the term 'nature.' Nature religion scholars will need to ask whose definition of 'nature' is being used to provide the 'transcendental signified' of this emerging field. If it is not a 'transcendental signified,' *ie*, an ahistorical category underlying all forms of 'nature religion,' then it will be important to continually ask: when should we apply the term, and when should we resist it? If, on the other hand, there *is* a 'nature' we wish to invoke through our use of this term, we may be doing environmental politics rather than scholarship. That may not be a bad idea, but the difference should be kept clear.

Notes:

1. I have traced such a genealogy in an earlier paper entitled 'Nature-Culture As Relational Animalia: Between Natural Priorities and Cultural Overcomings' (unpublished, originally presented at the Fourth Bath Quinquennial Science Studies Workshop, University of Bath, England, July 27-31, 1995). On the history of changing conceptions of nature, see C. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1967); N. Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992); K. Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-human* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995); R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1960); D. Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (2nd. ed., Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996); R. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (3rd ed., New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1982); and C. Merchant, *The Death of*

Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

2. A taste of this debate can be gleaned from William Cronon's anthology *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: Norton, 1995, and see the preface to the 1996 paperback edition) and the fallout that occurred after its publication. See, for instance, the critical debate in *Environmental History* 1:1 (1996), the essays in M. Soule and G. Lease, eds., *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1995), and the writings of George Sessions in *The Trumpeter* (issues 1:3, 12:4, and 13:1) and of Dave Foreman in *Wild Earth* (editorials in 6:4 and 8:3). Cronon's anthology simply gave a focused voice to what many, if not most, social scientists and humanistic scholars take for granted these days—that our ideas of 'nature' are socially, culturally, and historically shaped.
3. See, for instance, D. Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990).
4. See Botkin's (1990:58ff.) discussion of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in Minnesota and Ontario.

Adrian Ivakhiv holds a PhD in Environmental Studies from York University (Toronto), where he currently teaches. His research interests include the cultural politics of nature, environmental ethics, pilgrimage and sacred space, and Slavic paganism. His articles have appeared in Social Compass, Gnosis, Ethnic Forum, The Trumpeter, and Musicworks, and he is currently completing a book entitled Places of Power: Charismatic Landscapes, Gaia's Pilgrims, and the Politics of Place.

Nature & Supernature— Harmony & Mastery: Irony and Evolution in Contemporary Nature Religion

by Bron Taylor

*A response to
Catherine Albanese's landmark book,
Nature Religion in America.*

Imagine a square made up of nine dots arranged in three rows and columns. Remember the childhood riddle: Draw four straight lines, without lifting your pencil, through each of the dots in the square. Most of us struggled with it, confined by our imaginations to think exclusively within the structure of the square. The riddle's answer, that we draw the lines outside of the perimeter of the given square, taught an important epistemological lesson: Keep your cognitive flexibility; remain open to broadening your perspective beyond the current, given, conventions.

This is what Catherine Albanese asks us to do in *Nature Religion in America*. If we look across the American landscape with an understanding of religion broader than conventionally understood—specifically, if we examine belief/value/action systems that take nature as their "symbolic center[s]" (p. 7)—we will discover culturally important, but largely ignored, aspects of our religious history (p. 8).

Albanese illuminates the many "links and connections" among such phenomena,

past and present. She convincingly demonstrates that certain patterns and ironies persist in contemporary manifestations of nature religion (pp. 7-8).

A key irony that Albanese perceived is that the quest for harmony with nature coexists with an impulse to master it. Nature religion devotees, for example, often seek harmony with nature through preservation of the natural world, but they simultaneously attempt to bend nature to their will, whether through physical, mental, or magical technique. Albanese also shows how the mastery impulse supports repressive ideologies, spotlighting how notions of "natural law" and "rights" deployed nature as a *religious* symbol serving racist nationalism and notions such as manifest destiny.

Albanese concludes the volume by noting the persistence of such ironies in contemporary nature religion. She also argues, however, that some 20th century nature religions, especially those influenced by quantum theory, are breaking down the division between matter and spirit, viewing energy and matter as manifestations of the same "universal life-force energy" (p. 188). This, she seems to suggest, unveils the possibility of a new form of nature religion that escapes dualistic assumptions, perhaps including those that precipitate the tension between harmony and mastery as two poles of an ironic religious ethic. Moreover, Albanese raises the possibility of a non-supernaturalistic nature religion, although I think she sees this more as a new direction than an achievement.

Today's panel points to the value and provocative nature of such analysis. Each panelist has been exploring ethnographi-

Nature religion devotees ... seek harmony with nature through preservation of the natural world, but they simultaneously attempt to bend nature to their will, whether through physical, mental, or magical technique. Albanese shows how the mastery impulse supports repressive ideologies, spotlighting how notions of "natural law" and "rights" deployed nature as a religious symbol serving racist nationalism and ... manifest destiny.

cally one or another manifestation of contemporary nature religion, bushwhacking deeper into the religious landscape where Albanese broke trail. This labor provides perspective that can advance the inquiry Albanese set before us.

Today I wish to focus my comments first on Albanese's "nature religion" construction. Then I will discuss post-supernaturalistic nature religion and the possible diminution of the mastery impulse in contemporary nature religion.

Nature religion as construct

First, I wish to defend Albanese's claim for the utility of her "nature religion" construction. Certainly, her concept of nature religion is broader and than many definitions of religion that insist, ostrich-like, that super-human beings or super-natural realities are an essential feature of religion.¹ Some of Albanese's case studies demonstrate that nature can be a central religious symbol even among people who disavow anything supposedly "supernatural."

I think, however, that her construction could be clearer. She believes religion has to do with both ordinary powers (related to human society) and extraordinary powers (related to forces outside the boundaries of human community)² (p. 6). She also says that what people believe and do religiously is related to symbolic centers perceived to reside beyond ordinary experience, in the realm "that Eliade has called the sacred" (p. 7). Two paragraphs later she then defines "*nature religion* as my own name for a symbolic center and the cluster of beliefs, behaviors and values that encircles it" (p. 7).

These reflections left me unsure whether the "nature religion" rubric requires only that nature be a *central symbolic resource*, or whether she thinks that nature must also be considered *sacred* in some way. I am also uncertain because, in some of her examples, although nature is symbolically important to the overall religious orientation, nature itself is not considered sacred.³ I surmise, therefore, that in Albanese's construction,

nature need not be sacred in "nature religion."

It seems to me, however, that for both for practical and common sense reasons, the sacredness of nature (however conceived, contested, and expressed by devotees) should be considered essential to a scholarly definition of nature religion. Indeed, as the term has become increasingly popular among scholars, it is usually assumed that such religion must involve a notion of the sacrality of nature.⁴

There is a stronger case for such a choice, however, particularly if religion is "that dimension of human experience engaged with sacred norms," as David Chidester asserts.⁵ It seems problematic, therefore, to apply the term "nature religion" to cases in which nature is an important symbol but is not considered sacred.

Albanese helpfully recognizes that nature may be an important but not central "religious horizon for thought and act." She believes that, in such cases, it is better "to speak of the natural *dimension* of religion than to speak of nature religion" (p. 13). Perhaps we should use her "natural dimension of religion" phrase, or speak of "nature-influenced religion," when discussing religion in which nature is influential but not sacred.

This suggestion may cohere with Albanese's original intent, although repeatedly making such a distinction could be tedious and awkward. Perhaps this is why she chose to leave obscure the line between nature-influenced religion and nature-as-sacred religion. Nevertheless, it would be useful to have a clearer, shorthand way to describe the difference between nature religion (for which nature is sacred) and nature-influenced religion.

Non-supernaturalistic nature religion: beyond the mastery impulse?

Now I wish to highlight cases that Albanese suggests point toward the emergence of post-supernaturalistic nature religion. Insightfully, she traced this apparent development to a syncretic process in which nature-oriented religions increasingly appropriate worldview elements derived from quantum theory. In Starhawk's Wicca and in several contemporary physical religions such as Reiki and Macrobiotics, Albanese discerns that such theory erodes the distinctions between nature real and nature ideal, and between energy/spirit and matter, dualisms that have typically permeated American nature religion. She concludes that, "with the dawn of twentieth century, the mysterious half-lives of the quantum resolved the conceptual conflict between nature real and nature ideal. At least in the subatomic world, the crack looked like it had been healed" (p. 200).

In a related and tantalizing passage, Albanese notes that Starhawk believes "matter and energy are different but continuous modes of being." Albanese suggests that this quantum-influenced notion may explain why Starhawk can "negotiate" more gracefully "the divide between [nature] ideal and real" (p. 185). By overturning "Neoplatonic idealism," Albanese implies, Starhawk is closing the gap between harmony and mastery impulses.⁶

Despite such developments, Albanese does not think the cracks between nature ideal and real, and the concomitant and contradictory impulses to harmony and mastery, have been healed. "Dominance" remains, Albanese seems to conclude,

although it may now be framed as “an entirely harmonious enterprise”⁷ (p. 200).

If, however, the new science has theoretically “resolved the conceptual conflict between nature real and nature ideal,” there is no logical impulse toward mastery. I am wondering, therefore, if Albanese wishes to suggest the possibility that, with further development, some nature religion might fully escape the dualisms of supernature/nature, idea/real, and harmony/mastery?

Summary & Conclusions

Albanese’s *Nature Religion in America* at least *implies* the possibility of nature religions evolving such that

(1) nature itself would be considered sacred, unambiguously and without supernatural deities or forces; and

(2) ethics would evolve promoting care for and preservation of all life forms and the natural processes that have produced them, purged of mastery aims.

Such religious ethics could express a desire to live harmoniously amidst nature in a way that does not reduce its complexity or fecundity.

If this were possible, then contemporary nature religion could do more than bring, as suggested in Albanese’s words, “harmony and mastery into easier, more graceful religious partnerships than at any time before” (p. 13). Perhaps such religion could even subvert mastery narratives themselves. Reading a bit between the lines, it seems to me that this is the kind of religious evolution that Albanese would welcome.

Indeed and ironically, it may even be that by identifying and (subtly) criticizing

the mastery impulse in nature religion, Albanese may contribute to its subversion. Given the innovative and eclectic bricolage that is nature religion today, the work of even the most careful and dispassionate religious studies scholar could be dropped into the religious stew.⁸

I cannot here provide detail, but there are some nature religionists who self-consciously subvert both supernaturalism and reject related mastery narratives. In 1998, for example, two organizations formed, grounding their religious sensibilities in the awe and mystery of the cosmological story, especially as it is known scientifically. One was formed in the United States and called itself “The Epic of Evolution Society.” It is inspired more by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme than by other figures, but a rapidly growing and prominent group of scientists, philosophers, and religious figures have enthusiastically enlisted in the endeavor. They seek to provide resources and create rituals that can evoke in people a sense of awe and reverence for scientifically sound cosmogonies. Put differently, they consecrate scientific narratives, and seek to foster a corresponding environmental ethic of reverence for all evolutionary processes.⁹

Meanwhile, from his computer in the United Kingdom, Paul Harrison founded and serves as President of the World Pantheist Movement, a new religious movement promoting “Scientific Pantheism.”¹⁰ The clearest distinction between the two groups is that the World Pantheist Movement is explicitly religious and hopes to make “Scientific Pantheism” a world religion, while the Epic of Evolution Society is remains open to those who do not consider themselves reli-

gious.¹¹ Despite this difference, the two groups soon “found each other” and expect to “cross-fertilize” and cooperate on many fronts.

Both movements recognize that ecology, environmental philosophy, and environmentalism are all driven by the awe and mystery people often feel when observing nature, including scientifically. So with a remarkable degree of self-consciousness, both movements seek to provide a spiritual home for people who might not otherwise have a place for their non-supernaturalistic, but nevertheless religious, self-expression.¹²

These and a growing number of other groups reject the idea of humans as masters of nature. Their emergence suggests that the persistence of the mastery narrative in nature religion may be in doubt. Whether they will escape these or other mastery narratives, however, remains to be seen.

I propose, in conclusion, that we revise the nature religion construction to refer to religions that consider nature to be sacred. Phrases such as “the natural dimension of religion” and “nature-influenced religions” could be reserved for cases where nature is not considered sacred but remains an

important religious symbol or conceptual and action resource. Meanwhile, I hope scholars of nature religions and the natural dimension of religion would focus some of their attention on the dynamics Albanese so insightfully identified and that I have also labored to spotlight. Specifically: What is the possibility and what are the characteristics of nature religion devoid of supernature and rebelling against visions of mastery? Where is such religion to be found? How will it shape human lifeways?

Notes:

1. A good recent example in *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* ed. J.Z. Smith (New York, 1995), defines religion as “a system of beliefs and practices that are relative to superhuman beings” (p. 893). Such a restrictive definition is needed, the author claimed, because it “moves away from defining religion as some special kind of experience or worldview” and excludes “quasi-religious religious movements” (pp. 893-84). This is unduly restrictive, in my view. For a more comprehensive discussion, see Bron Taylor, “Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality: From Radical Environmentalism to Scientific Paganism,” a paper presented to the “Consultation on Spirituality,” funded by the Henry Luce Foundation of New York and sponsored by the Religious Studies Department at

These reflections [of Albanese] left me unsure whether the “nature religion” rubric requires only that nature be a central symbolic resource, or whether she thinks that nature must also be considered sacred. I am also uncertain because, in her examples, nature is symbolically important to the overall religious orientation, but nature itself is not considered sacred.

In Starhawk's Wicca and in contemporary physical religions such as Reiki and Macrobiotics, Albanese discerns that theory erodes the distinctions between nature real and nature ideal, and between energy/spirit and matter, dualisms that have typically permeated American nature religion. ... Starhawk believes "matter and energy are different but continuous modes of being." ... this quantum-influenced notion may explain why Starhawk can "negotiate" more gracefully "the divide between [nature] ideal and real." By overturning "Neoplatonic idealism," Albanese implies, Starhawk is closing the gap between harmony and mastery impulses.

University of California, Santa Barbara, March 1998.

2. For this distinction she credits Charles Long (p. xvi).
3. Nature is important but not sacred, for example, in many of the cases in the "Republican Nature" chapter.
4. This may be because few have read carefully the book in which Albanese coined the term.
5. David Chidester, *Patterns of Action: Religion and Ethics in a Comparative Perspective* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1987), p. 4.
6. The most pertinent passage is where Albanese writes that, for Starhawk, "Mind, clearly, rules. But mind comes with a concreteness, a focused sense of body energy, that veers strikingly away from the Transcendentalist dilemma. The Neoplatonic idealism that drained Transcendentalist forces, leaving so wide a gap between harmony and mastery, finds no echo in Starhawk's magic caverns" (p. 185). If there is no echo, however, would not Starhawk's

religion have escaped the mastery impulse?

7. According to Albanese "The impulse to dominate was ... everywhere in nature religion" (p. 12). Perhaps this is one reason Albanese does not think it likely that the impulse can be dissolved, even under the subatomic microscope.
8. Many involved in the contemporary nature religion read widely in anthropology and religious studies, borrowing freely ideas from such literature for their religious production.
9. I am grateful to Connie Barlow her ongoing assistance in keeping me abreast of developments in the Epic of Evolution movement; see her book, *Green Space, Green Time: the Way of Science* (New York & London: Springer-Verlag, 1997) for excellent background. See also the book by Barlow's husband, Tyler Volk, *Gaia's Body: Toward a Physiology of Earth* (New York & London: Springer-Verlag, 1998) for another example of scientific nature religion.

The rapid influence of the Epic of Evolution as a modern myth promoting harmonious

lifeways on earth can be seen in the "Earth Charter," a proposed resolution winding its way, possibly toward approval, by the United Nations General Assembly. See "Earth Charter," a special issue of *Earth Ethics* 8 (2 & 3): pp. 1-24, 1997.

10. The movement's credo was created over the internet and adopted in 1997. The movement was incorporated in Colorado in 1998. According to November 3 1995 email from Paul Harrison, "The WPM is international in outlook, and predominantly American in its present makeup. It was formed on the Internet and is 75% American in membership, plus others from 36 countries. 75% of the directors are American." The scientific paganism mailing list had 450 members in October 1998.

See the revealing interview conducted by EPIC board member Ursulla Goodenough with Paul Harrison, in the *Epic of Evolution Society* newsletter (Fall 1998 issue, forthcoming). In one representative passage, Harrison explains the central idea in Scientific Pantheism: "The universe's overwhelming power and fundamental mystery establish it as the only real divinity."

The following passage, also written by Harrison and posted in a section entitled "The Unity of Religion and Science" on the Scientific Pantheism web site [October 23, 1998] shows the affinity of this approach with quantum-influenced, non-supernaturalistic nature religion similar to that Albanese found in some nature religion. "Scientific pantheism believes that everything that exists is matter or energy in one form or another. Nothing can exist, be perceived, or act on other things if it is not matter or energy. That does not mean that spiritual phenomena or forces cannot exist. It means that, if they do, they must in fact be material." See <<http://members.aol.com/Heraklit1/basicpri.htm>> for this quote and the basic principles of Scientific Pantheism.

Goodenough is a molecular biologist and author of *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (Oxford University Press, 1998), a terrific example in itself of scientific nature religion.

11. As Harrison explained in the above-cited interview: "Our intention is to make this scientific/naturalistic form of pantheism into a full-blown religion, complete with basic shared beliefs, systems of meditation, local circles, people able to facilitate pantheist funerals and weddings, suggested celebra-

tions for solstices and equinoxes, and an ethic that is earth-centered and humane."

12. Indeed, the Harrison-Goodenough interview shows that some contemporary nature religion explicitly rejects supernaturalistic metaphysics. Harrison explained as follows his pragmatic decision to create two pantheism-related internet groups, one materialist, the other spiritual: "The Scientific Pantheism listserve is the core [of our approach], which I established in July 1996. I set up the Spiritweb listserve later, because some schools of pantheists still believe that the universe has a soul, a mind, a purpose, an intelligence, and so on. We got quite a few people applying who believed in such things, but we wanted the Scientific Pantheist list to focus on developing our own non-dualist approach. At the same time these 'spiritualist' pantheists were decent folk and deserved their own place ... They have fewer members, most of whom have joined by browsing around Spiritweb, which is a vast collection of New Age stuff. Obviously there is dialogue between the two main positions in pantheism, but the New Age dualistic/supernaturalistic strand will never be an integral part of Scientific Pantheism."

Bron Taylor is Director of Environmental Studies and Oshkosh Foundation Professor of Religion at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. He earned a PhD in Religion (Social Ethics) from the University of Southern California and has published two books and over three dozen articles exploring the religious, moral, and political dimensions of grassroots environmentalism, including Ecological Resistance Movements: the Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism (State University of New York Press, 1995). He hopes to soon finish On Sacred Ground: Earth First! and Environmental Ethics and recently began work on The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, which he is editing with Jeffrey Kaplan. His email address is <taylor@uwosh.edu>.

On Meeting Amatera-Su (and Oya, too):

The Warrior Path for the Non-Practitioner

by Mira Zussman
San Jose State University

The Samurai Game is a role-playing game, invented by George Leonard, a fourth degree black belt and Aikido sensei in Northern California, and author of numerous books on transformative practice. The game takes you into 17th century samurai consciousness and is intended to allow players the opportunity to face their own death—and thereby, the pattern of their life. I studied with Leonard, and his partner Michael Murphy (co-founder of the Esalen Institute) for three years in an experiment in what they called ‘Integral Transformative Practice.’ This was in addition to my own practice, the Japanese martial art of Aikido. The Samurai Game was a special treat that Leonard used periodically to help us test out our way in the world. The first Game I played (at the end of our first year) I was killed out within seconds of the opening scene, while the banners were still being metaphorically unfurled and the troops being trained—*ie*, before even the first battle began. In that Game, I lay dead for a solid week before being allowed to resurrect into the world again.

The Samurai Game has an uncanny way of hitting players in some incredibly vulnerable spot (no matter how many times they play). In the game I describe here, instead of facing my death, I stood face to

face with something more terrifying to this devout atheist: she was the Shinto Deity—Amatera-su Omi-Kami—and I found her, from then on, inhabiting the landscape of my life.

The particular Samurai Game I’m here to talk about was fought about a year after my first Game. I was determined not to get killed out so fast, so I began training myself for war. I went down to Japantown and found every book I could on the “warrior spirit.” Books on medieval Japanese warfare. Tactical guides. Novels based on the life of Musashi. Books on swords. The making of swords. The drawing of swords. The testing of swords (turned out they were ranked in terms of how many human bodies they could slice through in one strike). The path of swords. The spirit of swords. Even the Hindus had a tradition associating Kali, the Goddess of Death, with the sword, so I started looking into the Hindu tradition as well. Then I discovered that to the Aztecs, the blade represented the embodiment of the Goddess.

Then, even the guy who cuts my hair got into the act. He’s from Brazil. Candomblé practitioner. Told me that according to Ife tradition, the goddess who watches over me is Oya, the Yoruba warrior goddess. He said he could tell by the condition of my hair that I was preparing for battle. Haircut divination! Before I knew it, I was being taught how to prepare an altar to Oya. By the time I found out that there was a path of the sword in my own tradition, Kabbalah, as well, I was no longer even surprised. My whole life came to be seen in terms of sword metaphors. Why swords? I’m not sure. It must have something to do with their precision. The sword is unforgiving—but very, very beautiful.

... even the guy who cuts my hair got into the act. He’s from Brazil. Candomblé practitioner. Told me that according to Ife tradition, the goddess who watches over me is Oya, the Yoruba warrior goddess. He said he could tell by the condition of my hair that I was preparing for battle. Haircut divination!

I burned incense. Samurai, apparently, used to go into battle with incense in their hair so that they would smell good even in death, even in the early stages of decomposition. I bought a summer kimono. Silk. Samurai warriors dressed aesthetically. I listened to tapes of Shinto purification chants during my three hour commute each day—unearthly sounds, powerfully intoned syllables definitely not designed for the highway. Rather,

tools to mobilize *ki*, the living energy of the universe. At home, I would ring my butsurin for more focused meditations, an hour in the morning, an hour at night. The bowl is about 150 years old and has some fine reverberations. My breathing slowed significantly. My posture began to change. My voice was clear and my eyes were bright. Every moment felt purposeful. The Samurai Game was still six months away.

“You should become a warrior,” I told my psychoanalyst husband one evening, thinking it would do him a world of good.

“A warrior?” he said. “I already *am* a warrior.”

I started reading reams of Japanese poetry. You know, of course, that Samurai about to commit seppuku wrote exquisite haiku before disembowel-

ing themselves. With sweeping calligraphic brush strokes, they captured the essence of life in that moment before death. I prepared myself. I wanted to die this way. With poetry written in the moment. For that moment.

Confucian literature talks about the death of the ancient sages. How you die reflects how you lived. It would be embarrassing, I thought, to have a lousy death. I want to die a very beautiful, aesthetic death. Lying on North African silks the color of Saharan sands. Deep reds and browns and ochre. Raw silk glimmering on a moonless starbright night. I want to die in North Africa, south of Ghardaia, Agzd or Amazrou. I see myself falling slowly into the fine red sand, like deSaint Exupery’s Little Prince, another lover of the Sahara. In the Samurai Game, I want to die one exquisite death. And I wanted an aesthetic War. So what does that say about me?

The Japantown bookstore was filled with samurai death haiku, all too flowery for me. All about breezes, and cricket sounds, lily pads, and running water. I could not feel these things. Took them for granted, even if they weren’t part of my own experience. Lily pads. When do I ever see lily pads long enough to miss them? The delicate flutter of butterfly wings. I was having trouble

relating to such pretty reminiscences of nature, no matter that they represented the final moments of a fallen warrior. I was still not living as if I were about to die, so I was still not even remotely a warrior.

Finally, I found samurai death poetry that worked for me. Morihei Ueshiba's *Budo: Poetry of the Path*, it was called. When I found these lines, I felt I was ready for war:

*At the instant
a warrior faces
an enemy
all things serve
to make the teachings more focused ...*

When I read *Budo*, I knew that I was training myself not just to be a samurai, but to be Daimyo, a Samurai Warlord. It wasn't that I 'wanted' to be Daimyo in the upcoming Game. It had nothing to do with desire. It was non-negotiable: with or without the game, I already was a Warlord.

For two weeks before the upcoming Samurai Game, all I could think about, even at work, was the War. My husband's diagnosis had shifted often over the previous months. In a generous mood, he called was I was doing 'preoccupation.' Until he ventured into the park one day and saw all the T'ai Chi, Chi Gung, Aikido and sword-work, he had thought I was the only person in the city immersed in such practice. The Samurai Game was not what this was about. I think I was using it as an excuse to immerse more deeply in my practice. I saw martial arts as a key to understanding the nature of conflict. A key to the ability to transcend conflict. And shouldn't a psychoanalyst be interested in the resolution of conflict?

I kept thinking about the War Gods in the Samurai Game. Something, something

was missing and it took a long time to figure it out. The Game had no religion! No priests, ritual, or prayer. No explicit sacrifice. No pilgrimages. No ability to appeal to—and attempt to sway—the Gods. Every war has it, but there was no spiritual dimension built into the Samurai Game. Having found the fatal flaw of the Game, I had to be Daimyo to introduce this element. My preparations a turn. I had to be more than just another Samurai Warlord. I had to be a Daimyo-Priestess. Had to test the integrity of the War Gods, themselves. Would they accept prayer and ritual into the Game? Could we transcend conflict?

I prepared headbands for the warriors. White cranes to ensure long life of my samurai. Even filmy shrouds to cover our dead. I packed my butsurin chime bowl to lead my Army in purifying breath exercises. I wanted my army to be as ritually prepared for war as possible. I wanted my warriors to die well.

Amaterasu-no-Omikami. I invoke the spirit of the Shinto Sun Goddess. Aid me in the battles to come. Set me on the proper path. Keep my Army safe. No, not safe. May my Army be filled with integrity. May we die well. And may our descendants keep well our shrines.

Where on earth did *that* come from? Unbidden, this invocation slipped from my lips, and and it took itself very seriously. Something is happening that I don't understand. All I've been doing is researching Samurai mentality so that I can play the Game without getting killed out so fast. Right?

One night during this pre-War period I dreamed my own death. My real death. It was no game, no pretend war. It didn't even feel like a dream. That night I died for real.

While trying to drive both my husband's car and my own, my car revolted, and of its own volition committed seppuku, drove us over an embankment into the middle of a reservoir, and sank, airtight, into the deep with me in its womb. I did not struggle and made no attempt to escape. Accepted it, with a simple, "*I forfeit.*" I've always trusted the instincts of my car.

Was it that simple? Could you just forfeit your life? What exactly does that mean, anyway? Yes, okay, we all know death is a symbol of transformation. Jung tells us that and folks like Joseph Campbell and George Lucas make sure we don't forget it. But all I felt was dead. Numb. Gone. Not part of this world. I went into a very calm place. Very still. My children felt it. They didn't fight.

A week before the Game, Michael Murphy, co-leader of our Integral Transformative Practice experiment, led us in a *perusha* meditation—a form of sitting witness meditation with the aim of letting go of all attachment. The last time he had taken us through this particular meditation, I had, as usual, felt nothing. I thought Michael over-rated *perusha* meditation as a

necessary purification. I went into this meditation with a bad attitude—bursting only with the desire for action—but willing, this time, to try to give it a shot. Like my car and my invocation to Amaterasu, the meditation had a volition of its own. I found myself relinquishing all that I possessed. Tears streaming down my face. My exquisite house went first, along with all the possessions that I seemed to need to surround myself with. The promotion I expected at work: relinquished. My nose started running. The tears would not stop. Without attachment, I witnessed my attachments vanish, watched from a distance as all my "stuff" up and disappeared. I simply watched: poof! psychoanalyst husband, gone! There was serenity in my own unquiet soul. And I'm not the kind of person who uses words like 'serenity' with a straight face. Or 'peace.' Or 'calm.' They're not part of my tradition. Murphy stopped the meditation just before my children disappeared. I sat there for what seemed ages, unable to move, feeling clean, inside and out. Clean and empty.

I spent the rest of the week feeling fully dead from my death dream, and emptied,

My breathing slowed significantly. My posture began to change. My voice was clear and my eyes were bright. Every moment felt purposeful. The Samurai Game was still six months away.

"You should become a warrior," I told my psychoanalyst husband one evening, thinking it would do him a world of good.

I found myself relinquishing all that I possessed. Tears streaming down my face. My exquisite house went first, along with all the possessions that I seemed to need to surround myself with. The promotion I expected at work: relinquished. ... I simply watched: poof! psychoanalyst husband, gone! ... Murphy stopped the meditation just before my children disappeared. I sat there for what seemed ages, unable to move, feeling clean, inside and out. Clean and empty.

purified from the perusha meditation. What remained was the will to be Daimyo, and it stood out in high relief.

The day the War would begin arrived. Leonard—creator, facilitator, and War God Supreme—was becoming increasingly dictatorial. He had been preparing himself, once more, to play God. His lanky frame grew, if that's possible. He was larger than himself. Transcendent.

The first night, Leonard put us through our paces. Basic training, with a pop quiz at the end to test our mettle. How appropriate that the test of the War Gods involved the one thing that had possessed me over the previous six months: swords. Going Under the Sword, and slowly stepping off line just in the nick of time, is something I would be happy to do for the rest of my life. What satisfaction could be greater than to watch your attacker's sword sweep down to split you in half, only for him to find you (serenely) already poised at the back of his throat? Mmmmmm, delicious. I love being up close enough ready to take

out a War God's throat. It's probably the closest to God that I'll ever get.

But the next task was much more difficult. We had to declare ourselves, samurai-style, in front of the assembled multitude. Stating our name and place of birth, after a military march up to the front of the hall.

Does not declaring oneself imply a certain degree of self-knowledge? Who am I? I don't really know. My name has changed more times than I'd like to remember. "Mira" is the name given me in Jerusalem, the year I cradled an Uzi in my arms. This person, "Mira," was the survivor of a brief, but devastating war that changed the subsequent borders and history of the Middle East. While I've had many names, what I wanted to say was "MIRA OF ARAGON, 1492." This was who I really was. In my family, the Inquisition was always now. It happened to us. We, not just our ancestors, were the ones expelled from Spain. But George Leonard wouldn't understand. He'd have thought I was messing with his Game. And a wrathful War God would kill me out

again just as he had done the last time. For it turned out that he had come over and killed me that first time because I was the only person to have been face to face with the reality of warfare.

What I proclaim, with conviction, is simply "MIRA." Delete the extraneous patronyms altogether. And in that brief declaration, I could hear the voice of the 16th century Hindu poetess, Mirabai, my namesake. Feel the power of Marie Laveau, priestess of my patroness, Oya. I did indeed embody my ancestors: I was Mira of Aragon, survivor of the expulsion from Spain. And the Daimyo-Priestess stood firm. "MIRAI" in Japanese is the inevitability of the future. They were all there with me, just a few layers below the surface, and I could see from their faces that the assembled masses preparing for War could hear and see them as well.

The next morning. "What is all that you're carrying?" Leonard says to me, looking suspiciously at the Genji shopping bag from Japantown that I'm hauling to the site of the battlefield. "Just some preparations for the War."

"YOU CAN'T BRING ANYTHING IN!" proclaims the War God.

Oh shit. I hadn't even had time to incense my hair, nor the hair of my warriors. Last War, our Daimyo was filled with props, and used them to great effect. Our Army slaughtered the enemy. It was beautiful. Or I imagine it so—I didn't get a chance to see it, having been dead and entombed in my bloody cold sepulchre for the duration. In not allowing "props," the War God just changed all the rules on us. Typical.

Leonard is briefing us. There are so

many picky, meaningless, frivolous rules—most of which have changed since the last War—yet for some reason, I can remember them all. It's completely out of character. Normally, I have no auditory memory at all. Have to write everything down. But I have no pen nor paper. Disallowed. Last year, my Daimyo took copious notes. This year, I simply know what to do.

But George seems an angry War God in the making. Without looking at me, he's berating those who would turn the Game into a costume party: "NO PROPS ALLOWED," he booms. "YOU MAY HAVE NOTHING BUT YOUR OWN WITS ABOUT YOU." I feel publicly humiliated, even though he does not single me out: Quite a number of us have had to leave our "props" as George calls them, outside the door. There will be no white cranes for long life, no incense for our rotting corpses, no shrouds, no *budo* poetry—and suddenly, I don't want to be Daimyo anymore.

I can't make the war aesthetic or spiritual. I am defeated even earlier than in the previous Game. I come from a Mediterranean culture: an honor and shame culture. Not too different from 17th century Japan. And right now I feel hot with shame. The War God has killed me, humiliated me, before I even belong to an Army. Before nightfall. Before daybreak on the battlefield. I have lost.

I don't want to be here. I've no courage, no heart. I am nothing without the props of my life. I realize how much I depend on outer images—"stuff"—to project who I am. I surround myself with what George calls "props." Grew up in a family devoted to material culture. We use objects to

express emotions. Approval. Disapproval. We give. We take. I don't think I can function stripped of such tools. Can't wage war without ritual objects to confer power and identity. More than this, I create whole worlds with my "stuff" which engulfs anyone who enters into my sphere. I take over: My husband can't even drive without my telling him which way to turn. Oh fuck. Oh fuck. The dream: *you can't drive your own car and your husband's too*. Let go, my car tells me. *You have to let go*. And now, Murphy's perusha meditation kicks in again: LET GO! it echos, and I comply:

Let somebody else be Daimyo for a change.

I'm sick of being a control freak. Don't want to order anybody around ever again. Don't want to send anyone out to die. If I have to tell just one more person what to do, I think I'll scream. All I want is my blade. Just want to be a good soldier, do my duty and die.

I relinquish. I forfeit. I am inside my death dream. There is nothing that I need anymore.

"I'm not gonna do it," I whisper to Daniel, who's sitting on the floor next to me as we listen to the War God's innumerable instructions. Daniel knows just what I'm talking about: for this War, he's made plans of his own.

"You have to do it," he whispers back. "Give up your control thing right *after* the Game. Let this be the last time." He makes me feel like crying, but my mind is set. I'm very very clear. I will not, I repeat NOT, try for Daimyo, Warlord of the North or South. Not this time. Not in real life. Not ever, ever again.

Nightfall. The Random Walk begins which will determine the composition of

our Armies. I couldn't care less where I end up, and wander aimlessly, without thought or premeditation. I relinquish control. I forfeit. I am a lost soul, forty years in the desert. But I have no goal. There is no Promised Land. There is no place to go. We walk through our intended battlefield, and suddenly mitosis occurs and two Armies emerge out of the division.

My Army looks pretty good. I'm pleased. We'll do well. I am ready to die for the honor of my Army. The first task is the choosing of the Daimyo. I hear my name being called out around me. There is no debate. No struggle. No challenge. No contention. Only consensus and acclaim. Without batting an eyelash I move into action. It's as if the above torment and struggle never took place. Evaporated without a trace. I'm on automatic pilot. But it doesn't feel like control freak mode. It's something different: I know precisely what to do. I form my troops in a circle around me, knowing we will win this War. I take from each a binding allegiance and watch the determination in each face. My main concern is to respect the abilities and limitations of my troops. I want to choose them carefully for battles they can feel good about fighting. But I know that's not always possible. I can see in their faces that they are ready for War. Together, we have no internal strife, no contention, no debate. Only stillness and calm. Within moments, we are ready.

Dawn. I open my eyes to the most magnificent sight: The battlefield appears in a blush of morning hues bursting out of the inky night—golds and orange and brilliant reds stretching as far as the eye can see. And two Armies of Samurai, each with its own Warlord, all in 17th century

Japanese battle garb ready for war. I think I must be hallucinating, knowing full well that we're indoors—inside a large barn on a farm in Northern California. But that rising sun over the battlefield is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. George had said we would enter an era that has vanished. And here I am.

I know what must be done and it comes effortlessly. With no magical tools. No Shinto chants. No budo death poetry. No incense. No white cranes. No thought-out plans. No challenge from my warriors. My samurai have entrusted me with their lives. I vow silently to preserve the purity of their souls.

Not until a week later do I think, who the hell was I to worry about the purity of anybody's "soul"? I don't even believe in souls! Don't know anything about them, except words. Yes, I know, I teach comparative religion, but what do I really know from souls? Yet throughout the duration of the War, I was very very sure. And I knew

Amatera-su would protect the souls of these brave, self-sacrificing warriors.

And so, inevitably, Mirabai, Daimyo of the Army of the South won a very bitter, wrenching War, for the War God took what he considered his: the toll of human life, and the manner of their loss, was devastating. Only my Sentry—and the fallen, humbled Daimyo of the North—are left alive to share the final moments, witness the holocaust, and take note of the victory. We had used nothing more than our wit, and will and solidarity. As Daimyo, I did not exploit, dazzle, intimidate or coerce the troops. Did not bully them, as I've seen done. And yet they followed—and they led as well. We ruled co-jointly. Call it consensual, collaborative warfare.

It haunts me still: no props. Is it possible that we don't need all the crap we Americans surround ourselves with? For me, it's the exotic clothing and jewelry. Mamluk Revival brass and Tuareg amulets. How insecure I must be to display such

For the duration of my second Samurai Game, for the germinating weeks which preceding it, and for every moment ever since, I have felt the presence of something beyond myself. Something that straightens my back when I slouch. Something that raises my head when it slumps. Still I ponder who or what it could be, and find myself in conversation with Amatera-su, Lady of Light, or Dark Oya, Mistress of Radical Transformation. Or is this whatever-it-is simply a part of myself I have not known?

egotism on every surface of my skin and walls. Can I make it in the world stripped of all these things? Crap, crap, crap... Can I be strong without stuff? Apparently so. Or is this victorious moment a fluke or accident? Some random act? And how can I know, for certain, what all this means, if anything at all?

Thanks be to you, Amatera-su, for your fierce, motherly protection. Thank you, Oya, for your gifts of vision and strength.

Oh shit. Oh, shit. I, of all people, roll my eyes over the weirdness of a Jewish-Kabbalist-atheist who invokes Japanese and Yoruba deities. I can't believe I'm even committing this to written word.

I swear I'm not a practitioner. I don't do workings. I don't pray. Never pray. Where do these prayers come from? Worse yet—they will not go away! Did the Shinto Sun Goddess indeed look down upon me with her guidance? Did she join hands with her dark West African sister? Or was I alone with my warriors and my imagination? And why, tell me, have these ladies of Light and Dark taken up residence inside my consciousness? Was there some 'vacancy' sign lit up inside my being? I am now inhabited—but all I did was want to play the Game and not get killed out so fast.

For the duration of my second Samurai Game, for the germinating weeks which preceded it, and for every moment ever since, I have felt the presence of something beyond myself. Something that straightens my back when I slouch. Something that raises my head when it slumps. Still I ponder who or what it could be, and find myself in conversation with Amatera-su, Lady of Light, or Dark Oya, Mistress of Radical Transformation. Or is this what-

ever-it-is simply a part of myself I have not known? Sweet swordmistresses, tell me: whatever it is, does it reside in my body? Or my mind? Or ... my soul?

With wonderful timing, so that I am saved from pursuing this line of thought, the War God calls me to him across the bloodied battlefield. I take note the setting sun: Amatera-su withdraws. "I HAVE WON," the God of War affirms as I step over the fallen victims of feudal war, "BUT DO I WISH TO DO SINGLE BATTLE WITH THE DAIMYO OF THE NORTH?" Winner take all. If I lose, I lose my victory not only for myself but for all of my warriors. It is the last possible battle. Do I accept the Challenge? If I lose, my Sentry will live to tell the tale, he adds. Obviously it would be dishonorable to send my Sentry out to battle the opposing Daimyo.

There is no question what the honorable response must be.

We face each other, kneeling in *seiza* position—on our knees before the War God. We bow first to him and then to each other. No other battles have been from this position. It is a mind battle. Deceptively simple. There is no question of the outcome, and the Daimyo of the North falls dead at my feet. The War is over.

When I look around at the fallen and entombed, seeing only my Sentry standing guard loyally against no one at all, I know how empty my victory is. There are no enemies. There never were. I win nothing. My slain warriors win nothing at all. I feel no cock's crow fill my throat to herald my own victory and the enemy's defeat. Just numbness and sorrow for the scars of real-life war. How primitive is the battlefield. How little it resolves. How arrogant the

Warlords of the world. How sick to death I am of the "good" fight. It all appears so very futile and devolved. This is no way to determine right from wrong! No way to determine global boundaries. My land from yours. Holy land. Promised land. Tribal land. Warfare is no way to apportion world resources. No one wins. How could they?

I find that I have just spoken these final thoughts aloud to the assembled not quite resurrected troops. They shiver and their eyes are lifeless still. Their pallor grim, but dwindling. They have gathered for the closing ritual which ends the Samurai Game. Their silence overwhelms me. I am surrounded by the undeserving Dead. It becomes very clear to me: No one can win the Samurai Game. Not even the Gods.

It's summer. The guy who cuts my hair is Brazilian. Candomblé practitioner. "You have just won a battle, but not the War" he says, running his fingers through my hair. "And now," he proclaims with authority, "your copper is boiling: It is time for you to get to know Oya."

Mira Zussman has a PhD in anthropology from UC Berkeley. She is currently professor of comparative religious studies at San Jose State University and coordinator of Middle East Studies there.

She is President of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness and is on the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association and the Association for Transpersonal Psychology.

In addition, she teaches Kaballah privately at Beit Malkhut in San Francisco. As a result of clearly doing

way too much, she has recently gone back to North Africa to begin a new collaborative project on Berber women's body arts and the Tamazgha liberation movement. Her most recent publication is a special edition of the Anthropology of Consciousness Journal (AOC) on Women, Sensuality and Consciousness, (Vol 9 No 4) including her article entitled, "Shifts of Consciousness in Consensual S/M, Bondage, and Fetish Play." Copies of this journal can be ordered through <lmertz@cecomet.net>.

Mira Zussman has two fabulous kids and a delicious girlfriend.

Four New Books about Goddesses

The first three of these reviews originally appeared in Wood and Water, a feminist-influenced Goddess-centered pagan magazine from England which has been appearing for over twenty years. The review of Concept of the Goddess first appeared in the Spring 1997 issue, that of The Faces of the Goddess in the Spring 1998 issue, and of Ancient Goddesses in the Winter Solstice 1998 issue.

Sample copies of Wood and Water are \$3US, subscriptions (four issues) are 10 dollars surface mail, 15 dollars air mail. Payment in cash or in checks (or money orders) made out to Daniel Cohen (NOT Wood and Water), 77 Parliament Hill, London NW3 2TH, England.

The Concept of the Goddess. **Sandra Billington and Miranda Green** **(eds.). Routledge 1996.**

This book has been reissued in paperback in 1999 at a more reasonable price. While the original, with its high price, was clearly intended for an academic audience, this version is directed at a general audience. Indeed, the quotations on the back cover are all from pagan magazines, including one from this review.

What do goddesses from Japan and Ireland have in common? This question, which may very well have irritated some of the contributors, is posed on the dust cover of this beautifully produced and immensely readable scholarly study of god-

desses from a wide variety of cultures. The book is based on contributions to a meeting of the Folklore Society in Glasgow in 1994. It is presented as a tribute to Hilda Ellis Davidson, past President and now Honorary Member of the Society and distinguished author, over a period of more than fifty years, of many influential works on the folklore of northern Europe.

I would like to give this book an enormous welcome. It comes at a time when an adversarial position, which might be seen to be entirely a matter of misunderstandings, has sprung up between academics concerned to protect from misuse factual evidence derived from scholarly disciplines, and goddess followers who feel that the criticisms are designed to rubbish women's new understanding of their relationship to the divine, and to re-establish a patriarchal template. There is a further dimension: modern thought categorically questions the concept of universal themes dominating culture and society. Each area must be viewed separately and within its own circumstances. As Miranda Green, co-editor of the book and noted Celtic authority, writes in the introduction to *The Concept of the Goddess*: "In a book which explores the veneration of the goddesses belonging to many different times and cultures, it is essential not to fall into the trap of using evidence from one area and period to account for the phenomena observed in another. If comparisons between beliefs and perceptions of differing peoples are made they must be based on genuine evidence for similarities rather than on generalizing theory" (p. 1).

Miranda Green also says: "The varied approaches that have been adopted embrace the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, mythic literature and folklore. Despite this

diversity, two important general points emerge: first, the enormous powers and wide-ranging responsibilities of the goddesses; and second, the inadvisability of making inferences from the status of female divinities about the position of women in society." (ibid).

Miranda Green writes on the Celtic Goddesses as healers, examines their links with sacred water sites, and discusses the sanctity of water itself. She describes in some depths little known goddesses such as Ancamna and Damona, both she says "distinctive in their apparent polyandry" (p. 30), Gaulish spring goddesses, and Sequana, Sirona, and Sulis. She devotes special attention to the last named, connecting her with the cult of the sun and rather surprisingly, naming her as "healer and avenger". If this title is surprising, it is based on material found at the shrine at Bath. These are lead or pewter curses, known as defixiones, addressed to Sulis, where she is certainly perceived as a righter of wrongs.

Catharina Raudvere writes about female shape shifters in Scandinavian tradition. She discusses the *mara*, described as the "night riding hag", not a goddess or a mythological being but a "temporarily transformed human being—more a witch than a demon" (p. 42). Raudvere sees the perception of the *mara* as a method of understanding mishaps, illness and pain. At the same time, she concedes there is a link with earlier mythological material on shape-shifting which is part of Icelandic culture. She gives a number of examples of Norse shape-shifting and also discusses how the "gods of the pagans became the demons of the church" (p. 52).

Contributions on Scandinavian Goddesses Freya and Frigg come from two authors—Britt-Mari Nasstrom and Stephen Grundy. Nasstrom looks at the many names of Freya

and suggests that these represent her multifarious concerns; Grundy enquires whether Freya and Frigg are variants of the same goddess or distinct entities, but sees them very much in their relationship to the god Odinn. Samuel Pyeatt Menefee provides a stimulating account of Long Meg and her Daughters who turn out to be not only the well known megalithic site in Cumbria but also Long Meg of Westminster "heroine of several ballads and chapbooks dating from the 16th century" (p. 80).

Hilda Ellis Davidson writes about the connections between milk and the goddess, citing first the ancient world where, for example, Hathor appears as a cow goddess; and then surveys in depth the variety of evidence from northern Europe. She makes the point that the dairy was always the women's responsibility and she suggests that there may have been, in Romano-British culture, an indigenous dairy goddess. This is a wide-ranging and fascinating survey that will also provide new researchers with a wealth of material for further enquiry.

Coventina, described as a purely British goddess, is the subject of Lindsay Allason-Jones' study. The well situated at Carrawburgh on Hadrian's Wall proclaims Coventina as a water deity, but Allason-Jones, citing numerous texts, artefacts and pictures, concludes that she was not a typical Celtic healing deity but was concerned with all aspects of her worshippers' lives.

Two authors deal with classical goddesses. Glenys Lloyd-Morgan with Nemesis and Bellona—whom she names as "two neglected goddesses", and Sandra Billington with Fors Fortuna in ancient Rome. Lloyd-Morgan indicates widespread acceptance of both her subjects in the Roman empire, acknowledging their earliest origins and

I would like to give this book an enormous welcome. It comes at a time when an adversarial position has sprung up between academics concerned to protect from misuse factual evidence derived from scholarly disciplines, and goddess followers who feel that the criticisms are designed to rubbish women's new understanding of their relationship to the divine, and to re-establish a patriarchal template.

continuing their veneration down to the rise of Christianity. Nemesis, first known by the Greeks as born of the night later became the "daughter of justice" and "keeper of the scales" and associated with Themis goddess of law and justice. Bellona, a later deity, is oriented towards the concerns of the military—goddess of war and patroness of success in battle.

The Banshee in Ireland as an aspect of the earth goddess is discussed by Patricia Lysaght. She is the supernatural death messenger. Many accounts are quoted of her foreboding and lamenting deaths of rulers and common folk, but she is never, says Lysaght, considered as an agent of death. Her connections with sovereignty and the land are discussed as well as those with the Badb and the Morrigan. We are reminded that folk belief in the Banshee carries with it a survival of the ancestral goddess both in her benign and caring and her sovereignty and war-function aspects.

Two contributors range further afield. Anna Chaudri discusses traces of the hunting goddess in Ossetic folklore

concerning the Caucasian hunting divinity, male and female; Carmen Blacker writes on Yamanokami, the Mistress of Animals in Japan. There is much of powerful interest in both: the Caucasian hunt is sacred and is an aspect of the humans interaction with divine nature. Female and male divinity cannot, says the author, be considered separately. However, there are particular traditions for each and often the female divinity appears to be guardian of the game, and also may be Sovereign of the Forest. The Goddess Yamanokami as Mistress of Animals and ruler of wild nature is presented most sympathetically by Carmen Blacker, who also points out that a similar figure has been discovered in a number of other cultures.

We have been presented with a huge thesaurus of precious information. Presented as it is, within a scholarly paradigm, it still resonates in many dimensions, where the spirit as well as the mind is refreshed and renewed. It is one of those cases where the whole is more than the sum of its parts. The sheer impact of a volume of such precise and loving studies of the various individual goddesses

urges an inner reflection, illuminating our path of discovery of our heritage both historical and spiritual. It provides an input into theology where the academic connects with the personal.

At the same time, such a volume helps us address goddess questions that are currently so keenly argued. It properly sets its face against a generalising theory; but it provides evidence of similarities within diverse cultures that need to be explained. Why for example, as Carmen Blacker tells us describing Yamanokami of Japan, has "the Goddess in her guise as Mistress of the Animals as a ruler of wild nature in which animals, birds, trees and plants are her subjects ... (also) been discovered in Scandinavia, in Siberia, in the Caucasus among the North American Indians and among the ancient Celts?" (p. 178) And in another connection, we have referred to Sulis as avenger as well as healer: the book provides us with a number of goddesses who are much more holistic figures than those the Goddess Movement often portrays as solely tender nurturing and maternal. Many questions arise and it is exciting that we have such helpful material to work with.

The opening chapter, which provides the book's title, discusses its philosophy. Juliette Wood overviews the "upsurge in the study of the feminine aspects of the sacred" (p. 8), discusses the work of Robert Graves, Marija Gimbutas and other proponents of the universality of the Goddess. First against a background of New Age and of feminist thought and then in the light of modern scholarship, she warns that "modern Goddess studies resemble influential nineteenth century models of culture in their use of archaeology, anthropology, in the assumptions they draw about early society, in their definition of myth, and in their conception of the relationship of

the past to the present" (p. 9). She also makes a distinction between those who view the Goddess as an historical entity and those who perceive her as a metaphor or poetic image. She challenges what she sees as inaccurate historical assumptions used to substantiate the construction of a modern divine female principle. It is important also that "negative" as well as "positive" qualities are recognised in goddesses.

Wood concedes that the Goddess as metaphor is powerful and often productive. "If we look at the Goddess-paradigm as an exercise in creative history then we are looking at a view of the past, which however it may fail academic criteria presents a powerful image of feminine cultural identity. In the case of the Goddess, the fact of survival, followed by suppression and transformation, is extended to the gender she represents" (p. 22).

Here we are back home on my own ground of survival repression and transformation: and also of pursuing academic material in as scholarly a manner as I can. At the same time I follow Carol Christ's warning concerning the ethos of objectivity when she writes: "feminist analysis reveals that scholarship that has been presented to us as 'objective', 'rational', 'analytical', 'dispassionate', 'disinterested' and 'true', is in fact rooted in irrational and distorted assumptions ... while presented under the guise of 'objective fact' patriarchal thinking employs a number of ... unnamed and unexamined assumptions." I am also much influenced by Margaret Conkey and Ruth Tringham, feminist archaeologists, who when discussing the work of Gimbutas ("Archaeology and the Goddess" in *Feminisms in the Academy*, Stanton and Stewart (eds.), University of Michigan Press 1995) affirm that although in many respects they profoundly disagree with her methods and

conclusions, she has caused a paradigm shift in the way archaeologists view their own discipline. I feel that Juliette Wood has not addressed such issues, nor has she taken into account the highly regarded work of biblical archaeological scholars (Ruth Hestrin, Judith Hadley, John Day, for example) which while researching goddesses of the period brings to the fore the possibility that anti-goddess polemic is the basis of much Western religious tradition. The fall-out from this kind of scholarship cannot be swept away from gender politics.

Some women grasp and convert goddess material into a religion of their own, others attempt a popular synthesis, and much of this must bear criticisms such as those by Juliette Wood. Until recently goddess research has not been an academic subject that found its way to the public. It is books like *The Concept of the Goddess* with its brilliant material that will help remedy this situation.

Asphodel

Asphodel (Pauline) Long received a degree in Theology at London University in 1983 at the age of 62. In 1996 she was the first Sophia Fellow at the University College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth. She is a founder member of the European Society of Women in Theological Research. She is the author of In a Chariot Drawn by Lions: The Search for the Female in Deity (The Women's Press, London, 1992). Asphodel has been called a grandmother of the Goddess Movement in Great Britain.

***Ancient Goddesses: The Myth and the Evidence.* Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris (eds.). British Museum Press 1998.**

“The idea of an original Mother Goddess in prehistory is surrounded by an intense controversy, but one in which neither side speaks to the other. In entering the debate on the nature of female divinity in ancient European and Mediterranean societies, this book is intended to bridge the gap between the two camps, shedding light on areas of prejudice and showing that in this fascinating area of study we still have more questions than answers.” (p. 6)

This opening paragraph of the introduction sets the scene for ten archaeologists and historians to provide specialist material and insights into their areas of Goddess study, which gives us a most valuable and interesting book. But its own premise of a Goddess Movement that sees the “nature of female divinity” as a single “original Mother Goddess” which the scholars can and largely do disprove is irritating and detracts from our enjoyment. We propose that for Goddess people generally the term ‘the Goddess’ describes all aspects of female divinity, Goddesses singular and plural: academic determination to impose a monotheism on us is misplaced and counterproductive.

Joan Goodnick Westenholz, in an illuminating and fascinating account of goddesses of the ancient near east prefaces her discussion with the assumption that modern writers “bent on ‘recovering’ a postulated Goddess-centred religion have assumed there is just one archetypal Goddess ...” (p. 63); she suggests that such writers have

... valuable as has been the work of Gimbutas, it is time to incorporate it and to move on: feminist archaeology is changing the old ‘certainties’ and Gimbutas has played her part in breaking them down. Today’s researchers proceed with less certainty than Gimbutas herself: everything is ambiguous and must be tested: there are no “proven facts”

tried to force all ancient goddesses into this preconceived mould. Her excellent account is set in this context, which appears to me unfortunate.

Elizabeth Shee Twohig provides a splendid survey of megalithic tombs in North-west Europe but contextualises it into disproving a “Mother Goddess” element. She admits that there are evidences of representation of females in, for example, Northern France in the later neolithic period (p. 168). But it does not appear necessary for her to re-iterate so forcefully that, whether or not these figures were worshipped as goddesses, they do not represent a single Mother Goddess.

On the other hand some writers go straight into their discussions without bias, notably Mary E. Vouyatzis, whose “From Athena to Zeus” provides “an A-Z guide to the origins of Greek goddesses”, and Miranda J. Green whose paper on “Some Gallo-British Goddesses” maintains this author’s usual highly lucid and accessible scholarship. Miranda Green makes the point that, since there is lively archaeological debate about the validity of using the word ‘Celtic’ to describe the culture of the European Iron Age (p. 180) she has decided to stay with purely geographical

nomenclature. Her arguments, descriptions, and illustrations are all satisfying and stimulating and provide us with a wealth of information.

A survey by Karel van der Toorn of female divinities in early Israelite religion brings forward the goddesses Anat and Asherah, either or both seen as the consort of Jahweh in the period referred to. That the early Hebrew religion was not monotheistic but worshipped a divine couple, male and female, has now gained pretty standard acceptance among scholars, although with reluctance from those with a religious background. The author discusses the mystery of the many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of female figurines found on territory that comprised the land of Israel, and while not opting for them all to be goddesses he proposes that they may be “cult images used for devotional or prophylactic purposes” (p. 94).

Crete, Egypt, and Malta are discussed in some depth by the editors, by Fekri A. Hassan, and by Caroline Malone respectively. Once again, much interesting information and excellent illustrations are provided.

It is impossible here to give sufficient time and attention to the first two papers of this book, which discuss the matter of goddesses

from a political perspective. Ruth Tringham and Margaret Conkey focus their attention on the work of Marija Gimbutas, while Lynn Meskell discusses the implications of the discoveries—both in the sixties and currently—at Catal Huyuk. Both discussions assert that the work of Gimbutas and of Mellaart (at Catal Huyuk) have been pivotal to the Goddess Movement, creating a set of assumptions as its framework. Over-simplification and essentialisation of this structure form the basis of the critique by Tringham and Conkey: they argue that Gimbutas tends to treat the whole of European prehistory as a homogeneous unit from the point of view of religious and social organisation (p. 23), whereas in fact new studies in archaeology based in a gendered framework show wide variations of “roles, relations, ideologies and identities” (p. 22). These must be set against Gimbutas’s view of the society of Old Europe where “the roles and symbolic place of men and women are set and fixed” (ibid). They call for openness to accept that, valuable as has been the work of Gimbutas, it is time to incorporate it and to move on: feminist archaeology is changing the old ‘certainties’ and Gimbutas has played her part in breaking them down. Today’s researchers proceed with less certainty than Gimbutas herself: everything is ambiguous and must be tested: there are no “proven facts”.

Lynn Meskell takes a similar view, providing, on the way, a thoroughly informed and sympathetic account of goddess ideas associated with the site of Catal Huyuk, and giving some account of alternative explanations. She is concerned to discount emphasis on a “Mother Goddess” and believes that “invoking the ‘Goddess’ as an empowering modern construction is positive for many people whereas claiming archaeological validity for

ancient gynocracy, social utopia and a single ‘Mother Goddess’ at Catal Huyuk may be seen as problematic and dangerous” (p. 55). We should not rest our desires for the future on an imagined golden age of the past, but rather our aims for social change should be based on “fundamental humanity by which we have learned the lessons of our own recent history and reached realisations about our future” (ibid).

As a ‘Goddess person’ over a period now touching three decades, I welcome this new feminist archaeology. Gimbutas and Mellaart were of their time; they broke down enormous barriers, and they helped put the idea of female divinities on the map of today’s consciousness. We are enormously grateful to them as we struggle on. Many of us—perhaps the majority—never felt that the story had to be of the single mother-goddess. Rather there was, and still is, work to do to show that the idea of divinity has not always been totally male, and that females have been and are divine too. This book provides us with marvellous accounts of such divinities and a treasury of illustrations. Thought-provoking and controversial in its analyses, its actual material is outstanding. I just do hope that sooner or later the scholars will stop transposing onto us their own (mistaken) views as to what Goddess people actually believe, and start asking us instead.

Asphodel

Daniel Cohen comments:

I would like to add to Asphodel’s review by conjecturing why the archaeologists misinterpret the Goddess movement.

In the first place it seems that they perceive ‘the goddess’ and ‘goddesses’ as being opposing notions. They do not see the dance that

occurs, with the same person referring to ‘the goddess’ in one sentence and ‘goddesses’ in the next. Textual scholars are more flexible in this. For instance, Hilda Ellis Davidson, in *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, has no problem using both phrases in adjacent paragraphs, and neither does David Kinsley in his book *Hindu Goddesses*. And (even if the titles were chosen by publishers, the authors accepted this) *The Book of the Goddess* (edited by Olson), *The Concept of the Goddess* (edited by Billington and Green) and *The Faces of the Goddess* by Motz all have titles mentioning ‘the Goddess’ with text devoted to many goddesses.

It is always useful to have material centred on the particularity of individual goddesses, and in many cases it may well be that the deities of an ancient pantheon were only considered separately, not as a unity. But that need not prevent us from also seeing them as facets of one (though we are not required to). Long before the current Goddess movement, Dion Fortune, a follower of the Western Mystery Tradition, said “All the gods are one God, and all the goddesses one Goddess.” Indeed, much the same idea occurs in the great speech of Isis in Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* nearly two thousand years earlier.

I also find the archaeologists frequently referring to ‘the Great Mother’ or ‘the Mother Goddess’, much more often than people in the Goddess movement. So where do these ideas of one universal goddess who is the Great Mother come from?

I suggest that these notions are most often found in the writings of archaeologists of an earlier generation, from (approximately) the 1930s to the 1960s. Modern archaeologists are entitled to object if people follow these earlier views without taking into account current views. But it seems to me that, to a large extent, they are projecting their disagreements

with their earlier colleagues onto a movement whose understanding of goddesses is much subtler and less rigid than they make it out to be.

Daniel Cohen

Daniel Cohen recently took early retirement from his post as a professor of Pure Mathematics at London University. He has been a pagan for over twenty years, and has been co-editor of Wood and Water for over fifteen years. He is particularly interested in developing positive responses by men to feminism. His published work includes a series of stories based on classical (and other) myths, rewritten to show male heroes acting in the service of the Goddess.

***The Faces of the Goddess.*
Lotte Motz. Oxford University Press
(New York) 1997.**

Rarely have I read a book which combines good scholarship and bad to the extent that this one does. The author argues that the terms 'Great Mother' and 'Mother Goddess' owe more to modern notions of what a goddess ought to be like, including Jungian archetypal theory, than to the understanding of the goddesses in the times when they were worshipped. In particular, such notions obscure the particularity of the goddesses themselves. She discusses various goddesses in detail, some with a mother aspect and some without.

She also suggests that 'mother' should frequently be regarded as a term of respect which may mean 'lady', 'goddess', or 'queen', rather than a descriptive term. This is an interesting idea, but it is not explored in sufficient detail. It would be valuable to see how the word is used for human women (as, for instance, such women as 'Mother Ship-ton' or 'Old Mother Hubbard'). It would also be useful to see how it is applied to Hindu goddesses, whom she does not discuss, where it seems to me it carries both interpretations (see, for instance, Katherine Erndl's "Victory to the Mother").

So far, so good. Such arguments can form part of a feminist approach to our understanding of goddesses (it is precisely for such reasons that I rarely use the words 'Great Mother' or 'Mother Goddess'; I prefer to say 'Great Goddess'). But the author is no feminist. Indeed feminism and other movements for change appear to have escaped her notice. I am not sure which of two of her remarks most surprised and offended me—a throw-

away comment that the relations of Zeus with nymphs and goddesses simply reflect the fact that "men rape women" or the reference to "ritual perversion such as transvestism or homosexuality". And her understanding of motherhood seems very limited. She seems to regard 'mother' as synonymous with 'birth-giver'—to such an extent that she remarks more than once that the Mountain Mother Cybele never brought forth a mountain from her womb. She does not seem to see that the use of the word 'mother' to mean 'nurturer' is as common as the more specific meaning, and in one of the few passages where she mentions nurturing she simply remarks that the Corn Mother and Water Mother do not nurture corn or water.

She argues against what she refers to as "the creed of the goddess religion", especially in its interpretations of history and prehistory. It is here that the flaws in her scholarship are most obvious. All books have mistakes, but some of hers affect her main arguments, and are not side issues. Can one take seriously someone who writes: "In the late 1960s the Women's Spirituality Movement came into existence, also known as Wicca ..." (p. 37)?

In one chapter she discusses Inanna, who she claims cannot be separated from Ishtar, and who she sometimes refers to as Inanna-Ishtar. This seems to me somewhat of an exaggeration, though it is allowable as some scholars do consider that the very close connection between the two amounts to identity. But she is not entitled without warning readers to refer in a single paragraph on characteristics and behaviour of Inanna to texts which do name Inanna and to other texts a thousand years later which are about Ishtar. She also claims that the standard popular account of Inanna is an example of how "a goddess may lose in depth by the ide-

alisation of a Goddess worshipper". She consistently gives the author of this book as Diane Wolkstein, whereas it is actually by Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer (as she knows, since it is referenced correctly in the bibliography). This is not just a matter of shorthand convenience. The first author is a folklorist and storyteller, whose portrayal of Inanna could quite possibly have lost in depth through the need to tell a good story. But the second author is a leading expert on Sumer and Sumerian, who is the original translator of many of the texts about Inanna. The fact that he is happy to be listed as joint author is enough to convince an unbiased reader that the portrayal is accurate. It is difficult to regard these errors as merely the kind of accident or carelessness that all scholars sometimes fall into.

There are other errors. The suggestion that "divine women are absent from the Hebrew texts" shows that Dr. Motz is unfamiliar with biblical scholarship of the past ten or more years. Her claim that "no female imagery is to be seen in the Paleolithic cave [paintings]" would not be accepted by many scholars of rock art. And she chooses not to mention those Celtic goddesses who Miranda Green, a leading scholar of that field,

specifically refers to as "mother-goddesses" (in such books as *Celtic Goddesses*).

In short, the flaws and failures of scholarship prevent one from taking her critique of goddess religion seriously, and even cast doubt on her more specific discussion of the goddesses. Readers interested in how and why several feminist archaeologists criticise some of the views of people involved in goddess religion would do better to consult the articles by Lynn Meskell (*Antiquity*, March 1996) and by Meg Conkey and Ruth Tringham (in Stanton and Stewart's *Feminisms in the Academy*), or the new book *Ancient Goddesses* (edited by Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris). Nonetheless, the chapters on the individual goddesses are worth reading, covering as they do both well-known goddesses such as Cybele and Demeter and also goddesses from the Eurasian shamanistic tradition and Saule, the Latvian Mother Sun.

Daniel Cohen

The suggestion that "divine women are absent from the Hebrew texts" shows that Dr Motz is unfamiliar with biblical scholarship of the past ten or more years. Her claim that "no female imagery is to be seen in the Paleolithic cave [paintings]" would not be accepted by many scholars of rock art.

***The Goddess Unmasked: The Rise of Neopagan Feminist-Spirituality*: Philip G. Davis Spence Publishing 1988.**

The Goddess Unmasked suffers from a bad case of false advertising. The dust-jacket proclaims that it is “the first critical evaluation by a qualified scholar of the theological, anthropological, and historical claims of the ‘Goddess’ movement”. None of this is accurate. It is not scholarly. It is not a review of the evidence on ancient cultures—in fact, only one 30-page chapter addresses this subject. Most ironically, it doesn’t even have much to do with the Goddess movement! By my count, only one quarter of the book discusses feminist spirituality at all.

What *The Goddess Unmasked* is, is a partisan attack on feminism, Neopaganism, and the New Age movement. Davis, a professor of Religious Studies in the University of Prince Edward Island, is a conservative Christian who believes that Goddess-worship is “self-evidently outlandish” and a “potent and disturbing malignancy”. His publisher, Spence Publishing (www.spencepublishing.com) is a small press that caters to the Religious Right. Throughout his book, Davis continually expresses his contempt for feminist spirituality, which he says “masks a set of ideas and values which lend themselves all too easily to the destruction of the careers, families, and personal lives of a great many people.” *The Goddess Unmasked* is slightly more impartial than *Wicca: Satan’s Little White Lie*. But not much. And in chapter one, when Davis was fretting that nurse-witches perform secret, occult rituals over their helpless patients, I did

start to wonder which of the two books I’d picked up.

The most ironic aspect of *The Goddess Unmasked* is that very little of it has anything to do with feminist spirituality. Most of the text is a superficial, erratic review of a host of different things Davis doesn’t like, such as Gnosticism, the witch hunts, Theosophy, the Masons, French Utopian feminism, modernism, ceremonial magic, and the New Age movement. Davis argues that these are all ‘sources’ that feminist spirituality draws upon and he attempts to summarize them—all of them—in a meager 300 pages. The end result is a survey of stunning shallowness. The influence and failings of Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, for instance, merit a mere two and a half paragraphs. Worse, Davis thinks that feminist spirituality and Wicca are identical. His inability to distinguish between these two related faiths leads to patently ridiculous statements, such as his insistence that Margaret Murray’s Witch-Cult hypothesis had only a “token” impact on Wicca!

Only one brief chapter actually attempts to address the evidence for and against Goddess-oriented cultures in the ancient world. And the attempt fails, for many reasons. He focuses exclusively on popular texts and ignores more rigorous scholarship. For example, Davis repeatedly quotes Marija Gimbutas’ *Language of the Goddess* and *Civilization of the Goddess*. He does not refer to any of her academic publications, and he only mentions *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* once. Second, Davis never explores any issues in detail. In most cases, he briefly mentions that a mainstream scholar disagrees with a “Goddess scholar” and expects that somehow that proves that the “Goddess scholar” is wrong. When he does mention evidence, it’s in such an abbreviated

The authors he cites may not be the cream of Pagan scholarship, but they’re certainly some of our more popular writers: Z Budapest; Monica Sjoo; Barbara Mor; Gerald Gardner. From their books Davis culls innumerable examples of reverse-sexism, ethnic stereotyping, and abysmal ‘research.’

form that it’s almost a parody of the original research. Third, in some sections Davis’ information is criminally outdated. For instance, all but one of his sources on historical witchcraft are twenty or more years old. This leads to an amusing bit of irony: his own account of historical witchcraft is as inaccurate as the theories he criticizes. Finally, Davis’ methodological assumptions are ridiculous. Over and over again, Davis assumes that “no proof” equals “proof not”: if we cannot prove that Venus figurines represent a goddess, then this proves that they do not. And he espouses a painful double standard: “Goddess” scholarship must meet impossible levels of proof, whereas mainstream scholarship need meet none.

Davis’ discussion of Marija Gimbutas aptly summarizes the biases and weaknesses of his book. Gimbutas’ seminal theories, her decades of academic publication, earn her a meager three pages of *The Goddess Unmasked*. Her coverage begins with an insult. Davis complains that modern academics are vastly inferior to their predecessors. The troubles began in the Baby Boom, where universities were forced to accept inferior professors to cope with the flood of new students. Thanks to affirmative action, Davis claims, these “recent graduates or dropouts of

doctoral programs” were retained and became “tenured radicals” who continue to poison America’s higher education. This is important because “some key individuals in the early promotion of Goddess spirituality were professors, many of them from the boomer generation.” As examples, he lists Carol Christ, Mary Daly, Marija Gimbutas, and Naomi Goldenberg. Though Davis never actually states that any of these women are college dropouts, that is certainly the implication of his passage. It’s a slander of breath-taking proportions, especially in the case of Gimbutas, a woman with impeccable academic credentials. Davis’ analysis of Gimbutas’ Old Europe theory is little better. He notes two academics who disagree with Gimbutas, Brian Hayden and Mary Lefkowitz. He summarizes their critiques in one sentence apiece, offering absolutely no evidence to back up either side. Then the remainder of Gimbutas’ three-page coverage is devoted to speculation that she came to believe in the Goddess in her later days. Which, Davis assumes, “proves” that her theories are wrong.

In summary, if you are searching for a scholarly discussion of the evidence for and against ancient matriarchies, look elsewhere. *The Goddess Unmasked* will not illuminate

you. Nor will it assist you if you want an in-depth discussion of the roots of Neopaganism. If, however, you weren't aware that tarot cards are used for divination, you might be unlearned enough to find his survey of the Western Occult Tradition useful.

Nevertheless there is one area where *The Goddess Unmasked* succeeds brilliantly, despite its biases—or perhaps because of them: it offers a very damning critique of the excesses of Neopagan “historical research”. Yes, this book is a partisan, bigoted assault. But it left me wondering who I was angrier with: Davis, for launching this attack, or the writers who painted the bull's eye he was aiming at.

The authors he cites may not be the cream of Pagan scholarship, but they're certainly some of our more popular writers: Z Budapest; Monica Sjoo; Barbara Mor; Gerald Gardner. From their books Davis culls innumerable examples of reverse-sexism, ethnic stereotyping, and abysmal ‘research’. He cites Elizabeth Gould Davis (*The First Sex*) opining that men are “mutants, freaks produced by some damage to the genes” and that “only masculine ego stands in the way of a decent society.” Alongside this is Merlin Stone's (*When God Was a Woman*) painful attempts to prove that Judaism is not a Semitic religion and her claim that “Hitler” meant “Hittite teacher”. Davis notes the belief, stated time and again in radical Pagan texts, that women are superior to men, that our “holistic” way of thinking is infinitely better than male logic, and the assumption that a matriarchy would be an egalitarian utopia, rather than patriarchy in drag.

To serious scholars, ‘research’ of this sort appears ludicrous, yet many of today's Pagans believe it. Check the readers' reviews of *When God Was a Woman* on Amazon.com

and you'll find that Stone is praised, over and over again, for the “splendid” depth and quality of her research. So I understood why Davis said, “it is perplexing that claims so easily disproved are nevertheless in wide and increasing circulation.”

If Davis admitted he was critiquing the fringe of Neopaganism, his book would be far more tolerable. Unfortunately he returns bias for bias. At several points he acknowledges that he focuses on extremists, and that it is their extremism alone which makes them easy targets. Yet most of the time Davis pretends that these radicals accurately represent all Pagans and New Agers. Unfortunately, Davis' own book sheds no light on the problem. There is nothing in it—no evidence, no logic—that will convince fans of Stone & Co. that they are wrong. And Davis' own biases are so blatant that many Pagans will no doubt dismiss his statements as prejudice, pure and simple. Had he done what he promised—provided a detailed, scholarly, and impartial analysis of this subject—*The Goddess Unmasked* would be a jewel. However, Davis' interests seem to lie, not in describing or exploring Neopaganism, but rather in trying to use our worst writers to make us all look like fools.

Jennifer Gibbons

READERS' FORUM

continued from page 3

for those with archaeological inclinations, that the ‘Permeability of Boundaries’ is planned close to the Theoretical Archaeology Group conference in Cardiff, Wales (14-16 Dec 99). TAG is the largest forum in the UK for archaeological students and researchers to present papers of diverse themes.

For further details about our conference please contact Robert Wallis, Ken Lymer or Simon Crook at the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton, Highfield, Southampton, United Kingdom SO17 1BJ. Email: <rjw2@soton.ac.uk> or <kjl31@soton.ac.uk>.

You can also visit our webpage at <www.soton.ac.uk/~kjl31/confer.htm>.

Blessings and salutations,
Ken Lymer

Devyn Christopher Gillette writes:

To the editor:

While naturalism certainly may have influenced the ideologues who contributed to the National Socialist worldview (Jeffrey Kaplan, “Savitri Devi and the National Socialist Religion of Nature,” issue 7), it may be an overemphasis to suggest that naturalist spirituality (rather than anti-Semitism and nationalistic romanticism) was a prime actor in the development of the National Socialist ideology. National Socialism was perceived to be “in accord with the laws of nature” among its proponents not because, foremost, nature was perceived as divine, but because the ideological hegemony itself was perceived as utterly empirical.

I'll contend that the NSDAP essentially sought to embrace any image, any symbolism, any social group, conflicting principles

notwithstanding, which would perceptively give them an edge toward achieving total political power and hegemonic domination. Applying socialist images, it allied with the industrial capitalists. Existing as a counter to communism, its leadership made pacts with the Soviet Union planning for a post-war order. Embracing some pagan images such as runes, it also absorbed and made use of the Christian church, including the drafting of sanctioned prayers for (and to, in a saintly fashion) Adolf Hitler. Among academics, it applied arguments to bolster already entrenched ideologies (eg, ‘German physics’), and effectively dismissed any academic counterpoint as being seditious.

Case in point: archaeological disciplines were the springboard for the invasion of Danzig, as the German press was saturated with reports of an ancient Teutonic site allegedly located near the Polish border. Under the Lebensraum policy, this warranted a ‘liberation’ of the region as being part of the greater Germanic homeland, resulting in the placement of the Wehr-macht in a prime location for the planned invasion of Poland.

The NSDAP emerged following the tide of pan-Germanism that had already swept Europe before the turn of the century, and became attached to naturalist movements (such as the Wandervogel) who argued against industrialized society. Such movements included hiking, camping, hostel development, singing folk songs, nudism, and sporting activities to illustrate ‘wholeness’ of self between humanity and nature. It is because these movements were popular and already existent that the emerging NSDAP would also fashion itself as a ‘movement’ (Bewegung), rather than simply a political party. The NSDAP's

absorption of the Wandervogel movement would later become militarized into the Hitler Youth.

Kaplan argues that it is “inevitable” that nature spirituality will close a link between itself and social phenomena such as National Socialism. I will argue that mysticism applied to counter industrial consciousness need not necessarily connect itself with the far right, as Goodrick-Clarke (quoted by Kaplan) suggests. Indeed, the fusion between such mysticism and the women’s movement (eg, Eisler) may illustrate that connections with the social left are perhaps equally, if not more, likely. Kaplan stresses the apparent “passionate concern for place and mastery in society” as a rationale for “the shadow side of nature religiosity.” I suggest that this demonstrates a greater emphasis on the desired attainment of “mastery,” rather than spiritual connectedness, as the priority, and it may be argued that such desire for mastery is not as much a concern as cooperative, spiritual balance with that natural world for the bulk of nature spiritual people. Kaplan’s argument seems to place the militarist cart before the primal horse.

It seems to me that Social Darwinist and neo-Nazi tendencies among (comparatively few) right-wing Pagan groups owe more of their perspective to race arguments than eco-spiritual ones, or at least from what I can tell, simply apply the eco-spiritual framework to further bolster the already entrenched racial ideology. It is the anti-Semitism, militarism, and later white supremacism of such ideologies that drive the wedge between what many non-neo-Nazi contemporary Paganfolk regard as offensive and marginal, and what is not. There would never have been an NSDAP without anti-Semitism, and thus I will contend that neo-Nazi-esque Pagan groups end

up having more philosophically in common with Christian ‘Identity’ churches than those of us who prefer to exchange backrubs, swim nekkid, praise the moon, and jump the fire. Members of hate groups may, sadly, be present in all manners of other social or spiritual groups, but this need not mean that any one of those other groups are necessarily predisposed to its ilk.

Devyn Christopher Gillette
Rutgers University

Dana Kramer-Rolls writes:

Jeffrey Kaplan, in his study of Savitri Devi stated that 1) she had a deep appreciation for nature, and 2) she was taken with the German National Socialist party, and therefore 3) deep appreciation of nature has a ‘dark side.’ This is a classic case of an undistributed middle.

To conceptualize her position, we must note that nature romanticism was not confined to the National Socialists. Rousseau’s noble savage, the English romantic movements in everything from poetry to garden design, and the German Goethe-inspired mythopoetics and Beethoven-inspired orchestral music had already swept the European consciousness. The ‘invention’ of folklore, through the linguistic work of the Grimms and later in the Finnish tradition spearheaded by Krohn and Aarne, had demonstrated the links between the Vedic and Germanic mythos. The discovery of Indo-European proto-language and cultural roots were exciting and heady stuff, and still are. The English armchair anthropologists such as Frazer (who, despite his current fall from grace was a significant intellectual contributor in his day) proposed the first paradigms of comparative mythology. Even the Soviets put their oar in with the structural

Kaplan argues that it is “inevitable” that nature spirituality will close a link between itself and social phenomena such as National Socialism. I will argue that mysticism applied to counter industrial consciousness need not necessarily connect itself with the far right, as Goodrick-Clarke (quoted by Kaplan) suggests. Indeed, the fusion between such mysticism and the women’s movement (eg, Eisler) may illustrate that connections with the social left are perhaps equally, if not more, likely.

formalism of Vladimir Propp and his Goethe-inspired surface narrative structure of the heroic fairy tale.

In science, evolutionary theory had alerted the world to the diversity and fragility of life. Without modern molecular genetics and shaped by a basically white, male, hierarchical culture, evolution was seen as determinate. Things didn’t just change; they got better. That same sort of determinism was also evident in anthropology where crypto-evolutionary schemes proclaimed the superiority of monotheism over polytheism or animism, monogamy over other types of breeding structure, cities over villages, kings over consensual leaders. That was the mind set into which Devi was born.

Regarding Devi’s anti-Semitism, in Europe Jews had been scapegoats for a millenium. Medieval tales about evil Jews and urban legends about Jewish cultic practice were as common as corn flakes. Neither Hitler nor Devi invented anti-Semitism. I would venture that a surprising number of Oxford dons and Paris professors held Jews in as much contempt, but were too civilized

to say anything about it. That is not to say that the Nazi policy of ethnic cleansing wasn’t reprehensible, but not so different than the subtle discrimination of the civilized world. Anti-Semitism did not cause Devi’s nature theology, nor was her anti-Semitism caused by her love of animals. Kaplan has not demonstrated any logical line of transmission.

The Nazis were masters at spin and display. I was told by a friend (and fellow Jew) who spent her Dutch childhood in hiding that she and her young friends used to sneak peeks at the Nazi magazines because they were so glamorous. The degree to which the slickness of the bread and circus presentations drew a crowd simply cannot be assessed from this historical distance. Devi was not the only one to be drawn into the illusion. So now we have Devi, a classical product of Indo-European scholarship, disillusioned with a religion that has serious flaws, taken against a holistic ecological or cosmological background, who is enchanted by political movement which exudes glamour. And that is all. She is a

Devi liked animals more than people. There is much to be said for this, especially in the face of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, the slavery of women in Afghanistan, the mutilations and murders in Sierra Leon and half of the rest of Africa, and the wonton murder of endangered animals such as tigers for trophies or aphrodisiacs. The list goes on and it doesn't speak well for humanity. Deep ecology and nature religions which do not deify Homo Sapiens may be the only way we will all get out of the next millenium alive.

product of her own history, a woman who probably meant well and was unable to shift her position after the war because of shame, or loyalty, or lack of flexibility, or some other purely personal reason. And that is the basis on which a Fulbright Bicentennial Professor of American Studies is pitching a warning against nature religion!

The fact that Hitler liked animals (and vegetables) is good. That doesn't make Hitler's actions in WW II good. Devi liked animals more than people. There is much to be said for this, especially in the face of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, the slavery of women in Afghanistan, the mutilations and murders in Sierra Leon and half of the rest of Africa, and the wonton murder of endangered animals such as tigers for trophies or aphrodisiacs. The list goes on and it doesn't speak well for humanity.

Deep ecology and nature religions which do not deify *Homo Sapiens* may be the only way we will all get out of the next

millenium alive. If hopes for a better human race and a better world were warped into a doctrine of mass murder, that is no reason to attack "sentimental love of animals" and concern for nature. Yes, there are liberal 'Nazis' as well as conservative 'Nazis.' There are those who have squandered political sensitivity to absurd levels of political correctness, and whose frustration and youth have led them to high profile proactive stances. That is not the point here. What is the point is Kaplan's lack of critical thinking and his bias couched as academic research. If Kaplan is afraid of nature or pagans, that is his problem, but to use his academic clout to demean the attempts by many others who are still fighting an uphill battle against Christian elitism is not just poor scholarship but poor judgement. I was hopeful when the AAR established the New Religious Movements Group but if it is going to be another excuse for pagan bashing or snobbish sneering at Hindu or Buddhist par-

adigms, we are not being well served.

Regarding "Odinism," while there are neo-Nazis who are attracted to Norse religion because of the National Socialist interest in it, there are also a great number of contemporary scholars and pagan/heathen practitioners who by faith or intellectual interest find a relatively intact non-Christian but European pagan religion to be of some personal value (see Jenny Blain, "Seithr and Seithrworkers: Recovering shamanic practice in contemporary Heathenism," *The Pomegranate* 6 (1998):6-19).

Dana Kramer-Rolls
PhD candidate
Graduate Theological Union
Berkeley, California

Cara Hoglund writes:

I'm a practicing Norse Wiccan/Asatru and my most recent undergrad and grad fieldwork experience has been on Norse Wiccan, Asatru, and Odinists groups. I must say that Jeffery Kaplan's books about Asatru and Odinism have proved extremely helpful and informative. I have not been able to find anything similar to Kaplan's thorough and in-

depth history of Asatru and the other Nordic groups of the movement before or since. In addition to putting the movement into perspective along with the growth of the Wiccan movements, it also made it easier for me to differentiate between the two movements. I think that finally being given the "roots" has been the most rewarding part of his writings, for me at least.

On the negative side, I did feel that his fieldwork and writing leaned a bit too far into the "gossipy" and sensational parts of that history, focusing in-depth on the careers of a few individuals and analyzing and displaying those individuals in a manner that he would not have been able to get away with in analyzing, say, a Christian folk church. On the whole, though, his writings are interesting to read and fill in a lot of connections between groups while providing further food for thought.

Cara Hoglund
Graduate in Folk Studies
Western Kentucky University

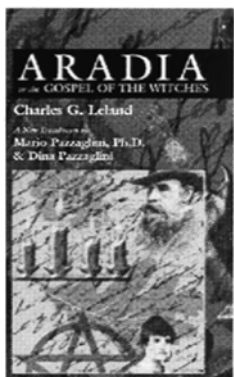


The Pomegranate

Announces the establishment of an awards program intended to encourage Neopagan Scholarship.

The recipient of this \$200 grant will be a full-time University undergraduate student in the last 2 years of a 4 year program leading to a Baccalaureate Degree in a related field: Anthropology, Archaeology, Religious Studies, Theology, etc.

Please apply in writing with transcript before July 1, 1999 to: **The Pomegranate**, 501 Thompson Mill Rd, Corbett, OR 97019



NEW!

Phoenix Publishing

Softcover, 5-1/2 x 8-1/2, 480
pages \$21.50

To order please send check or
money order for \$24.50
(includes \$3 postage) to
Phoenix Publishing, Box
3829, Blaine, Wa 98231
www.phoenixpublishing.com

Aradia

or The Gospel of the Witches

Expanded Edition

This special edition features contributions by several eminent writers:

Mario Pazzaglini, PhD, whose family origins on both sides are deeply rooted in the area where *Aradia* originated, has spent 25 years working on a new translation. He gives a line-by-line transcription showing where Leland made his original errors as a result of his lack of comprehension of the dialect of the area. The new translation is then presented in the same format as the original edition (which is also included here). Mario's research notes are included as well.

Robert Mathiesen, PhD, has been a member of the faculty of Brown University for over 30 years. During the last decade most of his research has been on the historical development of magical theories and practices in Europe and the Americas from the Middle Ages to the present. He writes on the origins of *Aradia*, including the culture and religion of the area, as well as the difficulties involved in translating the book.

Chas Clifton has been studying witchcraft and the occult for over 25 years and has a long list of published books to his name including *Modern Rites of Passage, Witchcraft and Shamanism*, and *Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance*. He writes on the significance of *Aradia* on the revival of modern witchcraft.

The foreword by Stewart Farrar includes a short biography of Leland.

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

continued from page 1

others. Copies of this issue are available for \$20US from Ethnologies, CELAT, Pavillion Charles DeKoninck, Université Laval, Quebec, Canada, G1K 7P4.

We would also like to direct your attention to page 55, where we announce the first phase of *The Pomegranate's* newly inaugurated Neopagan scholarship program. If you qualify, or are interested in more details, please write.

In our 5th issue, Jenny Gibbons deplored the fact that scholarly books like

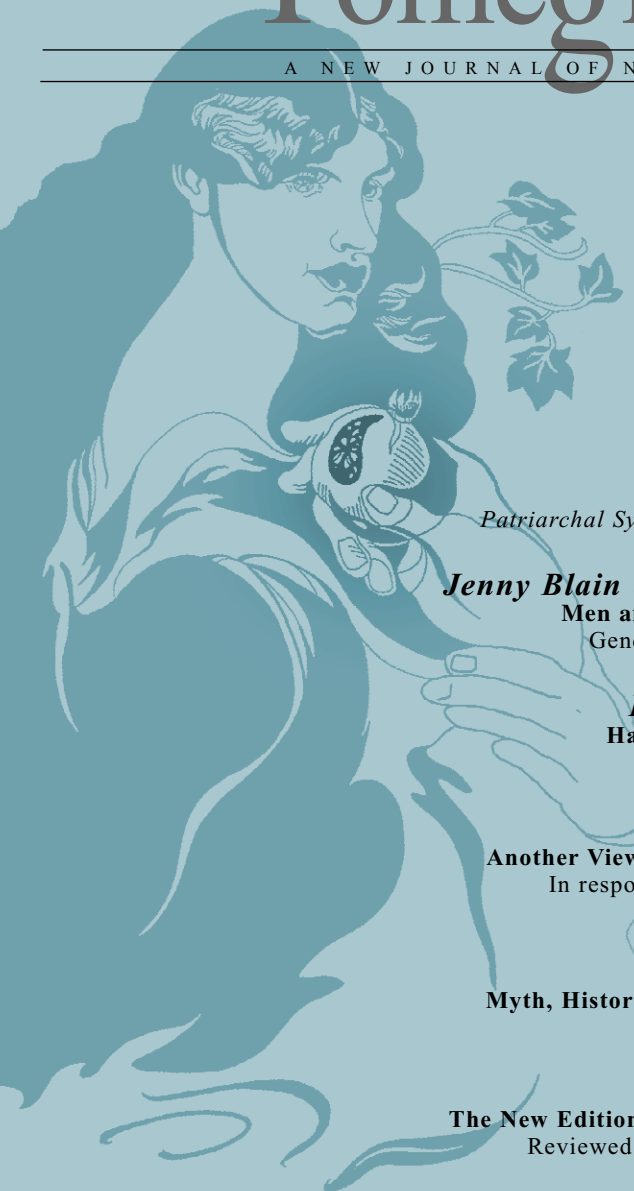
Levack's *Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* are notable in their absence from Pagan bookstores, while popular (and 'deeply flawed') books like Barstow's *Witch-craze* are readily available. I'm happy to report that at least one store, Shambala, in Berkeley, not only carries Levack but also offers a wide selection of other excellent books including related titles by Ankarloo, Bengt & Henningsen, Robin Briggs, Norman Cohn, Diane Purkiss, and James Sharpe. Mention *The Pom* when you call or visit.

Persephone's hard-working minions.



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Readers' Forum 2
Patriarchal Symbolism, Typography

Jenny Blain & Robert Wallis 4
Men and 'Women's Magic'
Gender, Seidhr and 'Ergi'

Donald H. Frew 17
Harran: Last Refuge of
Classical Paganism

Max Dashu 30
Another View of the Witch Hunts
In response to Jenny Gibbons

Essay 44
Myth, History and Pagan Origins
John Michael Greer

Book Review 51
The New Edition of Leland's *Aradia*
Reviewed by Sabina Magliocco



The Pomegranate

COPYRIGHT

© 1999 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate
is published Quarterly.

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

4 issues: \$16US — 8 issues: \$30US
by surface mail anywhere.

Send US Cash, Checks drawn on US banks,
or Money Orders in US funds to

The Pomegranate
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019
email: antech@teleport.com

DEADLINE:

The Solstice or Equinox preceding
each issue.

Editorial email:

fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca

See the inside back cover for our Call
for Papers. Send to the above address
for our Writers' Guidelines,
or read it on our website:
www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/

THE COVER:

Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

CO-EDITORS:

Fritz Muntean
Diana Tracy

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:

Chas S. Clifton

EDITORIAL BOARD:

Maggie Carew
Stephen McManus

EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE:

Melissa Hope
Sîân Reid
Angeline Kantola

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

It is with great pleasure that we welcome back Jenny Blain and Robert Wallis, whose work first appeared in our Fall 98 issue. In this instance, they are the co-authors of an article on the fascinating subject of seidhrwork and gender. Those of us who are (still!) running into people who believe that only women can be Witches will be interested in the parallels between this all-too-common misunderstanding and the challenges faced by Heathen men who engaged in the oracular practice of seidhr.

In the earliest days of Neopaganism, nearly all of us believed that the basic elements of our religion were descended from either Classical Paganism or Neolithic tribal practices, and that these had survived in Europe alongside the official state religion for a millennium or so, only to be ruthlessly and (almost) completely wiped out by the terrors of the Inquisition. Subsequent, however, to the publication of Brian Levack's *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* in 1987, and Aidan Kelly's *Crafting the Art of Magic* in 1991, these beliefs have generally fallen out of favour, at least among the majority of educated Neopagans.

Two senior Pagan scholars, Donald Frew and Max Dashu, have continued to resist this trend, and we are happy to be able to present articles by both of them, written especially for *The Pomegranate* at our request. Frew, well known for his critiques of Kelly (and more recently of Ronald Hutton and Jacqueline Simpson; see the most recent issue of

Ethnologies), writes about a hitherto unsuspected vector for the transmission of religious ideas and sacred texts from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Europe by way of the Islamic center of scholarship at Harran. Dashu writes in response to Jenny Gibbon's article in our Summer 98 issue, questioning the new models of the Witch Hunt which are being proposed by social historians such as Robin Briggs, Norman Cohn, and Brian Levack. Those who wish to learn more about the work of Ms Dashu and her Suppressed History Archives should refer to the bio sketch on p 43.

We have followed these articles with an essay on the difference(s) between myth and history by John Michael Greer, co-author of the now-famous (or infamous) 'Red God' article that appeared recently in *Gnosis* magazine.

The new edition of Leland's *Aradia* is reviewed here by Sabina Magliocco. Further reviews or letters about this landmark publishing event are actively encouraged.

We mentioned in the introduction to our previous issue that no one had yet commented on our new layout and typeface. We've received several responses since that time—one of which appears in our letters column—and as a result we have returned to a denser typeface, while maintaining our two-column layout. We have also reversed the previous trend toward longer and longer call outs, restricting ourselves to short quotes surrounded by more 'air'. We hope you continue to enjoy our evolving appearance, and we welcome your comments and suggestions.

Persephone's hard-working minions.

The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.

CARMELLA HUGGINS WRITES:

Dear Pomegranate Readers,

I was greatly impressed by Professor Salomonsen's recent article [*Pom* 8, Spring '99] on the difficulties facing those conducting research in 'Modern Magical Communities'. The efforts she went to, as well as the thoughtful insights she arrived at, are a credit not only to her own wit and character, but also to the way the scholarly process is supposed to work, IMHO, and often does.

Although Salomonsen's article mainly addresses the methodological problems she encountered, my attention was drawn to the issue she raises in her introductory remarks: the essentially masculine nature of the ritual symbolism in use, not only by Reclaiming, but throughout much of the modern Pagan community. Her closing comments on the subject were welcome and informative, and if there's anything more she has to say on this subject—something that may have found its way into her thesis, for example—I, for one, would be most interested to see it.

For several years now, I have heard and read others, both inside and outside of the magical community, express similar opinions: not only is Neopagan Witchcraft in

general, and feminist Witchcraft in particular, carrying what Salomonsen refers to as "the heavy patriarchal burden of romantic gender essentialism", for the most part we are also largely "only replacing one patriarchal tradition (Judeo-Christian religion) with another (Western occultism)". But if this is true, how can it be, as Salomonsen's respondent asks, that feminist Witchcraft continues to provide so much enrichment and empowerment to so many?

The answer to this question may lie in a more careful consideration of what greater access to 'enrichment and empowerment' actually implies. Here's a quote on the subject from Sukie Colgrave, the British Jungian writer:

Instead of urging a new and wider definition of thinking and feeling to include both the masculine and feminine principles, [American feminists] have largely restricted their demands to securing equal rights to develop the masculine thinking and feeling sides of their nature ... By doing this, women may win a more respected place in society, but the strength of the consciousness which exalts masculine thinking over feminine thinking, and all thinking over feeling will remain intact (*The Spirit of the Valley: The Masculine & Feminine in Human Consciousness*, J Tarcher, 1979, p. 91).

If the purpose of the exercise is to appropriate more political power, more access to material rewards, and more personal safety for women, then there can be little question that the most effective way of achieving these ends is through the aggressive use of masculine energy.

Even if the rhetoric surrounding these activities is couched in terms of what Salomonsen refers to as "the consciousness of human rights and its gospel of social constructionism", it doesn't require much in the way of psychological insight—or knowl-

edge of 20th century history—to know how hard it is to actively resist something as powerful as the patriarchy without becoming part of it in the process. This is particularly true if what pass for feminist aspirations are little more than a wish to extend the many, obvious benefits of patriarchal society to wider circles of women.

This process of appropriating patriarchal consciousness—and magic—for women, rather than working to undermine it on a cultural basis as it effects both women and men, may be effectively guaranteeing the victory of patriarchalism.

Carmella Huggins
Toronto, Ontario

SÍÂN REID WRITES:

I received the Beltaine issue in the mail today. Your editorial noted that no one had commented on your format change. Well, let me be the first then. I don't like it.

I understand that because of cost and space limitations, you needed to pick a smaller, more compact font than the one you

were previously using; I just don't like the one you've picked. I find it too rounded, slightly script-like, and more difficult to read. Two small, serif, compact fonts I think would make better text are Garamond and Palatino.

I also think that your call outs are too long and narrow. In general terms, I was taught that a call out should be four lines deep, max. Some of them look as though you've made a hole in the top of the page, and just sort of poured the text in. Could you make them wider, and fit the text around them, with, say, a one point line above and below to separate them from the text?

Just thoughts ... I know it is a big job to do this stuff, even when it is on a computer, and I probably shouldn't be so critical, but I think your other issues looked a whole lot better than this last one ...

Síân Reid
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario



Pomegranate

Announces the establishment of an awards program intended to encourage Neopagan Scholarship.

The recipient of this \$200 grant will be a full-time University undergraduate student in the last 2 years of a 4 year program leading to a Baccalaureate Degree in a related field: Anthropology, Archaeology, Religious Studies, Theology, etc.

Please apply in writing before October 1, 1999 to:
The Pomegranate, 501 Thompson Mill Rd, Corbett, OR 97019

Men and 'Women's Magic': Contested Narratives of Gender, Seidhr, and 'Ergi'

by Jenny Blain,
Dalhousie University
and Robert Wallis,
University of Southampton

INTRODUCTION

'Seidhr' is a particular form of practice, broadly 'shamanistic' in nature, within Nature-religions based on Northern European traditions. This article is the work of an anthropologist and an archaeologist, who are discovering seidhr in different ways and from different locations, talking with seidhworkers and engaging with various forms of participation and observation. Here we examine some accounts of seidhworkers, from present and past: today's interviews, and the sagas written around 800 years ago that purport to describe activities of 1000 years ago. The intent is to display some of the interweaving of narratives within the accounts of the present, and hint at how the discursive construction of 'seidhr' as gendered practice provides, for at least some of those who undertake it, a means of resistance to dominant gender paradigms.

SEIDHR AS WOMEN'S MAGIC

seidhr appears in accounts from the past, in the Norse Sagas and Eddic poems, most often as a female activity, 'women's magic', involving trance-journeying to

gain knowledge of the future, or influence perception, thought or action. Male seidhworkers (seidhmenn) were spoken of as 'ergi', a term of insult relating to behaviour seen as 'unmanly'. Over the time of writing of the Sagas (approximately the 12-14th centuries CE) seidhr and other forms of magical practice seem to have been increasingly devalued and proscribed by church and state authorities, re-emerging within the late 20th century search for spiritual and cultural 'roots' and awakening of 'alternative' spiritualities.

One of the best known of the Icelandic sagas, Eiríks saga Rauða, holds an account of the seeress fiorbjörg who comes to a Greenland farm to prophesy. From this account, much of the formal ritual of today's oracular seidhr practice has been derived (Blain, 1999). Her divination, or prophesy, was aided by 'powers' or 'spirits' (nátúrur, from Latin *naturae*), and she entered a trance stage, assisted by the singing of a special song. This divinatory practice was not the only 'magical' component of what a seidhworker might do, but it was the one which most obviously resembled the trance-journeying of shamanistic practice elsewhere. Other components might include shapeshifting, and drawing on the spirit world to help or harm others. It is not clear precisely which activities were covered by the term 'seidhr', and it is likely that the meaning of the term changed over time. In this paper we use 'seidhr' as a convenient name for shamanistic activities, in the knowledge that other terms may have been used. Old Norse was not lacking in such terms: *ffölkunnigr* 'much-knowing', *hamramr* 'shapestrong', *völva* a woman who could see the future, and so forth. It is pos-

sible that seidhr at one time referred specifically to the seeking of the assistance of spirits, in trance. Our usage in the paper parallels current usage within the communities that are attempting to re-construct seidhr-practices today.

Definitions of shamanic practice vary. Eliade's (1964) outline of the 'shamanic complex' is still widely used, including several major components—primarily the ecstasy gained by means of ascent to the sky, or descent to underworlds, in trance. Often shamanism is described as a potentially-universal phenomenon, a 'shamanic complex' experienced by individuals, to be elaborated or explained in terms of individual spirituality or psychology. Oosten, however, comments (1984: 377) that:

Many authors have described the shamanistic complex as a religious phenomenon ... mainly interested in the origin and the essence of the shamanistic complex and they were less concerned with its social dimensions. For the anthropologist of religion, however, these social dimensions are of crucial importance in order to understand the cultural significance of shamanism.

Examining the history of shamanism and its study shows that 'shamanism' is an extremely problematic term. It is derived from the Tungus word 'sama:n' (Pentikäinen 1998). In the eighteenth century various Mandchu-Tungus language speaking 'tribes' in central Siberia who named their ecstatic practitioners 'sama:n', were encountered by German explorers (Flaherty 1992). The roles of these individuals varied, however, even among this handful of peoples: 'shamans' were not all the same (Hoppál, pers com). While Westerners used terms from their own languages to describe these 'sama:n', such as 'wizard'

in English, by the end of the 18th century, 'Schaman' and the verb 'schamanen' had become the generic terms (Flaherty 1992).

In this way, 'shaman-ism' was born, originally a culture-specific term, extracted, essentialised and universalised into the Westernism we know today (Wallis, in prep.). Therefore, 'shamanism' is whatever the definer wants it to be; no wonder academics find discrete definition elusive and scholars such as Eliade have been criticised for their definitions. Shamanism can still be a useful term though, but definition confines interpretation, where another approach might be more appropriate. Dowson's "Elements of Shamanism" (in press) embrace diversity to avoid the metanarratives definition embodies. Techniques of trance are embedded in specific social relations: shamans enter a trance in order to engage with a spirit world, and this role is socio-politically supported by the community. By focusing on the socio-politics of shamanism, as well as 'techniques' or activities in the spirit world, we can discern cross-cultural difference as well as similarity. The ways that shamans' roles are sanctioned by their communities show how different shamanisms are across the world. The study of shamanism in this way is not monolithic (searching for the same thing everywhere, across space and time) because it emphasises difference. Neither is it vague: the shaman assumes very specific social/spiritual activities.

seidhr, we think, was a shamanistic practice, involving aspects of shamanism as described above; but not necessarily 'shamanic' because the communities of the time did not have 'shamanic religion'. The reconstruction of seidhr today may be

said to be also shamanistic, but not shamanic, for the same reasons. We treat seidhr as shamanistic practice embedded within culture, and within discourses (past and present) of gender and ‘appropriate’ behaviour. This is an explicitly sociohistoric approach in which shamanistic prac-

the literature is full of the concept of magic-workers, what these might do, who they should be, and how others should treat them. seidhr may not be central to the community, but its practice is still community practice, based in cultural possibilities for women and men. Today seidhr is

hwoman or völvu seems one that was generally acknowledged. Jochens says that:

... these narratives ... give credence to a historic reality of prophetesses among pagan Germanic-Nordic tribes. Equally important, the literary proliferation of the sibyls in the thirteenth century suggests that they were part of the contemporary perception of pagan times. (Jochens 1996: 116)

These women may be portrayed ambiguously: later accounts of the (historic) queen Gunnhildr—a woman exercising power in a man’s world—are from her opponents’ point of view (Blain 1998). The later-written romances and sagas of ‘old times’ (*fornaldursögur*) deal with the fantastical, and the seeresses become stock figures, the ‘wicked witch’ of more recent folk-tales. In these fantastic stories seidhr or magical practice is increasingly portrayed as evil (Jochens 1996).

References to men as seidhworkers are fewer, but they do exist. Thus, we are told in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* that “*fiorgrímr hastened to his seidhr and built a scaffolding and worked fjölkyngi with all ergi and skelmiskáp (devilry) ...*” (Ch. 10). Kotkell of *Laxdæla saga* uses both seidhr and galdr (sung spells, often associated with rune magic), more often associated with men. There, however, seidhr and galdr appear entwined together—Kotkell builds a seidhr-platform, ascends it, and with his sons chants galdr to raise a storm.

One of the half-brothers of Eiríkr Blóðøx (*Gunnhild’s* husband), is described as a seidhmadhr, Rögnvaldr rettilbeini, put to death by his half-brother and father, along with 80 other seidhmenn, for reasons that may have more to do with politics than religion.

The account of Óðinn’s performance of seidhr, from *Ynglingasaga*, repeats the

negative association of the term ‘ergi’, for men who are seidhworkers:

But after such witchcraft followed such weakness and anxiety [ergi], that it was not thought respectable for men to practice it; and therefore the priestesses were brought up in this art. (trans., Samuel Laing, London, 1844)

In reading these accounts, it is necessary to place them in context, historical, cultural and political. The accounts were written long after the occurrences they purport to describe, within a christianized Iceland which was part of the European political system. They say more about discourses of magical or shamanic practice in the 13th century than in the 10th. Reading them, we do not know how the people of the 10th century considered seidhr, and it seems unlikely that one view would have prevailed. The accounts themselves are at times supportive, at times critical—and often magic is mentioned when it is performed against the leading figures of the sagas. Context and description may be capable of multiple interpretation, as for instance in the verse about Heidhr from *Völuspá*:

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| Heidi hana hétu | hvar er til húsa kom, |
| völu velspáa, | vitti hún ganda; |
| seidh hún kunni, | seidh hún leikin, |
| æ var hún angan | illrar brúðhar. |

(Kuhn (1962):*Völuspá* 22)

This verse is conventionally interpreted negatively, chiefly from the last line, translated approximately as “ever was she welcome / to evil women.” Recently it has been suggested by several people within Heathenism (notably Jörmundur Ingi, head of the Ásatrúarmenn in Iceland), that the words of this line could bear an alternative interpretation, ‘ever she was welcome to women in trouble’. Indeed, if the phrase ‘illrar brúðhar’ is taken literally, it

Seidhr appears ... most often as a female activity ... Male seidhworkers (seidhmenn) were spoken of as ‘ergi’, a term of insult relating to behaviour seen as ‘unmanly’.

tice cannot be understood apart from its ‘social dimensions’; including how seidhworkers were regarded, and regarded themselves, within specific cultural and historical contexts of the 10-12th centuries CE, and the present-day, late 20th century revivals of heathenism in North America and the UK.

Interestingly, seidhr is different from other forms of shamanistic practices because not all of the community accepts or is happy with the practice of it. seidhr has certain connotations which people (past or present) find unacceptable. It is also under-studied in academia, as are neo-shamanisms generally, because researchers (particularly archaeologists) avoid ‘religion’ in the past due to a perceived lack of evidence: a kind of ‘shamanophobia’ (Dowson 1996).

In the sagas, seidhr appears as a somewhat marginal phenomenon, and the seidhworker is often feared, or set apart from the community in some way. Old Norse society and religion were not, apparently, ‘shamanic’. However, on closer inspection

being re-invented as community practice, as part of ‘Northern European’ religion known as Heathenism or Ásatrú.

In the sagas, seidhr appears primarily as women’s magic: *Ynglingasaga* holds that the first practitioner of seidhr was Freyja, who taught this magic to the Æsir. In the Eddic poems, we meet the völvu, or prophetess who speaks the great poem *Völuspá* (the speaking of the seeress), and Heidhr (who may be Freyja herself, or may be another name for the völvu who is speaking). Freyja in the poem *Lokasenna* is described as ‘fordædha’, a word for a (usually evil) magic working-woman. In the sagas, in addition to *fiorbjörg* the seeress of *Eiríkr the Red’s* saga, numerous women are described as *seidhkonur* (seidhwomen), or as illusion-workers or shape-shifters (Blain 1999). Some of these sagas deal with the everyday lives of Icelanders, and while they were composed some two centuries after the episodes they purport to record, people are portrayed in them as engaging in activities of a fairly usual kind, so that the concept of the seid-

could suggest Heidhr as a midwife, doing her magic for the relief of young women in labour. The verse then would become:

Heidhr she was called
when to houses she came
a völvu well-forespeaking,
staffs enchanting
seidhr she knew,
seidhr performing in trance
ever she was welcome to women in need.

It is possible that at the time of composition the verse was ambiguous, perhaps deliberately so. Today, the verse is quoted by scholars and some Heathens as evidence of the ‘evil’ image of seidhr and of those who performed it.

Finally, although we have not seen this discussed elsewhere, there remains a possibility that the mostly-female gendering of ‘seidhr’ in the literature relates in part to connections with Sámi shamanism. The Sámi of the time of the sagas were a truly shamanic people, foragers and fishers engaging in small-scale reindeer breeding and developing trade links with their Norse neighbours, with large-scale reindeer herding being a later development (Hultkrantz 1994). In repeated instances, Norse women are described as trained by ‘Finnish sorcerers’, generally considered to have been Sámi shamans—Gunnhildr being the most obvious example. Recent Sámi shamanism was gendered: their shamans were male, often with female assistants. Elsewhere gendering of shamanistic practice is quite common, for instance most San shamans are male (Katz 1981), Korean shamans are mainly female (Kendal 1996). Is there a possible link between the mostly male gendering of Sámi shamans and the mostly female gendering of seidhworkers of the sagas, coming from a non-shamanic community

to be trained as ‘assistants’ in a shamanic one? This can of course only be speculative. Additionally, in saga times the strict gendering of Sámi shamanism may have been less, as ‘Finn’ women are spoken of in the sagas as working shamanistic magic, though it is not clear that they were doing so on behalf of the community as the mediator between people and spirits. Sámi shamans, on the other hand, were acting as specialists, for the community (Pentikäinen 1984). (It is not suggested here that all seidhr is derived from Sámi practices; as Hultkrantz (1992) points out this has been raised in the literature but never demonstrated. Here we imply only that by saga times ‘Finns’ appear to have been seen as teachers of seidhwomen.)

MEN WHO DO SEIDHR TODAY

Today’s seidhworkers draw directly on accounts from the Sagas and Eddas. They are in a sense living the stories, inserting themselves into their narratives in attempting to reconstruct seidhr-practice. These reconstructions are challenged both within and without the community of Heathens, by those who say there is little evidence for seidhr, that the details are not known or that in any case seidhr was ‘evil magic’, done primarily to effect ill fortune. In reply, seidhworkers point to links between their practice and other forms of shamanic journeying, healing and divination. This, then, is a debate about narrative and meaning, occurring within a framework of reconstructed spirituality and religious belief. Yet the reconstruction takes place within a late twentieth-century world, using its discourses and assumptions about gender, magic, ‘evil’, religion and shamanism, which may be very far

removed from the discourses and assumptions of 10th century practitioners.

Today’s seidhworkers have read the saga material, they know the reputation of seidhr and the taunts of ‘ergi’ that were applied even to the god Óðinn (the master magician, who we are told had the greatest knowledge of seidhr). Yet for sei-

time jobs, social connections outside Heathenism, families or partners. Within Heathenism, they regard themselves as community workers—though ‘community’ may include not only human people but animals, plants, deities, land-spirits, and, at times, ghosts. Their work may include divination (high-seat seidhr, or the

Kotkell of Laxdæla saga uses both seidhr and galdr (sung spells, often associated with rune magic), more often associated with men. There, however, seidhr and galdr appear entwined together ...

dhworkers, their work is integral to identity formation. Here we examine narrative accounts of four present-day male seidhworkers, with different degrees of experience of seidhwork and for whom the meanings of ‘seidhr’ differ, and discuss how they speak of their entry into seidhr and how their seidhwork is implicated in identity construction.

For example, Jordsvin speaks of what seidhr means for him, in general:

It has enriched my life ... And, ah, I am satisfied it’s real. I’m happy with it. It, it seems to be a service to the community. Do I enjoy doing it? Yeah. I like my animal spirits, I visit with them. Ah, I like the journey work, I’ve gotten directions through the underworld journey, on how to get to see Ran and Eir and how to see the Svartalfar and their forges ... (Jordsvin 1996)

This sense of enrichment is echoed by others. So, how do they reconcile the reputation of seidhr with their everyday lives? For these people are not thrill-seekers, not attempting to shock the uninitiated (or ‘freak the mundanes’). They have day-

trance journey in quest of answers to specific questions of others), mental-health work, healing, dealing with spirits, ‘unhaunting’ on behalf of others, and particularly for Bil, the seidhman who comes closest to the model of classical shamanism, working with those who are dying, to ease their spiritual transition.

Yet they have read the literature, and know the reputation. They point out that while many people within the Heathen community have an interest in seidhr, and may engage in solitary journeying, relatively few—and fewer men—are anxious to learn to become community seidhworkers.

Here we return to the epithet ‘ergi’ applied to male seidhworkers, among others. Often this has been glossed by scholars and Heathens alike as ‘passive homosexual’, and various colourful descriptions of imagined seidhr activity have been given to account for it (e.g. Jochens 1996: 74). Within Ásatrú, some have expressed the opinion that ‘seidhr is

... [many] have interpreted 'ergi' in terms of rejection of conventional masculine ideology, including, today, rejection of violence as a first line approach to dealing with interpersonal problems.

for women and gay men' (quoted from an email discussion on an Ásatrú mail list). This is tinged with homophobic implications. That heathenism is not immune to the homophobia of the wider society is evident from Jordsvin's experiences.

I occasionally get bigoted rants via email, usually from young males high on testosterone and bravado, usually with blatant homophobic content. Large sections of the Heathen community really need some education on this matter. (Jordsvin)

Homophobic implications may extend to all male seidhworkers. One seidhman says:

Having been practicing seidhr for a good while now, the 'ergi' accusation gets thrown at me on a regular basis, usually with some very uneducated and childish interpretations along with it. (Malcolm)

While there are indeed gay male seidhworkers, they do not define the field. Jordsvin, a trained seidhworker, is now assisting in training others, female and male, gay and straight. He says:

The concept of sexual orientation *per se* is a modern one. There do seem to be references in the lore connecting men who do seidhr with men who have sex with men, more specifically, men who are in the receptive role during such activities. Obviously, this should not be an excuse for bigotry against gay people today. Gay men and women seem often to show a knack for seidhr, but heterosexual men can and do learn it and do it quite well.

Interpretations of the old material, 'the lore', are not constant, however, even

among today's seidhworkers. As Bil points out:

That seidhr was not much liked during the late Viking era is quite obvious ... I can think of several things about seidhr that people could find disgusting (Ódhinn's little practice of necromancy probably raised a few eyebrows). To call something an aberration or a name which indicates unusual (to the average public) sexual practice when it is disliked by a group of people is a fairly common thing among the various Germanic peoples and Europeans at large. 'Homosexual' is used as a common insult... (Bil)

Malcolm, who suggested this topic for research, pointed out that 'ergi' may have a broader meaning than specifically sexual behaviour. He and others have interpreted 'ergi' in terms of rejection of conventional masculine ideology, including, today, rejection of violence as a first line approach to dealing with interpersonal problems. There can be many speculations as to reasons for the application of the epithet in the past. It may have had the primary meaning of 'coward', which a related word still has to present-day Scots.

In the poem Lokasenna, Ódhinn and Loki use the epithet 'argr' of each other. Opinions differ in the Heathen community on how this should be interpreted. On the one hand, as the accusation against Loki relates specifically to sexual activity, it is claimed that the meaning is to become 'like a woman' or to be 'used' 'like a woman'. (Loki changed into a mare, and

bore a foal.) This links with the interpretation of argr or ergi as involving sexual contact, 'passive' or 'receptive' homosexuality, so that when Loki states:

Enn flic seidha kóðho Sámseyo í
oc draptu á vött sem völor;
vitca líki fórtu veflióðh yfir,
oc hugdha ec flat args adhal,

But you once practiced seidhr on Samsey
and you beat on the drum as witches do
(völor, volvas, seeresses)
in the likeness of a wizard (vitki) you
journeyed among mankind
and I thought that showed an ergi nature,¹

the implication is that Ódhinn also had engaged in 'receptive' sexual practices. The counter-argument is that it is not one specific set of behaviours that is referred to, but more generally behaving in ways that would be seen as not within the usually-accepted masculine repertoire. Loki did something that was 'not masculine' (giving birth to a foal) and Ódhinn did something else that was also 'not masculine' (performing seidhr, beating a drum, journeying as a *vitki* or sorcerer, activities associated in that culture with women).

The words 'passive' and 'receptive', in this discourse, are worth an article in themselves, implying as they do a direct equation of homosexual practice with a model of heterosexuality that is heavily reliant on 'active male, passive female' constructions: a 20th century psychological/psychoanalytic elaboration of 19th century ideas about womanhood, severely critiqued from feminist and queer theory approaches today. But they remain part of the discourse of both academics and heathens who read these passages. It may be more useful to regard the word 'ergi' as primarily an insult, that can be used to convey the meaning either of 'homosexual

man' or of 'acted upon sexually' (in the sense in which warriors have been described as treating defeated enemies) but need not definitively state this. Most of the uses of the word, including those in Lokasenna, are of this nature. And this is how it is interpreted by some of the men who perform seidhr today. Bil Linzie says:

... 'effeminism' and cowardice were two character traits which were frowned upon and ... both were lumped into the category of 'ergi'. Also, it is fairly easy to tell that the 7-12th century Norseman used the term as an insult. True connections between the terms 'ergi' and 'seidhr' are speculative at best.

A seidhman in Scotland relates that the word 'argi' is still used there today:

I was challenged (aged 15 or so) to fight someone, and refused, and was accused of being 'argi' ... dealing with it by throwing the attacker into a puddle, and refusing to 'give him a good kicking', was still considered 'argi'. I got the impression that what was meant, was cowardice, in terms of holding back violence considered to be 'appropriate'. My relatively non-violent solution was considered 'argi', just as failure to fight at all was. (Malcolm)

The utterance had the connotation of 'coward, unmanly, not using the resources men are expected to use'. Similarly, the Icelandic terms become a way to site men within discursive concepts of masculinity. Used with a context of present-day Heathenism, they carry mixed messages, and position those who use them, or those of whom they are used, according to the discursive constructions of present-day masculinity. 'Ergi' may still be used as an insult; alternatively it may be used by a practitioner to try to uncover, or explain, the meaning of his seidh-work or the ways in which his identity is changing or developing.

Often this relates directly to the concept

of seidhr as shamanistic practice, in which the seidhworker becomes an intermediary and interpreter between the community of human people and those of spirits, including ancestors and deities, associated with the human community or the land. Many seidhworkers point out that this involves a loss of 'ego' or an abnegation of self or of privilege. Some relate this to the concept of 'ergi'.

My sexuality is heterosexual. I was never approached by the ghosts who follow me to change that in any way. I was, however, severely 'lambasted' for carrying too much of a 'macho attitude' and was forced to make many changes in that area. (Bil)

Let us return to Jordsvin's suggestion that gay men may have an advantage in practicing seidhr, that they may—in his words—be more 'called' to it, be a little better or learn it a little easier'. It may not be that sexuality as such is at issue here, rather that men whose sexuality is ambiguous, or who are marginalized because of sexuality, are in a position where they must attend to levels of meaning that escape from, or that are not obvious to, those privileged by dominant discourses of gender: thus it becomes easier to lose ego-attachment. This has of course been noted elsewhere! Lewis and others have discussed, for instance, spirit possession as a way of reversing conventional power relations, the claiming of power by people who otherwise have little (Lewis 1989). Conversely, feminist scholarship has pointed to needs for those in disprivileged positions to develop multiple ways of understanding the world. Dorothy Smith's 'bifurcated consciousness' comes to mind (Smith 1987). If in today's society women and gay men are more used to dealing with multiple understandings of social rela-

tions, and interpreting one understanding in terms of another, indeed this may constitute an advantage in seidhr, or any form of shamanistic practice.

seidhworkers are anomalous figures, working within a broad cultural framework in which dominant discourse rejects concepts of 'the spirits' or 'deities' and yet within specific contexts or learning paths where spirits or deities are the teachers. There are issues here of suspension of control, for both men and women, but in Western society it has been men who are assumed to 'control'. Within traditional shamanic practice, spirit 'helpers' indicate possibilities or work to be done, set the pace, give directions. These seidhmenn give accounts of working with spirits (in Bil's case, nine ghosts) that could come directly from the anthropological descriptions of shamanic practice—which they have also read.

We conclude this paper as a dialogue. We each have observations and involvements with seidhr practice, bringing our own perspectives to the work. Robert is an archaeologist researching the impact of neo-shamanism on archaeological and anthropological discourses, ancient sites and indigenous peoples. Personal involvement with heathen shamanism requires that he explores the researcher-practitioner position. Jenny has been involved with community development of seidhr practices, as practitioner and researcher. We speak each from where we are, attempting an understanding of shamanistic practice within small-scale religious communities on two continents.

From one perspective (a limited one), ergi can be seen as a man becoming like a woman (a negative perception defining

woman in relation to man rather than in her own right, with obvious negative connotations for men). However our ancestors defined ergi (which may have changed over time from possibly a beneficial experience to a largely undesirable one), ergi

This narrative opens possibilities for interrogation of his transition, and comparison with Bil and Malcolm.

JB: Obviously it's a very personal account and one that will 'make sense' to people who are using the same discursive

Within Ásatrú, some have expressed the opinion that 'seidhr is for women and gay men' ... That heathenism is not immune to the homophobia of the wider society is evident ...

today might better be understood in a wider perspective. The basis of the discussion is the narrative of a man named James, who is discovering himself as a seidhworker, and undergoing and analysing a series of personal transitions in the process. The narrative returns to the contested interpretation of 'ergi'. He says:

For me, seidhr focuses on the 'male' and 'female' deities Woden and Freyja, in rituals of possession. The rituals also involve spirit creatures, including two lynxes, and a berdache. With Freyja, her cats, and the berdache, the experience transcends conventional understandings of gender. At times it can be described as experiencing female, or male, or both. It is always gendered, but sometimes expressing how it is gendered is difficult. This is something I am still learning to come to terms with, explain and interpret.

I think many people (especially men) would find seidhr disturbing because of how it makes them feel (apart from the radical change into shamanic consciousness), going beyond stereotypes of male, female, gay, etc. For me, seidhr with Freyja allows an integrating understanding of what it is to be male, female and other multiple possibilities. That is empowering and affects how I live with my reality, world, local and spiritual communities. It changes who I am.

frame of reference. It's situated knowledge, the account is specific to his situation and to his interaction with his deities. And it's cast as a political statement, a challenge to established gender discourses. A third (or fourth, fifth, sixth) gender, is a political location ... Robert, you've seen the reverse situation, of women doing spirit-possession/god-possession with a male deity. How do you 'read' this in the light of that experience?

RW: The men practicing seidhr today, who speak here, have come to shamanism by diverse roots and their understandings of it vary. We are, after all, living in a multivocal, postmodern society; the 'global village'. Yes, I observed a possession ritual conducted by Diana Paxson and the Hrafnar community in San Francisco. These instances involve possession by Odin for the purpose of divination. It can be described as 'seidhr' because that is what the community names it, and as 'shamanic', since our understanding of shamanism and possession largely agrees with Lewis (1989). Among the Hrafnar, the number of women and gay male par-

participants suggests they certainly had a propensity for seidhr, but there were straight women and men also present who were equally active in the proceedings. It does seem though, that seidhr in all these examples attracts many individuals who are questioning and engaging with what it means to be a gendered being.

... the seiðworker becomes an intermediary ... between the community of human people and those of spirits ... Many seiðworkers point out that this involves a loss of 'ego' or an abnegation of self or of privilege.

First, it provides very particular, even peculiar examples of certain 'heathens' doing unconventional practices—unconventional to their own religious communities and the Western society they live in. Second, it exemplifies some of the difficulties that rigid (Western scientific) definitions of gender involve. Indeed, these and other ethnographic examples reveal difficulties with the definition of berdache, ergi and seidhr in terms of sexuality. Furthermore, our culture is science based and requires categories based on biological sex to understand gender differences. I think however, that most people would object to being defined in terms of what their reproductive strategy is, or who they have sex with. I am sure most people don't think they are adequately described in terms of 'male' and 'heterosexual' (or female, gay, etc). These categories are simply value-laden judgments which marginalise the rest of what makes people who they are.

These Heathen examples of religious

gender reorientation, then, cohere with other ethnographic instances in which sex (defined biologically) loses clarity and standing because cultural view redefines what it is to be male, female and other third, fourth (multiple) genders, in meaningful ways. The dialogues with Malcolm, Jordsvin and James show how Western

people are, within their own religious framework, examining gender and reinterpreting the past. What is more, Western society is having to get to grips with gender issues such as these.

JB: In a sense women may have it a bit easier than men seem to, in terms of seidhr acceptance. Because seidhr was described as female, and is presented as that still today, it's assumed that women seiðworkers can be categorized in ways that are acceptable socially and people get past that into at least some of the rest of 'who they are'. Whereas I've seen Jordsvin pigeonholed, to some extent, as a 'gay man' (which definitely is part of who he is, but doesn't define him or how he does seidhr); and Bil and Malcolm say that these questions arise. It's an example of an intersection of gender and sexuality that many in today's society find very hard to deal with.

I'm seeing this as being much more about gender and power relationships than sexuality, at least in the past—the ways

gender was constructed and used in the creation and maintenance of centralized power, for instance. seidhr was contested and gender was contested, and the insult 'ergi' was used as part of this. And as you point out the word may have earlier held different implication. Now it's part of today's discourse for people in the community and still used politically

RW: Clearly some Heathens have problems with seidhr, ergi and homosexuality, and link these three together. However, this has little to do with the past; they are simply imposing their own western ideas onto what seidhr may have been in the past, and translating that onto contemporary practitioners. Clearly, 'reviving' past religions is a political and contested act, much the same as archaeological approaches are. But today, you don't have to be a woman or gay to practice seidhr, as the experiences of Malcolm, Bil and James attest. That seidhr is empowering and life-transforming for its practitioners and the communities they work with is the important point. Also, they are not appropriating Native American or other indigenous spiritual traditions; they are examining their own pasts. These benefits, unfortunately, seem to be all too often overlooked by homophobic or suspicious spokespersons in both Heathen and academic communities.

JB: Regarding your comments we incorporated earlier about seidhr not being shamanic because it's not accepted by the whole community, though—I'm seeing changes in the community's relation to seidhr, which are interesting. Partly this is because of the ways the Heathen/Ásatrú communities here in North America are developing—those people who are most

uncomfortable with seidhr and 'ergi' also tend often to be those who are most 'folkish' or right-wing and farthest politically from the mainstream. And as the communities are becoming more defined, people who are part of 'mainstream' Heathen practice are becoming much more exposed to seidhr and ideas of seiðworking. Indeed some now say that seidhr is central to their thinking on Heathenism and relations with deities and spirits. This is fascinating—it's an opportunity to watch a potentially shamanic community in process of formation, and defining itself partly in opposition to non-shamanic communities.

CONCLUSION

The meanings that seiðmenn associate with seidhr have arisen from their researches and experiences, and from the ways in which they are treated by the communities within which they are practising or learning. They construct identity through a constant positioning of themselves within a community that can be at times hostile and distrustful of ambiguities, as they develop their community work. In developing their specific shamanistic practices, men and women are actively involved in research, in constituting meaning, in moving among discourses of past and present, even as they move between the worlds, or between realities, in their trance-working. Their lived experiences, therefore, reflect the meanings of the past, conveyed by the stories they have read, but are not defined, or confined, by these, as they interpret their experiences, creating a community within a community, developing and living their own stories today.

NOTE:

1. Locasenna, 24. First three lines from the translation by Carolyn Larrington (1996: 89), Larrington's fourth line gives 'and that I thought the hallmark of a pervert' which while keeping the spirit of 'insult' does so in such a way that it serves as an illustration of what we're saying about academics' assumptions about the word 'ergi'. Old Icelandic from Kuhn (1962).

REFERENCES:

- Blain, J., 1998. "In memory of Gunnhildr". *Idunna*, 37, Yule 1998.
- Blain, J., 1999. "seidhr as Shamanistic Practice: Reconstituting a Tradition of Ambiguity". *Shaman*, 7(2), forthcoming.
- Eliade, Mircea, 1964. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. New York: Pantheon.
- Dowson, T.A., *Shamanism and Diversity of Interpretation in Rock Art Studies*. In Press.
- Dowson, T. A., 1996. Review of Garlake, P. 1995. "The Hunter's Vision: The Prehistoric Rock Art of Zimbabwe". *Antiquity*, 70: 468- 469.
- Flaherty, G., 1992. *Shamanism and the Eighteenth Century*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Hultkrantz, Åke, 1992. "Aspects of Saami (Lapp) Shamanism". In *Northern Religions and Shamanism*, ed. Mihály Hoppál and Juha Pentikäinen. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, and Helsinki: Finnish Literary Society
- Hultkrantz, Åke, 1994. "Religion and environment among the Saami: An ecological study". *Circumpolar Religion and Ecology: An Anthropology of the North*. Ed. Takashi Irimoto and Takako Yamada. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.
- Jochens, Jenny, 1996. *Old Norse Images of Women*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.
- Katz, R., 1981. *Boiling Energy: Community Healing among the Kalahari Kung*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Kendall, L., 1996. "Korean Shamans and the Spirits of Capitalism". *American Anthropologist* 98 (3): 512-527.
- Lewis, I.M., 1989. *Ecstatic Religion: a study of shamanism and spirit possession*. 2 ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- Oosten, J.G., 1984. "The Diary of Therkel Mathiasen, 1922-1922". *Shamanism in Eurasia*. Ed. Mihály Hoppál. 2 vols. Göttingen: Edition Herodot. 2: 377-390.
- Pentikäinen, J., 1984. "The Sámi Shaman—Mediator Between Man and Universe". *Shamanism in Eurasia*. Ed. Mihály Hoppál. 2 vols. Göttingen: Edition Herodot. 1: 125-148.
- Pentikäinen, J., 1998. "The Shamans and Shamanism". *Shamans*. Ed. J. Pentikäinen. Tampere Museums Publications 95, Tampere, Finland.
- Smith, Dorothy E., 1987. *The everyday world as problematic: a feminist sociology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Wallis, R.J., in prep. 'Ancestors are still there. Spirits are still there': Contested Monuments, Conflicting Views, and the polemics of Neo-Shamanism in Southwest USA.

Jenny Blain is an anthropologist teaching at Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia. She is a Heathen shamanist/seidhworker. The current focus of her research is on seidhr shamanisms, gender and contested constructions of meaning and 'identity', and she's exploring ways to investigate these through experiential anthropology and writing (mostly Heathen) poetry. She can be contacted at <jenny.blain@dal.ca>.

Robert J. Wallis is studying for a PhD in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Southampton in England, where he received his BA and an MA in Rock Art. His research interests focus on archaeological and anthropological theory and the inherently political nature of these disciplines. Robert practices shamanism in the Heathen tradition.

Harran: Last Refuge of Classical Paganism

by Donald H. Frew

For many years, I have been researching and writing a book on the subject of the origins of the modern Witchcraft movement. I now believe that a direct line of transmission can be traced from the Hermetic and Neoplatonic theurgy of late antiquity to the beginnings of the modern Craft movement in the 1930s. Of course, any such transmission must be embedded within the wider context of the transmission of Hermeticism in general from the Classical world to the European Renaissance and the beginnings of the Enlightenment.

Anyone looking into this history cannot help but be struck by a glaring gap. At the end of the Pagan world in the latter days of the Roman Empire, so the sources tell us, several Hermetic and Neoplatonic scholars left the Empire to go "to the East". At the beginning of the revival and rediscovery of Classical knowledge in Europe, Classical texts in Arabic translations, including the *Hermetica* (the revealed teachings of Hermes Trismegistus), came back to Europe "from the East". What happened during the 500 or so years in-between? And where "in the East" did classical Greco-Roman knowledge (and possibly classical Greco-Roman Paganism) survive?

One name comes up over and over again: Harran. Even so, there is relatively little information about this ancient city in West-

ern sources. As more and more of my sources pointed to Harran, and in the face of an almost total lack of available information about the city and its people, I resolved to go and see for myself, talk to the local authorities and scholars, and find what I could. Anna Korn and I visited the area in January of 1998. This article incorporates many of our findings.

HARRAN BEFORE THE NEOPLATONISTS

The city of Harran was founded c. 2000 BCE as a merchant outpost of Ur, situated on the major trade route across northern Mesopotamia (Green 1992: 19). The name comes from the Sumerian and Akkadian "Harran-U", meaning "journey", "caravan", or "crossroad" (Kurkcuoglu 1996: 11). For centuries it was a prominent Assyrian city, known for its Temple of Sin, the Moon God (Green 1992: 23). While many modern Pagans may balk at the idea of a Moon God, the people of upper Mesopotamia lived in a different world than do we. Harran is in the middle of a flat, dry plain that was described as a "barren wasteland" even in antiquity, nourished only by its many wells (another possible meaning of "Harran-U" is "broiling heat"). In this baking, desolate landscape, the Sun was an enemy and the Night a comforter. The Moon, the ruler of the Night, must therefore be the supreme deity and therefore, to a patriarchal culture, male. Sin was the giver of fertility and of oracles. In this latter capacity, he also served as kingmaker. Many rulers sought his blessings and confirmation of their reign, endowing the city of Harran and its temples with riches in the process.

As early as the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE, the Harranians established a pilgrimage site at the Giza Plateau in Egypt

(Hassan 1946: 34). In later centuries, they would say that the Pyramids were the tombs of their gods, Idris (Hermes) and Seth (Agathodaimon) (Green 1992: 110, 174, 212).

In the 6th century BCE, after the fall of Nabonidus, Harran was ruled by the Persians until the coming of Alexander the Great. In the 4th century BCE, Alexander conquered the area. After him, Harran was part of the Hellenistic Seleucid Kingdom until the 2nd century BCE, when the Parthians conquered the Seleucids. In the 1st century BCE, the Romans arrived. During this time, Harran passed through many hands, usually at least nominally under foreign authority, but in practice independent. It was during this period that a Roman army led by Crassus was defeated by the Parthians near Harran (called Carrhae by the Romans) in May 53 BCE. It was one of the worst military defeats in Roman history; one the Romans would never forget (Stark 1966: 114-23).

In the 4th century, 363 CE, the last Pagan Emperor Julian stopped at Harran at the beginning of his Persian campaign. He consulted the oracles at the Temple of the Moon (called either "Selene" or "Luna" by Roman historians, reflecting Roman ideas of the Moon's gender). The oracles warned of disaster. Julian ignored the warnings and was killed during the campaign; some say by a Christian in his own ranks (Smith 1976: 114). His body was brought back by way of Harran, and Harran was the only city in the Empire to declare citywide mourning after his death.

This complex history of Harran is important in order to understand the city's even-

I now believe that a direct line of transmission can be traced from the Hermetic and Neoplatonic theurgy of late antiquity to the beginnings of the modern Craft movement.

tual fate. For much of its history, Harran welcomed any would-be conqueror that came along, switching allegiances at the drop of a hat, and so peacefully going on about its own business.

THE COMING OF THE NEOPLATONISTS

By the 6th century, Paganism in the Roman Empire was fighting a losing battle for survival. Pagans had been forbidden to teach, and finally, to sacrifice. Temples were being closed, if not destroyed, all over the Empire. In 529 CE, the Emperor ordered the closing of Academy at Athens, the last true bastion of Pagan learning in the Empire. In response, many Neoplatonists, invited by a Persian monarch who knew the value of philosophers, fled "to the East", specifically, to Harran (Chuvin 1990: 137). There, they founded a Neoplatonic academy that survived at Harran up into the 12th century (Chuvin 1990: 139, 149).

Neoplatonism began as a school of philosophic / spiritual thought in the 3rd century CE with the works of the Roman philosopher Plotinus (b. 205 CE). Educated in Alexandria, he traveled to Persia and eventually settled in Rome to teach. Beginning with the Middle Platonic concept of the Divine Creator of the universe, or Demiurge, Plotinus

introduced three radical concepts.

First, he postulated the existence of a divine, ineffable unity more fundamental than the Demiurge. This he called "the One", although it was also sometimes called "the Good", "the True", and "the Beautiful" (akin to the "Dryghton" of some contemporary Craft traditions).

Second, Plotinus argued that all Being emanates from the One through a hierarchy of realities consisting of: the One —> Mind (the Gods & the Demiurge) —> Soul (the Daimons) —> Matter, and at the same time returns to the One. The Natural World, as we experience it, is the interaction of the organizing properties of Soul with the chaotic properties of Matter.

Third, Plotinus explained that while this hierarchy is ontologically true, emanation (*prohodos*) and return (*epistrophe*) are neither temporal nor spatial. In other words, all things are always both emanating from and returning to the One and exist simultaneously at all levels of the hierarchy. (An excellent, simple introduction to the concepts of Neoplatonism can be found in David Fideler's *Introduction to Porphyry's Letter to His Wife Marcella*, Zimmern 1986: 7-35. For a more in depth presentation, I recommend R.T. Wallis' *Neoplatonism*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1972)

Plotinus focused on a contemplative, ascetic approach to union with the One, as did his student Porphyry (b. 233 CE), who is responsible for organizing Plotinus' teachings into the text known as *The Enneads*. However, Porphyry's student, Iamblichus of Chalcis (b. 250 CE), favored an approach to the One that was known as "theurgy" or "god-making". If the One is immanent in all of the Natural World, reasoned Iamblichus, then not only is the Natural World inher-

ently good, but all things in the Natural World are paths to the One. Iamblichus also introduced a concept now called "the law of mean terms". This stated that for there to be any communication between any two things or concepts there had to be a third thing in between that partakes of both. Since this idea can be applied *ad infinitum*, it meant that there could be no gaps between the levels of reality. The spiritual universe of the Neoplatonists, therefore, became fluid and continuous, without defined boundaries between its many constituent parts and levels.

Neoplatonic theurgy used techniques that we would recognize as "natural magick" in rituals designed to facilitate union with the One. Its source material consisted of the writings of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus (as well as earlier Platonists), the Egyptian writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus (the *Hermetica*), the texts collected as the *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM), and collected teachings (the *Chaldean Oracles*) "channeled" from Hekate and other deities by two 2nd century Roman theurgists (the *Juliani*). With these texts as guides, Neoplatonic theurgy focused on two forms of "god-making": deity possession and the creation of animated statues. The former was very similar, if not identical, to the practice modern Witches know as "Drawing Down the Moon", and indeed this phrase was used in antiquity to describe this practice. The latter involved techniques that we have all but lost, but vestiges of which remain in the certain contemporary Craft traditions.

Neopythagoreanism was a 1st century CE revival of the number mysticism of Pythagoras. Incorporating elements of astrology and Eastern magical lore, it was very popular

with Iamblichus and was eventually subsumed into Neoplatonism.

Proclus of Athens (b. 412 CE) was the last major Neoplatonic writer before the closing of the School at Athens and the flight of the surviving Neoplatonic theurgists to safety in the Persian Empire.

In addition to its emphasis on philosophy and theurgy, the later Neoplatonists also stressed the importance of traditional Pagan popular religion (Athanasias 1993: 7-8; Shaw 1995: 148-152). The continued performance of time-honored rites formed a necessary foundation to the more intellectual pursuits of Neoplatonic philosophy. The Neoplatonists sought to incorporate and synthesize the practices of all Pagans known to them, believing that all were divinely inspired. In this, they were in tune with the syncretic nature of their age, in which composite, cross-cultural deities such as Serapis and Jupiter-Ammon came to predominate. Accordingly, most Neoplatonists not only continued to practice traditional popular Paganism, but were also initiates of Mithras, Isis, and others. The 4th century Neoplatonist, Macrobius (writing in *SATURNALIA*), reconciled the mythologies of the many Pagan traditions by asserting that all Gods were actually aspects of a single Sun God, and all Goddesses aspects of a single Moon Goddess, and that really there was just the God and the Goddess—and beyond them, the One, of course (discussed in Godwin 1993: 142-143).

When Julian attempted his revival of traditional Paganism in the 4th century, he asked his friend Sallustius to write a sort of “catechism” of Paganism from a Neoplatonic point of view. This text, *On the Gods and the World*, survives (best version is Nock 1926). It is not insignificant, I think,

that Gerald Gardner refers to this text in *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (Aquarian Press, 1959):

Now, the thing that will, I think, strike most the consciousness of the reader who is well versed in the teaching of the higher types of spiritualist and occult circles generally is not the antiquity of this teaching of Sallustius, but its startling modernity. It might have been spoken yesterday. Further, it might have been spoken at a witch meeting, at any time, as a general statement of their creed ... the spirit of his [Sallustius'] teaching, the spirit of the Mysteries of his day, which is also the spirit of the beliefs of the witch cult, is timeless. (Gardner 1959: 188-189)

(In other words, Gardner specifically states that this Neoplatonic text from the ancient world may be understood as explaining the theology of the Craft as he understood it. This statement alone should engender interest in Neoplatonism on the part of contemporary Witches.)

HARRAN UNDER ISLAM

In 717 CE, the Muslim caliph Umar II founded the first Muslim university in the world at Harran. To give this university a good start, Umar brought many of the last remaining Hermeticists from Alexandria and installed them at Harran. A later Harranian author, Ibn Wahshiya, would write about these Hermeticists in the mid-9th century CE:

The Hermesians let nobody into the secrets of their knowledge but their disciples, lest the arts and sciences should be debased by being common amongst the vulgar. They hid therefore their secrets and treasures from them by the means of this alphabet, and by inscriptions, which could be read by nobody except the sons of wisdom and learning.

These initiated scholars were divided into four classes. The first Class comprehended the sect *Hara'misah Alhawmiyah*, who were all descendants of Hermes the Great. ... No man in the world was acquainted with any of their secrets: they alone possessed them.

In response [to the closing of the Academy at Athens in 529CE], many Neoplatonists ... fled “to the East”, specifically, to Harran. There, they founded a Neoplatonic academy that survived ... up into the 12th century.

They were the authors of the books commonly called the books of *Edris* (Enoch) [Hermes]. They constructed temples dedicated to spirits, and buildings of magical wisdom. The few of those, who in our time are acquainted with this knowledge, live retired in some islands near the frontiers of China, and continue to tread the steps of their forefathers. [Hammer-Purgstall notes that this might refer to the Brahmins.]

The second class of the Hermesians, called *Hara'misah Alpina'walu'ziyah*, the sons of the brother of Hermes, whose name was *Asclibianos*. ... They never communicated their secrets, and Hermetic treasures to any body, but they preserved them from generation to generation, till our days. ...

The third class was called *Ashra'kiyu'n* (Eastern) or children of the sister of Hermes, who is known amongst the Greek by the name of *Trismegistos Thoodios*. This class was intermixed with some strangers and profane, who found means to get hold of the expressions of their hearts. Their sciences and knowledge are come down to us.

The fourth class, denominated *Masha'wun* (walkers, or peripatetic philosophers), was formed by the strangers, who found means to mingle with the children and family of Hermes. They were the first who introduced the worship of the stars and constellations, and who forsook the worship of the God of Gods. (Be his glory exalted—there is no other God but him!) From hence came their divisions, and everything that has been handed down to us, proceeds originally

these two sects, the *Ashra'kiyu'n*, eastern, and *Masha'wun*, peripatetic philosophers. (Hammer-Purgstall 1806: pp 23-30)

Later in the 8th century, Harun al-Rashid (the caliph of the *Arabian Nights*) founded the *Bayt al-Hikmah* (“House of Wisdom”) at Baghdad to be a center for the translation of Greek and Latin texts into Arabic. Scholars from Harran would later be brought there.

In the 9th century, 830 CE, the caliph Abdallah al-Mamun (son of al-Rashid) arrived at Harran at the head of a conquering army and what happened next has dominated both scholarship on Harran and the potential for archaeological excavation ever since.

THE “CON-JOB STORY” AND THE “SABIAN” OF HARRAN

Al-Mamun was outside the gates of the Harran, intent upon razing the city. He demanded to know if the inhabitants were Muslims. No, they said. Were they Christians or Jews? No. Well, al-Mamun said, if they were not *ahl al-kitab* (“People of the Book”), they were not protected from violence by the Qur'an and he would sack their city. What happened next depends on whom (or more properly, what) you believe (Green 1992: 4 -6, 100-123; Gunduz 1994: 15-52).

Some accounts say that the Harranians replied, “We are Sabians!”

One account, that of the writer Abu Yusuf Isha' al-Qatyi'i, a Christian historian of the time who tended to make both Pagans and Muslims look bad, says that al-Mamun gave the Harranians a week to come up with an answer. The Harranians then consulted a

lawyer knowledgeable in Muslim law who told them, "Tell him you're Sabians. No one knows what they are, but they're protected!" Either way, the Harranians claimed to be Sabians, produced a copy of the Hermetica as their "Book" and claimed Hermes (recognized by Muslims of the time as one of the prophets leading up to Muhammed) as their prophet.

The question hinged (and still hinges) around three verses in the Qur'an (Ali 1405 AH: 26-27, 308-309, 953-954):

*Qur'an 2:62

Those who believe (in the Qur'an).
And those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Christians and the Sabians,
Any who believe in Allah
And the Last Day,
And work righteousness,
Shall have their reward
With their Lord on them
Shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

*Qur'an 5:69

Those who believe (in the Qur'an).
Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Sabians and the Christians
Any who believe in Allah
And the Last Day,
And work righteousness,
On them shall be no fear,
Nor shall they grieve.

*Qur'an 22:17

Those who believe (in the Qur'an),
Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Sabians, Christians,
Magians, and Polytheists,
Allah will judge between them
On the Day of Judgment:
For Allah is witness
Of all things.

At this point, history becomes a matter of doctrine, with one's preference being determined by one's interpretation of and beliefs about the Qur'an. Whether or not the Harra-

**Neoplatonic theurgy used
techniques that we would
recognize as "natural magick"
in rituals designed to facilitate
union with the One.**

nians were indeed Sabians, according to modern scholarship, depends in large part on whether the scholar is a Muslim or not.

In the days of al-Mamun, the dominant interpretation of Islam was known as Mu'tazilism (Green 1992: 130-135). Mu'tazilism relied upon an approach called *kalam* ("rationalist theology") and argued that revelation was an ongoing process in which scripture guided and informed direct mystical experience of the divine, to which one then applied reason in the analysis and understanding. Mu'tazilism was the view of the Abbasid caliphs (including both al-Rashid and al-Mamun) and led to a valuing of the philosophical writings of the Greeks and Romans. Most of the writings available to them were those of the Neoplatonists and the Hermeticists. The logical and philosophical arguments of the Neoplatonists in support of theurgy could be used to support the Mu'tazilite reliance on *kalam*. After the Abbasids, Mu'tazilism was replaced in a period of religious upheaval by a new dominant interpretation of Islam, Ash'arism. Ash'arism was and is much more devotional in approach, focused primarily on the Qur'an and Hadith (recorded sayings of the Prophet). It is much more conservative than Mu'tazilism, downplays mysticism (although there is a certain grudging acceptance of Sufism), and definitely wants noth-

ing to do with Paganism. (Interestingly enough, under Ash'arism the followers of Shi'ite Islam, which also believe in a form of continuing revelation, would rely on the arguments of the Harranians for support, protecting them where possible from oppression. The idea of Shi'ite Muslims protecting Pagans from oppression will no doubt surprise many modern Pagans.)

The Ash'arites would much rather believe the "con-job story" than think that the Prophet in any way endorsed any kind of Paganism. Ash'arism remains the dominant interpretation of Islam to this day.

Accordingly, books by modern Muslim scholars (e.g. Gunduz) tend to endorse the "con-job story", while books by modern non-Muslim scholars (e.g. Green) tend to point out the problems with it:

1) The primary source for the "con-job story", Abu Yusuf, had a vested interest in making both the Harranians and the Muslims look bad, the former as con-men and the latter as their dupes.

2) The Harranians had been paying the poll tax to the caliphate for many years. Only People of the Book could do so.

3) Harran was an extremely well known center of learning at the time. There is no way that al-Mamun or his administrators could not have known about their religion.

4) The Harranians are called Sabians in Muslim documents at least 75 years before al-Mamun's visit.

The only reasonable conclusion is that the Harranians were indeed Sabians. If so, what did the Prophet mean when he included them in the protected people? Mecca at the time of Muhammed was steeped in traditions of the earlier prophet Abraham. Abraham came to Mecca from Harran (the Well of Abraham, mentioned in

the Old Testament, is outside the city). It is entirely possible that Muhammed was aware of the religion of the Harranians and distinguished its philosophical / theurgical approach from the "idolatry" of the Pagans around Mecca.

At any rate, the continuing controversy around the identification of Harranians as Sabians means that in modern discourse one must always refer to "Harranian Sabians" to distinguish them from the many other attempts to identify the Sabians as another group.

However, from the time of al-Mamun, in common usage "Sabian" became virtually synonymous with "Harranian". And as the writings of Arabic scholars about the planetary religion of the Harranian Sabians became more widespread, "Sabian" became synonymous with "astrologer" and sometimes "sorcerer", as had the word "Chaldean" among the Romans.

(An etymological aside ... The very early connection between Harran and Egypt mentioned above, while noted by Egyptologists, has been largely ignored by those studying Harran. As a result, a possible source for the name "Sabian" has also been ignored. Most have focused either on the Arabic verb *saba'a*, "to convert", the Hebrew word *saba*, meaning "troops", the Ethiopic word *sbh*, meaning "dispensing alms", or the Syriac verb *sb*, "to baptize". I lean towards the Egyptian root *sba*, meaning "star", "star-god", and "teacher". As both followers of what has been called "astral" religion and renowned teachers and scholars, this would seem to be appropriate and fitting.)

THE SURVIVAL OF PAGANISM AT HARRAN
Late in the 9th century, the Harranian Pythagorean Thabit ibn Qurra was invited to

found a Sabian school at the *Bayt al-Hikmah* in Baghdad. Thabit was adamantly Pagan, but maintained his position as an advisor to the caliph, even when making statements like:

We are the heirs and propagators of Paganism. ... Happy is he who, for the sake of Paganism, bears the burden [of persecution] with firm hope. Who else have civilized the world, and built the cities, if not the nobles and kings of Paganism? Who else have set in order the harbours and the rivers? And who else have taught the hidden wisdom? To whom else has the Deity revealed itself, given oracles, and told about the future, if not to the famous men among the Pagans? The Pagans have made known all this. They have discovered the art of healing the soul; they have also made known the art of healing the body. They have filled the earth with settled forms of government, and with wisdom, which is the highest good. Without Paganism the world would be empty and miserable. (quoted in Scott, 1982, 105)

Note: Thabit used the Syriac word *han-putho*, usually translated as “pagan”, but also possibly meaning “a possessor of the true religion” (Green 1992: 114).

In the 10th century, the amir ‘Adud al-Dawlah issued an “edict of toleration” specifically permitting traditional rites of Harranian Pagans.

In the 11th century, after the Muslim conquest of North Africa and Spain, the *Ghayat al-Hakim* (“Aim of the Sage”), a book known in Latin as the *Picatrix*, was written in Spain by “al Majriti” (Pingree 1980; 1986). Considered the basis of the grimoire tradition of Europe (including material that survives down into the Books of Shadows of certain modern Craft traditions), the *Picatrix* includes significant material about the religion and rites of the Harranians. This same “al Majriti” is also our source for the *Rasa’il Ikhwan al-Safa*

(“Epistles of the Brethren of Purity”), a mystical Muslim order incorporating teachings from Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and even Buddhist sources (Netton 1991). Both books contain material from each other and have a Harranian source (Nasr 1993: 25-104). Whether “al Majriti” was himself a Harranian Sabian is unknown.

Note: David Pingree has pointed out that many of the Greco-Roman magical texts evident in the *Picatrix* passed into Arabic by way of Sanskrit, picking up Indian magical terms and Sanskrit names for the Gods along the way (Pingree 1980). Truly, Harran deserved the name “crossroad”.

THE LAST DAYS OF HARRAN AND THE RETURN OF PAGANISM TO EUROPE
Later in the 11th century, 1081 CE, the Temple of Moon God was finally destroyed by al-Shattir, an ally of Seljuk Turks, contemporaneous with the rise of Ash’arism (Green 1992: 98-100). At this point, the “con-job” story became the “official” Muslim view. Also late in the 11th century, c. 1050 CE, the Christian writer Michael Psellus, studying in Constantinople, received an annotated copy of the *Hermetica* from a scholar from Harran. It is quite possible that these were sacred texts that had escaped the decline and ultimate destruction of the temples (Scott 1982: 25-27, 108-109; Copenhagen 1992: xl; Faivre 1995: 182). Copies of the *Hermetica* eventually made their way to Western Europe, igniting the interest of Cosimo de’Medici who, in 1462, set a young Marsilio Ficino to the task of translation. Thus began Europe’s fascination with the *Hermetica* (Copenhagen 1992: xlvii-l; Faivre 1995: 30, 38-40, 98).

During the First Crusade, Harran was often contrasted with its neighbor to the

[The] Neoplatonist, Macrobius ... reconciled the mythologies of the many Pagan traditions by asserting that all Gods were actually aspects of a single Sun God, and all Goddesses aspects of a single Moon Goddess ...

north, Edessa (known today as Urfa). Edessa was the birthplace of the prophet Abraham and the first city to convert to Christianity (Segal 1970: 60-81). Edessa converted after its king, Abgar, wrote to Jesus requesting healing. The apostle Thaddeus came with a cloth bearing the image of Jesus’ face. Abgar was healed and his kingdom converted. The cloth, known as the Mandylion, was an important relic during the Crusades (Segal 1970: 215; Wilson 1998: 161-175). (Recently discovered documents have led some to believe that it is the same cloth that later came to be called the Shroud of Turin.)

In the 12th century, Edessa was the capital of the short-lived Crusader County of Edessa. The Knights Templar occupied the city and are described as “roaming about the countryside at will”. Their presence might explain an unusual architectural feature that survives at Harran. In the Citadel, there is a Christian chapel of Crusader architecture (Lloyd & Brice 1951: 102-103). There is no record of any Crusaders ever conquering the city (Segal 1970: 230-251; Green 1992: 98; Gunduz 1994: 133). The presence of the chapel would appear to indicate a peaceful Crusader presence. The fact that the chapel is side-by-side with the Citadel’s mosque,

even sharing an entry hall, is even more striking. It was far more common for chapels and mosques of that time to be built on top of each other or to be co-opted one from the other. Is this another example of the city’s remarkable religious tolerance?

This chapel also contains a feature, a floor of black basalt brought from hundreds of miles to the East, which is found in only

one other place at Harran. The floor of the temple of the Moon God (currently under the remains of the Grand Mosque) is of the same black basalt construction. Muslim accounts have always referred both to a temple of the Moon God under the Grand Mosque and to one in the Citadel (Lloyd & Brice 1951: 96; Gunduz 1994: 204; Kurkcuoglu 1996: 17). The black basalt floor under the Crusader chapel suggests these Crusaders, whoever they were, built their chapel on top of the Citadel’s Moon God temple.

Edessa delighted in contrasting itself, the first Christian city, with Harran, the last Pagan holdout. Unfortunately, Edessa is higher up the water table from Harran. As Christian Edessa grew and prospered it sank more and more wells, gradually drying up the wells of Harran.

Finally, in 1271 CE, the Mongols conquered the area around Harran. They decided that Harran was too much trouble to control (they would probably open their gates to the next army to come along), too remote to garrison, but too valuable to destroy. They arrived at an unusual and dramatic solution.

They deported the populace of the city, walled up the city gates, and left it.

There is no record of the city being destroyed, sacked, burned, or in any other way damaged. The space enclosed by the city walls gradually filled up with wind-blown dirt.

Since that time, only three parts of Harran have been kept relatively clear of covering soil. The Citadel at the south end of the city and the central tumulus in the center are on hills and so remained above the accumulated debris. The area of the university (and its Grand Mosque) have been kept clear by human effort because of its historical and religious significance to Muslims. Everything else is about thirty feet below the current ground level. It is difficult to over-estimate the treasure-trove of artifacts and knowledge waiting to be uncovered. One has to wonder why it hasn't been excavated.

A TREASURE WAITING TO BE UNCOVERED ... OR DESTROYED

The most recent archaeological information on Harran can be found in three articles published in issues of *Anatolian Studies* by Seton Lloyd and William Brice in 1951 and by D.S. Rice in 1952. These expeditions confined themselves to surveying the site and clearing the rubble from in front of one of the city gates.

H.J.W. Drijvers, author of *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, visited Harran sometime in the 1970s, and Tamara Green, author of *The City of the Moon God*, visited Harran in 1977, but both confined themselves to observing the discoveries previously reported and did not uncover any new material.

Nurettin Yardimci has headed a small but meaningful effort at Harran, doing restora-

**... in the 11th century ...
Michael Psellus ... received an
annotated copy of the
Hermetica from a scholar
from Harran. It is quite
possible that these were
sacred texts that had escaped
the decline and ultimate
destruction of the temples.**

tion work on buildings that were falling down and working with a Belgian team to excavate the Roman-period dwellings on the central tumulus, but this effort had to be suspended in the mid-90's after only a couple of seasons due to Kurdish violence (Bucak 1998: pers. comm.). The results of the tumulus dig have not yet been published.

Harran remains virtually untouched. Why? The reasons appear to be financial, social, and religious.

When Anna and I met with Eyyup Bucak, the Director of the Museum in Urfa, he was obviously haggard and over-worked. He explained that the Turkish government is engaged in what is called the GAP project, a dam across the Euphrates that will provide water for irrigating the Harran Plain. The rising waters behind the dam will eventually cover six important Neolithic sites. Accordingly, rescue archaeology is underway at a furious pace. This has taken all of their funding and energies for many years. While Dir. Bucak said that he would welcome foreign interest in Harran, the Turkish government's regulations make it very difficult for

foreign archaeologists to work in Turkey. Turkey has a long history of their archaeological treasures being plundered by foreigners.

The GAP project is bringing irrigation to the Harran Plain. Irrigation means crops; crops means farmers; farmers mean settlement. When Lloyd, Brice, and Rice visited Harran in the 50s, only a few of the "distinctive beehive huts" of the local nomads could be found in the filled-in area inside the old city walls. Now, permanent houses are being built there. Turkey does not exercise "eminent domain" over archaeological sites. Whatever is under a house is lost forever.

Anna and I also met with two professors of Muslim theology from the local University of Harran at Urfa, Dr. Mustafa Ekinci and Prof. Kamil Harman. Dr. Ekinci is a specialist in esoteric movements in Islam. We explained what we were studying. They not only knew nothing about the early Muslim and pre-Muslim movements we were studying, but actively disapproved of our studying them. The Ash'arite view of the Harranians prevails and contributes to a lack of interest in excavating Harran. (And when the topic drifted into them inquiring about our own religious beliefs... the evening got interesting and we sorely taxed the abilities of our able translator.)

Harran was a thriving Mesopotamian and later Hellenistic city of some 10 to 20,000 people for nearly 3000 years. Towards the end, for about 500 years, Harran would appear to have been a kind of intellectual refugee camp for educated members of the mystery cults of late antiquity, eventually becoming the font from which Hermetic and Neoplatonic learning returned to Europe.

Many of the Pagans of Harran had fled

the triumph of Christianity in the West. All of them, including the practitioners of the indigenous Moon cult, were surrounded by an ever-expanding Islam. The Pagan community of Harran must have lived with a constant awareness of being the last refuge of the old Pagan religions. These "Pagan refugees" would have had every reason to preserve their traditions for future generations. Some were Mithraists, well aware of the concept of turning cycles of ages. Others would have known that their own sacred texts, the *Hermetica*, predicted the fall of Paganism, and its eventual return:

Hermes Trismegistus speaking to his student Asclepius:

[24] ... since it befits the wise to know all things in advance, of this you must not remain ignorant: a time will come when it will appear that the Egyptians paid respect to the Divine with faithful mind and painstaking reverence—to no purpose. All their holy worship will ... perish without effect, for the Divine shall return from earth to the Heavens, and Egypt will be abandoned. ... When foreigners occupy the land and territory, not only will reverence fall into neglect but, even harder, a prohibition under penalty prescribed by law (so-called) will be enacted against reverence, fidelity, and divine worship. Then this most holy land, seat of shrines and temples, will be filled completely with tombs and corpses.

[25] ... In their weariness the people of that time will find the world nothing to wonder at or to worship. This world—a good thing that never had nor has nor will have its better—will be endangered. People will find it oppressive and scorn it. They will not cherish this entire world, a work of the Gods beyond compare, a glorious construction, a bounty composed of images of multiform variety, ... a unity of everything that can be honored, praised, and finally loved by those who see it, a multiform accumulation taken as a single thing.

How mournful when the gods withdraw from mankind! Only the baleful angels remain to mingle with humans ...

[26] ... When all this comes to pass, Asclepius, then ... the Gods ... will restore the world to its beauty of old so that the world itself will again seem deserving of worship and wonder, and with constant benedictions and proclamations of praise the people of that time will honour the Gods... And this will be the geniture of the world: a reformation of all good things and a restitution, most holy and most reverent, of nature itself, reordered after the passage of time... which is and was everlasting and without beginning. (adapted from Copenhagen 1992: 81ff.)

Ibn Shaddad, who wrote a financial inspection report on Harran in 1242 CE, only twenty-nine years before its demise, described cisterns feeding public fountains, four *madrasas* (theological colleges), two hospices, a hospital, two mosques (in addition to the Grand Mosque), and seven public baths. To these, Ibn Jubair, who visited the city in 1184 CE described "the city's flourishing bazaars, roofed with wood so that the people there are constantly in the shade. You cross these *sugs* as if you were walking through a huge house. The roads are wide and at every cross-road there is a dome of gypsum." (Rice 1952: 36-39)

Harran was the last haven of Mediterranean Paganism up until the 11th century—only 800 years ago. It was never destroyed, it was never sacked, and it was never dug up by treasure hunters. It was just abandoned and allowed to fill in with dirt. And it has never been excavated. It is not difficult to imagine that under some 30 feet of wind-blown sand and dirt, the heritage of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Paganism is just waiting, intact, for someone to dig it up.

But they'll have to hurry...

Another effect of the GAP project, and its attendant increased irrigation, is that the water table of the Harran Plain is once again

rising. Whatever treasures are waiting underground, whatever documents survive (and the Museum believes there are likely to be many), will soon be below the water table.

I hope that an increased awareness of Harran's place as a repository of our Pagan heritage will lead to the necessary conservation and study of these sites that are so important to the history of Western Paganism. I fully expect the final unveiling of Harran to rival Pompeii in the splendor and value of its contents.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS & ARTICLES ON HARRAN & HARRANIAN RELIGION:

(Note: I am indebted to Brandy Williams for first making many of these texts available to me and for sharing the fruits of her own extensive research on the subject.)

- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, trans., *The Holy Qur-an: English translation of the meanings and Commentary*, The Custodian of The Two Holy Mosques King Fahd Complex For The Printing of The Holy Qur-an, al-Madinah, 1405 AH
- Athanassiadi, Polymnia, "Persecution and Response in Late Paganism: The Evidence of Damascius", in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Volume CXIII, The Council of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, 1993
- Betz, Hans Dieter, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation (including the Demotic Spells)*, 2nd (revised) edition, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992
- Bucak, Eyyup, personal communication, January 7, 1998
- Chuvin, Pierre, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1990
- Copenhagen, Brian P., trans. and ed., *Hermetica*, Cambridge University Press, 1992
- Drijvers, H.J.W., *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1980

- Faivre, Antoine, *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, Phanes Press, Grand Rapids, 1995
- Godwin, Joscelyn, *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival*, Phanes Press, Grand Rapids, 1993
- Green, Tamara, *The City of the Moon God: The Religious Traditions of Harran* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, Volume 114), E.J. Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 1992
- Gunduz, Sinasi, *The Knowledge of Life: The Origins and Early History of the Mandaeans and Their Relation to the Sabians of the Qur'an and to the Harranians*, (Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 3), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994
- Hammer-Purgstall, Joseph, tr., *Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters Explained* (translation of Ibn Wahshiya's "The long desired Knowledge of occult Alphabets attained."), W. Bulmer, London, 1806
- Hassan, Selim, *Excavations at Giza*, Government Press, Cairo, 1946
- Kurkuoglu, A. Cihat, *Harran: The Mysterious City of History*, Harran Koyleme Hizmet Götürme Birligi, Ankara, 1996
- Lewy, Hans, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the later Roman Empire*, Etudes Augustiniennes, Paris, 1978
- Lloyd, Seton, and Brice, William, "Harran", in *Anatolian Studies*, Vol. I, pp. 77-111, British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, Ankara, 1951
- Majercik, R.T., *The Chaldean Oracles* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, Volume 5), E.J.Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 1989
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993
- Netton, I.R., *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991
- Nock, Arthur Darby, ed. & trans., *Sallustius: Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1926
- Pingree, David, "Some of the Sources of the Ghayat al-Hakim", in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Volume 43, pp. 1-

- 15, The Warburg Institute, London, 1980
- Pingree, David, ed., *Picatrix: The Latin version of the Ghayat Al-Hakim*, The Warburg Institute, London, 1986
- Rice, D.S., "Medieval Harran: Studies on its Topography and Monuments", in *Anatolian Studies*, Vol. II, pp. 36-84, British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, Ankara, 1952
- Scott, Walter, ed. & trans., *Hermetica: Introduction, Texts and Translation*, Hermes House, Boulder CO, 1982
- Segal, J.B., *Edessa: "The Blessed City"*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1970
- Segal, J.B., "The Sabian Mysteries: The Planet Cult of Ancient Harran", in *Vanished Civilizations of the Ancient World* (Edward Bacon, ed.), Thames and Hudson, London, 1963
- Shaw, Gregory, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park PA, 1995
- Smith, John Holland, *The Death of Classical Paganism*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1976
- Stark, Freya, *Rome on the Euphrates: The Story of a Frontier*, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York, 1966
- Wallis, R.T., *Neoplatonism*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1972
- Wilson, Ian, *The Blood and the Shroud*, The Free Press, New York, 1998
- Zimmern, Alice, *Porphyry's Letter to His Wife Marcella: Concerning the Life of Philosophy and the Ascent to the Gods*, Phanes Press, Grand Rapids, 1986

Donald H. Frew is a Gardnerian Elder and a Research Associate of the Central Asia / Silk Road Religion Project. This article is based on presentations given to the Central Asia / Silk Road Working Group (U.C. Berkeley, March 1998) and Pantheacon (San Francisco, February 1999) and is part of a book on Craft origins currently in preparation.

Another View of the Witch Hunts

by Max Dashu

*In response to Jenny Gibbons' article
in The Pomegranate 5 (Summer 1998).*

I would like to offer an alternative to the locked-in polarity between often-uninformed Wiccan takes on history and the denial by many academic historians that repression of social groups and of culture played any role in the witch hunts. Yes, the story is more complex than the Church stamping out paganism, though that suppression is part of the story and can not be disregarded. The history of witch persecution begins with repression by feudal rulers, with a strong patriarchal impetus already visible. It may have very old Indo-European roots. But it's also clear that priestly advisors urged on kings like Charles the Bald and Alfred the Great. Bishops carried out a less severe but determined repression of the old religions for over a thousand years.

No, a majority of those burned during the mass hunts were not healers and diviners, but yes, they were a targeted group, in significant numbers in places like Italy, the western Alps, and Scotland. Pagan themes do surface in trial testimony, turning into diabolist narratives under torture. They also figure in popular images of the witch, though in an increasingly distorted way as diabolism penetrated into popular culture.

There are perceptible differences in the way academic writers approach pagan

themes, especially when comparing English and American historians to the Europeans. As a group, the Anglo/Americans seem much more resistant to recognizing the role of diabolism in shaping the hunts and in supplanting still-current beliefs of pagan origin. A lot of exciting work is being done in Europe examining pagan content in the witch trial transcripts themselves, including Juhan Kahk's studies of Estonian hunts, Gustav Henningsen on trials of faery healers in Sicily, Bengt Ankarloo's work on Sweden, and Behringer's book on Bavarian beliefs, *The Shaman of Oberstdorf*. The pagan factor is also recognized by Robert Muchembled, Michèle Brocard-Plaut, William Monter, and Eva Pócs, among many others.

Probably the most impressive body of 'pagan' research comes from the Italians, going back over three decades. These historians include not only Carlo Ginsburg, whose work is well known and available in English, but others—including Lucia Muraro, Giuseppe Bonomo, Carlo Bondi, Ermanno Paccagnini—whose books have not been translated. They offer an important perspective on the much-overlooked Italian hunts. Some do us the favor of reproducing portions of the original trial transcripts so we can see what the 'witch' said, and how she was browbeaten and tortured into repeating diabolist cant.

THE FIRST WITCH HUNTS

The 'new chronology' replaces one mythology with another. The old mythology said that the witch hunts happened in the Middle Ages. The new academic mythology insists that no significant witch hunting happened until early modern times. Robin Briggs claims that there was "no risk" of witch

burnings before the 14th century because "until then the relative skepticism of the ruling elites, together with the nature of the legal system, excluded the possibility" (Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 397). Many writers equate witch trials with diabolist trials, going so far as to say that no 'real' witch trials occurred until the 1400s. This, and their failure to analyze the nature of the information we have about medieval witch persecutions, is profoundly anti-historical.

Feminist historians have been pointing out for a couple of decades that the Renaissance inaugurated the worst witch hunts, but it is also clear that these grew out of an earlier history. Laws empowering kings and lords to persecute witches were enacted throughout western Europe from the early feudal era. The earliest barbarian codes, such as the first Salic law, were more concerned with punishing defamation *as* witches than with witches themselves. Those who committed magical harm paid a fine, the same as for a physical attack. The Norse codes treated sorcery similarly.

Under christianization, Roman law was brought into play, and burning at the stake appeared. A late recension of the Salic law ordered burning for those who killed with incantations. Roman law heavily influenced the Visigothic code, which ordered burning at the stake for worshipping 'demons,' and flogging and enslavement for diviners and other witches. The Lex Rotharii of north Italy forbade witch-burning, but allowed lords to kill their (female) subjects as witches.

Bishops at the Council of Paris (825) called for rulers to "punish pitilessly" witches, diviners, and enchanters who practiced "very certainly the remains of the pagan cult" (de Cauzons, 118). In 873, the

THE ITALIAN HUNTS were colored by a strong pagan subtext. Trial records say that witches gathered to revere the goddess Diana, "wise Sibyllia," or the "lady of the good game." A weaver-diviner tried at Mantua in 1489 said that this "mistress of the games" had appeared to show him "the properties of herbs and the nature of animals" (Ginsburg, 12, 28, 50). Up through the 1530s, accused witches told inquisitors at Modena that they worshiped not the devil, but Diana. A Brescian trial of the same period refers to the folk goddess as Befana. But gradually, over the course of decades of torture-trials and burnings, the goddess of the witches is demonized, subordinated to the devil, and finally, in the late 1500s, replaced by him.

Pagan content is also rife in the Scottish trial records, with testimony of encounters with the Queen of Elfame and the faery folk. Quite a number of those tried as witches were in fact healers, like Geillis Duncan, whose arrest after a night call touched off the North Berwick craze, or Bessie Dunlop, who had visions of the faery host and learned how to prepare medicine from a dead acquaintance among these 'good wights.' Less well-known are the Orkney and Shetland islanders burned during the 1600s for 'saining': performing animist cures with three stones, fire and water, by stroking, brushing, and charming, or by ritually walking around lakes. The primary charge against many of the accused was "giving you sel furth to haue sick craft and knowledge" or "to have skill to do things." Although these are technically secular trials, they were driven by the Presbyterian kirk (Folklore Society #49, pp 55, 61).

French king Charles the Bald issued new laws ordering all counts of the realm to hunt down and execute sorcerers and witches in their domains "with the greatest possible diligence" (Quierzy-sur-Oise statutes, in Russell, 73). Alfred 'the Great' decreed death, exile or heavy fines for witches and diviners, and of women who consulted charmers and magicians, added: "Do not let them live." These provisions were repeated by Edward and Guthram; then Ethelred ordered witches exiled; but Ethelstan (928) renewed the call for them to be burned at the stake (Ewen, 3-4).

I see no reason to assume that these laws went unheeded and unused. Manorial lords acting as haut-justiciers did not keep records of trials, and very few records of any kind survive from this period they call the Dark Ages. Chroniclers mention witch-executions, such as the women tortured by aristocrats into saying that they had bewitched count Guillaume of Angouleme in 1027, or the executions of Sagae (wisewomen) by Wratisslaw II of Bohemia and his brother, the bishop of Prague, in 1080 (Fournier, 63-65; Lea, 1280). Around 1100 Caesarius of Heisterbach reported that judges had witches and wizards burned at Soest in Westphalia (Grimm, Jacob, *Teutonic Mythology*, tr., James S. Stallybrass, London: George Bell & Sons, 1883, p 1622). Thirty were burned at Graz in eastern Austria in 1115 (Russel, 321, fn 20-1). The Arab trader Abu Hamid al-Gharnati wrote in 1153 that the Kievans accused old women of witchcraft "about every twenty years," and subjected them to the water ordeal. "Those who float are called witches and burned ..." (Klaniczay, *Magie et Sorcellerie*, 217).

Burning seems to originate with the Romans, but witch-executions by drowning

are also attested. Chronicles say the Frankish prince Lothair drowned the lady Gerberga as a witch in a river, "as is customary with sorcerers." (Fournier, 63) In 970, an English widow was drowned as a witch at London bridge (and her male accuser thereby succeeded in seizing her property, a theme reprised some 700 years later). (Crawford, Jane, "Witchcraft in Anglo-Saxon England," (1963) in Levack, Brian, ed., *Witchcraft in the Ancient World and Middle Ages* (1992), p 167). Bishop Serapion reported Russian witch-drownings in the 1270s, and other Russian witch executions are recorded for the 11th to 13th centuries (see Zguta, Russell, "Witchcraft Trials in Seventeenth-Century Russia" *American Historical Review*, December, 1977).

The Spanish reiterated their witch laws in the 11th to 13th centuries, adjudicated by the ordeal of red-hot iron. *Fuero Cuenca* is typical: "A woman who is a witch or sorceress shall either be burnt or saved by iron" (II, 1, 35, in Baroja, 82). Females are the stated targets, and the laws treated the minority of men entangled in sorcery trials with unambiguous favoritism. The Forum Turolii code (1176) ordered female witches to be burned, but shaved a cross on the men's heads, scourged them and banished them (Wedek, Harry E., *A Treasury of Witchcraft: A Sourcebook of the Magic Arts*, Citadel Press, NY 1970, p 257). Spanish women were subject to the ordeal of incandescent iron, which was used to test female chastity and fidelity, establish paternity, and determine whether a woman had induced abortions, cast spells or prepared potions (see Heath Dillard's excellent discussion of these issues in "Women in Reconquest Castile," in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard, U of Pennsylvania Press, 1976. In some corners

of Europe, such as Transylvania, insubordinate male serfs were also put through this ordeal). The ordeal of iron was also used as a sexual trial for German women in the same period, as well as in witch trials in 13th century England and the Black Forest in the 15th century.

Witch persecution was reaffirmed by urban communes in Italy, as in the municipal laws of Venice (1181) and later, Florence, Padua and other cities. German magistrates followed suit. The *Sachsen-spiegel* (1225) and *Schwabenspiegel* (1275) prescribed burning at the stake for witches, then Hamburg, Goslar, Berlin, Groningen and Bremen. The Norman kings of Sicily and England decreed laws against witches, including Henry I and Edward I, who called for burning. This penalty was

reiterated in the *Fleta* code toward the end of the 1200s and in the *Britton* code a few decades later. The *Treuga Henrici* (1224) ordered burnings of "heretics, enchanters and sorcerers" in the German empire (Cauzons, 212). Many more laws were passed across western Europe during the 1300s.

When pope Innocent IV gave his blessing to inquisitorial torture in the 1252 bull *Ad Extirpanda*, he called on rulers to punish heretics "as if they were sorcerers" (Lea, 431). The pope was addressing people still accustomed to thinking of the stake as a punishment for witchcraft, and so referred to the long-

standing precedent of feudal witch-burning as a model for the repression of heresy.

This brief summary of early witch persecutions sketches their importance as a foundation for the mass hunts. The elements of sex, class and pagan content already figure in strongly. This early data also raises questions about the numbers which have been so

confidently declared as the maximum of witch-executions. I don't find an argument from silence convincing, since documentation for this period is so sparse, and manorial trials (and even municipal ones) nearly invisible in the historical record.

In the late middle ages, a sea change took place as diabolism was injected into the witch persecutions. This ideology originated among theologians and scholastics, with a hefty helping of Roman-era themes of orgies, unguents, and

baby-killing. Imposed by church and state over a period of centuries, against considerable resistance, it became the crucial ingredient in forging the mass hunts. The blood libel in particular was the wedge that shattered the historic solidarity of the common people against elite repression of their culture(s).

There is much more to be said about the evolution of diabolist hunts in the 1300s than I have space to discuss here. Hansen rightly pointed to the western Alpine countries as the early crucible of diabolist witch trials. Ginsburg has contributed an important part

The history of witch persecution begins with repression by feudal rulers, with a strong patriarchal impetus already visible. It may have very old Indo-European roots.

of the puzzle: how the scapegoating of Jews and lepers, with charges of poison powders and blood libel, spread and evolved into diabolist persecutions of ‘sects’ of witches. More remains to be uncovered about how these secular witch hunts in Dauphiné, Savoy and Valais were related to the intensive inquisitorial purges (backed up by invading armies) in the same region during the 14th century. It’s critical to note that these repressions were propelled by elite powers and interests.

Popular resistance to the clergy’s repression of their folk rites and healers comes into focus in the sermons of the famous preacher Bern-ardino da Siena. In 1427, this ‘saint’ used inflammatory charges of baby-murder to turn people against their traditional folk healers, which he called *femmine indavolate*, ‘devil-ridden women.’ He deplored Romans’ disbelief of his stories about witches (“what I said was to them as if I was dreaming”) and the fact that the Sienese chose to “help and pray for” witches denounced to the secular lord. Bernardino implored his audience to denounce the witches, not to feel sympathy for a woman who (he claimed) had diabolically killed twenty or thirty babies: “If it happened to you, that she had killed one of your children, how would that look to you? Think of others!”

Fra Bernardino told people that it was

their duty to denounce all suspected witches to the Inquisition right away; otherwise they would have to answer for it on Judgement Day. After a series of these incendiary sermons in 1427, so many people were reported as incantatori and streghe that the friar had to consult with the pope about how to handle all the denunciations pouring in. Their solu-

tion is typical of witch-hunting illogic: they decided to arrest those accused of the worst crimes. So those whose enemies told the tallest tales were burned (Bonomo, 262-3).

WITCH HUNTING INQUISITORS

Jenny Gibbons writes of ‘the myth of the witch-hunting Inquisition,’ repudiating the 19th century historians who pointed to papal inquisitors’ role in inflating witch persecution into a craze. Unfortunately, she

doesn’t address the solid evidence assembled by those historians—notably Henry Charles Lea and Joseph Hansen—of inquisitorial hunts in northern Italy, eastern France and the Rhineland during the 1400s and early 1500s. Lea can be excused for including the Lamothe-Langon fabrications, since this forgery was not exposed until a century later. But its misinformation was far from being “the last great piece of ‘evidence’” of witch-hunting inquisitors, as Gibbons claims.

In 1258 Alexander IV denied inquisitors’ petition for authority to try divination and

sorcery cases, limiting them to cases manifestly savoring of heresy. However, it didn’t take inquisitors of a demonological bent long to invent pretexts to work around the papal ruling. Only forty years later, canonist Johannes Andreae added a gloss that effectively nullified it: “Those are to be called heretics who forsake God and seek the aid of the devil.” He broadened the definition of heretical sorcery to include pagan prayer, offerings and divinations (all demonized, of course) as well as sorcery based on christian symbolism (see Russell, 174; and Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law*, 131).

The trend of redefining witchcraft as heretical grew in various inquisitorial manuals of 1270, 1320, and 1367. A shift occurred in the later 1300s, as the relatively sedate attitude to folk witchcraft visible in Gui’s 1320 manual gave way to Eymeric’s scholastic diabolism in 1367, and to the first recorded inquisitorial witch burnings a few decades later. The bishops’ centuries-long campaign against pagan observances was seen as manifestly ineffectual, and the more militant inquisitors were eager to take a turn. To ensure their jurisdiction, they claimed that a dangerous ‘new heresy’ of devil-worshipping witches had arisen and was threatening christendom.

Almost all the demonologies of the 1400s and early 1500s were written by inquisitors, who often refer to witch trials that they or other inquisitors conducted. The formative diabolist literature was penned by Dominican inquisitors, including Eymeric, Nider, Vineti, Jacquerius, Visconti, de Spina, Prieiras and Rategno, as well as Kramer and Sprenger. Their books build on the demonological framework laid by scholastic theologians and by papal bulls like Gregory IX’s 1233 *Vox in Rama* (which attacked insurgent

peasants as devil-worshipping heretics led by ‘sibyls’). Inquisitor Etienne de Bourbon tried witches in the early decades of the Inquisition, using the same diabolist paradigm as Gregory: a devilish black cat presiding over orgies, while his colleague Bernard de Caux tried a woman in 1245 for healing and ‘other sorceries.’ But there is no evidence of executions in these early trials, and records of (Inquisition) witch executions only begin to appear in the late 1300s.

In 1385, inquisitor Antonio da Savigliano was already blending witchcraft with heresy in trials at Pignarolo and Turin. Inquisitors at Milan tried Sibilla Zanni and Pierina de’ Bugatis as witches in 1384 and burned them for relapse four years later (their testimony was loaded with pagan content, revolving around a goddess who revealed the secrets of nature and revived the animals the witches feasted on). Other trials were going on in this period, according to Bernardo Rategno, inquisitor at Como, who wrote in 1508 that “the sect of witches began to pullulate only within the last 150 years, as appears from the old records of trials by inquisitors of our Inquisition at Como” (*Tractatus de Strigiis*, cited in Bonomo and Ginsberg). These records do not seem to have survived—though Ginsberg points out that scholars have not been allowed to examine the Como archives—but such testimony points to early Inquisition persecutions. The diabolist inquisitor Prieiras made a parallel comment, dating the ‘witch sect’ back to 1404.

By this time witchcraft-minded inquisitors clearly had papal support. In 1409 pope Alexander V commissioned Pons Feugeyron to prosecute people spreading “new sects and forbidden rites,” who practiced “witchcraft, soothsaying, invocations to the devil, magic spells, superstition, forbidden and

**Bishops at the
Council of Paris
(825) called for rulers
to “punish pitilessly”
witches, diviners,
and enchanters who
practiced “very
certainly the remains
of the pagan cult.”**

pernicious arts.” In 1437 Eugenius IV issued a bull to all inquisitors authorizing them to prosecute people for sorcery: not just magical harm-doing, but also divination, healing, weather-witching, and adoration of ‘demons’ (Lea, 224). In 1451 Nicholas V authorized the head inquisitor of France to prosecute diviners and to punish those who spoke ill of this bull as rebels (Cauzons, 409). Some years later, Calixtus III ordered witch-inquisitions in numerous cities of northern Italy. The 1484 Hexenbulle of Innocent VIII clearly had its precedents. Papal calls for witch-inquisitions accelerated and continued through most of the next century.

Some of the most severe witch hunts of the 1400s were carried out by Italian inquisitors in the alpine foothills, at Como, Bergamo, Valtellina, Mendrisio, Turin, and in Piemonte. They were already raging by mid-century. In 1484, the inquisitor of Como carried out mass arrests of witches, so many that secular officials warned him not to overdo it. Popular memory still recalls 1484 as a year of burnings. The following year, 41 witches were burned in nearby Bormio. Other burnings took place at Milan, where few documents have survived. But these burnings were numerous enough to provoke a rebellion in 1516, when peasants protesting inquisitorial witch hunts brought them to a temporary halt. In 1518, at the other end of the Alps, inquisitors burned eighty witches in Val Camonica, ‘valley of the witches,’ and informed the Senate of Venice that another 70 were in prison, while 5,000 more were suspected. Inquisitors also had a large number burned at Bologna in 1523, where Pico della Mirandola wrote that executions went on daily, under mounting protests (see Bonomo for a fuller description of these Italian hunts; also Ermanno Paccagnini’s *In*

Materie de Stregarie, 1989).

Savoy was another epicenter, and western Switzerland, especially by inquisitors at Vevey and Neuchatel around 1437-42. Among those arrested in France in the 1430s were two women who defended the memory of Jeanne d’Arc—whose burning inquisitors had collaborated in—and the one who refused to recant was burned (this is according to Nider’s *Formicarius*, which refers to other witch trials by an inquisitor at Evian). In northern France during the mid 1400s, inquisitors Nicholas Jacquier and Pierre le Broussard hunted witches, as well as an unnamed inquisitor of Artois, and others active at Dijon and Lyons in Burgundy from 1460 to about 1480. German inquisitors tried witches at Thalheim and Heidelberg between 1446-75.

In the early 1500s, Inquisition witch trials took place in the Rhineland and over much of eastern France and northern Italy, as well as in Navarra, Catalunya and Aragón. The feminist-humanist Agrippa was forced into exile from Metz in 1519 after intervening to save an accused witch (the only evidence against her was that her mother had been burned as a witch). Inquisitor Nicholas Savin lost no time in torturing and burning another woman. Agrippa later described the inquisitors as “rapacious wolves” and “vultures gorged with human blood” (Lea, 545; Bonomo, 247-8).

REHABILITATING THE INQUISITION

Edward Peters’ influential book *Inquisition* omits all mention of inquisitorial witch trials (the bias of this author is best illustrated by his description of heresy as ‘theological crime’—a worthy companion to Orwellian ‘thought crime’). Peters employs a clever leger-de-main to avoid describing witch

trials by papal inquisitors; just as his narrative arrives at the cusp of these persecutions, he skips over to deal with the (state-run) Spanish Inquisition. When he returns, it is only to describe details of how the papal Inquisition was reformed into the Roman Inquisition (in 1540). In this way, he nimbly side-steps the diabolist witch frenzy of papal inquisitors in the 1400s and early 1500s, which shaped the ideology, methods, and course of the witch craze, including the secular trials.

Surprisingly, Peters’ complete omission of any discussion of inquisitorial witch hunts has been adopted wholesale. Many writers ignore the 15th century and early 16th century trials and literature, without ever bothering to critique what has been written about them previously. Under this new orthodoxy, it no longer seems to be considered necessary to discuss the role of diabolism, or any period other than the height of the Burning Terror. Discussion can then focus on the less severe procedures of the post-1600 inquisitors, and even praise their relative ‘lenience.’ However, this approach begs the question of their original role in fueling the hunts.

The generalizations drawn from this narrowed focus are false, or at best, misleading. Gibbons states that, “The Inquisition almost invariably pardoned any witch who confessed and repented.” This was just not true in the 1400s and early 1500s. Church law

required that a witch who ‘confessed’ (said what the inquisitors wanted) be spared from death—the first time. If she was arrested again, she was burned as a relapsed heretic. This became a common pattern: once accused and tried, a ‘witch’ was likely to be suspected and denounced again. In practice, a second arrest was not necessary for a burning; if the witch retracted a ‘confession’ obtained under torture, she could be treated as relapsed.

The fiction that ‘the Church abhors blood’ required that those convicted by the Inquisition be turned over to ‘the secular arm’ for execution. Its charade of recommending mercy was sometimes exposed when civil authorities balked at carrying out the execution, as when the mayor of Brescia refused to burn witches condemned by inquisitors in 1486, or in 1521, when the Venetian

government blocked the burning of more witches. The pope became furious that the expected death sentences were not carried out (Lea’s account of these events is still well worth reading).

Even in the 1600s, it is inaccurate to say witches were ‘pardoned.’ Exile was a common penalty in both Italy and Spain (and especially dangerous for women). The Spanish also flogged ‘witches’ with 30 or 100 or 200 lashes (the latter penalty being common) and sentenced them to jails and workhouses (*Cirac Estopañan*, 230-46). Other penalties subjected the ‘witches’ to a

**Almost all the
demonologies of the
1400s and early
1500s were written
by inquisitors, who
often refer to witch
trials that they or
other inquisitors
conducted.**

public spectacle of humiliation and injury: they were forced to ride backwards on an ass, naked to the waist, wearing mitres painted with devils while the mob swarmed around, shouting insults and throwing stones and filth at them.

What's more, the Spanish Inquisition increased its witch trials from 1615-1700, and Portugal from 1700-1760 (Bethancourt, MSE, 186-7). Both Iberian Inquisitions were actively repressing pagan Indian and African religions in Latin America during the same period, using the same diabolist models as in Europe (see especially Laura De Mello Souza's, *O Diabo e a Terra de Santa Cruz: Feitiçaria e Religiosidade Popular no Brasil Colonial*, São Paulo: 1987 (Companhia das Letras) and Silverblatt, Irene, *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru*, Princeton UP, 1987).

How 'lenient' the methods of the Roman Inquisition had been can be gauged from a document attempting to reform witch trial procedure as late as 1623: "The gravest errors in trials for witchcraft are daily committed by inquisitors, so that the Inquisition has scarcely found one trial conducted legally, with *women* (emphasis added) convicted on the most slender evidence, with confessions extorted by legal means, and has had to punish its judges for inflicting excessive tortures" (Robbins, Russell Hope, *The*

Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology, New York: Crown, 1959, p 269). Even after this, torture remained a factor, though more restricted, and death in prison a possible outcome.

RELIABILITY OF TRIAL RECORDS

Jenny Gibbons asserts that the trial sources come from "people who knew what actually happened" and who had "less reason to lie." I find this disingenuous. These records were produced by judges who presided over torture trials, attempting to extract from accused witches 'confessions' in line with diabolist doctrine. Their hunts were based on lies: that witches had sex with devils, murdered and ate babies, made powders to cause disease or hail. The defendant had to lie to stop the torture, then repeat the lies at the stake, (or assent to the lies being read out) in order to receive the favor of being strangled before burning.

The assumption that "trial records addressed the full range of trials ..." is seriously flawed. In country after country, specialists note that trial records only began to be kept after a certain time—before that, there is little or nothing. Even afterwards, the archives are notoriously riddled with lacunae. Records for entire cities, counties or regions are often missing. Gibbons rightly praises Ewen's scholarship, but overlooks his point that judicial records only begin to

be sent to the royal archives in the 1330s, and much later (or never) for many counties. Even for the 1400s, wrote Ewen, the Public Record Office contains few records of assizes, and many later judicial documents were destroyed: "For the reign of Henry VIII practically nothing has been preserved ... (and for Elizabeth) the bulk has been destroyed" (Ewen, 40, 102-9, 71).

This pattern repeats itself in studies of most countries, with no records available until early modern times: 1576 in Denmark; the 1590s in Norway; the 1630s for Latvia—and even these are thin and incomplete. For Hungary, Gabor Klaniczay notes that "The loss of complete series of court records is especially frequent for the period before 1690 ..." He concludes that lynchings were a frequent occurrence during the Turkish occupation (EMod, 221).

In Savoy, Brocard-Plaut observes that that out of 800 trials cited by two judges of the period 1560 to 1674, only 40% appear on record. She states that many documents have been destroyed—not least because of the Savoyard practice of hanging the court record around the victim's neck before burning (Brocard, 153). In the Swiss Jura, judicial records are missing but burnings are visible in fiscal accountings for loads of wood, tar and executioners' fees. Monter writes that "... even when the records seem to be in fairly good condition, as for 17th century Valangin, the chance discovery of a parallel source can double the number of known trials for a particular decade." He adds that the gaps in the prison registers often occur in years known to have experienced "extremely heavy waves of trials throughout the canton" (Monter, 91).

Inquisition documents for entire periods appear to have been destroyed, as intimated

by Bernardo Rategno's 1508 reference to inquisitorial records of Italian witch trials from the mid-1300s, no longer extant. Local inquisitorial archives for Venice, Aquileia, and Naples are full of gaps, according to Bethancourt, who refers to a "massive loss of the trials ..." (Magie et Sorcellerie, 187-90). Of Italian cities, only Reggio Emilia has complete inquisitorial archives and many others, none at all (Romeo, Giovanni, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe nell'Italia della Controriforma*, Florence: 1990 (Sansoni Editore), 53). An unknown number of records were lost after Napoleon carried off the papal Inquisition's archives.

Political reasons sometimes account for incomplete record-keeping and deliberate destruction of records. Secular officials in the Basque country, for example, pursued hunts in defiance of the Inquisition's belated attempts to brake them. In France, 17th-century trial records were destroyed on a grand scale after local courts defied the central government in pursuing witch trials. Robert Mandrou notes large gaps in the Toulouse archives, with "only a few traces" of trials during the worst craze periods, when one lawyer wrote that its Parlement was dealing with cases 'daily.' The skimpy 17th-century court records of Bordeaux—missing cases known from other sources and with no record of the 'innumerable' mass trials of 1643-45—are easily explained; its parlement burned its secret registries in 1710. Pau, another southwestern capital where witch hunts were intense, also burned all of its Archives du Parlement shortly after 1700. (Mandrou, 19, 377-84) Mandrou also describes how freelance witch-finders ravaged the provincial hinterlands in 1620-1650, leaving no judicial traces. The French hunts are possibly the most underestimated

witch hunts in Europe.

These massive, systemic gaps make me extremely skeptical of the conservative estimates—20,000 to 40,000, or even 10,000—now being advanced by some writers as the toll of witch hunt dead. Their adjustments for unrecorded executions are based on theoretical speculation and shaky assumptions (not least, the claim that deaths before 1400 were negligible). Historians have a tendency to be ruled by the nature of available documentation, which in this case is demonstrably flawed and incomplete. I appreciate that the popular figure of nine million burned is mythical, though my own count would have to include those who were drowned, branded, beaten, fined, imprisoned, scored, exiled, shunned, expropriated and deprived of their livelihoods. This much is certain: no one knows how many were killed.

SEXUAL POLITICS OF THE HUNTS

“Where we burn one man, we burn maybe ten women.” von Kaiserback, *Die Emeis*

The scapegoating of women was a major dynamic at work in the persecutions. They were the majority of those burned, however you want to slice it: averaging eight females to one male. In places the percentage of females exceeds 90%. Few regions show a male majority—and these rarely involve sizeable hunts. The action of misogyny is even more striking when you study the winnowing-out of accused males who were not prosecuted; who, when prosecuted, were convicted at significantly lower rates than women; and when convicted, often received more lenient sentences.

The pattern of witch hunts in most countries started with arrests of women, especially poor old women, the stereotypical witch. The numbers of men tended to rise as

the net widened, a consequence of the demand that the accused name other ‘witches’ under torture (as well as officials’ greed for confiscated property). When the number of men (and women related to important men) reached critical mass, a shut-off kicked in and halted the craze, til the next time. A significant number of accused men were related to women burned as witches. Other risk factors included age, disability, deformation. Given the diabolist fantasy of same-sex orgies, gays were probably targeted too, though this information was not recorded.

Some writers have claimed that medieval persecutions were directly mostly at men, focusing on the famous political trials spurred by court intrigues. But these trials were atypical; the very fact of their documentation is a result of the primary defendants’ prominence. Yet even these trials hauled common witches into court as an instrument to bring down the magnates—and burned them, whether or not the elite targets got off (as they often did). This is what happened in the 1315 trial of the bishop of Châlons; three women were tortured until they testified that he had gotten poison from them to kill his predecessor. They were burned, while the bishop got off. Even earlier, in 1309, the royal minister Enguerrand de Marigny forced a poor sorcière to testify against the bishop of Troyes. The sorcery charge was later turned on Marigny, who eventually went to the gallows—but only after his valet’s wife was burned at the stake. In England, the Witch of Eye was burned in 1441 in a successful plot to eliminate the Duchess of Gloucester, who was exiled (de Cauzons, 308-9; Lea, 185-92; Ewen, 40-1).

Witch-hunting was saturated with sexual

politics, most obviously in the frequent accusations of impotence “knottings” and female love magic designed to attract or bring back a mate. But female expression, mobility, and freedom were also at stake. During the mass hunts, women became suspect for going out at night, or being alone in the woods, or kindling a fire on a hilltop, or dancing, alone or in groups. Having drunk pints together at a tavern and caroused at each others’ houses was enough to indict some Scottish female revellers. Female speech had become dangerous, especially when a woman expressed anger at a wrong done to her. If she defended herself against verbal attacks, answered back to harassers, her defiance could be blamed for male impotence, or a dead horse, or a hail-storm.

In innumerable cases, the charge of witchcraft was a weapon ready for use against women. In Britain, Germany and Italian Switzerland, husbands accused their wives. Tiziana Mazzali found so many cases of husband-accusers in Poschiavo that she concluded that they “were able to easily get rid of their wives in this way,” observing that these men were frequently batterers (Mazzali, 154-5). Conversely, having a husband or other male relative willing to stand up for her significantly increased a woman’s chances of beating the charges (Karlsen, 71-5. Though her study concentrates on New Eng-

land, this was true in Europe as well).

Men as a group often enjoyed an entrenched presumption of immunity. In New England, males who incriminated themselves tended to be disbelieved or let off (See Karlsen, 53, 58-9). Male witch-finders claiming magical powers and even attendance at sabbats caused arrests and lynchings of many women in France and Bavaria. In the Italian Friuli, male *benandanti* acted as witch-finders, while their female counterparts were accused and tried as witches (later, after their usefulness in crushing the shamanic traditions was over, the men were also repressed by the Inquisition). Even in Finland, where most of those executed for witchcraft in the 1500s were men, the numbers of accused women rose under Swedish colonization, passed that of male defendants in the 1650s

until, at the height of the Finnish hunts, two thirds of those convicted were female. But the inland (non-colonized) Finns, who continued to think of sorcerers as men, tried very few witches (EMod, 383-86; 324-5).

Tracking the patriarchal repression of the hunts does not mean that this was ever their sole function, without relation to other socio-economic factors. It requires a longer view, taking the persecutions in their full historical context. Otherwise, the temptation to see them as rising full-fledged during the diabolist Terror leads to all sorts of miscon-

**The Toulouse
archives show large
gaps, with “only a
few traces” of trials
during the worst
craze, when one
lawyer wrote that
its parliament was
dealing with cases
“daily.”**

ceptions.

Jenny Gibbons asks, if the hunts were about sexism, why shouldn't we be able to find greater bias against women in the border areas which were often flashpoints during the mass hunts? Although this question is already an oversimplification of the problem, I would answer that in some cases, at least, the reverse was true. The most dramatic example would be the Basques, whose high status for women is attested in ancient and medieval sources, and whose pagan culture survived into the 20th century. (For the record, Basque witch persecutions become historically visible in the late 1200s, with secular burnings and ordeals recorded during the 1300s.) We

could also look to low-land Scotland, whose women were noted for their "smeddam," or the famous freedom of Occitanian women, both in regions stricken by mass hunts.

I see plenty of reason to think that witch persecutions acted to curtail women's power, and brought about a behavioral devolution from earlier public expressions of that power. Contemporary literature is saturated with admonitions of the dire consequences for women who resort to witchcraft. One of the most dramatic examples is a German pamphlet which held up the burning of 85 women at Gülch in 1591 "so that it may serve as a warning to all honest women and maids" (Held, Robert, *Inquisition/Inquisición: A Bilingual Guide to the exhibition of*

Torture Instruments from the Middle Ages to the Industrial Era, Florence: Qua d'Arno, 1985, p 118).

But returning to the complexity of causes, I would emphasize that the peripheral areas are very often colonized regions which underwent hunts in the aftermath of colonization. Think of Sicily, Finland, Estonia, Catalunya, and even the southern French provinces, or the Spanish Netherlands. For that matter, the alpine societies qualify too, especially if you look at the common pattern of villagers being hauled off the mountains to be tried in urban centers. This colonial dynamic also had implications for the degradation of female status.

The subject of witch hunts is loaded with political ramifications. It is not just the feminists or the pagans whose analysis is colored by political interpretation. The orthodox camp visibly add spin to their history, whether it is in habitually defining witchcraft as diabolist maleficia while erasing all positive folk traditions, or in Peters' highly selective, bald apologia for the Church Militant, or Middelfort and Sebald arguing for a 'positive function' of witch hunting. Unexamined assumptions are rife in the sources most praised for their 'rigor,' as when Cohn calls the accused witches "deluded women," or Levack and Quaife dismiss them as "senile." Most stunning of all is the refusal to deal with the massive body of evidence that women were the pri-

mary targets of witch persecution, and the impact of that reality on Western civilization. Aldegonde de Rue voiced it in 1601, when she was accused: "But look, they say that all women are witches!" (Muchembled 1987: 194).

SOURCES CITED:

- Baroja, Julio Caro, *The World of the Witches*, translated by Nigel Glendinning, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1961
- Bonomo, Giuseppe, *Caccia alle Streghe*, Palumbo, 1959
- Black, G.F., and Thomas, Northcote W., eds, *Examples of Printed Folklore Concerning the Orkney and Shetland Islands*, Folklore Society Publ #49, Nendeln, 1967 (Kraus Reprint Ltd)
- Brocard-Plaut, Michele, *Diableries et Sorcelleries en Savoie*, Editions Horvath, 1986
- de Cauzons, Theodore, *La Magie et la Sorcellerie en France*, Paris: Librairie Dorbon-Ainé, 1908
- Cirac Estopañán, Sebastian, *Los Procesos de hechicería en la Inquisición de Castilla la Nueva*, Sebastian Cirac Estopañán, Madrid, 1942
- Ewen, C. L'Estrange, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, London, 1929
- Fournier, Pierre-François, *Magie et Sorcellerie*, Editions Ipomée, 1977
- Ginzberg, Carlo, *Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, translated by John and Anne Tedeschi, Penguin, 1985
- Henningsen, G, and Ankarloo, B, eds., *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, Oxford, 1988 (footnoted as EMod)
- Karlsen, Carol, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*, WW Norton, 1988
- Lea, Henry Charles, and Howland, Arthur C., *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft*, New York, 1957

Mandrou, Robert, *Magistrats et Sorciers en France au XVIIe Siecle: Une Analyse de Psy-*

chologie Historique, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1980

Mazzali, Tiziana, *Il Martirio delle Streghe: una Nuova Drammatica Testimonianza dell' inquisizione laica del seicento*, Milan, 1988 (Xenia Edizione)

Monter, William, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland: The Borderlands during the Reformation*, Cornell U Press, Ithaca, 1964

Muchembled, Robert, ed, *Magie et Sorcellerie en Europe du Moyen Age à Nos Jours*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1994 (footnoted as MSE)

Muchembled, Robert, *Sorcieres, Justice et Société aux 16ième et 17ième Siecles*, Editions Imago, Paris, 1987

Russell, Jeffrey Burton, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, Cornell U Press, Ithaca, 1972

In 1970 Max Dashu founded the Suppressed Histories Archives, with a research focus on international women's studies, archaeology, and indigenous traditions. Drawing on a collection of over 10,000 slides, she has created seventy presentations, including Women in Power; Diasophy; The Mysteries; Drummers; The Women; Racism: History and Lies, and Witch Hunts, as well as scores of regional titles. She has presented these slide talks at universities, community centers, bookstores, and conferences around the US. Dashu is one of the founding mothers of the Goddess movement on the West Coast, where her art is well-known. She is currently working on a website and completing a multi-volume work on witches and the impact of the witch hunts on Western Civilization.
<maxdashu@lanminds.com>

Myth, History and Pagan Origins

by John Michael Greer

Over the last few decades, the debate about the origins of modern paganism has swelled steadily in volume, if not always in clarity. By any standard, there are some odd features to this debate. All through this debate, several odd features have maintained a persistent presence. Perhaps the oddest is the way that the question of pagan origins has almost always been framed in terms of history, as though its meanings and the implications of the question are limited to matters of bare historical fact.

That focus seems sensible enough at first glance, since the modern pagan revival does have a history, one that deserves serious study. Still, it's increasingly clear that to treat the subject of pagan origins as a purely historical question is to evade the dominant issues of the debate. In my one previous contribution to the debate, my co-author and I focused purely on the historical dimension. The nature of the response made it clear that, whatever our intentions, the article was read by many people in terms of mythic issues (see John Michael Greer and Gordon Cooper, "The Red Lodge: Woodcraft and the Origins of Wicca," *Gnosis* 48 (1998), 50-58, and the letters column in the following issue, *Gnosis* 49 (1998) 4-9). Those issues come up, in one way or another, whenever the roots of modern paganism are discussed within the pagan community. They are not matters of evidence and

inference, sources and developments; they have to do instead with questions of validity, of meaning and of ultimate concerns. They are not questions of history, in other words, but of myth.

The real subject of the whole debate, in fact, is *the origin myth of modern paganism*. From this standpoint, the thicket of claims and counterclaims that surround these questions can only be effectively untangled by approaching pagan historical narratives at least partly from their mythic side—by understanding them as myths, with all that this implies.

Dealing with any dimension of myth nowadays, though, is a difficult matter. People raised in the industrial societies of the present era typically view myths through a set of unspoken and highly problematic assumptions. These assumptions are the ambivalent gifts of a culture that has very little understanding of myth in general, and even less of its own mythic underpinnings.

HISTORY AND MYTH

Some of the most important of these assumptions are coded into the very words we use to discuss the subject. To most people in modern Western societies, the word 'myth' means, simply, a story that isn't true. The phrase 'myth of racial superiority', for example, is used to mean that the claims made by racists of various stripes are factually inaccurate. The word 'history', in turn, is treated as an antonym of 'myth', and thus a synonym for 'truth'—or at least of 'fact'. Myths are stories about events that didn't happen, in other words, while history is what did happen. Thus any attempt nowadays to speak of pagan origin stories as myths tends to run up against the immediate response, "But this isn't myth—it's history. It's *true*!"

The myths of a culture or a subculture have tremendous power to shape ... human experience — one reason why such stories [are] treated with a good deal of suspicion in postmodernist circles ...

This sort of pagan-in-the-street definition is to some extent a caricature, but it reflects a real and pervasive attitude toward the realm of myth. That attitude comes out of the ideas and definitions of truth that came into fashion in the West around the time of the Scientific Revolution—ideas that restricts the concept of truth to the sort of thing that can be known by the senses and written up in newspaper articles. The literature on the modern West's blindness to the mythic is extensive, but not always useful. One of the best analyses is that of Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, Anchor, 1972.

In an earlier time, different definitions held sway. "Myths", as one classical philosopher put it, "are things that never happened, but always *are*" (this saying is attributed to the late Classical philosopher Synesius). This draws a distinction useful for understanding myth, but even so it can mislead. Myths can be made out of events that happened, or events that never happened, or a mixture of both. I propose that it's not the source that defines something as myth, but the function; not whether the thing happened, but whether it *is*—whether it goes beyond the merely factual into the realm of meaning and ultimate concern, of the deep patterns of interpretation through which people comprehend their experience of the world.

Myths, according to this understanding, are the stories groups of people use to teach ourselves about who they are and what the world

is like. They are the narratives that define a given vision of reality. The myths of a culture or a subculture have tremendous power to shape the universe of human experience—one reason why such stories ('metanarratives', in current terminology) have come to be treated with a good deal of suspicion in postmodernist circles—and that power is greatest when the myths are accepted blindly, unthinkingly.

HISTORY AS MYTH

It was reflections of this sort, in part, that motivated the rejection of myth by the founders and banner-bearers of the Scientific Revolution. They sought to purge society of myth, to replace myth with historical and scientific fact (See Roszak, 101-61, and Berman). That was the plan, at least; it's clearly not the way things turned out. Human beings are incurably mythic creatures. Take away myths from a group of people, and they will quickly construct new ones; demand that they believe facts rather than myths, and they'll construct their new myths using facts as the raw material.

This is exactly what happened in modern industrial societies. The mythical narratives of these cultures are called 'history', 'scientific theory', or just 'the way things are'—anything but 'myth'. Thus, for example, most people raised in American culture think of Progress as a simple historical fact, and never notice that in this idea they are actually touching on the ruling myth of the modern world.

**... not all myths are constructive, or positive, or useful.
... [Myths] shape consciousness, and therefore they
shape behavior. The myths one believes in determine
the world one creates, for good or ill.**

Myth, supposedly the antithesis of science, affects the sciences just as much as any other part of our culture. Thomas Kuhn in his magisterial *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, has demonstrated that the great shifts from one scientific paradigm to another are motivated less by changes in data than by the realization that the new paradigm tells a better story than the old one did. More telling still, the anthropologist Misia Landau has shown that scientific theories of human evolution are lightly rewritten hero myths of the classic type, with *homo sapiens* in the starring role, and every one of the incidents common to hero myths around the world present and accounted for (Landau 1984: 262-68. See also Lewin 1987: 30-46).

History is even more vulnerable to this sort of disguised mythology. The common notion that history is simply 'what happened' is naive, to use no harsher word; 'what happened' in any single day in any small town, recorded in detail, would fill volumes. The historian must select—must decide what is important and what is not—and makes the selection, consciously or not, on the basis of the story he or she is trying to tell.

Some postmodernist theorists have claimed, on the basis of such considerations, that history is simply another mode of fiction. Such claims, though, have been widely criticized as overstated, and this criticism seems reasonable. Historians are indeed in the business of storytelling, but the stories they tell are

bound by a set of very specific rules, foremost among them the rule that every event in their stories should be a verifiable fact. More deeply, though, history in the proper sense of the word has specific goals, as well as specific materials and rules; its purpose is to show the texture and flow of past events, in all their complexity and ambiguity, through a selection of illuminating facts. This purpose can overlap to some degree with the goals of myth (or of fiction), but overlap is not the same thing as identity.

In the modern fusion of history and myth, therefore, something is arguably lost on both sides. History and myth are both types of stories—but they are *different* types of stories. They have different goals and expectations and, usually, different raw materials as well. A story that tries to be both rarely succeeds well at either.

This is the kernel of truth behind the otherwise very questionable claim, made by certain modern pundits, that our society suffers from a shortage of myths. On the contrary, we have plenty of myths; we just call them 'science', 'history' and so on, and think that their validity depends on the accuracy of the facts that make up their raw material. We no longer examine them as myths; we no longer judge them on their strength and meaning on the mythic level. More important, we no longer ask ourselves what these stories are teaching us, what kind of world they are leading us to build.

MYTHS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Such questions remain highly relevant in the present situation, because not all myths are constructive, or positive, or useful. Consider the myth of racial superiority, mentioned above. This is a myth in both senses of the word, the deeper one as well as that of the person-in-the-street. It's a story that some people use to teach themselves about who they are and what their world is like. In the hands of a powerful storyteller such as Adolf Hitler, it's capable of shaping the behavior and destiny of entire nations. The results of such shaping can be traced without much difficulty in the history of the century now ending, and there are very few people who would argue that those results have been positive.

It's clear, therefore, that myths have implications and consequences. They shape consciousness, and therefore they shape behavior. The myths one believes in determine the world one creates, for good or ill. By examining the implications of a myth, it may be possible to guess at the sort of world that myth is likely to create.

THE MYTH OF PAGAN ORIGINS

There are many different accounts of the origins of modern paganism, backed up with historical claims of varying degrees of plausibility, and so far—as mentioned earlier—disputes about the claims have hidden the fact that what lies behind them is a single, powerful, and very distinctive myth. Setting aside all the arguments about historical evidence for a moment, and look at the myth itself *as a myth*, the whole debate takes on a very different character.

To help get past the historical dimension, I will outline the myth as though it were a folktale from some distant culture. Told in such a

way, it might go something like this:

Once upon a time, long ago, people lived in peace and harmony with each other and the world, following the teachings of their ancient pagan faiths. Then a terrible and tragic event happened. (The nature of this event differs from version to version—the introduction of Christianity, the arrival of patriarchal Indo-European invaders from the East, or any of several other variants.) This shattered the peace and happiness of that ancient time, bringing in its place savage persecution, oppression, and every kind of suffering.

Still, despite all this, a small remnant hidden away in deep woods and isolated places kept alive the ancient traditions in secret. The Burning Times are a testimony both to the savagery visited upon this small remnant, and the steadfastness with which they persevered despite all opposition.

Finally, in the fullness of time, the ancient traditions were revealed again, and people began to turn away from the oppressive system around them—a few at first, but then steadily more and more. The defenders of Christianity (or patriarchy, or whatever the villains of this tale happen to be called in any given version) have responded with renewed persecution, but their strength is weakening daily. Sooner or later, the whole process will conclude with a renewal of the golden age, and people will once again live according to the ancient traditions, in peace and harmony with each other and the world.

This 'folktale' version of the origin myth of modern paganism is derived from many sources drawn from the current pagan subculture. See especially the extraordinarily revealing "Life, Death, and the Goddess: The Gnosis Interview with Starhawk and Carol Christ," *Gnosis* 48 (1998), 28-34, in which Christ argues for the historical reality of a scheme basically identical to the one given here. There are, of course, some pagan origin accounts that do not follow the story given here, but it should be noted that claims of lineal connection between modern paganism and its ancient equivalents are not a necessary

part of the story; there are many full-blown versions of this myth that explicitly renounce such claims without impairing the myth as such.

OTHER VERSIONS OF THE MYTH

In trying to make sense of this myth and its implication, pagan scholars have one great advantage: it's not a new myth, or one unique to modern paganism. It's actually quite old, and it's found in many versions throughout the history of Western cultures. The names of the characters change from version to version, but the story remains essentially the same.

For the sake of comparison, here is another version, which is familiar to most people nowadays:

Once upon a time, long ago, people lived in peace and harmony with each other and the world, in the state of primitive communism. Then, a terrible and tragic event happened: the invention of private property. This shattered the peace and happiness of that ancient time, bringing in its place savage persecution, feudalism, and every kind of suffering.

Still, despite all this, a small remnant hidden away in the depths of the proletariat kept alive the ideals of a classless society. The outbreaks of class warfare throughout the feudal period are a testimony both to the savagery visited upon this small remnant, and the steadfastness with which they persevered despite all opposition.

Finally, in the fullness of time, the precepts of dialectical materialism and proletarian solidarity were revealed, and people began to turn away from the oppressive system around them—a few at first, but then steadily more and more. The defenders of capitalism have responded with renewed persecution, but their strength is weakening daily. Sooner or later, the whole process will conclude with a renewal of the golden age, and people will live in the glorious dictatorship of the proletariat, in peace and harmony with each other and the world.

Again, the story is the same; only the names have been changed. Still, the historical

mythology of Communism—like the historical mythology of modern paganism—is a recent revision of a much older and more widespread myth. The most common form of that myth in Western culture is also one of the very earliest, and it's familiar enough that it shouldn't be necessary to repeat more than the beginning:

Once upon a time, long ago, the first two people in the world—Adam and Eve—lived in peace and harmony with each other and the world, in the Garden of Eden. Then a terrible and tragic event happened...

And so on.

The implications of all this are not likely to sit well with many people in today's pagan community. From the Original Paradise through the Fall, the righteous remnant in their isolated purity, the age of persecution, the redeeming revelation, the rising struggle between good and evil, all the way up to the New Jerusalem and the restoration of the original paradise—the core myth of modern paganism is structurally identical, point for point, with that of traditional Christianity.

WHAT THE MYTH IMPLIES

This in itself says nothing about what the myth implies, or what kind of world it creates for those that accept it. For that, mere labeling is inadequate. What is needed is a clear look at what the myth actually says and how it structures experience.

Here, we can only make a beginning at that task. A full exploration of this myth—the Christian myth of Fall and Redemption—could easily fill entire books. Still, there are at least a few points that can be seen clearly right away.

First of all, the myth we've described is a myth of *moral dualism*. There are two sides, and only two; one is right, and the other is wrong. There is no middle ground, no moral

... there is no balance being struck, no greater harmony created, only a struggle to the death. Peace and harmony are restored only when one side no longer exists.

ambiguity, only good and evil in stark contrast.

Secondly, the myth is *agonistic*—that is to say, it's a myth of war. The opposition between the two sides in the myth isn't complementary, like the Yin and Yang of Taoist philosophy, or the Oak King and Holly King of some Wiccan traditions; there is no balance being struck, no greater harmony created, only a struggle to the death. Peace and harmony are restored only when one side no longer exists.

Finally, the myth is based on a cosmology of *linear time*. It has a beginning and an end, and travels from one to the other once and once only.

It probably needs to be stressed that all three of these characteristics are very much part of the modern pagan version of the myth, not just the Christian and Marxist ones. It may be useful, for the sake of contrast, to imagine a pagan version of the myth that eliminated these features—that presented the relation between paganism and Christianity (or patriarchy, or whatever) as a creative balance between equally positive forces; that saw, let's say, the two of them as incomplete without each other, or forming some kind of greater whole in their union; or that traced out the historical struggle between them and then said, "And then, in another two thousand years or so, another monotheistic, patriarchal religion will rise up and start the cycle again—and isn't that *wonderful*!" Such versions of the narrative may be in circulation somewhere in the modern pagan community, but they seem

few and far between, at least at present.

MYTH AND IDEOLOGY

These points are central to the issues raised in this essay, because the three characteristics discussed above are among the central features that many modern pagans use to distinguish their own spirituality from Christianity and other revealed religions. Many pagan writers and teachers have claimed that pagan spirituality rejects moral dualism, ideologies of conflict, and linear time in favor of a cosmological polarity between opposites, in which each side is equally necessary and equally good, relating harmoniously in the endless dance of the cycles of nature and the turning of the heavens. The problem is that the historical claims and origin myths propounded by most of these same writers and teachers tell exactly the opposite story.

Such conflicts between ideology and mythology are not precisely rare nowadays, close equivalents may be found all over the cultural spectrum. One highly relevant example from outside the pagan community can be found in the writings of the Reverend Matthew Fox.

In his voluminous writings, Fox has some very harsh things to say about dualism. In fact, his argument—as presented at length in *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* and other books—is that there are two and only two kinds of religion: dualist and nondualist,

which are utterly opposed to one another. Dualism is absolutely evil, while nondualism is absolutely good. At one point he spends the better part of two pages running through a long list of polar opposites, defining one ('nondualist') pole as good and the other ('dualist') as bad (see especially pp 134-35, where the opposing powers of Fox's Manichean cosmos are set out in a convenient list). All in all it's one of the better examples of hardcore moral dualism you'll find this side of Gnostic scripture.

It's hard to imagine anything more typically dualist. Fox, in fact, is probably the most dualistic thinker on the modern theological scene. His ideology rejects dualism, but his mythology is yet another version—an ecological, feminist, politically liberal version—of the myth we've been discussing, and it's as deeply rooted in moral dualism as any of the others. His ideology and his myth are in conflict, and it's the mythology that wins out.

MYTH AND THE FUTURE

Fox's antidualist dualism is all the more important because you can find the same thing in most of the central texts of the modern pagan revival. Pick up books by Starhawk, Riane Eisler or any of several dozen others, and you'll find ringing critiques of dualist thinking phrased in highly dualistic terms. Myths have implications and consequences. They shape consciousness, and therefore they shape behaviour. More to the point, they are at the height of their power when they go unrecognized and unexamined.

Much of what this implies depends on what today's pagans want their spirituality to be, and how they want it to develop over time. The histories of Christianity, Marxism and several other related traditions provide numerous examples of the ways in which the

myth of Fall and Redemption tends to shape behavior and define the world. It may not be unreasonable to suggest that modern paganism, by embracing the same myth, may be headed down the same road.

If this is the road the pagan movement wants to take, well and good. Current initiatives in some parts of that community to establish a full-time paid pagan clergy, and to redefine pagan spirituality in terms of belief in some generally accepted set of doctrines, suggest that this process may already be well under way.

On the other hand, if that isn't what the members of that movement have in mind, there is plainly a good deal of work to be done. Some of that work, it might be suggested, is a matter of confronting some of the thoughtways of Western culture: a matter of learning to take myth seriously on its own terms, of facing the implications of myths and letting go of those myths that lead in directions we do not wish to take. Much of it, finally, has to do with learning the difference between myth and history, and realizing that the history of a tradition may have no particular bearing on its validity and relevance, or about the nature and powers of the mythic and spiritual forces in its deep places.

John Michael Greer is an Ovate of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD) as well as a longtime student and practitioner of Hermetic ceremonial magic. His writings include Paths of Wisdom: The Magical Cabala in the Western Tradition (Llewellyn, 1996) and the forthcoming Earth Divination, Earth Magic: A Practical Guide to Geomancy. He is also the editor of the quarterly Abiegnus: A Journal of the Western Esoteric Traditions. He can be reached at PO Box 95674, Seattle, WA 98145.

BOOK REVIEW: The New Edition of Leland's *Aradia*

Aradia, or The Gospel of the Witches

by Charles G. Leland

Translated by Mario Pazzaglini, PhD and Dina Pazzaglini; with additional material by

Chas S. Clifton, Robert Mathiesen, and Robert Chartowich; foreword by Stewart Farrar. Blaine, Washington: Phoenix Publishing, 1998.

Reviewed by Sabina Magliocco

California State University, Northridge

In 1899, amateur folklorist Charles G. Leland first published *Aradia, or The Gospel of the Witches*, a collection of Italian spells, conjurations and legends which he claimed to have obtained from a Florentine witch named Maddalena. Leland translated the texts and strung them together with interpretations based on the prevailing folklore theories of his time, suggesting that they were survivals of a pagan religion dating back to the days of ancient Rome and Etruria. From the very beginning, *Aradia* has been surrounded by controversy. Neither Italian nor American folklorists have ever taken it seriously. Leland was suspected of having fabricated the text himself, as well as having invented his key informant. Even those who accepted her existence believed Maddalena, a Florentine fortune-teller of dubious repu-

tation, may have concocted material to satisfy the American folklorist who was paying her for information. In spite of this, as Chas S. Clifton demonstrates in his essay "The Significance of *Aradia*" (pp. 59-80), *Aradia* has become a fundamental text in the 20th century Witchcraft revival. A possible source for parts of the Charge of the Goddess, it has influenced many later Neo-Pagan texts and thinkers, including Gerald B. Gardner or his predecessors in the New Forest coven, Doreen Valiente, and some of the most influential theologians in Dianic Witchcraft.

The publication of a new, expanded edition from Phoenix promises to shed light on many aspects of this intriguing document. The product of interdisciplinary collaboration, it includes Leland's original text plus a new translation by Mario Pazzaglini, essays by several scholars giving historical and cultural background, and some previously unpublished materials. The book is organized into three sections. Part I includes essays contextualizing the material: Robert Mathiesen's "Charles G. Leland and the Witches of Italy: the Origin of *Aradia*," Chas S. Clifton's "The Significance of *Aradia*," and Mario Pazzaglini's "Leland and the Magical World of *Aradia*." Part II consists of the texts themselves: Leland's original version, Pazzaglini's new translation, and a line-by-line translation with the original Italian, a corrected Italian version, the English translation, and annotations. Part III includes commentaries by Pazzaglini on magical principles in *Aradia* and on the firefly verses, an essay by Robert Chartowich entitled "Enigmas of *Aradia*," a ballad Leland composed in Italian called "La Bella Strega" ("The Beautiful Witch") and a photocopy of a letter sent

to him by Maddalena in 1895. As is almost inevitable in collaborative edited works, this one is somewhat uneven in tone and quality. While the new translation is valuable, and some of the contextualizing materials are very helpful in understanding *Aradia* as a document, others are more problematic.

ESTABLISHING AUTHENTICITY

The essays by Robert Mathiesen and Mario Pazzaglini in Part I go a long way towards clearing up some of the mysteries surrounding *Aradia*. In some ways, these are among the book's most valuable contributions. Working with Leland's personal papers in the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, and the Library of Congress, Mathiesen is able to establish that Maddalena was a documented historical person, and that she was Leland's principal informant for *Aradia*, as well as for *Legends of Florence* (1896) and *Etruscan Roman Remains in Popular Tradition* (1892). In fact, about half of *Aradia's* 15 chapters are actually materials which Leland had published in these other works (p. 35). By closely examining Leland's hand-written, pre-publication draft of the texts, Mathiesen concludes that while Leland revised much of the English text as he went along, the Italian parts show no editorial changes, suggesting that he was copying them from another source. This lends some credence to his claims that he received an actual manuscript from Maddalena.

But Mathiesen incisively observes that the text of *Aradia* is clearly intersubjective—it is the product of the interaction between two unique individuals, Leland

and Maddalena, and reflects both their interests. It is apparent that Leland's own views of magic, folklore and 'survivals' shaped his editing, translation and interpretation of Maddalena's materials. At the same time, Maddalena, a consummate fortune-teller, was skilled enough to intuit Leland's interests and predilections, and to select and edit material from her own tradition which she thought would please her patron. Mathiesen makes clear that while this does not detract from the text's authenticity, it does make it idiosyncratic rather than typical or representative of any Italian magical folk tradition.

What is quite typical of an Italian peasant worldview is the oppositional quality of the verses. Mathiesen shows how the anti-clerical, anti-hierarchical counter-religion of *Aradia* is actually in keeping with the flavor of much Italian folklore—the voice of peasants against their historical oppressors, the Church and the landowning elite.

The first part of Mario Pazzaglini's essay "Leland and the Magical World of *Aradia*" (pp. 81-105) further illuminates the peculiarities of the original text of *Aradia*. In translating Leland's Italian passages, Pazzaglini had before him a difficult task. He worked from the original manuscript, now among Leland's collected papers in Philadelphia. The manuscript is in Leland's own hand; the 'original' which Maddalena allegedly gave him has never been found. The Italian in the manuscript has multiple problems which make the translator's work especially vexing: errors in spelling, missing and misused words, lack of punctuation and diacritical marks, and lack of gender agreement between nouns and their modifiers. Pazzaglini explains this by suggesting that Leland

either copied incorrectly, or received a text composed by a person who made many errors in writing Italian. Yet these are not the sorts of errors usually made by a semi-literate native Italian speaker writing down a text. Perhaps the most likely interpretation Pazzaglini proposes is that the text at some point went from oral into written tradition, and that many errors are the result of mis-hearing Italian or Tuscan dialect words. Pazzaglini correctly points out that any collection of folk magical incantations would most likely have existed originally in dialectal form; yet the rhymes in *Aradia* are all close to standard Italian. He infers that at some point the texts went from dialect to standard Italian to English—a series of steps which leaves a great deal of room for mistranslation, misinterpretation and lost meanings.

Pazzaglini has been able to compare some of the material in *Aradia* with material currently in oral tradition in Italy, a fascinating and worthwhile endeavor. While some of his informants recognized in *Aradia* general principles pertaining to the magico-religious worldview of rural Italy (pp. 435- 441), none reported ever having heard of the person of *Aradia* or of any witches' 'gospel.' In fact, the idea of writing down charms and cures is an anathema to most Italian folk magical practitioners. Pazzaglini

accurately observes that the *Aradia* material has very likely been 'de-Christianized' or 're-paganized' (p. 93), because actual Italian folk magical charms all have some Christian content. These observations reinforce Mathiesen's hypothesis about the idiosyncratic nature of *Aradia*.

Pazzaglini finds current Italian analogues to some of the chants and verses in *Aradia*. He points out in this essay and in "The Firefly Verses" (pp. 443-449) that several chants closely resemble widespread, well-known Italian children's rhymes used in counting out, hand-clapping games, dandling, jumping rope, and catching fireflies—an important clue to the origin of some of Maddalena's material. But unfortunately he presents only a few examples of analogues from contemporary Italian oral tradition. Here is where a greater knowledge of folklore and ethno-

graphic methods would have been helpful. What is necessary here is a systematic examination of multiple variants of these chants to see which elements are stable over time and place, and a comparison of the *Aradia* material with all the other versions. This is not as difficult a task as it might seem; such chants are readily collected from any speaker of Italian (I remember many of them from my own childhood), and recorded, transcribed examples exist in the Italian Dis-

**Pazzaglini
accurately
observes that the
Aradia material
has very likely
been 'de-
Christianized' or
're-paganized' ...
because actual
Italian folk
magical charms
all have some
Christian content.**

coteca di Stato and in the archives of the Facoltà di Storia delle Tradizioni Popolari at the University of Rome. Yet Pazzaglini seems strangely unaware of these sources. He limits his fieldwork to areas in his native Emilia-Romagna, a region of Italy near Maddalena's Tuscany, but nevertheless significantly different in dialect and folk culture. And he oddly refers to both Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany as "northern Italy," when linguistically and culturally they are better categorized as part of central Italy.

Pazzaglini is unfortunately out of his depth when it comes to observations about the nature of peasant life in rural Italy. Vast amounts of ethnographic data exist on this subject, yet he makes reference to none of it. His lack of ethnographic knowledge leads him to make some inaccurate interpretations: for example, he considers the

ubiquitous nicknames by which families and individuals are known as a protective form of secrecy, when in fact they have been well-documented throughout the Latin Mediterranean as a form of social control, the very opposite of secrecy and protection. Even more problematic is his presentation of Italian rural communities as primitive isolates, preserving unchanged the traditions of yesteryear. In

**[Pazzaglini]
considers
the ubiquitous
nicknames ... as a
protective form of
secrecy, when in
fact they have been
well-documented ...
as a form of social
control, the very
opposite of secrecy
and protection.**

fact these towns are very well-connected through trade and mass media with the European Economic Community and the outside world, and their folklore has changed to reflect new social realities. Many Italian words are either misspelled or not proofread—*strega* ('witch'; singular) and *streghe* (plural) are misspelled occasionally throughout, and on p. 96 he writes *la compagna* (the [feminine] companion) for *la campagna* (the countryside), leading the reader to wonder about inaccuracies in the rest of the Italian.

THE TRANSLATION

Pazzaglini's new translation is cleaner, closer to original Italian, and easier on the modern reader than Leland's artificial rendition. The new version has been stripped of archaisms and other devices Leland used to make the translation sound more 'old-

fashioned,' and thus authentic, to his readers' ears. What it loses in poetry it gains in accuracy, at least most of the time.

Much more interesting is the line-by-line translation, because we see the translator at work and comprehend the arduousness of his task. Here, the errors in the original Italian are clearly contrasted with Pazzaglini's attempts to clean them up, to correct the grammatical errors in agreement, verb tense, and phrasing which make the original so

problematic. Overall, he has done a remarkable job, and most of his interpretations and conjectures seem to be quite plausible. Occasionally, however, he slips up. On p. 408, for example, in translating Diana's curse upon Endymion, he translates "Che il tuo cuore ritto sempre possa stare / E al amore più non portai fare ..." as "To have your heart always remain withdrawn / And you will no more be able to make love ..." (p. 408).

In fact, the couplet means something more like "May your heart always remain rigid / erect // And [may you] no longer be able to make love." Diana is either wishing upon Endamone a hard heart, or, more likely, 'cuore' (heart) is a euphemism for penis, as it often is in stornelli (Italian satirical songs), in which case she is cursing him with a perpetual case of priapism. Of course, no translation is ever perfect; but here, as elsewhere, Pazzaglini's missteps could significantly affect the interpretation of the work.

COMMENTARIES

If *Aradia* is not the book of shadows for a 19th century Italian witch cult—and at this point it should be amply obvious that it is not—then what exactly is it? Some of the commentaries by Robert Chartowich and Leland's Italian ballad "La Bella Strega" hint at answers. Chartowich suggests in his essay "Enigmas of *Aradia*" (pp. 451-460) that the material preserves references that might have originated with the Albigenians, one of the heretical groups persecuted by the Inquisition for worshipping Sophia, Isis and Diana (p. 455). Could fragments of this oppositional belief system have survived in the folklore of central Italy, to emerge in the legends of *Aradia*?

He further speculates on the connection between the fireflies, wheat sprigs, fairies and the Eleusynian Mysteries—but here his methodology seems to be based more on free association than on any kind of systematic discipline. His insight are provocative, but not supported by data; they provide material for further investigation.

The ballad Leland composed in Italian is illuminating because it shows that he knew Italian well enough to compose (bad) poetry in imitation of an existing folk tradition, and it demonstrates many of the same kinds of grammatical errors as the Italian verses in *Aradia*. This suggests that whatever Maddalena may have given him originally, Leland probably had a hand in re-shaping it. This was not at all unusual for 19th century folklorists, many of whom sincerely believed they were 'restoring' to ancient texts their 'original' meaning. In so doing, however, completely new works were born. The Grimm brothers, whose *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (1812) set the standard for European folktale collections, heavily edited their material, combining versions, changing endings, and otherwise shaping them to suit their own romantic aesthetics. Elias Lönnrot compiled the Finnish folk epic *The Kalevala* from fragments of ballads which had never been part of an epic tradition. It is in this scholarly context that Leland's *Aradia* must be understood. Neither a forger nor an inventor, Leland was merely compiling and editing material as many of his contemporaries had already done, shaping it to reflect his own biases and beliefs about the folklore as 'survivals' of a religion from an earlier historical period. In attempting to systematize his materials, he actually created a new and unique document.

Aradia

or The Gospel of the Witches

Expanded Edition

This special edition features contributions by several eminent writers:

Mario Pazzaglini, PhD, whose family origins on both sides are deeply rooted in the area where *Aradia* originated, has spent 25 years working on a new translation. He gives a line-by-line transcription showing where Leland made his original errors as a result of his lack of comprehension of the dialect of the area. The new translation is then presented in the same format as the original edition (which is also included here). Mario's research notes are included as well.

Robert Mathiesen, PhD, has been a member of the faculty of Brown University for over 30 years. During the last decade most of his research has been on the historical development of magical theories and practices in Europe and the Americas from the Middle Ages to the present. He writes on the origins of *Aradia*, including the culture and religion of the area, as well as the difficulties involved in translating the book.

Chas Clifton has been studying witchcraft and the occult for over 25 years and has a long list of published books to his name including *Modern Rites of Passage*, *Witchcraft and Shamanism*, and *Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance*. He writes on the significance of *Aradia* on the revival of modern witchcraft.

The foreword by Stewart Farrar includes a short biography of Leland.

Phoenix Publishing

Softcover, 5-1/2 x 8-1/2,
480 pages \$21.50

To order please send check or
money order for \$24.50
(includes \$3 postage) to
Phoenix Publishing, Box
3829, Blaine, Wa 98231
www.phoenixpublishing.com

Perhaps we should look at *Aradia* as the first real text of the 20th century Witchcraft revival. In fact, it strongly resembles the materials in many of our books of shadows: collections of folk rhymes, charms and stories from multiple sources with an attempt to systematize them and give them an underlying theology. Mathiesen, Pazzaglini and the editors of this new edition are to be commended for making this material available to scholars in a way that begins to expose the mysteries which have long surrounded it.

Sabina Magliocco holds a PhD in Folklore from Indiana University, Bloomington,

and is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at California State University, Northridge.

She is a native speaker of Italian, having grown up in Italy and the United States.

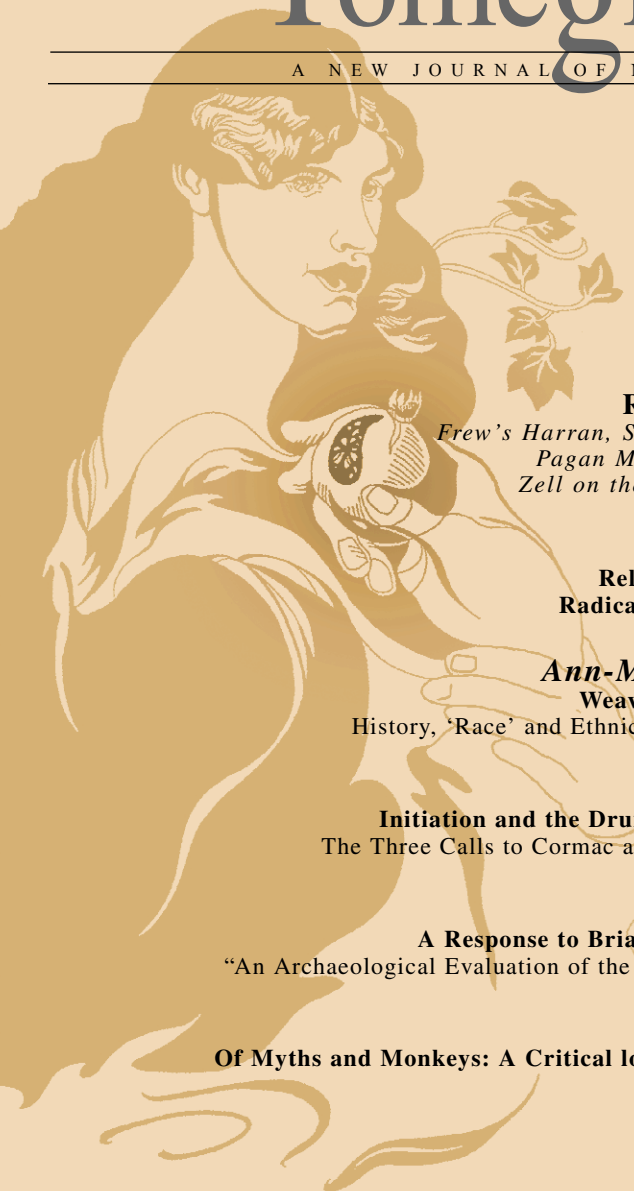
She has done field research in Italy on traditional festivals and folklore, as well as on Pagan groups in the San Francisco Bay area, and is currently completing a book

on ritual and expressive culture in the movement. She is the author of several articles on Paganism, the guest editor of the special issue of Ethnologies devoted to Wicca, and has also published extensively on Italian folklore. During the course of her Pagan research, she became a Gardnerian initiate.



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Readers' Forum

Frew's Haran, Siedhwork and 'Ergi'
Pagan Myth, the Witch Hunt
Zell on the Letter to the Pope

2

Bron Taylor

**Religion, Violence, and
Radical Environmentalism**

4

Ann-Marie Gallagher

Weaving a Tangled Web:
History, 'Race' and Ethnicity in Pagan Identity

19

Brendan Myers

Initiation and the Druid Secret Language:
The Three Calls to Cormac as a Druidic Initiation

30

Joan Marler

A Response to Brian Hayden's Article:
"An Archaeological Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm"

37

Essay

Of Myths and Monkeys: A Critical look at Critical Mass
Maureen O'Hara

48



The Pomegranate

Copyright

© 1999 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate

is published four times a year
at the Cross-Quarters.

Subscriptions:

4 issues: US\$16 — 8 issues: US\$30
by surface mail anywhere.
Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds,
or Checks drawn on US banks to
The Pomegranate
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019
Subs email: antech@teleport.com

Submissions:

Editorial email: fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca
See the inside back cover for our
Call for Papers.
Ask us for our Writers' Guidelines,
or read it on our website:
www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/
Deadline for submissions:
the Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

Co-Editors:

Fritz Muntean
Diana Tracy

Associate Editor:

Chas S. Clifton

Editorial Board:

Maggie Carew
Stephen McManus

Editorial Assistance:

Melissa Hope
Síân Reid

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

According to Edward Whitmont, in *Return of the Goddess* (NY: Crossroads, 1989), our newfound interest in the magical and the matrifocal is causing material which has long laid dormant in our unconscious to now be brought to the surface. For the most part this is a good thing, but Whitmont cautions us that the "free-floating impulses from the magical layer are powder charges waiting to be ignited by the sparks from the torches of the returning Dionysos and his menadic retinue". Many of us seem to be aware of this, at least intuitively, and are concerned about the implied potential for violence in Nature Religion and Neopaganism, especially about their fringes.

We begin with two articles which address this issue. In the first, Bron Taylor argues convincingly that, incendiary rhetoric notwithstanding, radical environmentalist and animal rights movements are unlikely to pose an immediate or intentional threat to human life. We are encouraged by his optimism and hope that it is well founded.

A more pessimistic view is proposed by Ann-Marie Gallagher. She warns that not only are Pagan beliefs and imagery being appropriated in Britain and Europe by neo-Nazi organizations in order to sacralize their political agendas, but that within the Neopagan community proper, the re-writing of history (and even, occasionally, geography) in search of 'authentic' identity has often led to quite reactionary nationalist and even racist rhetoric.

Our third article is by Brendan "Cathbad" Myers, a respected member of the Celtic

Reconstructionist community. It is our hope that by seeding our magazine with writing of this quality, we will encourage other scholars of the Druidic persuasion to contribute.

Joan Marler, Marija Gimbutas' editor and biographer, has entered the lists with a critical response to Brian Hayden's recent defence of classical academic archaeology, and we have allowed Prof Hayden a few short paragraphs in reply. The editors now serve notice that these are the final words we wish to publish on this subject (at least as articles—letters are still welcome). It is our considered opinion that the dialogue which first appeared in *Pom* #6 between academic feminist theorists and the supporters of Gimbutas is of much more interest, and we would like to actively encourage our readers to address this subject.

We close this issue with an essay from the archives, by the humanist psychologist Maureen O'Hara, wherein she takes issue with the misappropriation of scientific language and methodologies in the service of sensationalist paranormal claims. The ostensive subject of this essay, the Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon, may not be familiar to many of our younger readers, but it enjoyed considerable popularity in the mid-80s. We hope that the lessons learned by reading its critics may be valuable in dealing with the similar ways in which marginal belief systems are promoted today.

This issue (our 10th!) also contains a bumper crop of Letters to the Editor, and we hope you enjoy reading them as much as we enjoyed receiving (and editing) them. Our thanks to all those who contributed, and as for the rest of you ... please write.

Persephone's hard-working minions.

The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas.

Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.

Dear Pomegranate Editor,

I have read the article on Harran by Donald Frew in *The Pomegranate* 9 with great interest.

Mr Frew has correctly referred to the group known as the Sabi'ah (Sabaeans) whose exact identity or qualification remains wide open to scholarship. The Qur'an lists them among those who were religiously acceptable in the eyes of God: Jews, Christians, Sabaeans, and—of course—Muslims. Th. Ibn Qurrah, it is reported by Ibn an-Nadim, claimed that he and his community were Sabaeans, and were thus exempt from being considered enemies of Islam, coming under the same protection (*dhimmah*) that is accorded to Christian and Jewish subjects. What exactly was the religion of the town and its people remains open to question.

The Syriac term with which he described himself (and his community) may be related to the enigmatic Arabic term *Hanif*. Abraham, the Qur'an states, was neither Jewish nor Christian; he was a *Hanif*. Some would argue that before his prophethood, Muhammad too was a *Hanif*. The term may mean someone who worshipped the One God prior to the descent of revelation.

Two important points are missing from the article (which I enjoyed reading). The first is the report—again by Ibn an-Nadim—that a rift over ideological and philosophical issues occurred between Th. Ibn Qurrah and his townsfolk to the point that he had to leave the town. How does one interpret this? The second point is that once he had referred to himself and his community as a Sabaeans, and the identification was accepted by the Muslims, neither he nor his community could be described as 'Pagans', unless one wants to suggest that Ibn Qurrah was not telling the truth.

Hanna Kassis,
Budapest, Hungary

To The Pomegranate:

For the last several years I have attended lectures by Donald Frew and have eagerly awaited the printed versions of his entertaining and convincing presentations. I'm sorry to say, however, that the substance of his recent articles in both *Ethnologies* and *The Pomegranate*—although almost identical with the content of his lectures—leaves much to be desired, especially as scholarship and academic precision are concerned.

One of the most convincing elements of Frew's lectures on Harran is his reading of the passage attributed to Thabit Ibn Qurrah that begins "We are the heirs and propagators of Paganism ..." No Neopagan audience of today can fail to be moved by these words. Nor could they fail to be convinced of the point, central to Frew's argument, that Ibn Qurrah is a descendent and defender of Classical Graeco-Roman Paganism. If this is so, Frew is well on his way to convincing us that Harran was a Pagan centre of scholarship under protection of the Islamic authorities of the day, and as such it can be considered a previously

unsuspected route by which Classical Pagan beliefs and their concurrent magical practices were transmitted from ancient times to the scholars of Late Medieval Europe.

But as it turns out, the word Frew's source gives as "Pagan" is actually *han-putho*. My medieval Arabic is pretty rusty, but this is surely a close relative of *hanith*, the term used in Islam to refer to those who were already on the right path prior to, or without having been formally exposed to, orthodox Prophecy. The primary element of this path, of course, was belief in the One True God: Abraham is usually given as the classical example of *hanith*. No polytheistic Pagans could possibly be referred to thus.

In his quotation of this passage, Frew capitalizes the words Pagan and Paganism. This is, of course, in accord with the current standard for referring to a modern practitioner of the religion or to those who practiced Classical Graeco-Roman Paganism in antiquity, but in this case it may only serve to lead the unwary reader astray. I would be curious to see if the original paragraph in Scott's *Hermetica* capitalized these words. Unfortunately, none of the university libraries to which I have access seem to carry this book. This, along with the book's having been published in Boulder, Colorado, and being no longer in print, lead me to suspect that Frew may be relying on a non-standard, possibly sensational, New Age source for information that requires more careful handling.

Aaron Walker
UC Santa Cruz

Prudence Priest writes:

As one of the founders of the Northern European Tradition, an original member of the Rune Guild, an long-time member and

elder in CoG, a philologist and diffident scholar, I feel compelled to comment on Blain & Wallis' article "Men & 'Women's Magic'".

There is no evidence that the practice of seidh makes you 'unmanly' (neither does being gay for that matter—where have you people been for the last 20 years?). But because these practices involve being 'possessed', and since genuine possession is virtually impossible to control (ask any Voodoo drummer or Pentecostal), there is plenty of evidence that you can be 'unmanned' by these practices.

For the difference between 'unmanly' and 'unmanned' please consult a dictionary.

Any genuine psychic experience can 'unman' anyone (male or female), and being a man who embraces his anima is not going to give you special dispensation to avoid this.

Prudence O. Priest

To the Editor:

I read with interest Max Dashu's "Another View of the Witch Hunts" (*Pom* 9 [1999]:30-43) and John Michael Greer's "Myth, History and Pagan Origins" (*Pom* 9 [1999]:44-50). Greer makes some astute observations about the myth of Pagan origins, including its character as a sacred narrative (the definition of myth used by many folklorists) and its structural similarity to other contemporary narratives of fall and redemption.

A key aspect of this sacred narrative seems to be the period of persecution known as "the burning times," during which witches—our actual or spiritual ancestors—were executed for their practices. I do not wish for a moment to question the historicity of this terrible episode

continued on page 53

Religion, Violence, and Radical Environmentalism

by Bron Taylor

University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh

Since the 1980 formation of Earth First!, radical environmental movements have proliferated widely. Their adversaries, law enforcement authorities, and some scholars, accuse them of violence and terrorism. Here, I scrutinize such charges by examining 18 years of radical environmentalism for evidence of violence and for indications of violent tendencies. I argue that despite the frequent use of revolutionary and martial rhetoric by participants in these movements, they have not, as yet, intended to inflict great bodily harm or death. Moreover, there are many worldview elements internal to these movements, as well as social dynamics external to them, that reduce the likelihood that movement activists will attempt to kill or maim as a political strategy. Labels such as 'violent' or 'terrorist' are not currently apt, blanket descriptors for these movements. Thus, greater interpretive caution is needed when discussing the strategies, tactics, and impacts of radical environmentalism.¹

Radical environmentalism is best understood as a new religious movement that views environmental degradation as an assault on a sacred, natural world. Aggressively anti-dualistic and generally anti-nationalist (human-political boundaries are cultural artifacts to be transcended), it has evolved as a global bricolage with both religious and political dimensions. Its nature-centered spirituality is patched together from bits and pieces of the world's major religious traditions, indigenous cultures, and

the creative invention and ritualizing of its devotees—thus, a good umbrella term for this movement is pagan environmentalism.² Its political ideology, while plural and internally contested, is an amalgamation influenced most prevalently by the world's radical intellectual traditions as informed by egalitarian (especially anti-imperialist and pro-peasant) social movements. All this is fused to a “deep ecological” moral perception of the kinship and sacred value of all life that is tethered to an apocalyptic vision of the impending collapse of these sacred ecosystems. In a new twist on the domino theory, this collapse will topple the human political systems that depend on such ecosystems.

Among government and industry elites, alarm has escalated about radical environmentalism. This is in part because these activists have demonstrated an increasing ability to organize massive civil disobedience campaigns, sometimes including the sustained blockading of logging roads, in campaigns that have challenged established resource regimes and occasionally forced significant concessions.³ Alarm has been acute among Conservative Christians, many of whom perceive radical environmental activists as promoting a pagan revival bent on destroying Christian industrial-civilization, and of using terrorism as a tactic. Alarm has been further fueled by law enforcement authorities and “wise use” partisans who have deployed the Unabomber's stated sympathy for radical environmentalists and green anarchists as evidence that radical environmentalists engage in terrorism. As exhibit one, they cite the January 1998 conviction of Theodore (Ted) Kaczynski,⁴ his clearly stated sympathies for radical environmentalists and anarchists, and court documents (including his own stated acknowledg-

ment) revealing that he drew on radical environmental tabloids when selecting two of his victims.

But this charge of terrorism had been leveled long before the Unabomber articulated sympathies for radical environmentalists; and it was a charge advanced not only by theists hostile to green paganism. In *Terrorism in America*, Brent Smith warned that ecoterrorism would become “a

mental spirituality.⁹ Supplemented by statements by contemporary Nazis extolling nature and calling for her militant defence, even empirically-grounded scholars such as Jeffrey Kaplan understandably wonder about possible affinities between radical environmentalists and participants within Far Right millenarian movements.¹⁰

... the martial symbolism and apocalyptic worldviews
found within radical environmental subcultures
has not and probably will not yield
widespread or proliferating terrorist violence.

major threat before the turn of the century.”⁵ In her analyses of Earth First!, Martha Lee concluded similarly, that it is “possible, if not highly probable, that more radical environmental movements will emerge” and that those, like certain factions within Earth First!, which have “a millenarian belief structure ... will be the most threatening [and best] prepared to use any tactics they deem necessary to achieve their goals.”⁶ Lee's analyses were subsequently deployed by “wise use” partisan Ron Arnold to buttress his claim that widespread ecoterror was emerging from radical environmental groups, and worsening due to the absence of aggressive law enforcement response to these threats.⁷

Such fears are supplemented by scholars who warn that radical environmentalism promotes an atavistic primitivism reminiscent of the Nazi preoccupation with blood and soil,⁸ or who criticize the irrationality they believe characterizes radical environ-

THE CULTIC MILIEU: SPAWNING GROUND OF GREEN VIOLENCE?

Even Colin Campbell's discussion of the cultic milieu can be used to suggest the *likelihood* of this possibility. He argues that a cultic milieu exists as “constant feature of society” representing “the cultural underground of society” including “all deviant belief-systems”; that cultic groups “rarely engage in criticism of each other [and] display a marked tolerance and receptivity towards each others' beliefs”; and that since mysticism is “the most prominent part of the deviant religious component of the cultic world” a key characteristic of the cultic milieu is “*the continuing pressure to syncretization*”¹¹ (my emphasis).

Although Campbell's characterization of cultic groups is overbroad (many are intolerant and anti-syncretistic even in relation to other culturally marginal groups), nature mysticism does permeate radical environmental subcultures and sometimes

the racist right.¹² It is prudent, therefore, to inquire about possible linkages and to wonder whether the cultural “tent” represented by the cultic milieu is pitched so broadly that radical environmentalists, animal liberationists, and those from the racist right, might cross paths underneath it and reciprocally influence one another, perhaps mutating synergistically into increasingly violent forms.

to rule it out, there is little evidence of violence being deployed to cause injuries or death.¹⁴ The interpretations of scholars and partisans building careers by warning us about proliferating radical environmental violence, thus, deserve scrutiny. Such analysts often restrict their inquiries to archival research of movement documents, law enforcement and court records, and at best, a few interviews, usually with promi-

It is certainly possible that some troubled soul or souls will decide that God or Gaia is calling them to defend their given sacred space through a terrorist holy war.

The martial rhetoric and tabloid graphics found among radical environmentalists amplify such concerns and appear to promote violence, perhaps even terrorism; my own work provides the most detail about violence-related debates within these subcultures.¹³ Some Earth First! activists, for example, have depicted their struggle as a holy war against those who would desecrate a sacred earth, express solidarity with diverse revolutionary movements around the globe, and endorse sabotage that involves at least some risk to human beings. One sabotage manual distributed by an anarchist faction associated with Earth First! even discusses firearms and firebombs. A few have expressed sympathy for the tactics employed by terrorist groups such as the Weather Underground and even the Unabomber.

Yet despite the recurrent debates about violence within radical environmental subcultures and the refusal by many activists

movement spokespersons, and often without a clear sense of who they are and which if any factions they represent. A clearer assessment of the prospects for violence emerging from radical environmental groups demands the inclusion of ethnographic data and judicious interpretation of all sources of information. Through my intensive qualitative fieldwork I have identified a number of variables that explain why the martial symbolism and apocalyptic worldviews found within radical environmental subcultures has not and probably will not yield widespread or proliferating terrorist violence. Although a complete overview of the record related to violence up to this point is beyond the scope of this paper, it is available in my forthcoming paper in the *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence*.

Not surprisingly, authorities and other adversaries of radical environmentalists overstate the risks posed by the kinds of

sabotage in which radical environmentalists tend to engage. Tree spiking, for example, does not threaten tree fellers because Forest Service regulations require that they cut the trees within twelve inches of the ground. Spiking should pose no risks in the mill if mill owners install the proper safety barriers and insist that workers follow safety procedures. If power line destruction were to continue, injuries would likely result, but probably more from a failure to foresee consequences (and possibly from callous indifference) than from an intent to kill or maim. Clearly, however, such tactics can and likely will cause injuries, at least indirectly.

Arson has been probably the most dangerous tactic employed thus far, with one exception: On 30 November 1992, after repeated acts of sabotage targeting a chip-mill company engaged in clearcut logging in North Carolina, the on-guard mill owner shot at a fleeing figure after awaking to find his chip-mill on fire. The apparent ecoteur eluded capture by shooting back, the bullet knocking the owner to the ground without causing serious injury. To my knowledge, this is the only incident where it appears that a radical environmentalist used a firearm.

To summarize, most radical environmentalists refuse to deploy sabotage that risks injuries to humans. During efforts to disrupt logging there have been scuffles with workers and sometimes with law enforcement officers resulting in minor injuries. And as we have seen in one case, an activist was apparently willing to employ lethal violence to avoid apprehension. There is, nevertheless, even after 18 years of radical environmental action, little evidence that radical environmentalists intend to maim and kill their adversaries or to foster “terror” among the general populace.

If David Rapoport is right, however, and nonviolent direct action has often appeared “as an initial step in conflicts which later matured into full-scale terrorist campaigns” and that the drama of such campaigns “may intensify and broaden commitments by simultaneously exciting hopes and fanning smoldering hostilities,”¹⁵ it makes sense to look deeper for clues regarding the possibility of these movements evolving terrorist dimensions. Although I cannot here offer detailed ethnographic description regarding traits and dynamics among radical greens that encourage and discourage violence,¹⁶ I can broadly discuss such tendencies and offer some judgments about their relative importance.

TRAITS AND DYNAMICS ENCOURAGING VIOLENCE

One dynamic that could fuel the prospects for violence is the tendency for both radical environmentalists and many of their adversaries to view their activities as defending sacred values. Radical environmentalists generally locate the sacred beneath their feet while their adversaries perceive the sacred as somehow above or beyond the world (or even as centered in the nation state and constitution).

A related but often overlooked dynamic that can encourage violence between these adversaries is the result of watchdog groups waging campaigns to demonize members of the radical group in question. Jeffrey Kaplan’s analysis of the role of watchdog groups opposing racist groups is provocative in this regard.¹⁷ He suggests that watchdog groups often promote a self-fulfilling prophesy in which only those with violent propensities are drawn to the demonized movement while potentially moderating voices are scared away. This

could increase the likelihood that violence will emerge from the individuals and groups under scrutiny. Applied to the social context in which radical environmentalists and their opponents are engaged it is reasonable to wonder if the demonizing of radical environmental activists by “wise use” partisans (such as Barry Clausen and to a lesser extent Ron Arnold), abetted by the alarm expressed by some academicians (such as Brent Smith and Martha Lee), might also add fuel to the possibility that violence could emerge from radical environmental groups. (Advocates of logging, ranching, and mining on public lands use the term “wise use” to contrast their own approach to natural resources, which they consider to be prudent use of them, with the “environmental extremists” or “preservationists” who hope to “lock up” the land and preclude anyone from responsibly making a living from it.)

Certainly some radical environmentalists likewise demonize their adversaries. Stuffed “Smoky the Bear” dolls symbolizing Forest Service employees are occasionally hung in effigy from trees in movement campsites. Earth First! activists sometimes use Biblical metaphors like “Babylon” to label the government evil and corrupt, and some radical environmental activists engage in their own incendiary and revolutionary rhetoric, intensified by apocalyptic urgency and their deep moral conviction. So it certainly is possible that violence could escalate as radical environmentalists and their adversaries engage in crusade rhetoric to justify their competing missions. It is certainly possible that some troubled soul or souls will decide that God or Gaia is calling them to defend their given sacred space through a terrorist holy war. Much more likely, however, are continued scuffles with relatively minor

injuries occurring at blockades and during other resistance campaigns, or somebody getting hurt while responding to or fighting an arson-fire. Sooner or later, someone probably will be badly injured by one or another act of monkeywrenching. Perhaps this will result from an environmentalist-placed tree spike, or from gunfire employed to avoid capture, or when a vehicle crashes after hitting an obstacle created to thwart industry or law enforcement.

Such possibilities, however, do not automatically suggest the likelihood that concerted terrorist violence will emerge from such subcultures. Based on the record of nearly two decades of radical environmentalism and a variety of impressions derived from my ethnographic field work—I believe that if terrorist violence does emerge from radical environmental groups, it will most likely come from people Kaplan calls “unguided missiles” or “lone wolf assassins”—namely from those untethered to the broader subculture with which the terrorist identifies.¹⁸

This said, even an individual like Judi Bari, who battled long and hard against violence promoting rhetoric in Earth First!, and who had repeatedly criticized tree spiking as ineffective and dangerous, did not rule out violence.¹⁹ In a 1993 interview, after the second major wave of movement debate about violence, she said that she agreed with those in the movement who believe that the movement should divide along strategic lines based on attitudes toward violence: “I think we need a split, like the Weather Underground and SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] so those who want to do such tactics can do so without any official connection to Earth First!.” Bari then mentioned what she considered to be a similar relationship between the Animal Liberation Front and

the above-ground People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, and other groups, that support and publicize ALF actions.²⁰ But in her reference to the Weather Underground, which engaged in armed robbery and bombings, Bari implied a greater sympathy for violent tactics than she was will-

scholars find helpful in analyzing the likelihood of radical groups turning violent is the relative isolation of the adherents from mainstream society. As Kaplan puts it, “The more distant a particular group tends to be from the values and beliefs of the mainstream society, the more difficult it

... their greatest and most consistent successes have
been won from the judicial branch
of the federal government; an inconvenient fact
for rigid ideological anarchists ...

ing to acknowledge publicly. After her death Bari was simplistically portrayed as the saint of the nonviolent faction of Earth First!, yet clearly the reality was more complex. Indeed, “a few days before her death Bari requested that her obituaries depict her occupation as a ‘revolutionary.’”²¹ This is not a term usually associated with nonviolence.

TRAITS AND DYNAMICS DISCOURAGING VIOLENCE STATE POWER

Within radical environmental groups rebellious and revolutionary rhetoric is consistently tempered with realism if not exaggeration about the repressive power of the state.²² As Kaplan observes with regard to Nazis, intense scrutiny of radical groups by law enforcement makes it “tantamount to organizational suicide” to “seriously contemplate violent action”—and this provides a strong disincentive to violence.²³

RELATIVE INSULARITY OR SOCIAL ISOLATION
Another variable within radical groups that

becomes for an adherent to moderate or give up the belief system altogether.”²⁴

When viewed through such an analytic lens, radical environmentalism seems less likely than many other radical groups to yield the kind of unbridled extremism that promotes violence. Earth First!ers do not, as a general pattern or membership requirement, sever ties to their natural families; indeed, some rely on such connections for part of their material resource base. While stridently critical of the consumerism they believe is prevalent among their friends and families, most Earth First!ers still celebrate holidays and life-passages with them. Although there probably are some cases where familial ties have been completely severed, this is not a general tendency. Although there are intentional and “back-to-the-land” communities within radical environmental subcultures, they do not generally sever all contact with the wider world. There are cases and contexts where terrorists, especially early in their campaigns, do not sever their ties with family, friends, and the wider society

which harbors them.²⁵ My point here is simply to suggest another variable that reduces the likelihood of violence emerging from radical environmental groups.

The Unabomber provides an important contrast that demonstrates the potential importance of the “withdrawal” variable. Ted Kaczynski severed ties with his family and society at large. This was one of many factors that led each of the three court-empowered psychology experts who exam-

Except for a tiny and unknown number of completely underground and isolated eco-teurs, most movement activists are engaged face-to-face with many of their adversaries, from loggers, to Forest Service bureaucrats, to attorneys. Such encounters are often unpleasant for all parties, but nevertheless they play an important role in humanizing the “enemy,” continually forcing the message on all involved parties that, however much we might dislike them, adversaries

... it is possible to imagine some radical environmentalists, despairing of peaceful social change, and having no expectation of divine rescue, splintering off into militia-like survivalist movements.

ined the documentary record and interviewed Kaczynski to diagnosis him “schizophrenic, paranoid subtype.” Moreover, Kaczynski’s refusal to acknowledge his own illness and to allow his attorneys to use it in his defence, these experts agreed, is a common aspect of the illness.²⁶ In any case, despite the prosecutor’s zeal to link Kaczynski with Earth First! by introducing into the record the existence of movement literature in Kaczynski’s cabin and one time reliance upon it in victim selection, the strong evidence of mental illness clearly erodes the implication that the Unabomber case proves Earth First! is a terrorist breeding ground.

Indeed, in the absence of mental illness, it is the activist engagements of radical environmentalists that can prevent social withdrawal and the dangerous “insularity-dynamic” linked by scholars to violence.

are human.²⁷ Sometimes activists must acknowledge that some adversaries are likable enough creatures, even if their values are “fucked up.” This moderates movement demonologies and reduces the possibility of violence. Indeed, much of the rage felt by movement activists is directed less at the mass of “functionaries” in governments and corporations than at high government and corporate officials. Ordinary workers are often viewed as brainwashed and deluded, trapped by the evil system due to their livelihood needs and advertising-manipulated lifestyle preferences.

CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Another variable, one linked to the relative isolation of adherents and postulated by some scholars of apocalyptic movements to have predictive value related to the likeli-

hood of violence, is ‘charismatic authority.’ Robbins and Palmer agree that this is a crucial variable as they summarize the argument that charismatic authority increases the “volatility and violence in apocalyptic or ‘world rejecting’ sects.” They argue, therefore, that

charismatic leadership ... probably enhances the antinomian potential of apocalypticism. Indeed, the combination of charismatic leadership and an apocalyptic worldview may create a kind of tinderbox, although much will depend on the particular qualities of the visionary leader [including whether he] demonize[s] any opposition. [Moreover,] world-rejecting sects manifest a stance of total rejection of or detachment from the broader society that may require ... a revered charismatic prophet with a compelling vision.²⁸

Yet again, when viewed through such an analytic lens, radical environmentalism seems less likely than many other apocalyptic groups to turn violent. There is no charismatic figure to follow blindly, indeed, any figure who even begins to consider her or himself an authoritative leader is usually quickly and effectively blocked or deposed by other activists within this radically egalitarian group.

The anti-hierarchical dimension to Earth First! not only makes this movement inhospitable to charismatic authority, it also manifests itself in another trait found among them—their enthusiasm for debate. The *Earth First!* journal itself provides a venue for debate that, on balance, has a moderating effect. No movement individual who is contemplating violence and in contact with other movement people, whether through the journal or at movement gatherings, will fail to hear the many good strategic and moral arguments against such tactics. Moreover, because of their activism, the most astute in these subcultures will surely notice that their greatest and most consistent successes have been

won from the judicial branch of the federal government; an inconvenient fact for rigid ideological anarchists, to be sure, but certainly one that makes difficult a comprehensive demonology of the federal government.

Certainly there are troubling insular dimensions to the subcultures of radical environmentalism, including certain anti-intellectual streams. I have heard startlingly ignorant statements about politics and ecology, especially by activists who grew up in these subcultures or were drawn into these groups at a young age. Because of the ideological commitment to free speech and expression within these groups, however, countervailing and moderating opinions will continue to be heard, along with the prevailing green militancy.

LIFE AS SACRED

There are also general religious sentiments, such as that the earth and all life is sacred, that lessen the possibility that movement activists will engage in terrorist violence. Sometimes such arguments are advanced explicitly during movement gatherings and in its publications. In response to Barry Clausen’s efforts to link Earth First! and the Unabomber, for example, one Earth First! group insisted that, “Earth First! practices non-violent civil disobedience.” They continued asserting that sabotage is controversial and there is no official position about it and “Earth First! does not advocate violence towards any person because ... Earth First! considers all life sacred, even Barry Clausen’s.”²⁹ Often, the sacredness of all life is conveyed through various forms of movement ritualizing. It is hard to avoid the logic that, if all life is sacred, one ought to eschew violence, especially when defending sacred places. This would seem to reduce the potential of such a movement spawning terrorist action.

THE CONVERGENCE OF ANIMAL LIBERATION AND RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM?

To a significant extent, the Animal Liberation and Radical Environmental movements represent distinct subcultures. My own perception is that within Earth First! there are at most a few dozen activists who regularly participate in both movements. Yet there is increasing cooperation and overlap between radical environmental and animal rights activists, and since a major movement schism in 1990, Earth First! has printed articles about animal liberationist resistance. Given the much greater propensity for ALF activists to engage in arson, the future extent of collaboration between these groups is certainly of interest in attempting to assess the likelihood of injuries resulting from radical environmental actions.

In addition to Rod Coronado, two other figures have attempted to bridge the gap by appealing to and writing for Animal Liberation tabloids and the Earth First! journal. Like Coronado, both David Barbarash and Darren Thurston have been convicted of crimes for which the Animal Liberation Front took credit, including the theft (or "liberation") of 29 cats from the University of Alberta on June 1, 1992. During a related search of property owned by the two activists, according to Ron Arnold, Canadian police found "an AK-47 assault rifle, ammunition and two hand grenades."³⁰ When informed that Arnold had reported this on his website, Barbarash replied

Ron Arnold, like most of his kind, are [sic] idiots who twist facts. During a raid on Darren's place in Edmonton in 1992 in relation to the university raid, police found an AK-47 type of rifle, as well as a dummy grenade being used as a paperweight. The weapon was fully legal and registered, and the dummy grenade was not illegal either.³¹

Since no charges were ever filed with regard to the firearm and grenade, it appears Arnold did not report all pertinent facts.

Thurston and Barbarash are currently, however, suspected of a number of additional crimes. According to articles in Animal Liberation tabloids and *Earth First!*, these include four 1995 cases where mail bombs were sent to two Canadian racists (the Nazi propagandist Ernest Zundle and Aryans Nation leader Charles Scott), John Thompson of the right-wing MacKenzie Institute, and Terrence Mitenko, a geneticist with Alta Genetics in Calgary. Yet neither of these activists have been charged with mailing bombs.

Although they have not been arrested in these bomb cases, they were charged in March 1998 with 27 counts related to sending packages booby-trapped with razor blades. The alleged aim was to injure big game "trophy" hunters in Canada, who might cut themselves on the blades when opening the letters. Barbarash was also charged with possessing an illegal weapon (a stun gun), and with Rebecca Rubin, "an explosive substance," that was, according to Vancouver Sun reporter Rick Ouston, a nine-volt battery and wire.³² They deny the charges and attribute the arrests to unfair, ongoing police harassment. If true, however, these actions represent one of the very few cases where activists at the intersection of Animal Liberationism and Radical Environmentalism have clearly intended harm to their adversaries.

These crimes did not have a clearly stated ecological purpose, however, in the articles written by supporters of these activists. Therefore, it is worth wondering if these qualify as "radical environmental" actions. Yet clearly, some ALF activists, seeking support widely and viewing Earth First!'s ecoteurs as kindred spirits, regularly

send news updates on their activities and encounters with law enforcement to Earth First!. By publishing these stories Earth First! creates an impression that these two movements are unifying or, at least, that they cooperate and are mutually supportive. There is certainly something to this impression, although it is probably exaggerated in

increasingly toward wild animals rather than domestic ones or those exploited in the fur trade. I know of no cases where radical environmentalists have suddenly converted to an animal liberationist perspective, abandoning forest protection work to liberate hogs, mink, or fox.

As we have seen, however, there are a

I have heard startlingly ignorant statements
about politics and ecology, especially by activists
who grew up in these subcultures or were
drawn into these groups at a young age.

the minds of watchdog groups and most law enforcement officials. The printing of such material is probably influenced by the anti-authoritarian and anti-censorship views widely shared by radical environmentalists more than it is dictated by ideological agreement with animal liberationist ideology.

Significantly, collaboration between these groups usually occurs where animal rights beliefs intersect with concern for ecosystems and species survival. (For example, when hunting of predators is underway, which often negatively impacts ecosystems, or where species themselves are threatened with extinction by human activities.) Most radical environmentalists are more concerned for ecosystems and species than for individual animals.

When radical environmentalists and animal rights activists collaborate the latter tend to become radically-ecologized—developing greater concerns for ecosystems and endangered species. Consequently, such activists often turn their attention

number of activists who dwell in both camps, even if sometimes uneasily. Often such activists are anarchists, opposed to all hierarchies, whether in human society or between humans and non-human nature. One woman activist who writes under the pseudonym "Anne Archy," for example, has made it a personal goal to unify the two movements, by writing for each of their tabloids.³³

Despite such efforts, profound ideological differences remain between radical environmentalists and animal liberationists. Radical environmentalists promote a ecosystem- and species-focused ethics (which includes plant life) while animal liberationists focus more on the well being of individual, sentient, animals. This has and will continue to cause tensions between these groups and reduce the occasions for their collaboration and mutual influence.

Moreover, my strong impression is that animal liberationists who come in contact with radical environmentalists without finding their priorities changing withdraw

to their more 'individualistic' and traditional animal rights groups. It is possible, however, that the more arson-friendly ALF may win tactical converts even if they do not change the focus of the radical environmentalists they know.

metaphysics-of-interdependence seriously, they will refuse to demonize opponents. On balance, the politics and metaphysics of the sacred, which permeates radical environmental groups, helps erode the kind of absolutist-Manichean demonizing of the "enemy" that otherwise might more force-

... much of the radicalism of the 1960s
started as Yippie-like fun-fests,
but did not end up that way.

DEEP ECOLOGICAL "IDENTIFICATION," INTERDEPENDENCE, AND ANTI-DUALISM

Deep ecology's goal of fostering a "deep ecological sense of identification with all life," as Bill Devall and George Sessions once argued, including a sense of the inter-related sacredness of all life, works against both misanthropy and violence in radical environmental groups. "Ecology has taught us that the whole earth is part of our 'body' and ... we must learn to respect it is as we respect ourselves," they wrote, "As we feel for ourselves, we must feel for all forms of life." It is difficult to advocate or justify violence against any life form when animated by such spiritual perceptions, as Devall and Sessions concluded: "Both on practical and ethical grounds, violence is rejected as a mode of ecological resistance."³⁴

Perhaps even the most "spiritual" or "woo woo" activists ("woo woo" is an amusing movement term referring to religious ritual or one's "spirituality") have a moderating influence. Some of them wear buttons with "us/them" crossed out with the universal sign "Not!"—suggesting that if movement people take their anti-dualistic,

fully emerge in these movements, given their apocalyptic urgency. Such dualism has been widely noted by scholars as an important variable that increases the likelihood of violence by radical groups.³⁵

NATURE BATS LAST AND "WHO SHALL BE THE AGENT OF TRANSFORMATION?"

It could be deduced from one of David Rapoport's arguments, however, that religiously motivated apocalyptic groups are especially prone to violence. He asserts that with such groups there are two conditions for terrorist violence, an expectation of an imminent day of deliverance and a belief that violent human actions "can or must consummate the process."³⁶

The critical question Rapoport is addressing is "Who (and what means) shall be the agent of transformation?" A related question is, "How does the answer to such a question influence the likelihood of violence emerging from a social movement?" Jeffrey Kaplan's answer is that when apocalyptic groups envision no divine intervention or rescue, violence is more likely.³⁷

Although it might seem that Earth Firsters do not anticipate a divine interven-

tion that will usher in a green-millennium, there is a strong belief that if humans do not radically change their lifeways, nature (whether personified as Gaia or goddess and/or conceived as 'population dynamics' within ecosystems) will eventually do it herself. This is symbolically represented in the popular movement slogan and bumper sticker, "Nature Bats Last" (coined by ecologist Paul Ehrlich) that musingly anticipates the eventual restoration of Eden on earth, even if by means of a tragic "cataclysmic cleansing." Here is expressed the widely shared movement belief that sacred earth herself will eventually shake-off species pathogenic to her long-term health. This belief might, in a way similar to that observed by Kaplan in a different context, reduce the possibility that movement activists will feel it is justifiable and possible to, by their own actions, violently force the needed transformations.

For this reason I disagree with Martha Lee's insistence that the Earth First! faction she calls the "apocalyptic biocentrists" are more likely to engage in terrorist violence than ones she claims are optimistic millenarians.³⁸ It is hard to see how despair regarding the possibility of human action bringing about the desired transformations can provide a basis for revolutionary violence.

This conclusion does not, however, address Rapoport's belief that there is a strong psychological need, by at least some devotees, to think their actions are central. Here he seems to imply that there is a strong tendency for apocalyptic groups to turn terrorist:

When a sense of imminence takes root, some believers must find it psychologically impossible to regard their actions as irrelevant, ... At the very least, they will act to secure their own salvation. And once the initial barrier to action has been overcome, it will only be a

matter of time before different kinds of action make sense too. Soon they may think they can shape the speed or timing of the process.³⁹

Moreover, Rapoport adds: "It would seem rather obvious that, when the stakes of any struggle are perceived as being great, the conventional restraints on violence diminish accordingly."⁴⁰

Such assertions are certainly sobering. Radical environmentalists do believe the stakes are high: the survival of Homo sapiens and untold other species is at stake. Consequently, it is possible to imagine some radical environmentalists, despairing of peaceful social change, and having no expectation of divine rescue, splintering off into militia-like survivalist movements. Or perhaps revolutionary cells will emerge, grounded in tragic, romantic scripts that argue that the only hope for the planet is in a vanguard of green-anarchist revolutionaries willing to resist violently the industrial juggernaut. Nevertheless, with regard to radical environmentalism, I am currently unconvinced of the psychological tendency cited by Rapoport. The anti-anthropocentrism in radical environmentalism works strongly against placing hope in human agency. Perhaps the musing movement slogan, "There is hope, but not for us" captures some of the fatalism to which I am alluding.

FUN AND EROS

Perhaps one of the most important factors that reduce the likelihood of violence emerging from radical environmentalism is the riotous sense of fun that characterizes its activists. In keeping with their conviction that "rewilding" is an essential part of the needed transformations, many of these activists are hearty "party animals." Indeed, the fraternity/sorority scene celebrated in the motion picture "Animal House" might

even be considered a ritual source. "Body shots," where activists take turns drinking Tequila off increasingly intimate body parts, has become a trust-building and group-bonding rite—even self-consciously so. It might also lead to even deeper intimacies in nearby fields or woods. Alcohol-fueled antics can become serious fun—and real ritualizing.

Also popular at most wilderness gatherings is an "amoebae" made up of circling and encircled mostly inebriated activists. With arms and hands intertwined around shoulders and hips, swirling chaotically around fields and campfires, the amoebae captures unwary human organisms, absorbing them into itself, all the while chanting "eat and excrete, eat and excrete." Not only does it provide a wild good time—although sometimes angering those trampled by it or whose overtly spiritual ritualizing was disrupted—the amoebae draws even some of the most retiring activists into the group. It also conveys other important messages: as another ritual of inclusion, it represents the value and importance of the so-called "lower" organisms, while simultaneously bonding activists together in the ritual play.⁴¹ It also articulates symbolically the kinship of all creatures who share the same primal urges. Perhaps it also signals that activists should not take themselves too seriously—for like amoebae food, they too will be reabsorbed into the biological processes from which humans emerged.

Early in their history *Earth First!* activists appropriated from a Native American culture the "mudhead Kachinas"—trickster-like figures known for making fun of solemn occasions—a role itself viewed as a sacred, anti-hubristic endeavor. In any case, the lampooning, the ridicule, and the mirth-making that characterizes *Earth First!* gatherings mitigates the sullen bitterness

and brooding anger that can characterize the radical personality of the "true believer"—the personality type especially prone to violence.⁴²

CAVEATS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is impossible to predict confidently the extent to which radical environmentalists (or the animal liberationists with whom they sometimes collaborate) will employ tactics that, intentionally or not, risk injury or death to humans. There are many examples of groups with non-violent records making a transition to violence. Sometimes, as Jeffrey Kaplan shows with regard to the rescue movement, it only takes someone to show the way, focusing pent-up frustration in a violent direction.⁴³

Nevertheless, much expectation that these are or will be violent, terrorist movements is based more on a priori expectations than on the historic record of these groups or on an understanding of their worldviews and how they precipitate action. Upon examining the record and characteristics of radical environmental groups, I here conclude that claims that these are violence-prone subcultures are inaccurate. I make this statement mindful that some animal liberationists and radical environmentalists have been willing to risk injuries to their adversaries and, in a few cases, have intended to do so. To summarize, excluding the Unabomber and perhaps one other case where an ecoteur sought to evade capture, there is as yet no proven case where Animal Liberationists or Radical Environmentalists have attempted or succeeded in using violence to inflict great bodily harm or death on their adversaries.

Radical environmental subcultures certainly threaten "business as usual" in western industrial societies. If such societies are to respond in a way that does not exacer-

bate environment-related conflicts, it is critical that the nature of such threats be apprehended accurately. Such an appraisal will not be achieved if exaggerated and ill-informed perceptions of the violent tendencies in these movements become conventional beliefs—and especially if such perceptions are allowed to be shaped by the most trenchant adversaries of these movements.⁴⁴

NOTES:

1. I wish to acknowledge collegial assistance and helpful comments from Jeffrey Kaplan, David Rapoport, Ron Arnold and Jean Rosenfeld.
2. See Bron Taylor, ed., *Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1995) and B. Taylor, "Resacralizing Earth: Pagan Environmentalism and the Restoration of Turtle Island" in *American Sacred Space*, edited by D. Chidester and E. T. Linenthal (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press 1995) pp. 97-151.
3. B. Taylor, "Earth First! Fights Back", *Terra Nova* 2/2 (Spring 1997) pp. 29-43.
4. On 22 January 1998, Kaczynski pleaded guilty to being the anti-technology serial bomber who between 1978 and 1995, killed three people and injured 23 others.
5. Brent L. Smith, *Terrorism in America* (Albany: State University of New York Press 1994) p. 129.
6. M. F. Lee, "Violence and the Environment: The Case of 'Earth First!'", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7/3 (1995) p. 124.
7. Ron Arnold, *Ecoterror: The Violent Agenda to Save Nature—the World of the Unabomber* (Bellevue, Washington: Free Enterprise 1997).
8. Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* (Paris: Bernard Grasset 1992; reprint Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press 1995).
9. Michael W. Lewis, *Green Delusions: An Environmental Critique of Radical Environmentalism* (Durham: Duke University Press 1992); George Bradford, *How Deep Is Deep Ecology? With an Essay-Review on Women's Freedom* (Ojai, California: Times Change Press 1989); and J. Stark, "Postmodern Environmentalism: A Critique of Deep Ecology", in B. Taylor, ed., *Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism* (Albany, New York: State University of New York

Press 1995) pp. 259-81.

10. Jeffrey Kaplan, "The Postwar Paths Of Occult National Socialism: From Rockwell and Madole to Manson", in *Cult, Anti-Cult and the Cultic Milieu: A Re-Examination* (2 volumes), ed. J. Kaplan and Heléne Löw (Stockholm University & the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 1998).
11. Colin Campbell, "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization", in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5 (1972) pp. 122-124.
12. Bron Taylor, "The Religion and Politics of Earth First!", *The Ecologist* 21/6 (November/December 1991) pp. 258-66; idem., "Evoking the Ecological Self: Art As Resistance to the War on Nature", *Peace Review* 5/2 (1993) pp. 225-30; idem., ed., *Ecological Resistance Movements*; idem., "Earth First's Religious Radicalism", in C. K. Chapple, ed., *Ecological Prospects: Scientific, Religious, and Aesthetic Perspectives* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994) pp. 85-209. On the racist right, see Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press); "Right Wing Violence in North America", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7/1 (1995) pp. 44-95; and idem., "The Postwar Paths of Occult National Socialism: from Rockwell and Madole to Manson".
13. Bron Taylor, "Diggers, Wolves, Ents, Elves and Expanding Universes: Global Bricolage and the Question of Violence Within the Subcultures of Radical Environmentalism", in *Cult, Anti-Cult and the Cultic Milieu: A Re-Examination*, ed. J. Kaplan and H. Löw (Stockholm University & the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 1998).
14. For the latest series of debates about violence (and a related debate about whether the journal should print articles that seem to promote it), see Gary McFarlane and Darryl Echt, "Cult of Nonviolence", *Earth First!* 18/1 (1 November 1998) pp. 3, 17; Rod Coronado, "Every Tool in the Box", *Earth First!* 18/2 (21 December 1998) pp. 2, 21; Lacey Phillips, "Censoring the Journal", *Earth First!* 13/3 (1998) p. 2; and the forum in *Earth First!* 18/4 (20 March 1998) pp. 7-11.
15. David Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions", *American Political Science Review* 78 (September 1984) p. 671.
16. For this see Bron Taylor, "Diggers ..." (note 14).
17. Jeffrey Kaplan, "The Anti-Cult Movement in America: A History of Culture Perspective", *Szyzyg: Journal of Alternative Religion and Culture* 2/3-4 (1993) pp. 267-96.
18. Jeffrey Kaplan, "The Context of American Millenarian Revolutionary Theology: The Case of



- 'Identity Christian' Church", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5/1 (Spring 1993) pp. 30-82; idem., "Right Wing Violence in North America".
19. Yet she was also clear that the time was not ripe to take up arms. Nicholas Wilson, "Judi Bari Dies But Her Spirit Lives On", *Albion Monitor* (5 March 1997), <<http://www.Monitor.Net/Monitor>>. See Judy Bari, "Monkeywrenching", *Earth First!* 14/3 (2 February 1994) p. 8, and idem., "The Secret History of Tree Spiking", *Earth First!* 15/2 (21 December 1994) pp. 11,15, for her arguments against tree spiking, especially that it does not work.
 20. Interview with Judi Bari, Willets, California, February 1993.
 21. Nicholas Wilson, "Judi Bari Dies But Her Spirit Lives on."
 22. Bron Taylor, "Diggers ..." (note 15).
 23. Jeffrey Kaplan, "Right Wing Violence ..." p. 47.
 24. Ibid., p. 46.
 25. As David Rapoport and Jeff Kaplan pointed out (personal communication) in most guerrilla wars, familial ties are often not severed. Kaplan suggests, however, that "leaderless resistance" whether radical right, anarchist, or green, often depends on breaking ties.
 26. These conclusions are drawn from a careful reading of the declarations submitted to the court by three court-appointed psychiatric experts.
 27. On the role of dehumanization in terrorist violence, see Ehud Sprinzak, "Right-Wing Terrorism in a Comparative Perspective: The Case of Split Delegation", in *Terror From the Extreme Right*, ed. Tore Bjorgo (London: Frank Cass 1995) pp. 17-43, especially p. 20.
 28. T. Robbins, and S. Palmer, "Introduction" pp. 20-21.
 29. Cascadia Forest Defenders, "Barry Clausen: The Unreal Truth", <<http://www.Igc.Apc.Org/Cascadia/Clausen.html>> (1996).
 30. Also, according to Arnold's internet site (<http://www.cdfe.org/ecoterror.html>), the "Ecoterror Response Network", Barbarash and Thurston were convicted of torching several trucks belonging to the Billingsgate Fish Company. But in email and telephone communications on 10 and 11 May 1998, David Barbarash stated that only Thurston was charged and convicted of the fish company crime.
 31. Email message 10 May 1998.
 32. Rick Ousten, "Activists' 'secret' lives probed", *Vancouver Sun*, (30 March 1988), A1.
 33. She recently published the lead article in *No Compromise* explaining Earth First! to ALF activists, arguing that habitat destruction is an animal rights issue, and urging greater collaboration between these movements. See Anne Archy, "Frontline Forest Defence for Earth and Animal Liberation", *No Compromise* # 8 (1998) p. 16-19.
 34. Bill Devall and George Sessions, "Direct Action", *Earth First!* 5/1 (1984) pp. 18-19, 24.
 35. E.g., "Apocalypticism is also, at least in its catastrophic manifestations, decidedly dualistic. Absolute good and evil contend through history such that there is no room for moral ambiguity." T. Robbins and S. Palmer, "Introduction", p. 6.
 36. "Messianic Sanctions for Terror", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20/2 (1980) pp. 197-198.
 37. Jeffrey Kaplan, "Right Wing Violence in North America", p. 52.
 38. Martha Lee, *Earth First!* (Syracuse University Press 1995).
 39. Rapoport, "Messianic Sanctions", p. 201.
 40. Rapoport, "Messianic Sanctions", p. 204.
 41. See Christopher Manes, "Paganism as Resistance", *Earth First!* 8/5 (1 May 1988) pp. 21-2, for a movement discussion of the importance of play.
 42. Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (Harper: New York 1951). When I presented an earlier version of this paper at the November 1997 meeting of the American Academy of Religion, David Rapoport reminded me that much of the radicalism of the 1960s started as Yippie-like fun-fests, but did not end up that way.
 43. Jeff Kaplan, "Absolute rescue: absolutism, defensive action and the resort to force", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7/3 (1995) pp. 128-63.
 44. Jeffrey Kaplan, "The Anti-Cult Movement in America: A History of Culture Perspective", *Syzygy: Journal of Alternative Religion and Culture* 2/3-4 (1993) pp. 267-96.

Bron Taylor is Oshkosh Foundation Professor of Social and Environmental Ethics at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, where he teaches in the Religious Studies and Anthropology Dept. and directs the Environmental Studies program.

Weaving a Tangled Web? Pagan ethics and issues of history, 'race' and ethnicity in Pagan identity

by Ann-Marie Gallagher
University of Central Lancashire

On the 25th of March 1997 a Witch, Kevin Carleon, got inside Stonehenge and at dawn unfurled and flew the Union Flag. This was in protest of a theory being put forward and published in the Wiltshire Archeological 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'. The deployment of a Union Flag under 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 18th 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, and 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 here in Britain at the end of the 20th 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 terms of our current historical, social and political situation(s). These assumptions articulate in a number of ways; in the opinions, philosophies, texts and vernacular expressions of Pagan culture and occurring 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, '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 we are also participant. 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 that this first requires acknowledging the links between the two. Identities and meanings being allotted and ascribed to an ongoing construction of current Pagan identity 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, Elements and Arkana turned up an arrestingly unproblematic relationship with ethnic, historical, national, social and political boundaries. Amongst the very popular titles surveyed, there was a markedly lackadaisical attitude towards historical perio-

dicity. 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 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 academic texts, 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 scholasticism nor the disclaimers to the effect that some texts occasionally carry exonerate them from blatant inaccuracy or unaccountability. The influence of popular Pagan texts should not be underestimated; the majority of identifying Pagans in Britain, Northern Europe and North America are first-generation Pagans (in the contemporary sense at least!) and the majority of us 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 gen-

erated 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 spin some particularly woolly ideas around some of the issues mentioned is the often uncritical and unproblematic application of the term 'Celtic'. What has effectively been a salvage job around previously suppressed, silenced and overlooked aspects of past and present cultures of these islands 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 19th 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 instance, Celticity actually be culture-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 awestruck 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 concentric 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 maintains 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 [sic] is overlooked, even trivialized:

Indian women are suddenly no longer the

A survey of popular Pagan texts ... turned up an arrestingly unproblematic relationship with ethnic, historical, national, social and political boundaries.

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 more keen 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 ..."

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', 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 unintended, 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".

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

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?

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 lovable" (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”. 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 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 a 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

... Paganism has proved a rich hunting ground for fascist groups looking for symbols of volkisch unification.

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. Initial analyses of alleged connections 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 (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Naturreligiöser Stammesverbände Europas or European Racial Association of Natural Religious Groups), the Thule Seminar, and others currently operating on the internet. 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 desktop-published newsletter *Valkyrie*, which advertises itself as the ‘voice of the Patriotic Women’s League’, an

organization based in the northwest of England. *Valkyrie* is replete with celtic knotwork and symbols and contains an advertisement for the ‘Church of Thor-Would’, and for the neo-Nazi band ‘Celtic Warrior’. It also contains 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 containing 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’ emphasizes the role of both mother and goddess, whose fiercer intentions are focused 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 other 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 and 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 declar-

ing 'Albion for Pagans' or 'the Pagan State of Albion' 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. 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, which are seen as being ontologically integral to the past(s) to which we refer, and as a distinctive aspect 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 what are actually socio-cultural constructs of 'Nature' are seen as joltingly modern (if not post-modern), interventionist and 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 inequalities; the will to change these inequalities are seen as being out of step with the 'realities' of past Pagan societies and the organic, with the 'Nature' from which past Pagan societies allegedly emerged. That our ideas about the past and about 'Nature' are largely social constructs doesn't seem to bother anyone overmuch, judging by the general ethos of popular Pagan literature and by attitudes and ethical standpoints being expressed

within the Pagan community. The spiritual is also seen as the authentic and there seems to be a widespread understanding of spirituality as essence. This essence appears to emerge fully-grown from encounters with Nature and unmediated (or 'untainted') by social conditions: pronouncements arising from the spiritual experience of individuals or groups are seen to have more authority, therefore, than understandings arising from the more suspect perspectives of the social and the political.

The predisposition towards misappropriation by fascist and neo-Nazi groups, in fact, is coming from the very bases upon which the anxious construction of Pagan identity appear to be resting: 'Nature', 'the past' and seeing spirituality as an absolute which can be separated from politicality. This is further adumbrated, thanks to an interlap with New Age philosophies, by notions of the collective 'fate' of peoples who are paradoxically deemed responsible for their own troubles. 'Destiny', it should be remembered, was a very good friend of British imperialism.

It could be argued that we are 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.

I am conscious, even as I am formulating and defining the problems that Paganism faces, that pointing them out constitutes a criticism of what for many of us, is a relief from imposed sets of beliefs and perhaps gives the impression that what is being recommended here is yet another

set of prohibitions, unsuited to the generally liberal ethos found within Paganism. I am also conscious that citing the political dimensions which indubitably exist within our spiritual understandings and within our ensuing ethicalities will meet some resistance in the community, particularly where Pagans feel that in coming into a nature-revering spirituality, which can claim to some extent ancient antecedents and links with counter-cultural tendencies, we have managed to evade the 'conformity factor'. It is my contention, however, that some of the myths attached to Paganism around some of our more favoured identity-touchstones ('Nature', 'the past', etc.) need to be subjected to scrutiny because they are always already political. Equally, I would argue that querying our spiritually-led philosophies risks dismantling that which many of us find empowering about our path: reinscribing social inequalities is about 'power-over' rather than 'power-within' and I have yet to encounter a Pagan spiritual aspiration which subscribes to the former rather than the latter. 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 and our reverence towards nature, 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. It also means seeing nature not as a 'given' to be translated into a brutalized social model of 'survival of the fittest' but as an understanding of the non-human world we have constructed from a socio-cultural perspective.

From that point we can move on to living in peaceful symbiosis with nature rather than distorting its lessons into exclusionary philosophies and dulling the edges of the most inspiring relationship we have within our spiritualities. 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, 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

... 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 ...

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 child-kidnaping by misinformed social workers is still a real fear. But the acknowledgement of our own oppressions and our own, often overlooked, histories, carry the responsibility of acknowledging both our own privileges and the oppressions of others and the suppression of their histories. 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. We are not, as some New Age interlaps with Paganism would have it, 'all the same'; we are all very different and have differing needs at both individual and wider political levels. 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. 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.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A PAGAN ETHICS OF DIVERSITY

A Pagan ethic which acknowledges 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).

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

... some of the myths
attached to Paganism
around some of our
more favoured
identity-touchstones
(‘Nature’, ‘the past’,
etc.) need to be
subjected to scrutiny
because they
are ... political.

their traditions from the sidelines rather than attempt to enter them from certain given positions of social privilege.

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 Pagan 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 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?”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Green, M. *Everyday Magic*. (Thorsons, 1995).
 ———. *Elements of Ritual Magic*, (Elements, 1990).
 ———. with J. Matthews. *The Grail Seeker's Companion: A Guide to the Grail Quest in the Aquarian Age*. (Aquarian, 1986).
 Hobsbawm, Eri. J. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. (Cambridge UP, 1990).
 Hutton, Ronald. “Who Possesses the Past?” in P. Carr-Gomm, ed. *The Druid Renaissance*. (Thorsons, 1996).
 Jones, P. & Matthews, C. (eds) *Voices from the Circle: The Heritage of Western Paganism*. (Aquarian, 1990).
 Matthews, C. & J. *Ladies of the Lake*. (Aquarian 1992).
 ———. *An Encyclopaedia of Myth and Legend: British and Irish Mythology*. (Aquarian, 1988).
 Robbins, K. *Nineteenth Century Britain, England, Scotland, and Wales: The Making of a Nation*. (Oxford UP, 1989).
 Rutherford, Ward. *Celtic Lore: The History of the Druids and their Timeless Traditions*. (Aquarian/Thorsons, 1993).
 Smith, A. “For all those who were Indian in a former life” (1987) in Adams, ed. *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. (Continuum, 1993).

Ann-Marie Gallagher is the course leader of Women's Studies at the University of Central Lancashire in the U.K. She writes and publishes on feminist pedagogy, women and spirituality, Paganism, and as a historian (recovering). She is currently editing a book on women and history titled Changing the Past: Women, History and Representation, which is scheduled to be published in 2000.

Initiation and the Druid Secret Language: The Three Calls to Cormac Understood as a Druidic Initiation

by *Brendan Myers*
University of Guelph

1. UNDERSTANDING THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF THE DRUIDS

A secret language is a means of communicating ideas to selected persons in such a way that everyone else will not be able to understand the message. Secret languages or esoteric use of language has been used by many famous authors over many centuries to hide the meaning of what they say from people who would not be receptive to it; typically, authors writing at a time when what they have to say is politically unacceptable or dangerous would write esoterically. Plato, Machiavelli, and Spinoza all wrote esoterically, to name a few. There is no need to search for a “key” or secret pass-code to unlock the secrets of esoteric language. Hidden messages in philosophical or literary works are not military codes. To read the hidden messages in this kind of writing one simply needs a good background in the culture of the time and the situation of the author, a reason why she might write esoterically, an idea of who her audience is, of who she is trying to reach, and who she is trying to fool.

In the case of the Druids, the secret language was used to speak to other Druids. Dr. Anne Ross speculated that the secret language of Welsh and British Druids was Q-Celtic, or the form of the Celtic language spoken in Ireland and Scotland (*Life and Death of a Druid Prince*, p. 148). I mount no argument against

her claim at this time but I believe that from the perspective of those involving themselves in the revival of Druidism, there is more that can be said of it. We know much about the Celtic use of language, and its use of poetry, “riddles and dark sayings”¹ and word play. In poetry we will find the “key” to unlocking the secret language of the Druids. The true secret language of the Druids is the use of literary symbol to communicate religious ideas.

If Dr. Ross is to be believed, the Druids kept a secret language in order to protect a trade route that brought gold from the Wicklow Mountains of Ireland into continental Europe via Britain. This is sufficient for economic or political perspectives, but does not seem to explain why they would have used a secret language in their magical roscanna poetry. The ancient Druids might have wanted a secret language for many reasons, but here I describe one possibility. The most plausible reason I can think of at this time is that the Druids may have had an “outer” doctrine, for consumption by the tribe, and an “inner” doctrine, for use among themselves. This is a common feature of ancient priesthoods, such as the Pythagorean “akousmatikoi” and “mathematikoi” cults.² Celtic society was a stratified, hierarchical society that by no means bore all of the egalitarian and democratic features that Neopagan Celts often ascribe to it. The Aes Dana caste, including the Druids, was an elite group that set itself in authority over other groups in society because of the irreplaceable service they rendered to society. Contemporary Paganism has, for the most part, rejected this feature of ancient Druidism. This has the advantage of consistency with modern liberal democratic values, but the weakness of allowing unprepared people to take on leadership roles. At least the ancient Druids, as stratified as they were, realized that not everyone has what it takes to be a Druid. Therefore they may have wanted to keep certain facts about

what they actually believed unknown to the rest of the people.

This may not have been to suppress others from becoming Druids, but it may have been to locate potential Druids: I speculate that if someone unexpected were to understand their secret language, she might be drafted into the Druid caste, for example, and inner circle doctrines revealed to her. Recall that when Cu Chullain courted Emer, he tested her with riddles, not to charm her with his wit but to see if her wit could match his. Recall also that when Nede took over Ferchertne’s seat as chief of poets, Ferchertne tests the young upstart to see if he is capable of producing Druidic magical poetry.³ I’m not about to speculate in this essay of what the inner Druidic doctrine consisted, but there are clues showing what was omitted from it. We know that they did not use idols, and we also know that they did not lead seasonal celebratory rituals. Eugene O’Curry tells us that “there is no ground whatever for believing the Druids to have been the priests of any special positive worship”⁴ and though the Druids do hail spirits and Gods in their magic poetry, it seems as if the relationship is that of companions or business partners, and not a relationship of worshipper to deity. So, whatever the inner circle teachings of ancient Druids may have been, worshipful adoration of Gods may not have been a part of it. A Druid has no need to worship any God when he can declare his own immanent divinity, with “I am a wave of the sea.”⁵ The idea that we don’t need the Gods would have been very politically unacceptable to devout people, and hence had to be covered with a secret language.

In this essay I won’t speculate on whether or not this sort of secret language of poetry was employed by ancient Druids to transmit Druidic mysteries in such a way that the Christian recorders would not identify them as such

To read the hidden messages
... one simply needs a good
background in the culture of the
time and the situation of the
author ... who she is trying to
reach, and who she is
trying to fool.

(and hence not edit them out). I will point out, though, that one can penetrate Christian suppression of Druidic mysteries by reading the stories with an eye for literary euphemisms. For example, a character’s motive is the sort of thing that gets Christianized, and one can read the pagan message by substituting a motive more consistent with pagan themes and teachings. Repairing the pagan content of our mythological heritage by way of meaning substitutions involves making interpretations of poetry. I am fully aware that the Pagan community tends to frown upon interpreting poetry, as if interpretation somehow kills the spirit. It is my view that interpretation actually reveals the spirit of poetry and does not kill it. The aesthetic state brought on by the enjoyment of symbols is an interesting place to be, but in my view does not ultimately lead to substantial principles by which we can guide our lives. I do not confirm nor deny that the Gods and the Otherworld are real. I simply read the text, and report what it told me.

With these disclaimers for the devout out of the way, I proceed with the inquiry. I made this particular insight about the Druids secret language while reading about Manannan in Lady Augusta Gregory’s wonderful book, *Gods and Fighting Men*.⁶ In the case of the story of “His Three Calls to Cormac”, I read the work with an eye for the use of esoteric language and dis-

Celtic society was a stratified, hierarchical society that by no means bore all of the egalitarian and democratic features that Neopagan Celts often ascribe to it.

covered that the story reports what I believe to be Cormac's induction into the Order of Druids. In this story the Otherworld becomes the grove at which the Druids meet and conduct ceremonies, the Gods become the Druids at the ceremony who take on certain ritual roles, or perhaps even ritually impersonate the Gods, and magical wonders describe not supernatural powers but principles of nature, humanity, and moral teaching.

2. THE SUMMONER APPROACHES

The first paragraph of the story as retold by Lady Augusta Gregory tell of how Cormac is at home alone and is approached by an 'armed man'. The description of the man is given in detail, yet the only carried item that is described is not a weapon but his "shining branch having nine apples of red gold, on his shoulder", so it is for bearing the apple branch (hereafter referred to as the bell branch) that the Summoner is described as an armed man. There is no indication that the man is a warrior, for the clothing that he wears is not combat armour, but a shirt ribbed with gold thread and bronze shoes. This is, I believe, consistent with reports of the multicoloured dress of Irish Druids, and hence establishes that the armed man is not a fighter nor even an ordinary traveler, but a Druid.

I use the term "Summoner" in this context as an anthropologist might. The role of the Summoner is already established in Neopaganism;

he is the member of the Wiccan coven (usually a man) who, before the ritual, sends out the call to the members of the coven that the ritual is about to begin and, during the ritual, acts as a kind of gatekeeper and stands outside the circle to protect against intruders. Manannan acts as a kind of gatekeeper in other myths about him as well, and so the role of Summoner seems appropriate here. Margaret Murray describes the

Summoner as the "Man in Black" who acts in this capacity for her (somewhat fictitious) mediæval witches. In our story, the figure who approaches Cormac is probably Manannan himself, or a Druid impersonating the God, for although the name is not given in the text, it is implied by the title. The Summoner exchanges words with Cormac and leaves him with the bell branch. The power of the bell branch is that it eliminates troublesome thoughts in the minds of those who hear its sound, for it rings with a music that comes from a land where, as Manannan describes it, "there is nothing but truth, and where there is neither age nor withering away, nor heaviness, nor sadness, nor jealousy, nor envy, nor pride". This is, as all readers of Celtic literature will recognize, Tir Na nOg, the most wonderful Otherworld that humanity has conceived. Cormac responds that our world in which he lives is not a place where there is only truth, but a place where there is heaviness, sadness, and all the other sufferings.

Cormac requests the bell branch along with the Summoner's friendship. By doing so, Cormac is actually asking for the means by which all the sufferings of this world can be removed. Cormac takes up not just the bell branch but a psychological commitment to the Druids, and the Druid way of reaching Truth and happiness. We shall soon see more of the spiritual method prescribed by the ancient Druids to lead one from suffering to contentedness.

3. THE SACRIFICE

The Summoner exacts a price for the branch: three unspecified gifts from Cormac in return for it, which are not to be collected immediately but remitted one at a time. First, the Summoner requests his daughter, then his son, and lastly his wife. Naturally his tribesfolk are upset by this but Cormac rings the bell branch to calm them down. The essential message in this part of the story is that in order to join the ranks of Druids one must break associations with one's own tribe. The Druids were pan-tribal, meaning that their authority extended across all Celtic tribes that they encountered, so if a postulant to the Druid order was still partial to any one tribe, he could not effectively discharge his duty to all tribes. Cormac shakes the bell branch to put the sorrow from his tribesfolk, perhaps to reinforce in their minds as well as his own the commitment he made to apprenticeship in the Druid order.

This first encounter with a Druid that the story describes is actually, albeit symbolically, describing a short ritual. In it, Cormac expresses his commitment to apprenticeship under the Druid who came to him by divorcing his own tribe, and the Druid accepts Cormac as his apprentice by gifting him with his first ritual tool, the bell branch-- but as we have seen, Cormac's acceptance of the bell branch has further layers of meaning. This is an initiation of the rite-of-passage type.

4. OPENING THE GATES TO THE OTHERWORLD

The storyteller writes that Cormac left Teamhair at this point to search for his wife. I believe it safe to suppose that Cormac's motive here is something that Christian editors inserted—and if so, the real motive is something else. Cormac already agreed to cut off his connection to his tribe for a short while so it seems inconsistent that he should try to win his kin back right away. His search for his wife is

not only the search for the place where she has gone but also for the man who took her, and the story tells us that the place she went was the Otherworld and the man who took her was Manannan. Understanding both the God and the Otherworld to be poetic devices here, we can understand the Otherworld as the symbol for the Druid's grove and Manannan as the Druid Summoner who called to him there. We enter the grove by passing through a boundary that establishes the division between ordinary space and space reserved for religious purposes; it is the famous Mist that appears in so many Celtic tales.

5. TESTING THE INITIATE BY RIDDLE

Some initiation ceremonies require that the postulant be worthy of initiation. This is established by a test. In contemporary Paganism, initiations that test people are generally avoided, or else the tests are superfluous and easy. In the ancient times, initiation tests were much more serious, and failure was a distinct possibility. Candidates for initiations may have risked injury, madness or death in the ceremony. There are legal and social reasons why contemporary Pagans no longer perform health-threatening initiations anymore, and moreover there are other kinds of initiations that are equally legitimate that we perform instead, such as recognition of achievements already obtained (which is what a rite of passage sometimes is). Lady Gregory describes the initiation of the Fianna of Ireland elsewhere in the same text. The postulants for entry into the Fianna had to demonstrate mastery of certain martial skills, mainly having to do with war and wilderness survival. They also had to be competent at poetry.

Cormac's initiation now becomes the testing type. The initiators will be testing his ability to recognize certain Druidic mysteries represented by symbols that he has not seen before. The possibility of failing the test is real.

As Cormac approaches the rath of Manannan, which is the sacred grove where the initiation will take place, he is shown three wonders. The first is a house with feathers thatched in the roof, and Riders of the Sidhe thatching them there, and once the roof was finished a blast of wind would scatter them and the job would have to be redone. The second was a man kindling a fire with an oak tree, and every time the man went for another tree to feed the fire the first would be consumed. The third wonder he saw was a grand fort, at the center of which is the Well of Wisdom. We know this well from identical descriptions of it in other tales: it has five streams flowing from it, and nine hazel trees growing around it, and salmon in the streams eating the nuts that fall from the trees.

Cormac is shown these wonders and his test for the moment is to meditate upon them. Their meaning puzzles him and so he seeks out the meaning from two Druids who enter the story at this point. Again, their style of dress is described in detail and it bears all the colour, ornament, and regalia of Druids. They are identified as "the master of the house and his wife", but this time they are not named because Cormac must identify them as a part of his initiation tests. Cormac is now offered a bath (for ritual purification?) and a place at the Druid's meal table.

A third unidentified person enters the room now, bringing the total occupants of the ritual chamber to four, or one for each cardinal direction. We know this to be an important part of ancient Druid ritual custom from the archaeology of sacred sites, as well as from other stories where certain rituals require four participants. Dian-cecht with his three children enchanting his Healing Well is one classic example. This extra man brings a pig for roasting over a spit for the meal, a log for cooking it, and an axe for cutting the log and gutting the pig, but "never and never will the pig be boiled until a truth is told for every quarter of it". Each person must

tell a story then, and the story given by the three Druids is a riddle that Cormac, as candidate for initiation, must be able to solve. The pig here is understood to be Cormac himself, transforming in the ritual experience from an ignorant, innocent, "raw" youth into a mature, knowledgeable, "cooked" adult.

The story given by the extra man is about his axe. Any pig killed by it is alive again in the morning, and any log chopped by it produces enough wood to boil the pig and, like the pig, is whole again in the morning. The story given by the master of the house is that of a field: when he had a mind to sow it with seed he found that it was already planted, and when he wished to harvest from it he found the crops already cut for him. The story given by the woman of the house is of seven cattle whose milk can satisfy all people of the world, and seven sheep whose wool can clothe all people of the world. What axe, what field, and what cattle and sheep can do these things? Cormac knows; but his answer is to say to the man of the house: "If this is true, you are Manannan, and this is Manannan's wife, for no one on the whole ridge of the world owns these treasures but himself". Cormac has announced that he understands the secret riddle language by employing the language himself.

6. WELCOMING THE INITIATE INTO THE NEW LIFE

Now that Cormac has passed the tests successfully, he is welcomed into the community of Druids. The story says that Manannan sang a song to him to make him sleep, and when he awoke he was in the company of fifty armed men, as well as his wife and children who were taken from him at the beginning of the story. I believe that this means his membership in all tribes, including yet not limited to his own, is affirmed here, as it is for all Druids.

The famous truth-detecting Cup is offered to him at this point. Its power is to shatter into

three pieces if three falsehoods are told under it, and to repair itself if three truths are told. The capacity to distinguish between the true and the false is an essential skill for judges and kings like Cormac. Without any means to discover whether a crime occurred or did not occur, there can be no justice. It is interesting that the principle of Truth is the first virtue that the Summoner confirmed for Cormac, which seems to verify its importance as an ancient Druidic doctrine. Cormac is also allowed to keep the bell branch.

The three wonders which he saw at the beginning of the ceremony are explained to him now. "And the Riders you saw thatching the house", Manannan explains, "are the men of arts and the poets, and all that look for a fortune in Ireland, putting together cattle and riches". This is a moral lesson about the pursuit of wealth: Just as the feathers fly off the roof of the house, the actual acquisition of wealth does not satiate one's desire for more. The pursuit of wealth is unattainable and hence a bringer of suffering, and so he ought not to live his life this way. "And the man you saw kindling the fire", continues Manannan, "is a young lord that is more liberal than he can afford, and everyone else is served while he is getting the feast ready, and everyone else profiting by it". The moral instruction here has to do with the pursuit of an honourable reputation. Even though one would think honour is a virtue,⁷ Manannan dismisses it, on the grounds that one cannot meet one's own needs while always seeing to the needs of others. Last, Manannan says "And the Well that you saw is the Well of Knowledge, and the streams are the Five Streams through which all knowledge goes". The third wonder in the triad is for the Druid caste, and at last Cormac is given a positive instruction: to seek knowledge, and drink from the streams as his predecessor Druids have

We enter the grove by passing through a boundary that establishes the division between ordinary space and space reserved for religious purposes; it is the famous Mist that appears in so many Celtic tales.

done. This is the psychological path promoted by Druids to alleviate suffering, to bring truth into the world, and heal all beings of their heaviness and sorrow. I find that the three wonders express virtues appropriate for the three main castes⁸ in ancient Indo-European society: wealth for the producer-caste, honour for the warrior-caste, and wisdom for the Druid-caste.

By bestowing these gifts and revealing these mysteries, the initiators invite Cormac into their community, and make him one of them. The initiation becomes a rite-of-passage again, so the ceremony has come full circle, and concludes upon Cormac's return home.

7. ADVENTURING AWAY FROM IGNORANCE

An excellent way of penetrating the secret language in Irish myths is to pose questions of the text. On encountering a magical artifact in the story, ask yourself what it is and experiment with some answers that emerge from your imbas, which is your divine inspiration. What axe can kill and yet allows for renewal? What field both fertilizes itself and harvests its own produce? What sheep and cattle both clothe and feed the world? What are the five streams from which all knowledge goes? Answer these questions and you have the hidden meaning that the speaker wishes to communicate to

In contemporary Paganism, initiations that test people are generally avoided, or else the tests are superfluous and easy. In the ancient times, initiation tests were much more serious, and failure was a distinct possibility.

you. It is up to you, gentle readers, to answer them for yourselves, but I leave you with my answer for the mystery of the Well. The five streams from which all knowledge go are the five physical senses, which bring us into contact with the manifest world around us. To drink from the streams is to engage our senses as fully and comprehensively as we can, and accept into our being all things that our senses contact, without the intervening obstacles of preconception, habit, expectation, and illusion. The Well of Wisdom is immanent within each of us, and may it never run dry!

REFERENCES:

1. "Riddles and Dark Sayings": A comment by Diogenes Laertius on how Druids teach their tribesfolk. Piggot, *The Druids* (Thames and Hudson, New York, 1975) pg. 117.
2. Nede and Ferchertne: see the "Colloquy of the Two Sages", in *Encycopaedia of Celtic Wisdom*, by John & Caitlin Matthews.
3. Outer Circle Pythagorean doctrine consisted in the famous theory of transmigration of souls, whereas Inner Circle Pythagorean doctrine eschewed soul-talk in favour of speculation about "inner harmony of elements". See, for example, Plato's discussion of Inner Circle doctrine in the *Phaedo*, 92a. At least four Roman historians (Hyppolytus, Diodorus, Ammaianus and Valerius Maximus) commented on the similarity between Pythagorean and Druidic thought,

which lends some strength to my argument.

4. Eugene O'Curry, "Druids and Druidism in Ancient Ireland", in *The Celtic Reader*, ed. John Matthews (The Aquarian Press, London, 1991) pg. 49.
5. "I am a wave of the sea": Song of Amergin
6. Lady Augusta Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men*. (Colin Smyth Ltd., Gerard's Cross, Buckinghamshire, 1904) pp. 106-110.
7. "honour is a virtue": Consider the several instructions that are given to young warriors by older warriors, such as by Fionn MacCumhall and Cu Chullain. Honour would seem to be a cardinal trait for the warrior caste, and yet in this story Manannan dismisses it. This is precisely the sort of unpopular idea that Druids might try to protect with a secret language.
8. "Virtues appropriate for the three main castes": The similarity to Plato's theory of the tripartite soul is tempting, not only for its organisation, but for its dismissal of honour and wealth as virtues for philosophers. See *The Republic*, 434d-441c.

Brendan "Cathbad" Myers is a graduate student at the University of Guelph (in Ontario, Canada), where he is finishing a Masters' degree in philosophy. He has been exploring and promoting Druidism for ten years, primarily as an independant. Current projects include a regular column in a local Pagan periodical, moderatorship of "The Nemeton", the internet's oldest discussion group on Celtic Paganism, and the "Ex Nemeton series of letters", which propose original answers to social and political questions, articulated in an informal, accessible style.

These may be viewed on his web site, www.uoguelph.ca/~bmyers

A Response to Brian Hayden's Article: "An Archaeological Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm"

by Joan Marler

Joan Marler worked closely with Marija Gimbutas as editor of *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991) and is the editor of

From the Realm of the Ancestors: An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas (1997). She is on the faculty of two graduate schools in San Francisco: *The California Institute of Integral Studies* and *New College*, and is an executive editor of *ReVision journal*. She is the director of the *Institute of Archaeomythology* and can be reached by email: jmarler@ap.net.

In the August 1998 issue of *The Pomegranate*, Brian Hayden harshly criticizes an article by Mara Lynn Keller that speaks in favor of the work of archaeologist Marija Gimbutas. It is the nature of scientific inquiry to question new theories, especially those that run counter to prevailing ideas. In my view, it is extremely important to engage in respectful discourse so that areas of disagreement can stimulate new levels of understanding. It is in vogue, among certain scholars, to treat the contributions of Marija Gimbutas with contempt. Before responding to some of Hayden's remarks I will begin by introducing Marija Gimbutas since she is often described in caricature at the center of an ideological controversy.

Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994) was a European/American archaeologist who was born and raised in Lithuania. She fled Lithuania during WWII with a Masters degree in archaeology and a background in philology and folklore, and knowledge of most eastern and western European languages. Immediately after the war, she completed her doctorate in archaeology, with emphasis on ethnology and history of religions, at Tübingen University before emigrating to the United States in 1949. Marija Gimbutas spent thirteen years at Harvard University as a researcher, producing texts on European archaeology which established her as a world-class scholar on the prehistory of the Slavs, the Balts and the Indo-European Bronze Age (see Polomé and Skomal 1987; Polomé 1997:102-107).

From 1963 to 1989, Marija Gimbutas taught Baltic and Slavic studies and was Professor of European Archaeology at the University of California, Los Angeles where she was instrumental in establishing the Institute of Archaeology and Indo-European studies. She was Chair of European Archaeology, Curator of Old World Archaeology at the Cultural History Museum at UCLA, and co-founder of *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*. Between 1967 and 1980 Dr. Gimbutas was project director of five major excavations of Neolithic sites in southeast Europe and devoted the last three decades of her life to Neolithic research. Her bibliography contains 33 texts (published in nine languages) and over 300 scholarly articles on European prehistory. For a compilation that includes everything except her posthumous texts *The Kurgan Culture* (1997) and *The Living Goddesses* (1999), see Marler 1997:609-25.

In her 1994 obituary in the London



Anthropologist Ashley Montagu considers Gimbutas' findings to be as important as Schliemann's excavation of Troy, while others, like Brian Hayden, are highly critical.

Independent, Colin Renfrew wrote: "[Marija Gimbutas] was a figure of extraordinary energy and talent. The study and the wider understanding of European prehistory is much richer for her life's work."

Gimbutas' research was supported by an encyclopedic background in European prehistory and a lifetime study of linguistics and mythology. Her theories have generated an enormous range of both positive and negative responses within the academic world and beyond. Anthropologist Ashley Montagu considers Gimbutas' findings to be as important as Schliemann's excavation of Troy, while others, like Brian Hayden, are highly critical.

Sometimes, the influence of particular views is made deeper by the dissenting opinions they have triggered or the continued investigations they have inspired. Nowhere are these considerations more valid than in the case of Marija Gimbutas (Polomé 1997:102).

ARCHAEOLOGY

Although the ideology of prehistoric societies is considered "one of the most taxing problems in archaeology" (Renfrew 1994:xiii), Gimbutas turned her attention, during the 1960s, to the study of Neolithic symbolism. She came to the conclusion that the art of Old Europe reflected a mythopoetic perception of the sacredness and mystery of the natural

world expressed through "a cohesive and persistent ideological system" (Gimbutas 1989:321, xv). In order to investigate the non-material aspects of culture, Gimbutas developed an interdisciplinary approach called archaeomythology which combines archaeology, mythology, linguistics, historical ethnology, folklore, and comparative religions.

Brian Hayden rejected the position put forth by Mara Keller that Marija Gimbutas was a pioneer in her formulation and use of archaeomythology to enrich the study of Neolithic cultures. In his view, archaeologists have always been interested in areas of cultural meaning, including ritual, symbolism and myth, and he quotes Lewis Binford, a main architect of the New Archaeology, to back up his point. This may be so in theory, but not in practice. In *A History of Archaeological Thought* (1989:327) Bruce Trigger points out: "Although the New Archaeology advocated studying all aspects of cultural systems... [m]ajor aspects of human behaviour such as religious beliefs, aesthetics, and scientific knowledge received little attention." This situation is understandable since it is rare for archaeologists to be suitably trained in mythology, linguistics and comparative religion that would give them the tools to cross the borders of their discipline to address such non-tangible subjects as aesthetics, symbolism and religious beliefs.

Twenty years after Marija Gimbutas published her first book on Neolithic symbolism, *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* (1974), an attempt is finally being made within the ranks of processual archaeology to study prehistoric human cognition. The preferred direction of this 'new' discipline of cognitive archaeology is one that is "rooted in the scientific tradition and in an empirical methodology. It draws upon the cognitive, the mathematical and the computer sciences" (Renfrew and Zubrow 1994) while providing little encouragement toward the study of mythology. Hayden nevertheless places himself within the hypothetical "long and strong tradition in archaeology of dealing with social, political, religious, and mythological aspects of culture," and gives the example of Schliemann who used mythology to locate the existence of Troy. Hayden points to research by mythologists and other scholars, but is unable to name any archaeologist other than Gimbutas who has incorporated a detailed knowledge of mythological elements in an archaeological study of Old European cultures.

GIMBUTAS' KURGAN HYPOTHESIS

Using an interdisciplinary approach, Marija Gimbutas was the first scholar to bring together archaeological and linguistic evidence in the formulation of her Kurgan Hypothesis. The linguist A. Richard Diebold writes:

To Marija Gimbutas we owe much. For the first time, with the formulation of her Kurgan Hypothesis, ... we have a defensible hypothesis that heuristically links linguistic and archaeological knowledge. ... [A]nd such is the cumulative weight of evidence adduced in support of these associations, that the unenviable burden of (dis)proof must fall upon the critics and skeptics

(Diebold 1987:19).

"Indo-European" is a linguistic term that refers to a family of languages found from India to the western edge of Europe. Proto-Indo-European (PIE) refers to the now extinct mother tongue from which all Indo-European languages developed. Gimbutas' hypothesis locates the homeland of Proto-Indo-European speakers in the area of south Russia and documents their movements into Europe from the end of the 5th millennium BC. Gimbutas describes the influx of nomadic pastoralists over a 2000 year period as a "collision of cultures" in which androcratic cultural and ideological patterns were introduced into Europe. This led to a hybridization between the Old European and Indo-European systems (see Gimbutas 1991: 352-401 and 1997). To his credit, Hayden does not turn the Kurgan Hypothesis into a cartoon to dismiss it, as others have done. Instead, he acknowledges in his article that this explanation of the spread of Indo-European languages "may still be the most widely accepted one" (1998:36).

Hayden appears to endorse some of Gimbutas' ideas in his 1993 textbook, *Archaeology: the Science of Once and Future Things*. He includes a map indicating the geographic range of Gimbutas' Kurgan theory; the terms "Kurgan" and "Old Europe" are freely used. Marija Gimbutas named the Proto-Indo-European speakers "Kurgans" after their burial mounds, and "Old Europe" refers to the Neolithic cultures of Europe before the Indo-European influence; both terms were coined by Gimbutas. Sections are included such as, "The Indo-European Invasions," and "Neolithic vs. Indo-European Societies"; and illustrations are included from Gimbutas' book *The Goddesses and Gods of*

Old Europe (1982) as part of a section titled, "Death and Resurrection: the Leit-motif of Neolithic Religion." Although Gimbutas originated these concepts, her name is conspicuously absent from the text. Her name only appears at the end of the book in small print as an illustration credit and by the inclusion of one small article in the bibliography (Hayden 1993: 238-240, 340-344, 348-353, 480). Other archaeologists whose theories are discussed are clearly referenced.

Hayden is using (and in some places distorting) Gimbutas' original scholarship while erasing her identity. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon situation for many women scholars who have made substantial contributions to their fields (see Spender 1982). Perhaps this is Hayden's way of incorporating some of Gimbutas' concepts without appearing to accept her work. As he states in his article in reference to her ideas about matrilineal cultures, "no reputable archaeologist has ever endorsed [her views] ..." (1998:43).

CHIEFDOMS OR CIVILIZATION

Hayden emphasizes that "there is no theoretical or empirical support for the idea of non-hierarchical, egalitarian, peaceful chiefdoms or states in the European Neolithic, and no support for colonies of artists producing art for art's sake" (41). This is quite correct. Gimbutas never considered chiefdoms to be non-hierarchical or egalitarian, nor did she ever refer to the production of Old European art by the modern concept of "art for art's sake." In her view, chiefdoms, which are by definition non-egalitarian and hierarchical, did not appear west of the Black Sea until Europe was Indo-Europeanized. Gimbutas did consider pre-Indo-European Old Europe to be the first European civiliza-

tion. The traditional meaning of 'civilization' assumes political and religious hierarchy, warfare, and class stratification that did not apply to Old Europe. Therefore, she redefined the term:

I reject the assumption that civilization refers only to androcratic warrior societies. The generative basis of any civilization lies in its degree of artistic creation, aesthetic achievements, nonmaterial values, and freedom which make life meaningful and enjoyable for all its citizens, as well as a balance of powers between the sexes. Neolithic Europe was not a time 'before civilization' ... It was, instead, a true civilization in the best meaning of the word" (Gimbutas 1991: viii).

Marija Gimbutas perceived Old European ceramic and sculptural traditions as refined expressions of the aesthetic, spiritual and technical development of this civilization. She acknowledged the work of specialists in Old Europe, but did not equate their activities with patterns of dominance. She also did not consider it impossible for people to be self-organizing for the common good without the dictates of a chieftain.

When criticizing Gimbutas' theories, Hayden stresses that "before accepting ideas or statements as reliable or true, whether they derive from intuition, logic, or other sources, they must undergo rigorous reality testing. Without such a step, no real progress in understanding can be made" (1998:37). I agree. Of course, this process must be applied to Hayden's theories as well.

THE BIG MAN COMPLEX

One of Hayden's major assumptions, elaborated in his 1993 text, seems to be that societies cannot develop without socioeconomic inequalities or hierarchies. In his view, Neolithic societies can best be

... it is rare for archaeologists to be suitably trained in mythology, linguistics and comparative religion that would give them the tools to cross the borders of their discipline to address ... aesthetics, symbolism and religious beliefs.

understood in terms of a "Big Man complex" which he believes is founded upon self-interest, desire for power and materialism (1993:251-253). Economic competition and prestige are given as the reasons for creating beautiful ceramics. This is also offered (amazingly) as a motivation for the transition to food production (225). Hayden posits "competitive feasting" as central to the development of economic advantage in early Neolithic societies, in which

... ambitious men try to give away as much food and as many goods as possible in order to earn interest on their gifts and establish a debt hierarchy. Desirable foods and exotic decorative items were also given to supporters as rewards for their help in raising the capital for these feasts (225).

The indirect evidence for competitive feasting is supposedly the appearance of "status items" such as special ceramics, ritual structures, and plazas where feasts could have been held. Hayden states that ritual structures found in the Neolithic settlements of Sesklo, Dimini, and early Knossos were probably centers for feasts, councils, and other events whose primary purpose was to "extol the qualities of the community Big Man" (255-256). The possibility that the creation of elegant ceramics, sculptural art, feasting and communal celebrations were motivated by concepts of the sacred within an egalitarian context is

never considered. Hayden does admit that "[m]uch more research must be undertaken, however, before this idea can be substantiated" (225). How true, since there is absolutely no evidence within the pre-Indo-European Neolithic period to support his notion of a Big Man complex. The first cemetery evidence of an elite male is found in the Varna necropolis at the end of the 5th millennium BC which is precisely the time that Gimbutas claims the transition to male dominance began (see Marler 1997: 141-142; Marazov 1997:175-187; Gimbutas 1991:118-121). Nevertheless, according to Hayden:

The Big Man complex is one of those invaluable conceptual tools that enables archaeologists to fit together a wide range of observations on past communities. It helps create powerful, predictive, and parsimonious models (1993:241).

Early Neolithic life, like that of most hunter-gatherers, was fundamentally egalitarian ... Many a Big Man had to work harder than any of his neighbors to ensure the success of his socially competitive games. Always, however, he did his utmost to pass on the extra work load to his wife (or wives, since many wives produce more food than one wife) ... (242).

Thus the Big Man is constantly running around his village, exhorting everyone to get up and get to work, not to be lazy, to be productive. In him we see the original incarnation of the Protestant ethic. Idleness and hedonism are anathema to Big Men. One ethnologist has likened them to impotent scoutmasters (248-249).

Hayden is using (and in some places distorting) Gimbutas' original scholarship while erasing her identity. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon situation for many women scholars ...

Why has there been no criticism of this bizarre scenario? Perhaps because it is congruent with a prevalent belief that male domination is the most natural mode of developed human society. There seems to be an assumption that large groups of people are unable to work communally for mutual benefit beyond the level of "primitive" tribes. Anything more complex requires control by a Big Man.

Naomi Goldenberg offers this reflection:

Gimbutas' ideas are important because they threaten to disrupt the performance of male grandiosity by suggesting that in some parts of ancient civilization, intense, aesthetic focus was not accorded to maleness. The facile rejection of this rather modest hypothesis is testimony to the hold that androcentric religions and the theories which support them have on the imaginations of many scholars (Goldenberg 1997: 45).

NEOLITHIC WARFARE

Numerous settlement mounds in southeast Europe indicate long-term habitation with no indication of internecine violence during the pre-Indo-European period. Such stable continuity provided suitable conditions for uninterrupted cultural development. Gimbutas makes a clear distinction between the peaceful character of Old European societies and the disruption that took place as a result of a "collision of cultures" during the late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

Hayden decries Gimbutas' assertion that the pre-Indo-European Neolithic period was peaceful by assuming a "Big Man complex". Using circular logic, he asserts that "warfare is endemic wherever the Big Man complex is found" (251). He believes that "brute instinctual force, violence, great power, great virility, and great ferociousness" were venerated during the Neolithic in the form of the bull (1998:39). For a contrasting interpretation of bull symbolism, see Gimbutas 1989:265-271.

Hayden also refers to Jacques Cauvin's repetition of R.A. Fisher's 1936 biological model of diffusion in which farmers were thought to have spread out from the Near East in a "wave of advance" into Europe at the rate of one kilometer per year, replacing, rather than assimilating, indigenous populations. Hayden presents the simplistic conclusion that this steady movement must have created antagonisms and war. The controversial wave of advance theory may work on paper as a theoretical model, but is highly questionable when applied to actual landscapes with varied concentrations of Mesolithic populations. According to Marek Zvelebil,

Archaeological research does not record any evidence for rapid saturation of areas colonized by Neolithic farmers or for demographic expansion, with the single exception of the Linear Pottery culture in central Europe (Zvelebil 1998).

There is evidence that three Linear Pot-

tery (Linearbandkeramik, or LBK) settlements in northeastern Belgium (c. 6300-5900 BP) protected themselves against attacks by Late Mesolithic foragers. But according to the excavators, "brief periods of armed hostilities do not preclude more peaceful interactions over longer periods" (Keeley and Cahen 1989:168-172). The short term use of palisades in these LBK colonies does not contradict Gimbutas' claim that Old European societies were primarily peaceful.

Hayden goes on to state that "there are many indications of fortified, palisaded, walled Neolithic sites from early to late Neolithic times, from southeastern Europe (sites such as Dimini in Greece) to northeastern Europe, including ones with mass graves in the bottoms of encircling ditches." Works by Christopher Scarre (1984), Sarunas Milisauskas (1986:787), Robert Evans and Judith Rasson (1984:720) and Gary Webster (1990:343) are given as evidence. Let's see what these references actually say.

Evans and Rasson's article is a 1984 review of the literature on Neolithic and Chalcolithic research in southeast Europe. Here are their remarks about "defensive" structures:

Features such as ditches, banks, or fences may be investigated for a variety of functions (Jacobsen 1981). The identification of a community by a wall or fence may be symbolic (to create a sense of community) or functional (to keep animals in or out, for instance). Tringham (1971) suggests that the evidence for fences, ditches, and banks is more likely a method of community "demarcation" than evidence for fortification. The question of works constructed with defence in mind—"fortification"—is another matter (Evans and Rasson 1984:720).

Recent archaeological analysis has reversed an earlier interpretation of the walls sur-

rounding Dimini in Thessaly:

[Dimini] consists of several concentric retaining walls, between which there were buildings and work areas... The walls are not now seen as defensive, and there are several entrances through all the circuits (Whittle 1996:87).

The article by Gary Webster includes these few words relating to fortification:

From the late 4th millennium on, cultural development in adjacent regions of the Balkans and the Aegean follow strikingly different trajectories... There is evidence for settlement nucleation (sometimes with fortification) and the associated widespread abandonment of small peripheral sites during the late 4th millennium ... perhaps reflecting a declining agricultural base (Webster 1990:344).

Gimbutas' Kurgan Hypothesis explains the disruption of settlements following invasions by Kurgan peoples (see Gimbutas 1991:358, 368).

The discontinuity of the Varna, Karanovo, Vinča and Lengyel cultures in their main territories and the large scale population shifts to the north and northwest are indirect evidence of a catastrophe of such proportions that cannot be explained by possible climatic change, land exhaustion, or epidemics (for which there is no evidence in the second half of the 5th millennium B.C.). Direct evidence of the incursion of horse-riding warriors is found, not only in single burials of males under barrows, but in the emergence of a whole complex of Kurgan cultural traits... The earliest hill forts are contemporary with late Lengyel and Rössen materials or immediately follow them. Radiocarbon dates place this period between 4400 and 3900 B.C. (Gimbutas 1991:364).

As archaeologist James Mallory points out, the indigenous populations were displaced in every direction except eastward, moving into marginal locations— islands, caves or easily fortified hilltop sites. The apparent cultural collapse and chaos of this period produced a Balkan 'dark age'.

Evidence for this comes from the abandonment of 600-700 tell sites in the Balkans which had flourished from as early as the 7th millennium BC.

This abandonment and movement, often propelling neighbouring cultures into one another, operated against a background not only of somewhat elusive traces of hybridization with the steppe cultures... but also with continuous incursions of mobile pastoralists (Mallory 1989:238).

The repeated movement of steppe people into Europe over two millennia shattered the continuity of Old European development (although Old European traditions continued in the Aegean and Mediterranean islands until the mid-2nd millennium BC). During the 4th millennium, a reorganization of social structure took place across much of southeast Europe.

Sarunas Milisauskas devotes one brief paragraph in an 1986 article to the subject of fortifications. In his view, warfare and fortifications began with the appearance of Neolithic farmers. He mentions that "a number of fortified settlements were excavated" and that ditches were found at the Lengyel site of Svodín in Slovakia.

Since evidence for the association of Neolithic farmers with warfare is not presented, it is impossible to evaluate the merits of these statements. What are these fortifications? Is Milisauskas assuming that ditches are evidence of warfare at the exclusion of other possibilities? Did Brian Hayden actually read the articles that Milisauskas cited (which were written in German in Slovakian and Polish publications), or is he simply adopting Milisauskas' statements as truth? In any case, no discussion of the material evidence is provided. Milisauskas, however, goes on to say:

It should be noted that not all Neolithic sites with ditches or enclosures are classified as fortified sites. For example, the Neolithic site of Makotrasy in Czechoslovakia was classified as a ritual place ...[whose orientation] was consistent with sunrise and sunset at the winter and summer solstice (Milisauskas 1986: 787).

The square enclosure of Makotrasy in central Bohemia from the Funnel-necked Beaker culture (TRB), excavated by Pleslová-Stiková, is a sophisticated example of astronomical orientation. For information on ceremonial enclosures see Gimbutas 1999: 99-111. Christopher Scarre (1984:225) mentions the discovery of 60 fortified settlement sites from west-central France with elaborate systems of ditches and ramparts that appear during the late Neolithic (c. 2800-c.2300/2100 BC). In his view, these sites reflect increasing community stress, competition for critical wetland pasture and a change in the organization of society toward a social hierarchy (237). The monumental tombs used in the earlier Neolithic for collective burials were no longer built and lost their importance in the new social circumstances (241-243).

By the Late Neolithic, Kurgan influences were being felt (directly and indirectly) throughout Europe. Signs of warfare and societal change toward social hierarchy reinforce Gimbutas' theory of the Indo-Europeanization of Europe. Old European cultures were replaced by such hybrid societies as the Baden, Ezero, Cernavoda and Globular Amphora. Evidence of massacres are not uncommon (see Merpert 1997:70-77; Gimbutas 1991:426). The abandonment of Neolithic collective burials is a common indication of the rupture of Old European communal patterns (see Gimbutas 1991:396-401; 1997:351-372). When no distinction is made

Why has there been no criticism of this bizarre ['Big Man'] scenario? Perhaps because it is congruent with a prevalent belief that male domination is the most natural mode of developed human society.

between the pre-Indo-European and Indo-European periods it is simple but misleading to conclude that there was warfare during the Neolithic period.

CONCLUSION

The cultural transformation that took place as a result of the Indo-Europeanization of Europe was "one of the most complex and least understood in prehistory" (Gimbutas 1980:1). Brian Hayden has claimed the superiority of a number of unproven assumptions, such as: Old European societies were chiefdoms controlled by "Big Men"; warfare was endemic to Old European (pre-Indo-European) society; and the Neolithic arts were created as prestige items for competing males. Gimbutas saw the Old European cultures as egalitarian, primarily peaceful, with a wealth of artistic expression that reflected a sophisticated veneration of the cycles of life, death, regeneration (which she called 'Goddess'); the transition to androcracy took place after the 5th millennium BC.

Keller and Gimbutas are accused by Hayden of resembling "born again" fundamentalists. While every new theory must withstand the scrutiny of skeptical colleagues, the emotionalism and sense of righteous disgust and name-calling exhibited by Hayden does not promote a balanced, objective discourse so essential to this field.

I'm quite sure that Gimbutas would agree with Hayden's statement that "[t]he best scientists in all disciplines are always willing to consider all possibilities and to evaluate and re-evaluate them on their relative merits" (1998:36). Marija Gimbutas was a woman of great dignity who refused to engage in personal attacks. She made original and significant contributions to her field and understood that progress rarely comes from the repetition of unsubstantiated formulae.

REFERENCES

- Diebold, A. Richard, Jr. 1987 "Linguistic Ways to Prehistory." In *Proto-Indo-European: The Archaeology of a Linguistic Problem*. Edited by Edgar Polomé and Susan N. Skomal. Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Man.
- Evans, Robert K., and Judith A. Rasson. 1984 "Ex Balcanis Lux? Recent Developments in Neolithic and Chalcolithic Research in Southeast Europe." *American Antiquity* 49 (4): 713-741.
- Gimbutas, Marija. 1974 *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe. Myths and Cult Images*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- . 1980 Introduction to "The Transformation of European and Anatolian Culture 4500-2500 B.C. and its Legacy." *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 8 (1-2).
- . 1982 *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- . 1991 *The Civilization of the Goddess*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

- _____. 1997 *The Kurgan Culture and the Indo-Europeanization of Europe*. Monograph 18. Papers by Marija Gimbutas. Edited by Miriam Robbins Dexter and Karlene Jones-Bley. Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Man.
- _____. 1999 *The Living Goddesses*. Edited and supplemented by Miriam Robbins Dexter. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Goldenberg, Naomi. 1997 "Marija Gimbutas and the King's Archaeologist." In *From the Realm*, J. Marler, ed.
- Hayden, Brian. 1993 *Archaeology: The Science of Once and Future Things*. New York: Freeman & Co.
- _____. 1998 "An Archaeological Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm." *The Pomegranate* 6:35-46.
- Jacobsen, Thomas W. 1981 "Franchthi Cave and the Beginning of Settled Life in Greece." *Hesperia* 50 (4): 303-319.
- Keeley, Lawrence H., and Daniel Cahen. 1989 "Early Neolithic Forts and Villages in Northeast Belgium: A Preliminary Report." *Journal of Field Archaeology* 16:157-176.
- Mallory, James. 1989 *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Marazov, Ivan. 1997 "The Blacksmith as 'King' in the Necropolis of Varna." In *From the Realm*, Edited by J. Marler.
- Marler, Joan. 1997 *From the Realm of the Ancestors: An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas*. Manchester, CT: Knowledge, Ideas & Trends, Inc.
- Merpert, Nicolai. 1997 "The Earliest Indo-Europeanization of the North Balkan Area in Light of a New Investigation in the Upper Thracian Valley." In *From the Realm*, Edited by J. Marler.
- Milisauskas, Sarunas. 1986 "Selective Survey of Archaeological Research in Eastern Europe." *American Antiquity* 54 (4): 779-798.
- Polomé, Edgar. 1997 "Marija Gimbutas' Kurgan Hypothesis and Indo-European Studies." In *From the Realm*, Edited by J. Marler.
- Polomé, Edgar, and Susan N. Skomal. 1987 *Proto-Indo-European: The Archaeology of a*

Linguistic Problem. Studies in Honor of Marija Gimbutas. Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Man.

- Renfrew, Colin, and Ezra B.W. Zubrow. 1994 *The Ancient Mind: Elements of Cognitive Archaeology*. Cambridge UP.
- Scarre, Christopher. 1984 "The Neolithic of West-Central France." In *Ancient France: Neolithic Societies and Their Landscapes, 6000-2000 BC*. Christopher Scarre, ed., pp. 223-270. University of Edinburgh Press.
- Sponder, Dale. 1982 *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Tringham, Ruth. 1971 *Hunters, Fishers and Farmers of Eastern Europe: 6000-3000 BC*. London: Hutchinson University Library.
- Trigger, Bruce. 1989 *A History of Archaeological Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Webster, Gary S. 1990 "Labor Control and Emergent Stratification in Prehistoric Europe." *Current Anthropology* 31 (4): 337-366.
- Zvelebil, Marek. 1998 "Genetic and Cultural Diversity of Europe." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 54.

Brian Hayden replies:

It seems that Marler is projecting much more hostility into my defence of archaeology than was actually there. For one thing, I avoided using overly impassionate terms in my defence of archaeology (unlike Marler's use of emotion-laden phrases such as 'bizarre,' 'amazingly,' 'righteous disgust,' 'emotionalism,' and 'name-calling'). If she and other supporters of Gimbutas' views want to attack and harshly criticize the entire discipline of archaeology as narrow-minded, biased, and bent on disenfranchising women of their true roles in the prehistoric past, they should learn to expect as strong a response as they dish out.

I view Keller's rejection of scientific methods and her advocacy of a semi-mystical methodology for establishing the facts of the past as pro-

If Marler thinks, for example, that the feasting model of domestication is 'bizarre,' this is probably a reflection of her isolation from recent theoretical work in archaeology.

foundly disturbing. If I used the term, 'fundamentalism,' it was to refer (accurately, I think) to the methodology that Keller advocated where a belief system takes precedence over the objective analysis of facts in establishing reality, and where contrary evidence is portrayed as promulgated by enemies of 'the truth.' I thought Keller's criticisms were unjustified and inappropriate.

In a similar vein, Marler begins by using ad hominem arguments to place Gimbutas on a pedestal of untouchable scientific respectability. My view is quite different. While Gimbutas may never have openly engaged in personal attacks, she was not adverse to using academically dishonest tactics to stifle criticisms of her ideas. Gimbutas was known to use her considerable popularity and standing to try to suppress the publication of articles which contradicted her theories. Such tactics, along with portraying those who disagree as being biased, androcentric, or wed to a narrow empiricism, are typically used by those who support Gimbutas' interpretations about Old European society. Both she and her followers have also been consistent in their efforts to polarize these arguments along gender lines, a strategy which I find distasteful and counterproductive.

While archaeologists during the 1960s-80s may not have made many advances in dealing with ideologies or myths, my point was that it was not because they were uninterested or biased, but because these topics were difficult to deal with. Archaeologists had certainly been trying to deal with these topics in other areas of the world besides Old Europe and even inside Old Europe

in the case of Evans' excavations of Minoan Crete.

If I used the term, 'art-for-art's-sake,' it is because this, rather than socioeconomic factors, seems to be what is implied by the appeal by Gimbutas, Keller, and Marler to the 'aesthetic focus' of Old Europe as the reason for creating the prestige items that occur there.

I have little quarrel with the speculations on Neolithic myths since it is difficult to disprove mythic models such as those proposed by Gimbutas. However, when claims are made about Neolithic society and politics, there is a great deal of hard archaeological evidence to indicate that there were aggrandizive Big Men (and probably Big Women) and chiefdoms in Old Europe, as well as state level societies in Crete. There is no assumption that 'civilization refers only to androcentric warrior societies' in archaeology. However, empirically, male aggrandizers (not necessarily warriors) seem to be most frequently the driving forces behind increasing sociopolitical complexity.

A refutation of Marler's attempt to minimize this evidence and the evidence for warfare would require far more space than I have been allocated here, but it is substantial. If Marler thinks, for example, that the feasting model of domestication is 'bizarre,' this is probably a reflection of her isolation from recent theoretical work in archaeology. She might do well to check out the forthcoming volume on the topic from the Smithsonian Institution Press.

Brian Hayden
Simon Fraser University

Of Myths and Monkeys: A Critical Look at Critical Mass

by Maureen O'Hara
Saybrook Graduate School

*The 'Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon' was first proposed by Lyall Watson, a writer on paranormal subjects, in his 1979 book *Lifetide*, and was subsequently elaborated upon by New Age author Rupert Sheldrake in *A New Science of Life* (1982), and Ken Keyes, a human-potential movement guru whose 1982 book *The Hundredth Monkey* sold a million copies. By quoting the more marginal of each others' theories as if they were established scientific facts, and by 'puffing' each others' books with glowing back-cover testimonials, these three writers managed to convince an entire generation of New Age readers of the staggering assertion that telepathy in monkeys had been accepted by science since the 1950s.*

The first published skeptical evaluation of this myth was written by psychologist Maureen O'Hara, who criticized the story in the July 1983 Association of Humanistic Psychology Newsletter and again in the Winter 1985 Journal of Humanistic Psychology. The response from many of her colleagues was one of hostility. They regarded her concern for objective truth as petty; their counterreplies paraphrased the New Age Axiom "if it feels good, it must be true".

Even though the Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon is now little more than an infrequently cited footnote to the history of odd 1980s beliefs, the confusion between speculation and proven fact, prevalent even in scholarly circles, remains, unfortunately, alive and well in the 1990s. This confusion is often deliberately reinforced by writ-

ers and public figures whose motivation is to push a particular theory or belief system, and by publishers who have found that representing sensationalistic claims as science sells books and magazines.

The following article originally appeared in Whole Earth Review 52 (1989) and is reprinted, with Dr O'Hara's kind permission, from The Fringes of Reason (New York: Harmony, 1989) pp 182-86. The substance of these preliminary remarks has been adapted in large part from the introduction by Ted Shultz, the book's editor.

The 'Hundredth Monkey' provides us with a case study through which to examine the deterioration in the quality of thought and scholarship among those people who participate in what has become known as the 'New Age' or 'Human Potential' community. I believe that this deterioration may ultimately result (if it has not already) in discrediting humanistic science altogether, leaving us with nothing more than faddism and a rag-bag of pseudoreligious and pseudoscientific superstition. Because I believe that a humanistic view of persons and their communities has never been more necessary in order to counterbalance the galloping alienation in human life, I view this trend toward superstition with real alarm.

Lyall Watson does not tell us the monkey tale in his book *Lifetide* because he is interested in studies of behavior propagation in macaques—he is merely using the story to support his conviction about human consciousness, that when a certain 'critical mass' of people believe in something, suddenly the idea becomes true for everyone. There can be no doubt that ideas and attitudes can spread rapidly through a community from time to time. Evidence of this exists everywhere. Perhaps this monkey story and the rapidity with which it passed from pseudoscientific specula-

tion, through dubious editing, word of mouth transmission by superstars in the human potential movement, into popular New Age superstition, makes a far better case study of the very phenomenon than the monkey research putatively demonstrates.

There are major contradictions in the present idealization of critical mass. In promoting the idea that, although our ideas are shared by only an enlightened few (for the time being), if we really believe them, in some magical way what we hold to be true becomes true for everyone, proponents of the critical mass ideal ignore the principles of both humanism and democratic open society. Are we really willing to give up on these ideals and promote instead a monolithic ideology in which what is true for a 'critical mass' of people becomes true for everyone? The idea gives me the willies.

PSEUDOSCIENCE, SCIENCE, AND AMBIVALENCE

How could such a profoundly nonhumanistic idea become so popular among people who consider themselves the harbingers of a 'New Age'? I think the answer lies, at least in part, in the renewed infatuation with science and its shadow, pseudoscience. In the past ten years or so, we have seen the image of nuclear physicist shift from Dr Stangelove-like creators of the most terrifying death devices in history to their present status as darlings of the so-called 'new paradigm' consciousness. When we saw the physicists as on 'their side', we rejected everything they did. Now that they are on 'our side', we quote them at breakfast. Books like Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* have the New Age community convinced that physics is just some kind of Taoism with numbers.

This new infatuation with science is a shallow one, easily swayed by tricks of the pseudoscience trade such as theorizing wildly in

Those who engage in pseudoscience want it both ways. They want the authority of science but are unwilling to abide by the rules by which the scientific community earned its authority in the first place.

scientific-sounding language, sprinkling speculative discussion with isolated fragments of real data regardless of relevance, confusing analogy with homology, breaking conventional rules of evidence at will, and extrapolating from one level of reality into others wherein different principles operate.

I do not wish to imply that pseudoscience necessarily stems from a conscious effort to deceive. More often than not, crossing the line from science to pseudoscience comes from ignorance and inexperience, and the popularity of pseudoscience is with an audience equally ignorant and inexperienced. Because this audience is not equipped to evaluate claims of scientific validity, they instead accept them on faith.

One standard trick of the pseudoscience trade, for example, is to emphasize whatever affiliations to established science the writers have or had. It is to great advantage if the writer can be referred to as a scientist associated with a prestigious university with a wide reputation for scientific excellence. It matters not to the purveyors of pseudoscience whether or not the 'scientists' referred to have been in a lab for years, or if, when they were, it was in a field even remotely relevant to the subject at hand.

An August 1981 *Brain/Mind Bulletin* account of the Hundredth Monkey story refers to Lyall Watson as a biologist: the monkey story follows. The bibliography of

Casually interchanging myth, science, and metaphor robs each of these realms of its unique power to deepen our understanding of the world ...

Watson's book contains not one reference to any scientific research, biological or otherwise, that he has published, yet his other books, on the occult, are listed. It is not difficult to imagine a rather different response from the reader if *Brain/Mind Bulletin* had introduced the monkey story by referring to Watson as a writer on the occult.

Another example of 'authority transfer' can be found in Tom Cooper's review of the film, *The Hundredth Monkey*, which appeared in the May 1983 issue of the *Association for Humanistic Psychology Newsletter*. In asserting that the Hundredth Monkey thesis is "substantiated" he says, "Rupert Sheldrake, the Cambridge scientist, reports that when one group of rats was taught ..." The implication here is clear and misleading. The statement conveys the impression that Sheldrake (a) is currently on the faculty at Cambridge; (b) does scientific research there; (c) knows a lot about rats; (d) is 'reporting' on his own research.

If we look at Sheldrake's own book, *A New Science of Life*, we find that he was once a scholar at a Cambridge College, and is described as currently a consultant at an international research institute in India. His research is on the physiology of tropical plants. Again, the impact would be very different if Cooper had written, "Rupert Sheldrake, tropical plant physiologist in an Indian

crop research center, says that when one group of rats ..." This kind of 'credentialleering' is obviously intended to give credibility to scientific-sounding propositions. Such authority-borrowing works because institutions such as Cambridge University and disciplines such as biology have, despite occasional, widely publicized aberrations, lived up to their reputations for reliability.

Another characteristic of pseudoscience is its profound ambivalence toward the scientific establishment. Despite his identification as a biologist, Watson's work carries within it clear evidence of his ambivalence. On one hand, he uses research findings to try to support his conviction about critical mass theory in human events. On the other hand, he suggests that the scientific community is less than honest when he tells us that these same researchers were reluctant to publish what they suspected was the truth. He panders to the popular distrust of science by suggesting that this reluctance was due to fear of ridicule by, one assumes, the scientific community.

Those who engage in pseudoscience want it both ways. They want the authority of science but are unwilling to abide by the rules by which the scientific community earned its authority in the first place. Pseudoscientists and their publishers may actually use criticism of their ideas by the scientific community as evidence that they are important because they are controversial. They seem to reason that because Einstein was controversial, anyone who is controversial must be an Einstein. On the jacket of the US Paperback edition of Sheldrake's *A New Science of Life* is the proud claim that the British scientific journal *Nature* had suggested that the book was "the best candidate for burning there has been for many years". As the designers of trade-book jackets

are well aware, such outbursts by the scientific establishment only enhance a work's attractiveness to a generation of lay people fed up with the excesses of 'more orthodox than thou' attitudes of the scientific establishment.

This ambivalence toward establishment science strikes an immediate and comforting chord in the minds of a public that is not only ambivalent about science, but largely ignorant. It is difficult for the uninitiated to distinguish between good science, bad science, and pseudoscience. Appraisal becomes especially difficult when isolated pieces of scientific knowledge are abstracted from their contexts within the broad, interwoven fabric of scientific thought. It is context that make knowledge out of data. This is true not only for sciences, but for all areas of advanced knowledge such as art, Zen, medicine, psychotherapy, and so on. This makes a book like Capra's *Tao of Physics* almost impossible to evaluate adequately. Those adept at physics don't understand orientalism; those well versed in Taoist philosophy can say little about the physics. The people who swallow Capra's speculations usually can critique neither. If they like what they read, they accept it as fact.

One concrete consequence of this ubiquitous ambivalence toward science can be seen in the rejection of training in science and logical thinking by some would-be humanistic psychologists and other aspiring agents of change. Without such training these people, regardless of their heart-felt commitment to transformation, have practically no basis on which to evaluate claims made in the name of science. Anyone—crackpot, charlatan, genius, or sage—must be dealt with in the same way (believed or disbelieved) solely on the basis of personal opinion. Personal opinion then becomes equated with knowledge and can be asserted without embarrassment.

The result is that the human potential movement has come dangerously close to cre-

ating the conditions for the establishment of yet another orthodoxy resting on unproved articles of faith and taken-for-granted definitions, axioms and concepts. Humanistic science loses ground each time it hands over authority to pseudoscientists and speculative myth builders.

GOOD MYTHS AND BAD MYTHS

On two occasions (both gatherings of humanistic psychologists) when the monkey story was told, I tried to raise some of the issues raised here. When I suggested that the Hundredth Monkey story lay in the realm of mythic thought, not scientific, the response was the same: the speakers were unimpressed. "Myths are as true as science", was the response. "It's a metaphor," was another. P.B. Walsh's comment in the November 1983 *Association for Humanist Psychology Newsletter* was characteristic: "Science or myth, the Hundredth Monkey is a metaphor that exactly fits ..." and later, "As metaphor it speaks to our empowerment."

As to the assertion that myths are as true as science, I take the point. But there is more that has to be said, for although they might both be 'true', they are not true in the same way. These respondents either do not know this or do not think it matters much. But, of course, it matters a great deal and I believe that it is urgent that we learn to recognize the difference. Casually interchanging myth, science, and metaphor robs each of these realms of its unique power to deepen our understanding of the world, to orient our science, and to inform our actions. Women and ethnic minorities well know the consequences of wrapping a myth together with science. It is especially pernicious, as any Nazi holocaust survivor can confirm, when a bad myth is wrapped up with bad science.

My objection to the Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon is not that it is myth, but that it

is bad myth, and that it draws its force not from the collective imagination, but by masquerading as science. It leads us, (as I have tried to show) in the direction of propaganda, manipulation, totalitarianism, and a worldview dominated by the powerful and persuasive—in other words, business as usual.

When I was first drawn into humanistic science, I was well aware that I was attracted to its myth. I know of very little actual 'data' that could support a belief in the possibility of a humane global collective, composed of free, responsible, rational people capable of purposeful action, critical thought, creativity, and individual conscience. Of course I knew this to be an idealized myth standing in sharp contrast to the indignities that are the actual daily experience of all but a privileged few. Even so, I think it is a good myth and has the psychological power to mobilize us and to orient our search for knowledge about ourselves.

Over the past 15 years, this myth has guided my studies and those of my colleagues (and at times has required acts of faith as great as any religion would demand) as we have tried to discover, as all science does, if this mythic possible world could, in fact, be an actual world, and if not, why not? So far we have discovered little that, in my judgment, gives much grounds for the current New Age optimism that the transformation is just around the corner. It is a testimony to the sustaining power of the humanistic myth that we did not give up our research long ago and open a restaurant.

In contrast, I most emphatically cannot agree that the "Hundredth Monkey myth empowers". In fact, I believe it to be a betrayal of the whole idea of human empowerment. In this myth, the individual as a responsible agent disappears; what empowers is no longer the moral force of one's beliefs, not their empirical status, rather, it is the number of people who share them. Once the magic number is reached, curiosity, science, art, crit-

icism, doubt and all other such activities subversive of the common consensus become unnecessary or even worse. Individuals no longer have any obligation to develop their own worldview within such a collective—it will come to them ready-made from those around. Nor are we called on to develop our arguments and articulate them, for, by magic, those around us will catch them anyway. This is not a transformational myth impelling us toward the fullest development of our capacities, but one that reduces us instead to quite literally nothing more than a mindless herd at the mercy of the 'Great Communicators'. The myth of the Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon is more chillingly Orwellian than Aquarian.

Inspired in the 1960s by the works of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Gregory Bateson, and others, Maureen O'Hara cut short a career in biology and became a humanistic psychologist in order to participate in "the creation of a precise humanistic science" with the goal of "a humane global collective, composed of free, responsible, rational people capable of purposeful action, critical thought, creativity, and individual conscience". Today she is alarmed by the way her profession, intertwined as it is with the human potential and New Age communities, has embraced the trappings of pseudoscience and become prone to accept and amplify 'bad myths', of which the Hundredth Monkey story is only one example. As a specialist in mass psychology and cross-cultural phenomena, she is particularly qualified to comment on the 'critical mass' concept idealized in the Hundredth Monkey myth, and to provide us with an insider's view of the reasons behind the rise of superstition in humanistic science.

Dr O'Hara is currently the acting president of Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center in San Francisco.

READERS' FORUM

continued from page 3

in human history, nor to minimize the suffering of those arrested, tortured and killed. However, it is important to understand why this episode has become central to the Pagan sacred narrative, especially when there are few, if any, documented historical links between contemporary Witches and Pagans and the victims of the witch hunts.

I would hypothesize that one reason for the popularity of this narrative in the late 20th century is that in the current climate of identity politics, narratives of past oppression are important elements legitimating the identity of any minority group. In the 1960s and 70s, African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, gays and lesbians, and other minority groups made forceful claims to identity and power by reminding the dominant culture of the very real violations of civil rights they had repeatedly endured. Somehow, these narratives became models for any group claiming a legitimate and authentic identity: victimhood has become a necessary step in constructing authenticity. Narratives of past oppression may be functioning to legitimate our current identity; this is one reason why we cling to them so strongly.

This may be especially so since most Pagans are white and middle-class—members of a group which is supposed to have all the privileges in American society. The trouble with this paradigm is that it reduces complex power interactions to one or two variables. Every group has been at one point or another the victim of some more powerful group; victimhood is no guarantor of authenticity or spiritual legitimacy.

Perhaps it would be more fruitful to recognize that all traditions are legitimate and authentic, no matter when they have been constructed or by whom, and regardless of

whether or not their practitioners have suffered oppression. What is authentic is always a matter of cultural construction.

Sabina Magliocco
California State University—Northridge

To the editors:

I've been following the articles in the last few journals about the great witch hunts. As someone who is by no means a scholar, I've found myself in the uncomfortable position of not being able to defend my gut feeling that the entire 9 million women scenario is incorrect. I was pleased to read Jenny Gibbon's article in issue #5. She provided a good argument as to why basing historical opinions on 'propaganda' such as witchhunting manuals can provide faulty conclusions.

Max Dashu provides at least a partial rebuttal to Gibbon's article, but in making her argument that the hunt was a specific dedicated campaign against the old religion, Dashu relies heavily on the witchhunting manuals about which Gibbons warns us. Further, she suggests that the trial records that might support her position have been intentionally destroyed. I am always uncomfortable with "the dog ate my homework" reasoning. It seems too convenient to me, particularly in the light of the more credible and less inflammatory sources to which Gibbons has referred.

This is obviously a developing and exciting area of study. Thanks so much for airing both sides of the issue. I'm hoping that studied differences of opinion will result in a complete and defensible history of that turbulent time.

Jennifer Alcott

Oberon Zell writes:

There has been quite a debate raging on some of the Pagan lists regarding Jenny Gibbons' article "The Great European Witch Hunt", with some people trying to say that, according to modern research, the Inquisition

hardly bothered the Witches and Pagans, so we shouldn't keep alluding to it as victims thereof.

This has come up particularly because of the letter to the Pope, which has been created by an international joint Committee of concerned Pagan leaders and liberal Christians, and which will be sent to the Vatican along with over a thousand signatures. This letter respectfully asks the Pope to be sure and include Witches and Pagans in his planned Millennial Apology for the Inquisition, wherein he has already stated he will be apologizing to the Jews, Protestant Christians and Moslems for the persecution their people suffered under the Inquisition.

In case you are not already familiar with this project, check Circle's web site for the Lady Liberty League: circle@mhtc.net.

Here is a little statement I wrote in reply to some of those aforementioned critics:

The excellent article to which so many critics allude, "The Great European Witch Hunt", by Jenny Gibbons, republished in the Autumn 1999 issue of *PanGaia*, contains several interesting statements apropos of the criticisms. One of these statements is on p. 30 of *PanGaia*:

"In 1258 Pope Alexander IV explicitly refused to allow the Inquisition to investigate charges of witchcraft: 'The Inquisitors, deputized to investigate heresy, must not intrude into investigations of divination or sorcery without knowledge of manifest heresy involved.' 'Manifest heresy' meant: 'praying at the altars of idols, to offer sacrifices, to consult demons, to elicit responses from them ... or if [the witches] associate themselves publicly with heretics.' In other words, in the 13th century the church did not consider witches heretics or members of a rival religion."

Well, that's certainly not the conclusion I would draw from those quotes. If "knowledge of manifest heresy" was required for an Inquisitorial investigation, and "Manifest heresy" meant: "praying at the altars of idols, to offer

sacrifices, to consult demons [*ie*, other deities than Jahveh—OZ], to elicit responses from them ...," then that would certainly indicate to me that this is a reference to "a rival religion," and a specifically Pagan one at that! I mean, who else besides Pagans and Catholics prays "at the altars of idols"? So how does the quoted statement confirm the author's point, that: "Pope Alexander IV explicitly refused to allow the Inquisition to investigate charges of witchcraft"? It seems to me that the quote specifically refutes that point!

Ms Gibbons also states, in bringing down the estimated total number of executions for Witchcraft, that: "To date, less than 15,000 definite executions have been discovered in all of Europe and Americas combined." Following this statement, she lists other recent estimates, of 60,000; 40,000; and 100,000. But even the lowest estimate of "less than 15,000" seems to me to be a considerable number. I mean, the entire country has been in a justifiable uproar over the recent hate-killings of a handful of gay men. Suppose the number had been 15,000? Would we have thought that this was insignificant, and not worthy of protest?

I don't wish to comment further on this article at this time, as, according to a note at the end of the article in *PanGaia*, a full rebuttal has been prepared by Max Dashu, and appears in the August 1999 issue of *The Pomegranate*: 501 NE Thompson Mill Rd., Corbett, OR 97019; antech@teleport.com.

*Never Thirst,
Oberon Zell-Ravenheart*

Jenny Gibbons replies:

I'd like to address a couple of the thoughtful points that Oberon Zell raises.

First, the citation from Pope Alexander states that the Inquisition cannot investigate charges of sorcery (witchcraft) without evidence that there is heresy ('incorrect' interpretations of Christianity) involved. Obviously,

... shouldn't we Witches be apologizing too? Many of our spiritual ancestors, the wise-women and cunning men ... accused their neighbors, and watched them die.

then, witchcraft and heresy are not the same thing. Magick was not the Inquisition's provenance at this point—only magick practiced by Christian dissidents (Cathars, Albigensians, etc).

And this also cannot be a reference to a rival Pagan religion, as Mr Zell suggests. The Inquisition investigated heretics, and only Christians could be heretics. Other religions, like Judaism and Islam, were not heresies and therefore not the Inquisition's concern. Non-Christians were considered infidels, and poorly treated, but they were not heretics. This is why the Spanish government forced Jews to 'convert' to Christianity. If it had not done so, the Spanish Inquisition would not have had jurisdiction over them. If the Church considered witchcraft a non-Christian religion, then the Inquisition could not have touched witches.

Second, I do not mean to imply that 'only' 15,000 people died in the Witch Hunts. We know of 15,000 definite executions, therefore scholars believe that 40-60,000 people died. The 15,000 figure is the evidence that scholarly estimates are based on, not an estimate itself. Many trial records have been lost, therefore we know the death toll must be higher than 15,000. And no one suggests that the Witch Hunts were less important if 'only' tens of thousands of people died. The Great European Witch Hunt was an atrocity of staggering proportions. We don't need to have nine mil-

lion deaths to be horrified by it. These were people, not statistics.

But the question remains, is it an atrocity that the Catholic Church bears the sole responsibility for?

Recent research shows the answer is a definite 'no'. All segments of European society bear some of the blame; no one's hands are clean. The Church helped created the stereotypes and religious intolerance that led to the Witch Hunts. But it was secular courts of

Europe that killed the vast majority of witches, not the Church. It was ordinary, everyday people who sent their neighbors to the stake. If we ask the Pope to apologize, why shouldn't we ask the same of all Europeans and Euro-Americans? And shouldn't we Witches be apologizing too? Many of our spiritual ancestors, the wise-women and cunning men of Europe and America, were active witch-hunters who blamed illnesses and misfortunes on 'black' witchcraft. They accused their neighbors, and watched them die.

I thought that the letter to the Pope was well-written and moderate, and yet I chose not to sign it. In part this was because I disagree with the history the letter is based on. It implies that the Church and Inquisition were somehow especially guilty, that the Witch Hunt was mainly their fault.

But more importantly, it reinforces Neopaganism's 'myth of victimization'—and that's not just bad history, it's dangerous history.

As Witches, our biggest obstacle to understanding the Witch Hunt is our insistence that we were victimized by it. When we look at the past, we split the world into Good Guys and Bad Guys. There are Bad Guys (witch-hunters, doctors, the Church, Christians—people we don't identify with). There are Good Guys (women, witches, Pagans—all groups we like). And the Bad Guys did terrible things to the Good Guys. We don't stop to think that this



DEMONOGRAPHIA

(demon graphics)

Newly translated from the French of de Plancy's *The Infernal Dictionary* by Prudence Priest. Beautifully hand-bound by the studios of Ars Obscura in black goatskin with an embossed baphomet and gold stamping with black cloth slipcase and black satin bookmark. 98pp with facsimile of original 1863 frontispiece. Signed copies available from the translator for \$125 postpaid.

Prudence Priest
PMB 2154, 537 Jones
San Francisco, CA 94102
Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery

dualistic world-view is precisely the philosophy that allowed the Witch Hunt to occur. We don't acknowledge that reality is far more complex than these dualistic stereotypes. Worse, we do not recognize that we were, and may continue to be, part of the problem.

In the 1980s, America went through a dress-rehearsal for the Burning Times: the panics over Satanic ritual abuse. For the most part, the Pagan community failed to notice the similarities. We began to make all the same mistakes that our ancestors made. Mistakes that, in another time and place, killed tens of thousands of people.

During the Witch Hunt, our spiritual ancestors believed the Church's demonology. They knew that they were not the Satanic witches that the Church warned about. But they were willing to believe that their neighbors belonged to this devil-worshipping conspiracy. And when people came to them, asking them to lift a curse or divine the name of a witch, they did so. Their expertise, their confirmation of suspicions of bewitchment, led to the convictions and deaths of their neighbors.

In the 1980s the exact same stereotypes arose. Fundamentalist Christians, like the

Catholic Church before them, resurrected an age-old myth of a nocturnal, murderous Satanic witch-cult. And like the wise-women and cunning men before us, many Neopagans accepted this demonology. We knew that we didn't do the horrific things that Satanic witches were accused of. But many of us were willing to believe that our neighbors did. Many of us (and I include myself in that number) believed we ought to use our magic to protect our communities from these Devil-worshipping 'Satanists'. Many of us made all the mistakes that created the witch-hunting witches of the Burning Times.

And the reason we did this was because our myths blinded us. We saw others as villains, ourselves as victims and so we did not break the cycle of fear that fed the satanic panics of the 1980s, and the witchcraft trials centuries before. I believe our community must break through the myth of victimization. We need to stop seeing the Witch Hunt as what *They* did to *Us*. There was no *Them* in the Burning Times. There was only a great *Us*, and we did terrible things.

Blaming others achieves nothing. Light a candle for the fallen, and remember them.

Jenny Gibbons



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Readers' Forum
*Frew on Harran, Gender,
Martyrs, Fundamentalism* **2**

Michael York
Defining Paganism **4**

Síân Reid
**Witch Wars: Factors Contributing to Conflict
in Canadian Neopagan Communities** **10**

Fritz Muntean
**Complex and Unpredictable Consequences:
Jewish Responses to the Catastrophe of 1096** **21**

Leah Samul
**Death Under Special Circumstances:
An Exploration** **37**

Essay
Effeminate Love
John Yohalem **45**

Book Review
A Voice in the Forest: Conversations with Alex Sanders
Reviewed by Chas S. Clifton **51**



The Pomegranate

Copyright

© 2000 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate

is published quarterly.

ISSN 1528-0268 refers to this Journal.

Subscriptions:

4 issues: US\$20 — 8 issues: US\$37.50
by surface mail anywhere.

Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds,
or Checks drawn on US banks to

The Pomegranate

501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019

Subs email: antech@teleport.com

Submissions:

Editorial email: fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca

See the inside back cover for our
Call for Papers.

Ask us for our Writers' Guidelines,
or read it on our website:

www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/

Deadline for submissions:
the Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

Co-Editors:

Fritz Muntean

Diana Tracy

Associate Editor:

Chas S. Clifton

Editorial Assistance:

Melissa Hope

Síân Reid

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

The editors of *The Pomegranate* were mortified when, after the publication of Bron Taylor's "Religion, Violence, and Radical Environmentalism" in *Pom* #10, we were reminded by him that his permission to publish excerpts from this article was contingent also on our receiving permission from the editors of *The Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence*, which originally published the full version, and indicating where the full version could be found. We regret to say that this fell through the cracks. We wish to apologize to Professor Taylor, and the journal's editor, David Rapoport, for the oversight. The complete article can be found in *Terrorism and Political Violence* v. 10, #4 (Winter 1998), pp. 1-42.

SUBSCRIPTIONS RISING

The Pomegranate is pleased to announce that our long-term goal of financial viability is, if not within our grasp, then surely visible on the far horizon. All that's required is (ahem...) a modest rise in the price of subscriptions. As of our next issue (#12, May 2000) the cost of a year's sub (4 issues) will be US\$20, two years for \$37.50, and back issues will \$5 each—all by surface mail anywhere. The good news, especially for those of you whose eagerness to support *The Pom* is matched by your speedy reflexes, is that until the first of May this year all new subscriptions, renewals, and requests for back issues will be charged out at the old rates—regardless of length or quantity. We hope that our dedicated readers will greet this news with understanding,

and cheerfully rise to the occasion as well.

A PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL

The wheels are also turning which will, probably in the course of the current year, convert *The Pomegranate* into a peer-reviewed journal. In other words, articles will be submitted to a panel of reviewers for evaluation. These reviewers will independently decide whether to accept the piece as it stands or to recommend to the editors that it be revised according to their suggestions. Not only do we hope that being so designated will enhance our status and acceptability, but we believe that it also will greatly increase the volume of articles submitted. Several scholars of Nature Religions have already volunteered to serve on this panel, and when their year of service has ended, we will solicit new reviewers. Prospective reviewers should contact Chas Clifton directly at <clifton@uscolo.edu>.

In order to continue offering our readers the broad range of topics and sources that has thus far distinguished *The Pom*, we intend to subject only our major articles to peer-review. Our 'Workings', 'Essays' and 'Book Reviews' sections (as well as, of course, our 'Readers' Forum') will continue to solicit writing from both within and beyond the academic community. These will be subjected only to the interest and whims of the editors themselves, who continue to be passionately interested in providing a venue for those many areas of inquiry which do not already have an established niche in the popular Pagan press.

IN THIS ISSUE

Those of us involved in Nature Religions in general and Neopaganism in particular often point with pride to the diversity evident in the

continued on page 56

The Pomegranate

Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.

JOHN YOHALEM WRITES:

To the Editors:

I always get a kick out of *The Pom's* letters column, but your issue #10 presented a bumper crop. I enjoyed them all very much—especially, perhaps, Jenny Gibbons (whose writing I always adore), and Prudence Priest's explication of the difference between 'unmanly' and 'unmanned'. Our society has become so skittish over anything that might be construed as a critique of one's sexual persuasion that decent English has been sacrificed to illiterate insecurity. Prudence, by insisting that words mean what they're supposed to mean, demonstrates the most antique sort of culture. Brava.

[Editor's note: Mr Yohalem's interest in the issues raised by Ms Priest's comments have moved him to offer The Pom an article on the subject, which we are happy to pass on to our readers. See page 45.]

I want to add my two cents, however, to the excellent comments of Sabina Magliocco concerning the myths of the Burning Times and why so many modern Witches feel a need to identify with the victims. (I use the word 'myth' here, of course, not to mean 'lies', but 'enhanced' truths: sacred narrative.)

Magliocco writes, pithily and well, on a subject from which treatises obviously could be quarried—the need so many groups feel in our society, perhaps in any society, for a self-justification based on past persecution, in order to “claim ... legitimate and authentic identity”. This means, of course, that the mere fact of being, say, a Witch, a Pagan, a Native American, an Afro-American, queer, a Jew (an example, perhaps the ur-example, that Magliocco curiously omitted from her list, perhaps because she is focusing on North American society, where Jews have had it comparatively easy) does not provide enough ‘identity’ to those who feel the need for victimhood as well. Many Native Americans, Afro-Americans, gays, lesbians, Jews and (I think and hope) Witches and Pagans do feel their identity strongly enough not to require twisting history to make themselves supreme victims. I have always been suspicious of those who seem to justify their individuality on ancient history and on separatist interpretations of it. They seem to doubt the reality of their professed beliefs unless they are being attacked by someone else for their difference. Separate identity by itself seems to require a perceived orthodoxy to defy as much as the great mass identities tend to require a perceived ‘other’ to persecute and stand above.

It has always seemed to me that either my Pagan religion had a spiritual justification ipso facto or it did not. Twenty million martyrdoms would not justify it if it did not fulfil the criteria of faith. Consequently, the fact that my rather personal version of classical Paganism, derived from ancient texts, contemporary writings and delving into personal instinct, has tenuous links at best with the religion of Homer or Euripides or Augustus Caesar has not

made it hollow to me.

Similarly, the fact that the overwhelming majority of those put to death for Witchcraft during the Burning Times were Christians of one sort or another, and that those who did practice Witchcraft did nothing that resembled the modern Wicca in which I have been trained, has not invalidated Wicca for me. I have found it fulfilling on spiritual levels, and have observed it work for many others. If Wicca lacked spiritual content (and that, of course, is necessarily subjective), no number of martyrs, female, innocent, Pagan survivalists, whatever, would give it one.

John Yohalem
New York City

DON FREW WRITES:

Dear *Pom* Readers,

In letters printed in the last *Pomegranate* (#10), Hanna Kassis of Budapest, Hungary, and Aaron Walker of UC Santa Cruz make some statements critical of my article “Harran: Last Refuge of Classical Paganism” (*Pomegranate* #9).

Some confusion may result from Dr Kassis' use of the term ‘Sabaeen’ where I used ‘Sabian’ in my article. This may seem a small point, but it focuses attention around the ambiguity of the term. In modern parlance, ‘Sabian’ (with an ‘i’) is often used of the people of Harran. ‘Sabaeen’ (with an ‘ae’) is often used of the Mandaeans of Southern Iraq, followers of John the Baptist. While ‘Sabean’ (with an ‘e’) is often used of the people from Sheba (as in ‘Queen of ...’) in Southern Arabia.

Dr Kassis notes that “What exactly was the religion of the town [Harran] and its people remains open to question.” This is not quite correct. The religion of the Har-

ranians was described in some detail by many contemporary Muslim scholars. All agreed that it included Hermetic and (what we would call) Neoplatonic elements, aspects of the indigenous cult of the Moon God, rites addressed to the seven Planets, etc. What “remains open to question” is whether or not this was indeed the “Sabianism” mentioned in the Qur'an. My article presented my views on this question.

Dr Kassis mentions “... the report—again by Ibn an-Nadim—that a rift over ideological and philosophical issues occurred between Th. Ibn Qurrah and his townsfolk to the point that he had to leave the town”, and asks “How does one interpret this?”

I failed to discuss this rift in my article as I thought it an unnecessary detail and omitted it for the sake of brevity. Also, I have found no discussion of any substance concerning this rift, save that Thabit is sometimes described as “more liberal” than his co-religionists. Walter Scott says:

We are not told what the quarrel was about; but it may be conjectured that the learned men and students of philosophy differed so widely in their views from the uneducated vulgar, that it was found impossible for the two parties to act together. (Scott, Walter, ed. & trans., *Hermetica: Introduction, Texts and Translation*, Boulder CO: Hermes House, 1982, p.103)

Conjecture, indeed. Michel Tardieu doubts there was any ‘rift’ at all. Summarizing Tardieu's comments at the 6th International Congress on Gnosticism (U. of Oklahoma, 1984), Ilsetraut Hadot reports:

[Thabit's] departure for Baghdad was not the result of a ‘schism’, according to Tardieu. Rather, it would appear that Thabit b. Qurra was attracted by the Caliph's subsidies and had chosen Baghdad ‘for social and political reasons, as the Abbasid capital

continued on page 53

DEFINING PAGANISM

by Michael York
Bath Spa University College

From a general Western perspective, paganism is a largely misunderstood phenomenon. The advances made by the coalition of pagan delegates during the recent Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town may in time represent a significant turning of the tide toward a more enlightened understanding of what paganism is and represents. Still, there often appears to be a confusion among contemporary Western pagans themselves—one which is abetted by a constantly affirmed independence and freedom of thought among practitioners. Coupling this with a general Western inability to recognize the spiritual in the tangible, it is important for the theological roundtable of the world to include the voice of 'physical spirituality' within its ongoing dialogue.

PAGANISM is a religious orientation whose historical trajectory has produced an overall misunderstanding which survives into present times. In fact, there appears to be little mutual understanding concerning what paganism is. For some, it is to be equated with nature religion; for others—both practitioners and critics—paganism is a form of atheism. On the other hand, there exists a popular connotation that often equates paganism with satanism. At the same time, even for contemporary Westerners who consider themselves pagan, there is a widespread and detectable unfamiliarity with, if not ancient and classical forms of paganism, at least other contemporary religious expressions that generically con-

form with what can be delineated as a pagan paradigm of general features and elements. It is the purpose of the present undertaking to elucidate a tentative understanding of paganism vis-à-vis the world's other religious traditions.

To begin, paganism occupies a particular theological niche. It can be placed into comparison with the other major world religions. The reason why this theological niche has not been generally recognized, however, can be largely attributed to the Judaeo-Christian global dominance which has caused a hegemonic exclusion in considering paganism among the full range of theological speculations. This exclusion also parallels an apparently 'natural' human tendency that exalts the spiritually transcendent while dismissing the spiritually immanent. Why this last is so—and so ubiquitously or nearly universally—is something upon which we can here only speculate.

Material existence, however, is intimately interconnected with the physical 'laws relating to pain and loss'. To enjoy physical incarnation and the tangibility of possession subjects each of us to the possibility, probability or even inevitability of suffering and deprivation. Underlying the physical embodiment is the foundational principle of desire with its dynamics of attraction and repulsion. Because of this, there appears to be an innate human propensity to reject the physical in religious terms, i.e., in those terms which involve questions of ultimate meaning and value. We see this in Buddhism's quest for *nirvana*; in Hinduism's search for *moksha* or release; in Christianity's need for atonement from 'original sin'; in Islam's picturing of a more perfect form of existence in the heaven of Allah; and even in paganism's own historical shift to gnosticism.

Physical form is ephemeral, and a basic religious impulse is to seek the permanent

which is unaffected by change. While on the one hand, we might be able to detect a well-nigh universal behavioral response that we could label as pagan, on the other, in religious aspiration, most people appear to react to the inevitability of *Weltschmerz* and decay and countenance instead the transcendental. The world-denying is a pervasive refuge for the world-weary.

In this light, paganism is a religion of youth and for youth. It appeals to those with energy, optimism and concern with the here-and-now. This of course does not mean that paganism is a religion only for the young. Far from it. But it is a religious sentiment and challenge which appeals to the youthful aspect of the spirit of humanity.

Every religion codifies some kind of relational attitude to the world, to humanity and to what we might loosely refer to as the supernatural or numinal. Each religion develops its unique understanding of what these are, how they are meaningful and valuable, and what their mutual relationships to each other might be. Some religions, quasi-religions and/or religious perspectives take a reductionistic approach to the human, the natural or the supernatural. Some, for instance, devalue the human by excluding certain groups, races or ethnicities and exalting a privileged few. We find this tendency in the Hindu caste system, in Calvinism, among Jehovah's Witnesses, and especially throughout the Identity Movement. The idea of 'mud races' as espoused by the World Church of the Creator led earlier this year to heinous acts directed against Asian-Americans, African-Americans and Jews by a 21-year old adherent with the name of Benjamin Smith. From such

The numinal
... encompasses the
supernatural, the
mythic, the miracu-
lous, the mystical, the
metaphorical and the
imaginal.

a perspective, the terms 'humanism', 'cosmopolitanism', 'pluralism' and 'multiculturalism' are regarded as 'dirty words' representing humanitarian tendencies that are to be fiercely combated.

The idea of conformity to a single human standard in order to be considered worthy is an age-old tendency of many of the world's more traditional religions. The notion of

'holy wars' directed against other people has existed at least since the beginning of recorded history. The Roman Catholic Church still manages today to occasionally incite parishioners to shoot abortion providers. The Mormon church has targeted the homosexual community in California in its vehement campaign against same-sex marriage. Shiite priests of hatred in Tehran have launched persecutions of both Baha'i and Zoroastrians. If religion is a key determinant in developing a sense of identity, it has also often been as much the precursor and ongoing parochial vehicle for anti-humanitarian myopia.

But religions might not only be reductionist vis-à-vis the human; some also are reductive considering the world itself. In the Gnostic offshoot of classical paganism—whether the non-pagan or merely 'nominally' pagan teachings of Orpheus, Pythagoreus, Plato or Plotinus, or the quasi-Jewish and Christian sects of the first few centuries of the Christian Era (eg. Marcionism, Manichaeism, or even the much later Catharism of the 12th and 13th centuries), a strict, hierarchical dualism is posited between the world and spirit. Matter becomes the furthest—and lowest—emanation and degrading of the

Godhead, the One, the Source, the Good, the Spirit. The body itself becomes regarded as a tomb, the *soma sema* concept, something from which to escape. Physicality and its phenomenal nature—including sensuality—are rejected as valueless impediments to true and emancipating gnosis. Spirit alone is true and real; the corporeal is an imprisonment. It becomes meaningless in and of itself.

Vedantic Hinduism takes this gnostic concept even further and posits the idealistic belief that all material phenomena are illusions of *mâyâ*. Whether Vasistha Advaita, American

Transcendentalism or the (New Age) Church Universal and Triumphant, the phenomenal world of nature is a veil which must be penetrated before one reaches spiritual truth behind the masquerade. Buddhism takes a closely similar position. Like Hinduism, the purpose of life is to escape life, to end the cycle of rebirth, to reach *moksha*, *samadhi*, *nirvana*, *satori*. Although Theravada does not deny the reality of matter, it still devalues it for the ineffable ultimate goal of disinterested wisdom and compassion. The common attitude and orientation of both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, Brahmanic Hinduism, Gnosticism, Transcendentalism, Theosophy and even today's New Age is to achieve emancipation from ignorance and extinction of all attachment. This translates as release from the physical and its concomitant laws of suffering and loss.

A third reductive approach within a reli-

... nature or the material world is not the whole of the sacred in the full pagan view of things. ... in its full scope, paganism is, or at least embraces, naturism, humanism and animism of some sort.

gious or quasi-religious framework is one which denies the spiritual itself. In its extreme forms, we have here the philosophical schools of materialism, mechanism, atheism, positivism and secular humanism. A more religious form might be the Satanism taught by Anton La Vey, the atomism of Democritus, or the hylozoistic teachings of the early Ionian philosophers. On the other hand, a quasi-religious, worldly-minded materialism might be understood as either Marxism, Epicureanism or Stoicism. In all these schools of thought and/or religious perspectives, the material world is the fundamental, perhaps only, reality. Ethics are determined by conformity to natural law alone. There is no consideration of the numinal or the spiritual as something beyond the parameters of the empirical world. The supernatural is regarded as a fiction and at best a superstition appealing to the ignorant and gullible alone.

These last are often not considered as religions because they have no room for the transcendent sacred. Like scientific materialism, they deny the supernatural. But I want to argue that they are no less religions in the broad sense of the term. They have simply denied the supernatural as the gnostic orientation denies the material. In all cases, there is a position taken on the human, material and numinal domains of ontology. The numinal is simply that realm of cognition that is non-phenomenal. It encompasses the supernatural, the mythic, the miraculous, the mystical,

the metaphorical and the imaginal. It is perhaps Baudrillard's 'hyperreality', but it is definitely that which cannot be known directly through the senses. The effect of people's reactions to the supernatural, or at least their perceptions of the supernatural, can be objectively studied but not the supernatural itself.

In the 'narrow' sense of religion, all religions entertain some concept of the numinal or supernatural as real. In the 'wide' sense of religion, all religions take some position—whether pro or con—on the validity of the mystical/magical other. Paganism conforms to both senses: to the wide sense completely, and to the narrow sense mostly. Like the Abrahamic religions, it generally endorses the human, tangible and spiritual modes of possibility without reducing any one of the three to the others. Whereas, however, Christianity and Islam accept and sometimes honor the world as God's work, they nonetheless share with Judaism an explicit or implicit condemnation of the heretical worldly-mindedness of the *Apikoros*. A puritanical streak runs through the Levantine religions which inevitably suggests a lesser valuing of the temporal world compared with, if not humanity, at least with divine spirit.

In paganism, the world or nature is itself divine—and as divine as either humanity or the numinal or both. While there may be pagan nature religions which deny or reject the super-sensory as having any kind of ontological reality, a pagan expression which does such is simply a 'sect' or 'denomination' which has focussed on one cosmological reality by reducing the tripartite range of totality. Such a position would still be pagan though simply not expressive of paganism as a whole—much in the manner that the Hari Krishnas or the Vasistha Advaitas are still Hindu, though they consider, respectively, Krishna or Vishnu as the entire godhead and

not merely one deity or avatar among several.

Part of the difficulty in understanding or defining paganism comes with its relationship to the emergent rubric of 'nature religion'. While there has been some debate on the nature religion list concerning which category, paganism or nature religion, includes the other, even though such world religions as Christianity and Islam might cherish nature as a divine gift, they do not comprise nature religions. Instead, I argue that any religious perspective which honors the natural as the sacred itself made tangible, as immanent holiness, is pagan. My further argument, however, is that nature or the material world is not the whole of the sacred in the full pagan view of things. The human and the preternatural are as divine as the phenomenal world of nature. In other words, in its full scope, paganism is, or at least embraces, naturism, humanism and animism of some sort.

So in answer to the question how does the contemporary Western pagan recognize that Chinese folk religion, Confucianism, Shinto, Siberian shamanism, Kahuna, Australian aboriginal religion, Amerindianism, the Afro-Atlantic practices of Santería, Macumba and Voodoo, various tribalisms of sub-Saharan Africa, and so forth are pagan is because they are pagan. They all share in an essential this-worldliness. Earth is sacred, the sacred source or mother of existence. The material is understood as the matrix in which and from which the world, the human and the gods have their being, though not necessarily their end. In each of these religions we have the implicit pantheism, animism and polytheism that Margot Adler recognized as the constituent features of paganism. I would also add humanism and naturism. There is neither the denial of phenomenal reality as we have in Hinduism and Buddhism, nor the exclusion of humanity from godhead as we have in

Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Consequently, paganism can be understood as both a behavior and a religion. As a behavior it is to be seen in the spontaneous and auto-reflexive quality as well as venerational ritual of cultic expression. The cultic is the passionate, and while all passion may not be cultic, all cult is something which is emotionally intense. The very term itself derives from *cultus*, the Latin past participle of a verb meaning 'to till the

earth, to cultivate, to pray or worship'. In other words, the origins of pagan cultivation and worship are directly connected with the earth and assisting its growth and produce. Cultic behavior and pagan behavior are in origin one and the same.

But paganism is also a religion, albeit a marginalized and neglected one in the advent of Judeo-Christian-Islamic ascendancy. As a religious generic, however, it can be contrasted theologically with gnosticism. Creation for the gnostic is a descent or fall. Physical life represents a loss of an original state of grace, and the gnostic agenda is to re-trace the ladder of being to the Ultimate Source, the One or the Good. The spatio-temporal world is a linear one in which history ends with the re-gaining of the original state of being. In its salvational plan, gnosticism represents its agenda as a completion of a circle.

But despite its circular agenda, gnosticism is not cyclic. There is a fixed end which is sought. Paganism, by contrast, rejoices in the cyclical round of nature, of birth, death and rebirth, as an open-ended plethora of possibil-

... the pagan
theological position
... sacralizes not
only the world, the
cosmos and humanity
itself but also the
nonempirical
reaches of the
imagination.

ity. There is no point to which to return. Earth is the divine womb of unlimited challenge, discovery and growth. It or she is the divine ground of being, advent and imagination. The tangible presents an unending arena of opportunity. It is to be honored rather than spurned and rejected; cherished as a gift rather than renounced out of horror and disgust. And because the pagan movement is out from the single point rather than back to it, it is multiple

and forever varied and different. Rather than aiming for a Hegelian logic of the same or a traditional encounter with a uniform One, paganism champions multiplicity, plurality and polytheism. It allows a full scope of interpretation and invention beyond any confines of dogma, doctrine or judgments of heresy.

In fact, because of its peculiar nature when compared not only to gnosticism but to other world religions, what is most appropriate to paganism is poly- and ad hoc definition. By its very nature, it is more encompassing than any single definition. What distinguishes paganism from most other major and minor world religions is its extreme polymorphism. There is no canon or authority which speaks for paganism as a whole. While there may be some strictly defined forms of paganism within the pagan category as a whole, its overall diffusion and variety exceeds that found within Christianity, Buddhism and even Hinduism. This is because pagan identity is locally determined—by both individuals and communities. It has neither central administration or ecclesiastical council. But paganism is poly-

morphic not only in its determination but also in how it perceives the divine. The sacred or spiritual itself can assume many different forms. This multiformity of the divine might be omniform or pantheistic, or it might simply be multiplex and polytheistic. At the same time, the heterogeneousness of divine reality from a pagan perspective may also be understood as subsumed within or as some kind of monistic unity. But even here, this is not necessary for a perspective to still be pagan. In a word, paganism represents a celebration of variety that challenges the very limits of human conception and imagination.

Nevertheless, it would be amiss in a paper on 'Defining Paganism' not to offer at least a tentative and pragmatic definition of the subject at hand. To this end, I offer two definitions. The first seeks to allow a definition that can include all forms of paganism—both generic and nominal. The second excludes the nominal forms of paganism such as Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Neo-platonism, Cabalism and even Theosophy. The first definition holds that:

Paganism is an affirmation of interactive and polymorphic sacred relationships by individual or community with the tangible, sentient and/or nonempirical.

The second definition allows that:

Paganism is an affirmation of interactive and polymorphic sacred relationship by individual or community with the tangible, sentient and nonempirical.

The only difference between the two definitions, in fact, is in the use of the 'and/or' conjunction/disjunction in the first and its replacement with the simple conjunction 'and' in the second. In the re-wording, simply nominal forms of paganism are excluded, and

paganism becomes understood as an endorsement of relationship between physical and supernatural realities as well as human (and possibly other forms of) consciousness. It may accept the supernatural as only approachable through metaphor (religious icons and symbols), or it may also entertain that the supernatural appears and is accessible through the miraculous. But along with its supernaturalism or proclivity for the nonempirical, its humanism and naturism are equally weighted. In other words, even if paganism or particular pagan identities may exalt the special or the numinously distinguishable over the whole, or the theistic or even polytheistic over the pantheistic, the divine or sacred is found ubiquitously. Paganism, therefore, allows the divine to manifest in and as the material, whatever else it may be. But paganism eschews any true hierarchy between the temporal and permanent, between the physical and spiritual, or between this-world and the otherworld. In paganism, all realms of being and possibly non-being partake in a dynamic partnership or colloquium that functions between potential equals. We can conclude our understanding of paganism by recognizing that emancipation from parochial and restricting ways of thinking and feeling is the full consequence of the pagan theological position which sacralizes not only the world, the cosmos and humanity itself but also the non-empirical reaches of the imagination.

Michael York is a Research Fellow with the Department for the Study of Religions at Bath Spa University College. He coordinates both the Bath Archive for Contemporary Religious Affairs and the New Age and Pagan Studies Programme in Bath and co-directs the Academy for Cultural and Educational Studies in London.

WITCH WARS: Factors Contributing to Conflict in Canadian Neopagan Communities

by Siân Reid
Charleton University

Neopagan Witchcraft is often portrayed, in books directed at practitioners and by the practitioners themselves, as a tolerant religious or spiritual movement, in which a wide range of beliefs and practices co-exist without normative prejudice. However, when one actually speaks to Neopagans about the Craft, and what they like and dislike about it, almost invariably, the subjects of 'politicking', 'bashing' and 'Witch wars' arise. These terms reflect the perceived presence of conflict between Neopagan groups. "I hate the trad bashing. And I hate the eclectic bashing. You know, I don't see this as being anything else but drawing virtual lines in virtual sand. It's so silly" (Francine). "... from what I know and have seen in [city], there's ... a lot of politics and infighting ..." (Martha).

This animosity is visible not only to those inside the movement, but also to those approaching from the outside. Kevin Marron, a Canadian journalist who, in 1989, published *Witches, Pagans and Magic in the New Age*, based on interviews with Neopagan Witches across the country, notes,

...the present day Craft is beset with factional differences. There are many versions of Witchcraft and the followers of each often engage in disputes over strongly held philosophical con-

flicts. This tendency towards infighting is notorious among Witches (91).

As some measure of conflict is inevitable in human interactions, it is interesting that participants should single it out over and over again as a particular problem in the Neopagan setting. Available data suggest that there is a certain construction of 'ideal' interaction, which, combined with structural features of Neopaganism and characteristics of the Neopagan population more generally, acts to make conflict particularly evident and particularly difficult to contain.

The data upon which the analysis in this paper is based come from a range of sources, including books published by, for or about Neopagan Witches, as well as 187 survey responses collected from a non-representative sample of Neopagans across Canada, 18 semi-structured interviews designed to supplement the survey information, and countless conversations with Neopagan practitioners during my 16 years of involvement with the movement as a student, teacher, priestess, resource person, occasional occult store employee, and, most recently, as a researcher. This paper is intended to be preliminary, speculative, and Canadian, as I have reason to believe that the dynamics of the American and British Neopagan scenes are sufficiently different from ours to require different characterizations. I have set out, in this research, to generate somewhat general observations and broad linkages that could be refined through subsequent fieldwork in specific communities or locations.

For the purposes of this discussion, 'Neopagan community' will be considered to be two or more Neopagan groups who are engaged in sustained interaction at some level. Conflict within a single group, although it certainly occurs, requires a dif-

[A Witch war] permeates and polarizes the community to such an extent that community participants are left with two choices: either to choose a side, or to withdraw from participation in the community ...

ferent level of analysis than the one I am proposing here. Similarly, two groups in geographical proximity who are not interacting in any way are part of the same 'community' only in a much broader sense than is meant here. A 'Witch war', as opposed to other kinds of conflict that may also be prevalent in any given community, tends to display two central features. First, the conflict is conducted in a fairly open and public manner that is visible to the community members; second, it permeates and polarizes the community to such an extent that community participants are left with two choices: either to choose a side, or to withdraw from participation in the community until the conflict finds some resolution. These are not arbitrary definitional distinctions on my part, but abstractions arising directly from the usages of participants, who only describe some conflicts as 'Witch wars', although they themselves are often not entirely certain why some things seem to 'qualify' better than others.

This paper will suggest that 'Witch war' type conflicts in Neopagan communities are the result of the difficulties experienced by practitioners in negotiating successful interaction between groups and individuals with competing visions of Witchcraft, in situations that are perceived to involve authority or legitimacy. There are three main types of factors that contribute to the proliferation of different visions of Neopagan Witchcraft. The first

is structural, the second is ideological, and the third factor is personal. Each of these will be discussed below.

ELEMENTS OF NEOPAGAN 'COMMUNITY'

Neopagan Witchcraft is not a homogenous movement. In fact, there are three broad categories of groups, which can engage in considerable amounts of borrowing and overlap in both ideology and practice: traditionals (Gardnerians, Alexandrians and those other mystery-based traditions that have persisted for more than a single generation, but which cannot be reliably attributed to Gardner); Goddess-spirituality groups (generally eclectic in style, distinguished by a more explicitly woman-centered approach, often privileging the Goddess over the God, or omitting the God in worship entirely, and frequently restricting ritual celebrations to women); and eclectics (the broad residual category of individuals and groups who do not fall clearly into one of the preceding categories).

The fundamental unit of Neopagan Witchcraft is the individual. Solitary practice is not uncommon and is seen as a legitimate mode of spiritual development, in most strands of the Craft, especially the more eclectic ones. The fundamental unit of social organization in Neopagan Witchcraft is the coven. Covens are generally small, rarely exceeding 13 members, and strive to maintain a high level of intimacy,

Many people ... encounter this ideology of tolerance, diversity, and respect that the movement is supposed to embody before they encounter other Neopagans or the enacted realities of Neopagan communities.

trust, friendship, cooperation and contribution among members. They are intended to be fully autonomous entities, regulating themselves and organizing their practice according to the needs and wishes of their membership, not accountable to any 'wider' body or organization. Even among traditionals, who tend to maintain more of a sense of connection with others in their own tradition, there is a very specific acknowledgment that once practitioners are senior enough to found an independent coven, they are no longer required to be subject to regulation by their initiators (Farrar & Farrar 1985:22).

Some urban centres, in addition to covens, which are small and private, have 'churches', 'groves' or 'temples', which are open to the public and are usually the extension of a vision of a more accessible Neopaganism that might eventually be able to get some form of legal standing with the Canadian government. Groups of this type include the Wiccan Church of Canada [Ontario], the Covenant of Gaia [Alberta] and the Temple of the Lady [BC]. These are not ecumenical assemblies of previously existing groups, but rather are modified and extended versions of a coven, inasmuch as they train and initiate their own priesthood and set their own standards independently. 'The Grove' in Montreal, is an ecumenical assembly, and relies upon priesthood from other traditions to conduct its rituals. The Pagan Federation of

Canada (PFPC) is an organization that facilitates efforts by Neopagans to combat discrimination, to provide accurate information about Neopaganism to government authorities, and to facilitate prison ministry and other similar programs. They neither hold rituals nor train priesthood and are the organization in Canada that is the most strongly similar to the Covenant of the Goddess (COG) in the US. However, like more mainstream 'churches', and unlike the case with most covens, members of these larger pagan organizations are not required to make an explicit commitment to the group in order to participate in the classes and rituals that the group runs for the public.

The prominent public position of these large pagan organizations, however, is often a source of irritation and conflict in those cities where they are found. Media outlets frequently go to the representatives of these organizations when they need comments from 'a Witch', with the result that their version of 'Witchcraft' is presented to the non-pagan public as 'Witchcraft', period, without any acknowledgment that there are other groups or beliefs around. Sometimes this represents a real attempt by the larger organization to assert a hegemonic vision, but other times, it is more the result of reporter's agendas and editorial practices. In addition, the fact that these organizations are numerically so much larger than

any individual coven means that they can often 'swamp' events that were intended to be ecumenical, leaving the members of other groups feeling marginalized or excluded.

The decentralized nature of Neopagan Witchcraft, combined with the principle of group autonomy, means that 'community', in the sense that I have described it earlier, is not an inevitable and natural outgrowth of the movement itself. The development of 'community' requires a focus, a reason for bringing groups together. These foci can have primarily religious, social or practical goals, and are most often a combination of all three. However, any sustained inter-group activity requires a continual negotiation of interaction. It is by no means guaranteed that the norms, values and practices that are taken for granted by one coven will be shared by, or agreed to, by another coven, group or individual. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that many Neopagan Witches use precisely the same language to represent related concepts with different underlying content.

The word 'Wicca' is a particularly good case in point. Traditionals, Alexandrians and Gardnerians in particular, tend to reserve this word exclusively for their style of practice. In Britain, where the bulk of Witchcraft is 'traditional', this usage of 'Wicca' is taken for granted in books and other publications. Other styles of practice are simply referred to as 'Pagan', and 'traditional' refers to those family traditions of Witchcraft that cannot be reliably traced to Gardner. In North America, however, 'Wicca' has been adopted by many branches of eclectic Witchcraft as an interchangeable and less controversial term for Neopagan Witchcraft more generally, while being retained by the traditionals as a word exclusively denoting their practice. This

creates tension between people with very different visions of 'Wicca' as well as a kind of territorial dispute over the 'entitlement' to the label. A couple of my traditional respondents made comments to the effect of "You know, I don't really care what the pagan community does with itself; I just wish they wouldn't call it Wicca!"

The difficulties of a shared vocabulary without shared connotations are exacerbated in the case of larger pagan organizations, where the demands of their larger size and public presence require very different emphases in structure and practice that those which are utilized in covens. Language touching on authenticity (what is a 'real' Witch), legitimacy (what is a 'real' initiation) and authority (who is qualified to do what, and on what basis) tends to be particularly contested, and it is on these issues that most 'Witch wars' hinge.

In the context of any individual group, generally some, often implicit, consensus has been reached on the content of such concepts as 'priesthood' and 'initiation'; members understand the roles and requirements of their negotiated structure, and express their agreement with the group's organization and procedures by staying within it. There is generally some understanding about how conflicts and disagreements within the group will be handled, and even in the cases where there are no explicit guidelines, members are always free to leave if they are dissatisfied, and in fact, are often encouraged to do so (Valiente 1983:176). In a 'community' setting, there is no consensus on the meaning of key concepts, and there is generally no structure or procedure through which disagreement and conflict can be mediated. This leads to a situation where groups and individuals with competing visions of

Witchcraft are trying to establish their authority and authenticity in an unregulated environment, where the language used by all parties, although superficially similar, often has very different connotations.

The different emphases, styles, orientations and 'standards' of Neopagan Witchcraft groups, although all perfectly legitimate in their own contexts, can pose problems when groups try to join forces for 'community' events. Those events that specifically involve 'theological' concerns and those in which a status-based hierarchy are implied are particularly volatile. As one Witch noted, there does tend to be a shared value orientation in the Craft, but it can be obscured by the plethora of liturgical minutiae that differentiates groups, especially when those groups are trying to negotiate which of their stylistic peculiarities is going to be incorporated into an inter-group ritual. Situations that force Neopagans to confront their differences in a manner that is concrete and requires consensus or resolution, and those that explicitly focus on people's individual practices and opinions about what is 'right' or what works 'best' in the Craft, are always going to hold the potential for conflict, as the parties involved advance positions in which they have placed considerable emotional and intellectual investment. Among these situations of high potential conflict are the organization of inter-group rituals, festivals and classes, where 'qualification', 'legitimacy' and gate-keeping can become issues, and in discussion fora, such as some newsletters and more recently on-line newsgroups, that highlight theological issues.

NEOPAGAN IDEOLOGY AND 'IDEAL' COMMUNITY

Clearly, the decentralized nature of Neopaganism in general acts as a crucible for conflict. However, the ideology of Neopagan Witchcraft is such that conflict 'should' not occur, because a whole range of beliefs and practices are accepted as valid and legitimate. Individuals are expected to develop their own understanding of the meaning of their practice, and come to their own conclusions about appropriate morality and ways of 'being' in the world. There is a widely expressed and almost postmodern belief that these are very personal decisions and choices, and that although they can be 'different', it is difficult to characterize them as 'wrong'. So, although there is no prescriptive text or practice to which all Neopagan Witches can refer for their vision of the Craft, normative visions still emerge on a small scale, for an individual, negotiated by a group, or presented by an author. Although it may not be possible to say that there is a 'right' way to do something for everyone, in practice, there is still a sense that there is a 'right' way for me, or for my group. These visions, however, are theoretically bounded, restricted to the individual or the group, because the underlying ideology is that no one is empowered to impose their version of the Craft on other people.

Many people involved in Neopagan Witchcraft encounter this ideology of tolerance, diversity, and respect that the movement is supposed to embody before they encounter other Neopagans or the enacted realities of Neopagan communities. A third of the people who responded to my survey indicated that their first awareness of the Craft came through books, about the same number said that they first became involved in the movement through books. The authors cited

... the decentralized nature of Neopaganism in general acts as a crucible for conflict.

most frequently as having been particularly influential by my respondents were Starhawk (*Spiral Dance*, 78 out of 187), Scott Cunningham (*Wicca for the Solitary Practitioner*, 40), Janet and Stewart Farrar (various, 37) and Margot Adler (*Drawing Down the Moon*, 21). Of these, Starhawk presents a feminist eclectic perspective, Cunningham takes a different, but also eclectic approach, Janet and Stewart Farrar are traditionals, and Margot Adler's book tries to present the range of Neopagan approaches prevalent in the United States. All use some or all of the words 'pagan', 'Neopagan', 'Wicca' and 'Witch' in ways that may seem almost interchangeable (and in some cases, are interchangeable), and can leave the novice with the impression that the movement is far more cohesive than it actually is. Adler, in particular, creates the impression that there is a 'Pagan community' that somehow encompasses all of the groups that claim the labels 'pagan', 'Neopagan' or 'Witch'. She writes,

Individuals may move freely between groups and form their own groups according to their needs, but all the while they remain within a community that defines itself as Pagan. The basic community remains, although the structures may change (1986:33).

Kevin Marron notes, "Perfect love and perfect trust' are the traditional passwords for initiation into a coven. The phrase represents the kind of total understanding and acceptance that Witches feel they must have in order to work together" (1989:91). It is also, I believe, the unspoken and somewhat

naive expectation of those venturing into Neopagan 'community' for the first time, and helps to explain why conflict between groups is singled out as a problem. The levels of agreement, consensus and intimacy that are possible within the confines of a coven do not translate well to larger, more diverse groups. That is precisely the rationale that most authors give for keeping covens small, but the coven experience somehow becomes 'typical' of the kind of interaction one should be able to expect in Neopagan Witchcraft, and that leads to disappointment and even disillusionment when one steps outside the coven boundaries.

The contrast between the portrayals of Neopagan Witchcraft as tolerant, diverse and unified around some vaguely articulated core of 'values' and the reality of bickering, sniping, and status games creates the perception that the latter is somehow an unfortunate aberration, and causes it to stand out. People know that the same thing happens in other kinds of groups, in the workplace, in society in general, but somehow they still cherish the belief that those involved in Neopaganism should be 'above' or 'beyond' that kind of thing. In fact, the composition of the Neopagan movement may well make it particularly susceptible to conflict centering around issues that touch upon people's religious beliefs and practices, because these tend to be tightly bound up with people's sense of identity and, more generally, their relationship to authority.

CHARACTERISTICS OF

Some traditionals are dealing with their disapproval of 'eclectic Neopagandom' by withdrawing from community interaction, which prevents the eruption of conflict, but also deepens the division.

NEOPAGAN WITCHES

When I surveyed Craft practitioners in 1995-96, I asked both how long they had been involved in the Craft, and how old they were when they first became involved. What I found was that, of 183 people who answered the first question, half had been involved for five years or less, an additional quarter had been involved between six and thirteen years, and the remaining quarter had been involved for more than thirteen years. In terms of age at first involvement, of 186 people who answered, half were involved by the time they were 22, another quarter by the time they were 30, and fully 90% of my respondents were involved by the time they turned 40. This suggests that the Craft contains a much larger proportion of young people than most other religions. These also suggest that people in their mid- to late 20s may have, in many cases, been actively involved in their Craft practice for almost a decade, giving them a level of 'seniority' and a claim to leadership that they would not have in more institutional religions.

Unfortunately, extensive experience with meditation, visualization, trance work, ritual writing, and the many other skills that are associated with the practice of Neopagan Witchcraft do not, in and of themselves, confer the interpersonal skills necessary to manage harmonious and productive relationships among a group of people with diverse views and interests.

People in adolescence and early adulthood are engaged in the process of establishing themselves as independent and autonomous individuals with the ability to develop their own beliefs and identity in line with the values to which they subscribe. Many are disinclined to merely accept the authority or pronouncements of others, preferring to decide for themselves, or find their own way. In addition, older people sometimes find it difficult to accept the leadership of those significantly younger than themselves.

A highly individualistic attitude is not confined to the younger or newer members of the movement, however. In the survey, I asked people to tell me what the three things were that appealed to them most about the Craft when they first became involved, and what appealed to them now. Just shy of 20% of all the responses I received to the first question had to do with the individual and personal orientation of the Craft: the flexibility of the beliefs; the requirement for the individual to take full responsibility for their morality and their life choices; the requirement to engage in self-reflexive and personal development practices; the empowerment of the individual to make choices and changes in their life; and the facilitation of a deeply personal relationship with the sacred, unencumbered by intermediaries. Twenty-three percent of the responses I received to the second question highlighted the same

elements. Most of those involved in Neopagan Witchcraft do not want a vision of the Craft that is presented to them as a fait accompli; the level of personal and spiritual autonomy that is provided is a central appeal of the practice.

In addition, when interviewed, many respondents described their disillusionment with their previous religious identification—and three-quarters of my survey respondents had some previous religious identification—as arising out of perceived restrictions on their ability to hold certain beliefs, act in certain manners, or play certain roles. It is not unreasonable to expect, then, that many people who are drawn to Neopagan Witchcraft are already predisposed to resist normative constructions of their spirituality and spiritual practice, and are likely to take umbrage at the suggestion that perhaps they are not a 'real' Witch because of differences in viewpoint, practice or standards with somebody else.

The tendency to take these differences of opinion very personally, and to respond to them defensively, which is one of the factors that contributes to the escalation of conflict in a community once it has begun, is, I believe, bound up in the central identification that practitioners make between their Craft and who they are. In interviews, many people expressed the sentiment that Neopagan Witchcraft reflected the essence of who they are, and who they had always been. Some also expressed the idea that they could not possibly do or be anything else, and that people who choose the Craft do so almost inevitably, following what, if it were occurring in a Christian context, might be termed as sense of 'vocation'. When the authenticity or legitimacy of an individual's religious practice is challenged, in this context, it can also be experienced

as a challenge to them personally, as a belittlement or disparagement of who they are, even if that was not the intent.

Finally, it has been the observation of many of those I have spoken to that many people come into the Craft with weak interpersonal skills. I am not prepared, in this paper, to challenge the accuracy of their perceptions, or to make any assertions about whether this is any more common in Neopagan Witchcraft than it is in other religions or segments of our society. But, like 'Witch-wars', it is something that many participants highlight when they speak about their experiences with Neopagan Witchcraft.

When confronted with a disagreement or dispute, especially one that centers around miscommunication, many of these people may not have the skills or experience to deal with it constructively. Instead of being resolved quietly at a fairly early stage, as might be the case if there were some formal mechanism in place, the disagreement can escalate and become not only polarizing, but also the focus of other tensions that might not, by themselves, be sufficient to cause a conflict.

CONCLUSIONS

'Witch wars' are polarizing conflicts that may occur when Neopagan Witchcraft groups interact. They are most often centered around issues of authenticity, authority and legitimacy, and are triggered by some perception that an individual or group is attempting to impose their particular vision of the Craft hegemonically. Various structural and ideological features of the Neopagan Witchcraft movement, combined with some of the features of participants, can both provide fertile ground for these conflicts and make them difficult to resolve.

Structurally, the most significant change going on in Neopagan Witchcraft right now is the push by some large pagan organizations to acquire legal standing as 'churches' with the federal and provincial governments. This would allow these organizations to benefit from tax treatments available to other religious bodies, as well as to offer religious services, such as marriages, in a legally recognized context. Despite the generally well-intentioned motivations behind these activities, they are likely to increase conflict rather than decrease it. The perception of many Witches is that if such recognition is given to the large organizations, it will reside with them exclusively, effectively creating two classes of Witches: those whose practice has legal standing and those whose practice does not. This will force those who want the benefits of legal standing to affiliate with and conform to the practices of the larger organizations, which is unlikely to sit well with those who already feel that the large pagan organizations are attempting to assert a kind of hegemony. These concerns about a certain lack of transferability are legitimate, given the way in which legal recognition is organized (Reid 1994). The Pagan Federation of Canada (PFPC) is engaged in a struggle to prevent just such an outcome by lobbying government departments to treat pagans in the same way that Quakers and native aboriginal elders are treated, as these are similarly decentralized groups.

In many ways, it could be argued that the pagan organizations are in a 'no win' situation here. If they go forward to obtain legal standing, they reinforce the perception among many other pagans that they are seeking a hegemonic position, when in fact it is the governments' constructions of legal recognition that produce much of the

apparent hegemony, not the intentions of the pagan organization. This source of conflict is likely to become more pronounced as more pagan organizations obtain legal standing.

Another clash of visions that appears to be deepening is that between traditionalists and eclectics. Kevin Marron also notes this division, although he highlights the politically and environmentally activist eclectics, whom he calls 'radicals', in particular.

These two groups are on a collision course. The radicals tend to see the traditionalists as failing to live out the principles of a religion based on respect for nature, which should oppose a society that exploits the earth. The traditionalists regard the radicals as people who have latched onto Wicca for their own political ends (1989:94).

When I have spoken with Witches, the 'activist' tensions have been less apparent than tensions based around the focus of the practice itself. Traditional Craft constructs itself very much as a mystery tradition and puts a relatively greater emphasis on the esoteric and mystical aspects that are highlighted in their received material than do most eclectics. Eclectics are far more likely to focus on the creative and celebratory aspects of the practice, with the esoteric and mystical components being available, but not essential, elements of the spiritual practice. This leads to tensions between the two groups because of the way in which each constructs and construes the other's practice. Eclectics often perceive traditionalists as hidebound, hierarchical, and slavishly adhering to received material, while traditionalists view eclectics as fundamentally missing the point of the entire practice, diluting the mystery tradition to the point of unrecognizability with 'surface' rituals.

Because the number of people involved in eclectic practice are increasing at a much

Despite the generally well-intentioned motivations behind ... the push by some large pagan organizations to acquire legal standing as 'churches' with ... governments, [these activities] are likely to increase conflict rather than decrease it.

greater rate than those involved in traditional groups, these tensions are unlikely to vanish. Some traditionalists are dealing with their disapproval of 'eclectic Neopaganism' by withdrawing from community interaction, which prevents the eruption of conflict, but also deepens the division. Again, there is no easy resolution to these differences. The traditionalists are entitled to hold whatever views they wish, but as long as there is a perception that the traditionalists' view is that everyone else is practicing a 'debased', and therefore less legitimate and authentic, form of the Craft, tensions will exist whenever people from both persuasions try to work together in any setting that highlights theology and practice.

One of the most successful ways to minimize the possibility of 'Witch wars' is to develop community in arenas that are not inherently 'theological', that do not require an authority structure and are not subject to gatekeeping on the grounds of legitimacy, but only on grounds of respectful behaviour towards others. Social settings, such as brunches, pub moots and coffee klatches, in which people participate voluntarily as individuals rather than as members or representatives of groups, allow Neopagans of various traditions to meet one another, interact and trade ideas without any intrusion onto what could be considered the territory of 'coven autonomy'. The individual nature of participation in these events allows people to get to know

one another as people first, and as traditionalists, or eclectics, or whatever, second. This means that people are less likely to react first out of the stereotypes that they carry about other types of practice, because it is not immediately obvious, or even necessarily relevant, what the particular practice of the other party to the interaction is. Once social interaction is established and people know each other and are familiar with the peculiarities of the way they communicate, then it may well be possible to organize a 'community' ritual or a festival, or another more theologically-invested event, with a greatly reduced likelihood of outright war breaking out on the organizing committee. Those individuals who feel particularly strongly about the value of intergroup interaction might consider getting some training in mediation, conflict resolution, or other peer-focused techniques so that the resources will be available to recognize and address incipient conflicts before they become polarizing and cause long term damage to relationships within the community.

Although maintaining strict separation between groups is certainly a guaranteed way to almost eliminate open intergroup conflict, being able to participate in a broader community has real advantages for Neopagans. It can allow them to trade ideas, techniques, songs, and fragments of liturgy. It can give them a wider group of people to discuss the various challenges

they encounter in being pagan in a non-pagan culture. It can provide a market to those people who enjoy making tools or robes or other paraphernalia, and who may have previously done so only for their own group. It can make setting up co-ops for buying supplies, or baby-sitting, possible. Most importantly though, it reinforces the idea that people are not alone in their beliefs, practices, values and orientations to the world.

Neopagan communities are constituted and re-constituted on an ongoing basis as their memberships shift and change. Individuals leave and other individuals arrive on a continuing basis. In the 'best case' scenarios, the regular events, locations and interactions around which the community exists can survive this personnel 'churn'; in the worst case, interaction must be negotiated again from scratch every time a key organizer withdraws their participation. However, as long as the notion of 'community' retains some practical or ideological appeal for participants, efforts to initiate and support it will continue to occur. The success of these would seem to be dependent on the participants' abilities to find and maintain a type of interaction that does not entail giving any of the participants the right, or the perceived ability, to dictate to others. For although Neopagan communities will often come together to combat pressures and challenges from the 'outside', the bonds within the communities themselves are nonetheless fragile, and will disintegrate if any one part pushes too hard on any of the others.

REFERENCES

Adler, Margot. *Drawing Down the Moon*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Clifton, Chas (ed). *The Modern Craft*

Movement: Witchcraft Today. St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1993.

Crowley, Vivianne. *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age*. Wellingborough, England: Aquarian Press, 1989.

Cunningham, Scott. *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1988.

Farrar, Janet, Stewart Farrar and Gavin Bone. *The Pagan Path*. Custer, Washington: Phoenix Publishing, 1995.

Farrar, Janet and Stewart Farrar. *The Witches' Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft*. London: Robert Hale Publishers, 1985.

Kelly, Aidan. *Crafting the Art of Magic: Book I*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1991.

Marron, Kevin. *Witches, Pagans & Magic in the New Age*. Toronto: Seal Books, 1989.

Reid, Siân. "Illegitimate Religion: Neopagan Witchcraft and the Institutional Sanction of Religion in Canada" Paper presented to the Annual General Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, 1994, unpublished.

Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979.

Valiente, Doreen. *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*. London: Robert Hale, 1983 [1978].

Siân Reid is a Craft practitioner and a PhD student in sociology at Carleton University, where she previously completed an MA in Religion. A longer version of this paper was presented at the Qualitative Analysis Conference in May 1999.

You can contact the author at <slreid@ccs.carleton.ca>.

Complex and Unpredictable Consequences: Jewish Responses to the Catastrophe of 1096

by Fritz Muntean

In the Autumn of 1095, Pope Urban II called for a 'military pilgrimage' to the Holy Land in order to safeguard and provide unrestricted access to the many sacred Christian sites which were then under Islamic control. In response to this papal request, European authorities spent the winter in preparation for what was to be the first (and the only successful) of a series of such adventures that later bore the name 'Crusades'. But this papal decree also set in motion, in several European backwater communities, preaching programs that inevitably escaped close scrutiny and control. In the Lowlands, a charismatic named Peter the Hermit, with the patronage of one 'Count Emicho', was able to raise an army of unemployed soldiers and peasants with the intention of marching to Palestine across the continent of Europe. By the Spring of 1096, however, this sizable mass of people had only succeeded in reaching the beginnings of the traditional pilgrimage route up the Rhine Valley and were reduced to laying waste to the surrounding countryside as they passed. At this point, their leaders began to realize that they were unlikely to reach the Holy Land, and so determined to use their strength of numbers locally in order to accomplish what appeared to them as the next best thing to the liberation of Palestine from the Muslims: the forcible conversion of Rhineland Jewry to Christianity.

The Jewish communities of the Rhine Valley had been in existence since the time of the Romans, and towns like Speyer, Worms, and Mainz were strong mercantile centres as well as being important centres of Torah study. These communities enjoyed, to varying degrees, the protection of local ducal and royal courts, and the Rhenish bishops saw the Jews not only as useful supporters of urban culture and economic development, but also as valuable allies in the balance of power between the Church and the rising independence of the burghers. Before the events of 1096 there was a sense that survival among the Gentiles was possible, or at least negotiable.

Between the middle of March and the end of April, Worms, Speyer, Mainz, Cologne, Trier, and Metz were stormed, and the enormous mob, fueled as it was by an fanatic-ecstatic religious hatred of the Jews, proved too much for the defenses of these cities. The Jews had full knowledge of the threat; some fled to the countryside, others were hidden in the homes of their neighbors. In Mainz the remainder took refuge in the episcopal basilica, but the bishop's guard was quickly overcome, and the Jews were forced to withdraw deeper into the palace. In an upper dining room they took counsel among themselves and vowed to die as martyrs rather than to submit to forced conversion by the mob. A scene of horror ensued as women strangled their children, turning "the faces of the tender, lifeless children toward the Gentiles" (Eidelberg 110). The men cut the throats of the women, and either slew one another, fell on their own swords, or threw themselves from the windows to the courtyard below. Similar events occurred in other Rhenish

cities. Scholars now estimate that about 5000 Jews may have perished in this and other massacres before the mob was halted at the borders of Hungary by an imperial army and destroyed.

In his 1984 work, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, Alan Mintz represents the Rhineland Crusader massacres of 1096 as a decisive turning point in medieval Jewish history. According to Mintz, the image of the martyr in the literature that was generated by the events of 1096 became the sovereign standard by which all future behaviour was “measured, adapted, or found wanting” (98). He maintains that the norm of response to catastrophe created in European Jewish culture by this literature had an enormous effect—not only on the self-image of the survivors, but on Jewish-Christian relations as well—for the next eight hundred years. Robert Chazan, however, in his 1987 book *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, emphasizes the limited impact of Crusader violence on these communities. He disagrees with the notion that 1096 was an important watershed, calling this idea “a commonplace of modern historiography” (8), and claiming that it reflects “a seriously flawed understanding of the historical process” (199). According to Chazan, the afflicted communities were quickly restored, and Jewish intellectual life revived itself as well, continuing to produce significant works of liturgy and law, mysticism and exegesis (208). Even Mintz would agree that Franco-German Jewish society itself experienced little in the way of long-term discontinuity in the wake of the First Crusade. Trade and commerce were quickly reestablished, and the towns that had been depopulated were resettled within a short period of time (98-99).

In this paper, we shall explore the possibility that the long-term effects of these catastrophes derived less from the actual incidents themselves than from what was written about these events by the survivors, immediately afterwards and during the following generation. Beginning with a comparison of the positions on this issue held by Mintz and Chazan, we shall examine the image-making capacity of the religious mentality as we do so and in the process, comparing the reputed standards of behaviour in the face of forced conversion among European (Ashkenazic) Jewry with the differing Sephardic (Middle Eastern Jewry) tactics for survival in the face of adversity. We shall then turn our attention to the idiosyncratic process by which catastrophe could be fitted into the comforting patterns of the past, to the possible fate of scholarship in an environment given over to the glorification of martyrdom, to the idea that the conflation of the past and the present can actually break a culture’s connection with the past and drain both of their instructive value. We shall then discuss several modern theories of the mechanisms by which memory is created and maintained as well as the social and political uses of collective memory, concluding that the importance of the events of 1096 lay not in the behaviour of the martyrs, which could certainly have remained an historical anomaly, but in the transformation of these acts into a future norm of response to catastrophe.

Chazan urges us to consider the behaviour of both the besieged Jews and the attacking Crusaders in the context of the tumultuous social environment of the 11th century. Noting the small cities of the era and their tiny Jewish populations (28), neighborhoods that may have been predominantly Jewish but were certainly not exclusively so (25), and the wide-spread

reports of Jews taking refuge in the homes of their Christian neighbors (5-6); he argues convincingly that the Jewish community of this time was fairly well integrated into its environment. Even though we may judge the degree of racial tension during the 11th century by the report, found in the Bar Simson Chronicle, that

to have possessed a strong sense of cosmic conflict, an absolute certainty in the ultimate victory and vindication of their own religious vision, and an unshakable belief in eternal reward for self-sacrifice and martyrdom (193). According to Chazan, the extreme conduct of both Jews and Christians could therefore be seen as little more

... the long-term effects of these catastrophes derived less from the actual incidents themselves than from what was written about these events by the survivors, immediately afterwards and during the following generation.

the bishop of Speyer felt the need to wall the Jewish community for its own protection, Chazan maintains that under normal circumstances the Jews enjoyed a level of safety and security which, although quite minimal by modern standards, was little different from that of their Christian neighbors (37). Unfortunately, the Church’s policy of tolerating and even encouraging Jews, while at the same time disputing the validity of Judaism, seems only to have been viable during untroubled times. The disruptive forces that were unleashed by the First Crusade clearly exceeded the intentions of those in authority, and subsequently proved impossible to control. As a result, the early months of 1096 were tumultuous in the extreme, and the fragile security of Rhenish Jewry was swept away.

Still, the attacking Crusaders and the besieged Jews may have shared more of a common spiritual environment than they themselves might have believed. Both seem

than an unfortunate side effect of the 11th century tendency towards radical behaviour, especially in the realm of religious expression: an effective argument against the precedent-setting nature of the causes and motivations for the massacres. He admits that the acts of martyrdom produced a “striking break with earlier patterns” and had a profound short term effect (221), but maintains that much of their radical nature was domesticated and effaced over time and the actual behaviour of the martyrs was noticeably softened in subsequent memorialization by the “confirmation of older styles of Jewish martyrdom” (9). It is, however, these very references to traditional forms of kidduch ha-Shem, particularly those involving sacrifice, which appear in both the Chronicles and the piyyutim written in the wake of the massacres, upon which we shall base our arguments in favour of 1096 as a decisive turning point in medieval Jewish history.

THE CHRONICLES

It is to Mintz, as a scholar of Hebrew literature, that we now turn for direction in our evaluation of the events of 1096 as represented in the Crusader Chronicles. Mintz does not disagree with Chazan's position

demonstrated "the general pattern of spiritual and intellectual creativity" that characterized the literary activity of late 11th and early 12th century Europe (7). They may appear frankly tendentious to modern sensibilities, but according to Chazan this is

... the intellectual giants of the 11th century remain vague and shadowy figures to this day compared to the hero-martyrs ... [these] observation gives us pause to consider the fate of scholarship in an environment given over to the glorification of martyrdom ...

concerning either the societal arrangements or the martyrological beliefs that preceded the massacres, neither does he question the rapid reconstruction and resettlement which followed. In spite of the tragic and impressive death toll, his evaluation of 1096 as a watershed for European Jewry derives less from what the Crusaders did to the Jews than from what the Jews themselves did in response (86). Mintz maintains that the "image-making capacity of the religious mentality" expressed in those Hebrew Chronicles which were written in response to the massacres caused a genuine and significant divergence in subsequent Jewish history (99). We will evaluate the importance of the Crusader martyrdoms by examining these documents in terms of these, essentially symbolic, considerations, but first let us look take a close look at Chazan's perspective on these documents.

Chazan refers to the Chronicles as a new kind of historical writing which emerged from the violent events of 1096 and

understandable, since they were written in the emotionally-charged atmosphere immediately following the catastrophes, in response to the pressing need for theological and spiritual insights as well as the alleviation of gnawing doubts (45). The reports are not histories, per se, and because they chronicle what can only be thought of as a devastating military defeat, they do not convey any expectation of miracles or divine intervention (150). Instead of thanksgiving, they emphasize justification and the fervent hope of future redemption. They present supplications to the Deity, while at the same time placing heavy emphasis on the courage of the martyrs who, under the most extreme duress, remained heroically steadfast in their commitment to the God of Israel (151). It is because of this relentless portrayal of the martyrs in such a favourable light that, according to Katz, the European Middle Ages are said to "outshine all other periods of Jewish history as an epoch of heroic steadfastness" (85). But

even a dramatic improvement in self-image does not a watershed make, nor was steadfast behaviour in the face of death a phenomenon unique to European Jewry.

In fact, it is the self-inflicted nature of the Rhenish martyrdoms that makes these acts unique, not only in the sense of being unprecedented in Jewish history, but also as possibly being unjustified by Jewish law—even to the point of being in violation of its spirit. Although the heroic suicides at Masada may immediately spring to the modern mind as a famous precedent, we should remember that the dramatic story of Masada was available only in Greek during the Middle Ages and was not read by European Jewry until well into the modern era. The same thing is true in regard to the suicides at Jodphata, which are reported in Josephus but were later dismissed in a 10th century Hebrew critique as being misguided and contrary to the teachings of Judaism (Mintz 88). European Jewry's Middle Eastern coreligionists dealt with their own, not inconsiderable, experiences of enforced conversion in a considerably different manner. According to Mintz, the comparable Sephardic texts "are neither liturgical nor poetic nor focused on concrete historical acts"; rather they emphasize consolation through the contemplation of the meaning of history (85). Sephardic writers such as Maimonides give rationally-based answers that limited the duty to martyrdom to the prescribed minimum. In contrast to the Crusader Chronicles, these texts read much like legal briefs arguing for reasonableness and personal survival in the face of adversity. But, according to Katz, for the European Jews it was completely inconceivable, for instance, that one should refrain from martyrdom merely because there were an insufficient number of witnesses (84). The determination of the Rhenish martyrs had

not been enfeebled by what they must have thought of as the subversive forces of philosophy and rationalism (85), and as a result, their speeches read as heart-wrenching pleas, and make use of compelling symbolic language to rouse exceptional acts of self-sacrifice (Chazan 153). If European Jewry can be said to have thus set new standards for behaviour in the face of enforced conversion, that would certainly qualify as a precedent. There are, however, more important issues to be discussed, as an examination of the liturgical poetry written in the wake of 1096 will show.

THE POETRY

Phenomenology, according to Casey, is devoted to discerning that which is obscure or overlooked in everyday experience (xi). Likewise, it may be the business of the historian to isolate idiosyncratic and unique elements from what is otherwise a universal and timeless reaction to violent death (Garland ix). The most unusual representations of the events of 1096 are certainly found in the *piyyutim*, the poetic works, in which elements of these massacres are frequently represented by allusions to biblical stories and classical texts: references direct and indirect which, as we shall shortly see, are often idiosyncratic in the extreme. Ignoring the sometimes startling implications of these allusions in favour of their 'universal and timeless' characteristics, Chazan maintains that, since the *piyyutim* lack the immediate historical impact found in the Chronicles' gruesome descriptions of bloodshed and endless tales of slaughter, the poems are not as effective at evoking emotional responses as the more artless and direct works of prose (154): we may be shocked by the endless descriptions of bloodshed and slaughter in the Chronicles, but we cannot help but be impressed by the

monumental heroism of the victims (163). However, as has been previously noted, if we are to identify 1096 as an important watershed we must look beyond heroic steadfastness or the improvement of self-image.

To Mintz, the poetic works represent just such another level of importance. Rather than working his way back through layers of literary and mythical devices in order to arrive at some kind of historical actuality, his intention is to work forward from the events themselves, focusing on the processes of image-making in the poetry, where they are most intensely at work, in order to discover the ultimate effect of their symbology and style (90). Mintz directs our attention to the Bar Meshullam *piyyut*, a poem which provides a considerable degree of harrowing realism as well as a graphic depiction of particularly violent acts. What makes these descriptions so 'idiosyncratic and unique', however, is that they refer to events that did not actually take place during the massacres themselves. While the pious martyrs of Worms and Mainz did slay one other, they certainly did not engage in the picking apart of organs and dismembering of limbs, the images of which so dominate the poem. According to Mintz, these descriptions may be resolutely realistic, but the reality depicted is not that of the events of 1096, but rather of the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple (96).

According to Yerushalmi, even the most terrifying events can be less distressing when they are stripped of their bewildering specificity and subsumed to familiar archetypes (36). Still, the radical language of the poem implies a expectation quite different from that of simple comfort, and although the familiar archetype of sacrifice is invoked, it seems to be strangely transformed. Perhaps the poems, as Yerushalmi

suggests, show only a superficial interest in the incidents themselves because the writers are so intent on unraveling the meaning of the events and their place in God's plan (39). There is certainly precedent for this, both in biblical and post-biblical writings. The sages virtually ignored the actual battles of the Maccabees, concentrating instead on the story of the miraculous cruse of oil that burned for eight days (25). But the martyrs dominate these poems much as the Bible is dominated by God, and the biblical stories to which the poem refer seem far less heroic, less epic, than these medieval accounts.

Chazan states that under the circumstance this is understandable, due to what he feels is the necessity of validating the suicidal, even homicidal, behaviour of the martyrs, even if it means granting them an absolutely biblical level of respect (158). The short-term effects of this validation may be comforting, but the reader is forced to wonder what the consequences of this way of thinking would be for European Jewish culture. To focus on miracles rather than on feats of arms can perhaps be expected of the writers of canon, but when Chazan informs us that the intellectual giants of the 11th century remain vague and shadowy figures to this day compared to the hero-martyrs, whose human attributes are given unusually distinct dimension by the poets (153), his observation gives us pause to consider the fate of scholarship in an environment given over to the glorification of martyrdom, particularly considering the degree to which the wisdom of the past, not to mention the often unequivocal counsel of the halakhists themselves, had been contradicted by the behaviour of these martyrs in particular. The use of biblical archetypes in the service of comfort, not to mention as justification for the most vio-

lent sort of behaviour imaginable, seems questionable to the modern reader, especially considering the intrinsic strangeness which the familiar biblical stories seem to assume in the poetry of commemoration.

As we read of the priest slaughtering the victims and placing their dismembered bodies on the woodpile, and of the pleasant

former (90). As audacious a boast as this is, it is basically a perverse one as well (91), since the ostensible point of the biblical story was to extend the claim that the people of Israel were, from the time of Abraham on, determined to distinguish themselves not only from those around them who continued to offer human sacri-

... factors appear to have combined to allow the
Rhenish memorializers to conflate the events of 1096
with traditions of the past in such a way as to drain
both ... of much of the instructive value they
might otherwise have had ...

smoke rising to God's heaven, the millennium that separates Rhenish Jewry from Jerusalem is suspended, and the alienation imposed between God and Israel by the Diaspora disappears (Mintz 97). But what is unique here also appears to the reader to bear more than a touch of the sinister. The objects of this sacrifice are not sheep or oxen, but the faithful themselves, and more, their children. In the *piyyut* of Bar Meshullam, the author mourns that Israel can no longer rely on the merit of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac and prays that the multiple sacrifices of 1096 will "protect us and call a halt to our miseries!" In the *piyyut* of Ephraim of Bonn, Abraham is portrayed as actually slaying Isaac, and when Isaac is resurrected, preparing with fierce determination to kill him again. In all the reenactments of this drama, the biblical and the contemporary events are compared in such a way as to demonstrate how the latter have outstripped the

fice, but perhaps from their own more primitive past as well. Would the poets have been so eager to have transformed the images of sacrifice in this way if they had been aware of the dark world that stood (perhaps at no great distance) behind the Patriarchs and Temple cult? We shall examine this question in greater detail later, but first let us explore another issue of no less importance which has been raised by the reading of both the *piyyutim* and the Chronicles.

DIVINE JUSTICE

What stands out in all the descriptions of these events, especially when compared to the accounts we have of the destruction of the First and Second Temples, is a lack of even the slightest sense of human misbehaviour on the part of either the victims or the memorializers. Despite the occasional invocation of the sin-punishment pattern, nowhere in the Chronicles or *piyyutim* are

any failings on the part of the Jews specified. To the contrary, according to Chazan, the afflicted Jews are never really depicted as sinful; they are unfailingly portrayed only in the most glowing terms (161-62). Free to speculate on the nature of those called to make the supreme sacrifice, the

Knapp, the purpose of theodicy, specifically of divine punishment, is to make certain that the recipients identify with their own (actual or inherited) past actions in order that they will anticipate, as they consider performing acts in the present, the disapproval merited by those acts, and that this

... it is important for us to realize ... how much of the public's memory is intentionally constructed and ... to what extent the consequences of this historical understanding match the intention of the constructing agencies ...

poets unabashedly portrayed the martyrs as the elite of all generations, chosen by Heaven to atone for the many former failings of Israel (Katz 87). In the history of Jewish notions of theodicy, according to Mintz, this is a unique and unprecedented approach to the problem of divine justice. If the suffering of exemplary individuals is taken as an indication of divine favour, then suffering can be seen as a sign of righteousness rather than turpitude (91), and a causal link between God's justice and suffering that does not involve human misbehaviour has been advanced.

In order to more carefully examine the significance of what appears to be a precedent-setting divergence from the norm, let us turn to Steven Knapp's article, "Collective Memory and the Actual Past", in which he discusses the ethical consequences of 'authoritative narratives' and the socially shared dispositions which they shape, particularly in regard to the question of their origins in historical actuality. According to

disapproval will subsequently become a permanent part of their ethical repertoire (139). This is a key point that the chroniclers and poets appear to have ignored in their determination to emphasize the unparalleled perfection of the martyrs' generation. If persecution and suffering are the natural result of being in exile, and if exile itself is the bitter fruit of ancient sins (Yerushalmi 36), then the sins themselves are of great importance. Unfortunately it is not entirely easy to determine the precise nature of these sins. The destruction of both Temples was assumed to be due to the sins of Israel, but the nature of these sins had changed in the centuries that had intervened between 586BCE and 70CE. At the time of the First Temple, the operative sin was idolatry, but what sin caused the destruction of the Second Temple? Our sources are, by and large, strangely silent on this subject: Yerushalmi (113) posits the following as a *locus classicus*:

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because

of three things which prevailed there: idolatry, immorality, bloodshed. ... But why was the Second Temple destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, precepts, and the practice of charity? Because therein prevailed hatred without cause (TB Yoma 9b).

'Hatred without cause' certainly seems to lack specificity, and this may have been an important factor lurking in the periphery of the Ashkenazic consciousness. Any level of contemplation on the already tense dialectic of rebellion and obedience which, as Yerushalmi informs us, is inherent in the paradoxical struggle between the free will of humanity and the divine will of an omnipotent Creator (8), requires at least some degree of specific understanding regarding the instructive intentions of God.

In the face of an active and unavoidable theodicy, expectation of the divine disapproval that is merited by forbidden actions can be expected to become a permanent part of the way a group evaluates its own behaviour only if some sort of consensus concerning the specific nature of those actions can be achieved. The historical consciousness of the Jews, particularly the history of the consciousness of choice, can be seen as an ongoing attempt to achieve at least some level of this theodicic specificity. At best, the contemplation of God's justice is a complex and difficult task, and one that is not made easier when a catastrophe such as the massacres of 1096 is 'stripped of its bewildering specificity' and subsumed to familiar patterns in such a way as to, even unintentionally, encourage the neglect of these issues of theodicy. To whatever extent 1096 can be thought of as a decisive turning point in medieval Jewish history, at least one new norm of response to catastrophe may to have been created that could have long-term consequences of

doubtful value. But the commemorative literature may have effected even more significant cultural divergence, particularly in the way European Jewry came to regard its own history. Resolute as the poets and chroniclers appear in their confident reorganization of complex theological issues, Mintz tells us that they are even more notable for their determination to assimilate their subjects into the rhythms of mythical time (85). In light of this observation, topics that have already been mentioned, such as the historical consciousness of Jewish culture, and the contemporary consequences of the ancient sins of Israel, now require us to engage in an examination of still more complex issues, particularly the mechanics of memory and the meaning of history, and specifically the ways in which these elements are employed in the documents of the Rhineland massacres.

HISTORY

Although Judaism has been traditionally absorbed with the meaning of history, according to Funkenstein, historiography has had virtually no role to play in the sphere of traditional Judaism: "the interest in history was never identical to historical consciousness or historical memory, even though they were close to each other at the time of the Scriptures" (11). Yerushalmi points out that while memory of the past has always been a central component of the Jewish experience, the historian, at least until the beginning of the 19th century, was never its primary custodian. This may be entirely understandable, since suffering and persecutions, combined with the lack of a state and political power (ordinarily the prime subjects of history), may have dulled the historical consciousness of medieval Jewry (52). According to



Yerushalmi, a reason for the European rabbis' disinterest in the cultivation of history per se, and one that relates directly to the issues at hand, was that they may have felt that they already knew as much of history as they needed to know. Perhaps they were even wary of history as they knew it (21), and possibly for good reason. Even though, for instance, minute historical details can be reconstructed from Jewish apocryphal writings, we can find no trace of historiography in them, only a search for prophetic clues and signs of the final conclusion to history, simultaneously feared and hoped for, with its conflated past and present and its never-changing scenario (37). On the other hand, this lack of interest may be the result of a level of confidence and self-sufficiency that our own culture no longer possesses (34). We have already seen what strange paths can be embarked on when an inflated sense of self-confidence interacts with a need to be comforted in the face of disaster, so let us now examine in closer detail the problems relating to Yerushalmi's notion of the conflation of past and present.

Ancient Israel had replaced the Pagan notion of conflict among the gods with the more poignant relationship of God and humanity, and it was this relationship, as Yerushalmi reminds us, that caused Judaism to first assign a decisive significance to history: 'The Heavens', according to the psalmist, might 'declare the glory of the Lord', but human history revealed God's will and purpose (8). To grant authority to a text written (albeit indirectly) by God is to assume, as a conservative believer must, that God's intentions have not changed since the text was set out, and therefore one can simply open the book and read in order to find out what God requires of us in the present. Knapp,

however, warns us that the same thing cannot be said, with any sort of casual certainty, about history, unless one supposes that God has been providentially manipulating all the events of the past in order to produce a kind of dramatic or moving-picture tutorial for the benefit of the faithful (129). History may reveal God's will, but only to the diligent and discerning reader, whose autonomy in the face of cultural upheaval must seem to us to be a necessary component in the search for God's message in the 'bewildering specificity' of history. The tendency, even today, of Jewish historic writing to refer to paradigmatic years and places—586, 1492, Mainz, Auschwitz—as a sort of mnemonic shorthand for what were actually vast and complex catastrophes, may be seen, according to Mintz, as a clear statement of how historical events can be drained of their discreteness and absorbed into larger traditions (102-03).

It appears that the situation in 11th century Europe was certainly more than simply prone to these problems. Medieval interpreters generally felt no need to distinguish between text and commentary nor to develop a systematic method which would enable them to evaluate the way in which life in the past differed from that of the present, and as a result their work suffered from what Connerton terms "an imaginative conflation between the life of antiquity and the life of the contemporary world" (100). This situation was further exacerbated by the medieval use for figurative imagery, a style associated with European Christian influences, as against allegory, which is to the modern reader a more familiar literary structure deriving from as it does from the Classical sources of antiquity. Figurative imagery identifies events or institutions of the past as prefig-

urations, unfulfilled images of archetypes that will be more fully revealed in the future. It is in this manner that Christians scholars came to regard Old Testament incidents or statements as the prefigurations of parallel images and events that were to find their fulfillment in the more real and significant forms of the New Tes-

of memory, to which we will now turn, demonstrate the mechanisms by which such acts may be seen to effect the cultures in which they occur.

MEMORY

More than fifty years ago, Maurice Halbwachs argued that we acquire and recall

... these implicit background narratives contain not
only the consistent, the enduring, and the reliable, but
also the fragile, the errant,
and the confabulated.

tament. According to Mintz, the martyrs of 1096 were hailed as having fulfilled their precursor *figura*, not only as expressed in the story of Abraham and Isaac, but also in the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple, and this subsequently served to stimulate a new kind of hermeneutic in which the past was evaluated less through exegesis than through figuration (99-100).

We have seen how European Jewry's notion of history prior to the events of 1096 had been marked by a sense of self-sufficiency in the present, a typically medieval propensity to use the past as a source of figurative imagery, and a wariness of history that had been created by the prior use of the past as a source of prophecy and apocryphal portents. All of these factors appear to have combined to allow the Rhenish memorializers to conflate the events of 1096 with traditions of the past in such a way as to drain both, to an important degree, of much of the instructive value they might otherwise have had to future generations. Modern theories

our memories within the mental spaces provided to us by membership in a social group—particularly, but not necessarily, a religious association (Connerton 36-37). He hypothesized that all memory is structured by social framework, and that collective memory is not a metaphor but "a social reality transmitted and sustained through the conscious efforts and institutions of the group" (Yerushalmi xv). The defining character of memory, as it applies to our inquiry, is that memories are public and shareable; one person's memories are supported by those of others in the same group (Halbwachs 12). Stressing the connection between collective and personal memory, he contrasted them both to historical memory—the reconstruction of the past by historians whose task it is to replace sacred liturgical memory with secular liturgical memory, essentially by conflating the two and by making more-or-less abstract religious symbols concrete, even if it involves creating some of them. This does not seem to be an inaccurate description of



the activities of the chroniclers of 1096, particularly those of the poets, as they invoked both Abraham/Isaac and Temple cult in an effort to sacralize the contemporary behaviour of the martyrs. Having noted this possible connection between modern theories of memory and the subject at hand, let us now turn our attention to the long-range effects that the catastrophes of 1096 may have had on the commemorative memory structures of

is basically as much a function of the human body as it is the human mind (x), and Connerton draws our attention to Durkheim's account of the non-cognitive strategies by which societies celebrate symbols of themselves in commemorative rituals that derive their power from the emotional effects of social interaction (103). In light of these observations, we may believe that whatever memories were invoked by these penitential liturgies were

... for those people of today who ... seem to have been
waiting for a new, metahistorical myth, even an
unabashedly fictional form of narrative ... may
provide at least a temporary surrogate.

subsequent generations of European Jewry.

We have already noted how cultures lacking a modern sense of historiography may be remarkably oblivious to the differences between period and qualities of time. This may be due to the topocentric nature which Funkenstein attributes to collective memory (9), because of which events and historical institutions of the past merely serve as prototypes and are not recognized for their uniqueness. According to Yerushalmi, the single most important response to medieval disaster was the composition of *selihot*, penitential prayers which "themselves militated against too literal a concern with specific details"—the poet being able to take it for granted that the community was sufficiently familiar with the 'facts' (45-46). Yerushalmi also tells us that religious memory flows through two channels: ritual and recital (11), likewise Casey suggests that memory

perhaps not matters of intellection alone, but may also be seen as being literally imbedded in the physiological makeup of the participants.

According to James Young, in his recent book on Holocaust monuments and memorials, it is important for us to realize how much our understanding of events depends on this construction of 'historical' memory, how much of the public's memory is intentionally constructed and, most important, to what extent the consequences of this historical understanding match the intention of the constructing agencies (15). The evaluation of the long-term effects of officially cast memory in a given society, to ask not only how people have been moved, but toward what ends they have been moved, has implications which bear directly on our topic of 1096 as a watershed for European Jewry, especially as they apply to the consequences, both

short- and long-range, of this kind of activity.

POLITICS

The concept of memory as social is especially important to our evaluation of 1096, especially when we consider Knapp's observation that religious values take the form of doctrines that are themselves dependent on the remembered patterns of behavior, our own and those of others who have gone before us (145). Yerushalmi tells us that personal memory is among the most fragile and capricious of our faculties (5), and yet the very way in which we employ images of the past, particularly in order to legitimate our current social order, presupposes a significant volume of mutually shared memory (Connerton 3). Historical consciousness and the consciousness of being 'Chosen since the beginning of history' are intertwined in the Scriptures (Funkenstein 13), but we must be aware that the aim of any group, religious or political, is to create a store of common memory as a foundation for unification (Young 6), since official memory of events in a people's past may be used to affirm the righteousness of a people, even their divine election (2). By selecting contemporary secular events, such as battles lost or won, and conflating them with sacred liturgical memories, the symbolic past is made concrete in the present. Unfortunately, there appear to be several problems with the idea of intentionally creating a ritually unified remembrance of the past.

Our experience of the present may very largely depend on our knowledge of the past, but the most important failure of collective memories is that across time they become far too easy to deny (Knapp 142). We are not speaking here of denial in the

psychological sense of pathological strategies for dealing with conflicting memories, but rather of a tendency for long-term and often disastrous error to occur when the leaders of cultures whose recorded history is only a small part of their collective memory are required to make decisions in crises which they can not wholly understand and whose consequences they cannot foresee. Religious leader who resort to rules and beliefs the elements of which 'go without saying' and are taken for granted, may often unintentionally achieve a level of social transformation that is more radical and in an direction different from anything that was originally intended. Casey reminds us that these implicit background narratives contain not only the consistent, the enduring, and the reliable, but also the fragile, the errant, and the confabulated (xii), and it is the ability, particularly in those in religious authority, to shift among domains of reference at will, while denying that any such process is occurring, that has caused many modern thinkers to become uncomfortable with too close an overlap between religion and politics.

AUTHORITATIVE NARRATIVES

It is the thesis of this paper that intentional modifications to the structures and symbols of collective memory are capable of producing complex and unpredictable changes in both the content of historical narrative and the ritual elements which depend upon these narratives for their authenticity. Let us therefore examine the role these narratives play in the shaping of a culture's ethical or political dispositions. Historical narratives can play what Knapp terms 'normative' roles, and specific narratives possessing this normative status can be said to bear collective 'authority' in so much as they supply criteria which can



shape or correct community behaviour (123). In both the Hebrew Bible and the prayer-book, 'remembrance' is the narrative process by which the major formative events in the history of the community are recalled and recuperated. But Funkenstein reminds us that the development of myths and historical fictions is an unavoidable part of the process of forming these narratives of historical consciousness, and that these historical fictions, like the sacrificial confabulations which we have already noted in the *piyyutim* commemorating the Crusader massacres, are often deliberate historical fictions (18).

Knapp, for one, would disagree with the idea that even deliberate historical fabrication must necessarily be a disqualifying factor. Modern reaction against the notion of fiction or myth as the source of a normative or authoritative narrative, he tells us, usually involves the claim that historical actuality really matters; that canonical texts ought to be subjected to some sort of "demystified account of the actual historical conditions under which those texts were produced" (132). Likewise, Yerushalmi reminds us that the legendary elements of the Bible or the scriptures of Homer have become part of our collective memory to the point that they are not considered 'fictions' in a pejorative sense. Myth and poetry were certainly legitimate, even inevitable, modes of perception and historical interpretation in ancient times, and for those people of today who, while not always rejecting history out of hand, at least seem to have been waiting for a new, metahistorical myth, even an unabashedly fictional form of narrative such as the novel may provide at least a temporary surrogate (98). Knapp rejects the notion that a special authority attaches to the actual as opposed to the remembered or the imag-

ined; for if genuine ancestral narratives can express values which may be, as we have seen, remote from any we can now embrace, then we can only truly consider the past as a source of analogies. Thus particular past events may provide us, by analogy, with norms of behaviour, but so may analogies borrowed from other traditions or even from fiction (131-32).

Chazan, as we have seen, states that the post-martyrdom narratives tell a story which is focused entirely on human volition, and is stripped of complex political and doctrinal issues. As a social historian, he views both the savagery of the attacking Crusaders and the remarkable Jewish readiness for martyrdom as resulting from the 'common spiritual environment' this frenzied period of history. But Mintz maintains that the importance of the events of 1096 lay not in the form of behaviour, which could have remained an anomaly (89) but in the transformation of the acts themselves into a future norm of response to catastrophe; into what Knapp terms an 'authoritative' narrative.

Knapp's thesis thus comes to bear directly on the issue of 1096 as a turning point in European Jewish history. According to Knapp, a culture identifies itself not only with remembered action, but with actions it does not remember but may be convinced occurred, just as an amnesiac might come to take pride in an unremembered but reliably reported accomplishment (137). However, if the purpose of theodicy is seen, not as justice, but simply as a means of inducing obedience, then any connection to actual past events is clearly irrelevant (135), the only purpose of divine punishment then being to make a people identify with an element of the past in a manner that requires them to take responsibility for it, regardless of its historical

actuality (138). On balance, it would appear that what is in question in the process of determining whether the long-term effects of the Crusader massacres of 1096 represent a significant divergence from tradition is not the actuality of either the recent or the ancient past. What is far more important is rather the religious and

the ancient Jewish soul, which was believed to have originally caused the Diaspora and henceforth all the woes that followed, had somehow had a more benign effect on European Jewish culture than the newly advanced system of divine justice which connected suffering with righteousness without involving any more than the nom-

... memorial narratives are capable of taking on lives of their own that are often stubbornly resistant to the intent of their original makers.

cultural quality of the commemorative literature as an authoritative narrative, especially if we agree with Knapp's societal concept of collective punishment as an attempt to cause people to identify with a collective future.

THE FUTURE

Young reminds us that, once created, memorial narratives are capable of taking on lives of their own that are often stubbornly resistant to the intent of their original makers (3). Of what Mintz calls the "mighty confluence of factors that had gone into the making of 1096", two stand out to the modern eye: the generation's extraordinary sense of its own righteousness; and the monumental hatred between Christians and Jews (101). The first of these relates to the point taken earlier about the new paradigm of punishment as a sign of righteousness that arose out of the memorial literature. After 1096, no transformation from an already attained state of perfection seems to have been deemed necessary. It appears as if the seemingly endless search for that unknown sin hidden within

inal mention of sin.

The most notable effect of this new paradigm, not surprisingly, was the shifting of the burden of anger from God to the enemy. Katz states unequivocally that "In the Ashkenazi Middle Ages, the act of martyrdom was deliberately and pointedly directed at the Christian world" (92), the concept of the Jewish community's religious mission as one of antagonism to Christianity being nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the attitude and behaviour of the Jewish martyrs (90). In their furious indignation, the chroniclers put anti-Christian sentiments in the mouths of the martyrs that are so excessive that later generations have found them to be substantially unrepeatable (89). It is particularly interesting to note, as Mintz points out, how many of the invectives in the Chronicles against Christianity take the form of the curses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, "in which the Israelites are told of the horrors awaiting *them* if they fail to uphold the covenant" (93).

We must agree with Chazan's sense that the creative lines of thought which devel-

oped in the late 11th and early 12th centuries not only continued to have a profound effect on subsequent European history, but came to dominate the world scene well into the 20th century. Unfortunately the ritualized nature of these self-sacrifices, which the Jewish chroniclers considered to be so sublime, were viewed by their Christian counterparts, once the Crusader Chroniclers and the *piyyutim* had been translated from the Hebrew, as barbaric in the extreme (221). The reported Jewish rejection of any form of surrender or any degree of accommodation to the, admittedly violent and frightening, but surely temporary, demands of the besieging hordes, lead to a shattering on the part of the Jews of normal moral and ethical constraints. According to Chazan, "One might easily hypothesize a connection between the 1096 reality of Jewish parents willing to take the lives of their own children rather than submit to conversion and the subsequent image of Jews capable of taking the lives of Christian youngsters out of implacable hostility to the Christian faith" (213). The pervasive nature of the violence which has ever since periodically engulfed European Jews and Christians alike can thus be seen as the offspring, at least in part, of the violence of the open age of the 11th century, accidentally promoted into the future by the myth-making activities of the chroniclers of the Crusader massacres of 1096.

REFERENCES:

- Casey, Edward S. *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.
- Chazan, Robert. *European Jewry and the First Crusade*. Berkeley: UC Press, 1987.
- Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*.

Cambridge UP, 1989.

- Eidelberg, Shlomo. ed. and trans. *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1977.
- Funkenstein, Amos. "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness." *History and Memory* 1 (Spring-Summer 1989): 5-26.
- Garland, Robert. *The Greek Way of Death*. (London: Duckworth, 1985)
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*. 1950; trans. F.J. and V.Y. Ditter. New York: Harper Colophon, 1980.
- Katz, Jacob. *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times*. Oxford UP, 1961.
- Knapp, Steven. "Collective Memory and the Actual Past." *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 123-49.
- Mintz, Alan. *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1984.
- Schwartz, Barry. "The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory." *Sociological Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1986): 147-64.
- Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Seattle: UW Press, 1982.
- Young, James E. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. Yale UP, 1993.

Fritz Muntean has an MA in Religious Studies from the University of British Columbia and is co-editor of The Pomegranate.

Death Under Special Circumstances: An Exploration

by Leah Samul

We are fortunate to belong to a religion that does not shroud death in fear of eternal damnation as punishment for a life that has not been lived in the proper way. Many of us believe in reincarnation and feel that we have another time around at life that can be used as an opportunity to do things differently. With fear out of the picture, we are able to honor death as a release to the Goddess.

Partly for this reason, and partly because we are young as a religious community, there have been no in-depth treatises on death until recently, though there have been articles and essays in magazines and anthologies.¹ *Into the Summerland* by Edain McCoy was published in 1996, and *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying* followed in 1997. These are the first two books devoted entirely to addressing the issue of death in essays, poems, rituals and prayers.

This article deals with death under three circumstances that were not examined at any length in the above books. The first circumstance is the execution of a convicted criminal by the state. The other two include death in the line of duty: the death of a Pagan or Witch in the military, and the death for a Pagan or Witch on the police force.

A shorter version of this piece was originally submitted to the book *Crossing Over*, which later became *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying*, put out by the Reclaiming Collective. Although originally in the queue for

inclusion in the earlier book, Starhawk and other Collective members interpreted Reclaiming's non-violent charter as extending to an article like this one,² and they rejected it for fear that the essay could be construed as condoning a military mentality or police brutality.³ Starhawk was also worried that her reputation as a non-violent peace activist would be damaged by including it in a book that came out under her name and the Collective's aegis.⁴ Additionally, she believed that these three situations didn't warrant a special category—she felt they were covered elsewhere.⁵

The Pagan Book of Living and Dying does contain material that could be used to cobble together rituals out of existing chapters in the book and applied to these three special circumstances.⁶ But it is useful to have the information discussed all in one place for those to whom it applies. And the complex issues involved in these situations can't be addressed by simply cutting and pasting from existing sources.

This complexity is offered here in hopes that the multi-faceted nature of it will give Pagans and Witches a vantage point from which to view things as they put together ceremonies for members of our community who fall into these categories. I have presented no rituals per se, preferring instead to simply raise the topics so that Witches and Pagans can think about them and perhaps use some of the ideas contained in this essay. As regards the deities I suggest, they are examples and not meant to limit you to any pantheon or point of view.

EXECUTION BY THE STATE

No matter what side of the issue you are on, it is obvious that capital punishment is a fact of life in many countries. The death penalty always carries with it the monstrous possibility that the condemned person is innocent



and therefore being put to death unjustly. It is impossible to know how often this occurs, but it probably happens more frequently than we'd all like to admit, especially for minority prisoners.

Any ritual for a case like this would include a call for justice to be done with the real perpetrator being discovered, even though it would happen after the fact. Many condemned prisoners have been through numerous appeals and have been on death row for years. Judging from the number of requests for information Covenant of the Goddess receives from prisoners, our religion is growing rapidly in correctional facilities.⁷ It seems that many long term prisoners become interested in Witchcraft and Paganism while they are incarcerated and awaiting execution. I know of one recently executed inmate who did exactly that.

There is no set position in Witchcraft or Paganism on the death penalty. Opinion is divided, with some members of the community being steadfastly against execution by the state and some members feeling it is justified. One priestess I spoke with who is against it posited the argument that death by the state is the ultimate 'power over' ploy, and that supporting it imitates the stance of patriarchy, that rules by 'power over'. (As opposed to Reclaiming Witchcraft, which teaches the importance of power from 'within'.) Further, she argues that keeping a person locked up for all his/her life is ample punishment for whatever crimes have been

committed. This priestess said that if she were called upon to do a ritual for someone about to be executed she would design the ritual around whatever the prisoner needed to assist him/her in getting through the final ordeal.

A Witch I spoke with (who is in favor of the death penalty) agreed with the priestess cited above regarding ritual. He cautioned that as priestesses and priests who are called upon to minister in an execution situation, we should avoid imposing our own religious agenda on the condemned individual. In other words, we as Witches should not assume that our own views on the Summerland or other parts of our own, personal theology surrounding death would be useful or desired by a condemned person.

Those who feel the death penalty is justified sometimes argue that executing a murderer is simply returning the energy to the sender. Our religion doesn't consider death a frightening thing, and most accounts of after death (sometimes called 'near death') experiences indicate that it is much more beautiful on the other side. Perhaps the most compassionate thing we can do for someone who has murdered is to let the murderer leave this life cycle, go on to healing and be reborn, thus having another chance to go through life and 'get it right'. A ritual from this point of view would comfort the prisoner and focus on what might most help the person process whatever they need to process before they die and have to face rebirth.

**If you know your
demons have gotten
the better of you in
this life, and you
don't want to carry
them over to the next
incarnation, I can't
think of a
better demon eater
than Kali Ma.**

DEITIES: Many death row inmates came from a cycle of poverty, hopelessness and abuse that would make anyone turn to violence. Part of the ritual should enable the inmate to feel compassion for what he/she has gone through, and to accept himself/herself as still being a child of the Goddess. Kwan Yin, the Goddess of Compassion who is known as "She who hears the Cries of the World" is an excellent choice for a ritual like this.

One might also think of calling on Kali Ma. If you know your demons have gotten the better of you in this life, and you don't want to carry them over to the next incarnation, I can't think of a better demon eater than Kali Ma. She's the Goddess I'd call on for help. She actually applies to the unjust conviction/execution, also, though it is not recorded in the written tradition. I heard this from an Indian man who sold me a statue of Kali in Berkeley, California. He said that if you have been wronged very severely, and the person who is responsible is fully aware of this (in other words, it can't be an accident), Kali Ma will bring about justice. So for someone who is convicted of murder, but knows that someone else committed the crime and should step forward and admit it, Kali is the Goddess who will straighten out the Karma.

IN THE LINE OF DUTY

Death as a job factor applies to the military, the police, rescue teams, firefighters and the like. But things are a bit more complicated in the military and on the police force, since both warriors and police officers are often put in the position of having to kill people as part of their job. So it would be necessary to have at least two different types of rituals for members of our religion in these professions: one for the death of a police officer or a warrior, and one to help an officer or warrior

deal with having killed someone.

Personnel in both professions face the prospect of death at any moment. Therefore, as part of Samhain preparations each year, it would be wise to include updating (or creating) a will, and even formulating directions for organ donation and the issues around withholding life support systems in case of injury to the point of long-term coma. This would be a good thing for all Pagans and Witches to do at Samhain, but it is especially important when danger and the possibility of death are a routine part of an individual's job.

Another suggestion for police, military, and anyone else who regularly risks his or her own life to save others, would be for the community, comprised of friends and family, to have a ritual of thanksgiving that honors the danger these people willingly accept in order to safeguard the community. This could happen either at the Autumnal Equinox or at Samhain.

Both police officers and warriors are frequently on the receiving end of violence, though police officers generally experience more day-to-day violence over the course of their careers, especially if they work on the street. As part of their jobs, policemen (and women) are repeatedly thrust into an emotionally, verbally and physically abusive environment that the rest of us cannot even begin to comprehend. This is something that other 'line of duty' workers (for example firemen or rescue teams) don't ordinarily have to deal with. It can leave scars of pain and anger on the spirit and soul that build up. If possible, Samhain preparations should contain a short ritual that focuses on releasing or processing the emotions that have accumulated over the course of the year. It is important to understand that the police officer (or warrior) might still feel angry at whomever did violence to him or her. The



ritual cannot eradicate painful emotional wounds at the wave of a wand; human beings are not made that way. Often, time is the only healer. But at Samhain, the officers and warriors can consciously state their intention to release these wounds to the Goddess and the God. Then, if death occurs unexpectedly, the intention has already been set to not carry the pain and/or the rage over into the next incarnation.

PAGANS AND WITCHES ON THE POLICE FORCE

In police work, a seemingly routine encounter can rapidly escalate to life and death proportions, with innocent lives being endangered. In some cases the 'bad guy' is well-defined and the decision to draw a gun and shoot is clearly the only solution. In an actual crime encounter on the street, this kind of clarity rarely occurs. Even when it does, as the officer writes up the report he or she must still deal with the fact of having killed someone, and second guessing can often occur.

The Neopagan world view has a different perspective on death and the after-life than most western religions. In the situation where death has been caused on the job, this world view greatly assists the process of dealing with the emotional fallout. Whether we are police officers or not, many members of our religion believe in reincarnation, which makes it possible for even the most hardened criminal to get a second chance at things. Nonetheless, taking a life is a difficult thing to deal with, even when the lives of innocent people are saved in the process.

Many police departments offer counseling in these cases to help the officer process his or her emotions around the issue, and mandate that the officer take time off active duty after the incident has occurred.⁸ But verbal counseling can only go so far, and

even the most thorough discussion of the incident doesn't necessarily make it easy to put it out of the mind when the officer has to get back on the street. This is especially true on the police force, where a similar situation could easily occur again in the course of the officer's daily work. And whether counseling is used or not, it seems implausible that simply taking a week off will wipe the officer's mind so clean that she or he doesn't even think of the incident once returning to work.

At times like this, rituals can be exceptionally useful. The reason that rituals are such potent agents of change is that they get beyond the rational mind's machinations. Just as a picture is worth a thousand words, so too, a ritual is worth hours of talking. The powerful dimensions of ritual can begin a healing process that goes further and deeper than words.

Even a short ritual can greatly facilitate grounding the emotions and putting them to rest. Part of the ritual could include a bath or shower. This would begin the process of letting healing wash over the officer and of letting the sadness and second-guessing wash away. The ritual can be performed more than once if necessary.

When a police officer is killed on the job, the focus shifts to the survivors; the family and friends. In this case, belief in reincarnation isn't necessarily a comfort to those who are left behind. We need to develop memorial rituals that heal the family and friends by affirming the courage of the officer. Police departments, of course, conduct their own funerals, with an honor guard and even pipe bands in some cases. But it is important to hold our own rites for Pagan and Witch police officers, where we can speak of them using their Craft names and calling upon our own Goddesses and Gods.⁹ Part of the ritual should include the expression of gratitude in

memory of the slain officer, who was willing to take on a job filled with the constant threat of death. It would also be helpful to create rituals to bring to justice whomever was responsible for killing the officer.

PAGANS AND WITCHES IN THE MILITARY

Several things need to be addressed when creating rituals that deal with death for Pagans in the armed forces. In military duty, death is especially sad because those who are sent to fight a battle or a war are usually young. If they die, there is the vague sense that their lives are over before they had a chance to complete this life cycle. This needs to be honored and spoken to when performing rituals for Pagan and Witch warriors who have died in combat. Like police work, war can have situations where things are not very clear cut; the horrible problem of 'friendly fire' is one example. If a warrior has been the agent of friendly fire, a ritual can help honor the death or injury that has happened because of it.

Another problem is that of warriors missing in action (MIA). As a group, MIA's constitute a sort of undead because no one knows if they are dead or alive. I have never seen a ritual for MIA's. Precisely because the status of the person is unknown, it would be difficult to write one. But it would focus on the survivors as much as the individual who is missing. The families and friends of MIA's

desperately need some sense of closure, and a ritual in this case would definitely be helpful. Even if we don't have many MIA Pagans or Witches right now, we are growing rapidly as a religion and it wouldn't hurt to be prepared.

But the most pressing ritual needs are for ceremonies that facilitate re-integration into society after having killed in battle. There are two reasons for this. First, unlike the

police, who constantly live in the society they serve, military combat takes place outside of civilian society. Second, the process of re-integration into society is where the military as an institution most blatantly fails the warrior's needs.

In an insightful article by Judy Harrow,¹⁰ eight Pagans [*Note: your Pom editor is honoured to have been one of these*] spoke of their military service as a rite of passage. Harrow shows that rituals of re-integration into civilian (or non-combat) life are sadly lacking in the military. Discussing military

training and service as the separation and transformation elements of an initiation, she noted that there are many weeks of basic training and then sometimes years of service. But leaving the service and coming back into civilian life takes only about a day or two and is mostly filled with administrative activities. This is not sufficient for someone who has been away from ordinary life for several years, and certainly insufficient for someone who has seen combat. If a warrior has killed in battle, we can't expect him or

Another suggestion
... would be for the
community, com-
prised of friends and
family, to have a rit-
ual of thanksgiving
that honors the dan-
ger these people
willingly accept in
order to safeguard
the community.



her to come back into the non-combat world without some sort of re-entry ritual.

Indigenous Pagans and native people have always been aware of the necessity of these kinds of rituals. The Dine (Navaho) are famous for their chantway ceremonies that restore a person to balance after a traumatic event has occurred; The Enemy Way is one such ceremony, and is performed specifically for a warrior returning from battle. Though we have no exact figures on how many Witches and Pagans there are in military service, we can certainly be pro-active in designing re-entry rituals for our community. And even more so than for the police, the re-integration rite for a warrior may need to be done more than once.

In addition to rituals for warriors who have died, we need uncomplicated rituals that Pagan and Witch military personnel can perform for themselves before battle, since battle inherently carries the possibility of death. These kinds of rituals should be quick ones that don't need a lot of accouterments and that are made up of parts that are easy to remember; complicated rituals with lots of steps wouldn't be usable right before the battle. The warrior might participate in a longer ritual, including family and friends, before leaving for passage to the war. Parts of the ritual could be called up mentally as the warrior enters the actual fighting. One example of this type of ritual that could easily be adapted to include preparation for possible death in the fray appeared in an issue of the Reclaiming Collective's Newslet-

ter during the Persian Gulf War.¹¹

DEITIES: Along with the usual underworld Deities, rituals for both police and the military could call on warrior Goddesses/Gods, any Deity associated with justice, and also Deities of compassion.

In the Greek pantheon there is Themis, the daughter of Gaia and Uranus. Themis ruled over order in the communal affairs of mortals, especially as regards to assemblies. One of her children was Justice (Dike). Another suggestion is Athena. Athena is usually associated with intelligence, but recall that she was born from the head of Zeus, brandishing a shield and spear at the moment of her own birth. She was known for being a true warrior, one who fights for a just cause. As opposed to Aries, who was the most disliked of all the Gods on

Olympus because he enjoyed fighting for its own sake. Athena was known for her cool headed logic in the midst of violent conflict, something needed by both police and military personnel.

As with death by execution, Kwan Yin could be invoked to bring compassion to rituals of friendly fire and also to release the sadness over bringing death to another human being—a criminal, in the case of the police officer, or the enemy against whom the warrior is fighting.

EPILOGUE

Our religion is growing exponentially, both in North America and in Europe. Recent

events at military bases in the United States indicate that increasing numbers of Pagan and Witch military personnel are willing to practice openly. We have no direct figures on how many Witches are on the Police force, though very likely we are on the rise in all the professions. And while at this point it seems that not many death row inmates enter prison as Witches or Pagans, it's not uncommon for them to find the Goddess in prison and to die having developed some relationship to Her.

So, these three 'special circumstances' are actually not so special at all. Given that fact, it is unfortunate that these issues couldn't be brought to the table in *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying*, which covers death under every other situation imaginable, and does so with great beauty and compassion. And as previously mentioned, *The Reclaiming Newsletter* printed a ritual for a warrior about to go to war. So, there was at least precedent within the Collective for recognizing our brothers and sisters who work in the armed forces,¹² though to my knowledge the *Newsletter* never discussed rituals for the police or for those executed on death row.

In Starhawk's novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing* there is a stirring scene near the end of the book. To stem the take-over of their city by the military, members of the non-violent community attempt to stop it by literally putting their bodies in front of soldiers bearing laser rifles. As they perform this very courageous act they say: "There is a place set for you at our table, if you will choose to join us."¹³ Obviously, when a person has died under one of the three circumstances described in this article, he or she cannot choose to "join us" any longer, for they are not alive to make the choice. But what of their surviving loved ones? Should they not be offered a place at the table, a place to be comforted in their grief? Opening out the

discussion to include them, by publishing this article in the book, would have been one way to offer them that place.

Moreover, facing down a rifle requires the kind of courage that doesn't come overnight. I really believe that the strength for that kind of courage and compassion has to be built up by practicing many small acts of courage and compassion. How can we expect to have the courage to offer a place at the table to 'the enemy' holding a gun, risking our lives in the process, if we can't even offer bereaved survivors a place at the table in a book of rituals, where no lives are at stake in the outcome?

With the publication of this article, it is hoped that the complexity of issues involved in these three special circumstances will provoke discussion and lead to deeper awareness for those planning rituals in their own Pagan and Witch communities.

NOTES:

1. See Oz Anderson's essay, "Pagan Rites of Dying," pp. 249-270, in *Witchcraft Today Book Two: Modern Rites of Passage*. Chas Clifton, editor. Llewellyn, 1994
2. "This book may be Reclaiming and Friends, but it is coming out under Reclaiming's name and bears some responsibility to be consistent with Reclaiming's ethical and political stands" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 8/18/95).
3. "I would rather not single out the military and police for special consideration—because I don't believe we can without falling into the 'God is on our side' mode of religions blessing undertakings of violence" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 8/17/95); Also:
"But I do not want to contribute any of my energy to blessing the operations of the military, or to anything that could possibly be construed as condoning or excusing police violence. I know that is not your intent, but that is one way the article as written can be read" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 9/19/95).

4. "Particularly (sic) as this book is coming out of the Reclaiming community, and so many of us have such strong antiwar feelings, I would not want us, under the guise of inclusiveness, to end up blessing something we are actually very much opposed to" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 8/17/95);

Also:

"And I have a name and a professional reputation I've spent 25 years to develop. I cannot lend it to anything I don't wholeheartedly agree with" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 8/18/95).

5. "Particularly because I don't think we would be excluding Pagan police or military by not specifically giving them a special section—they would be included, as would anyone else, in the community through the rituals and prayers we do for everyone" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 8/17/95);

Also:

"For the same reason, I don't think we need to create something for someone on death Row specifically—again, the appropriate prayers and chants should be offered to them" (Starhawk, e-mail correspondence, 8/17/95).

6. For example, there is an essay and prayer for one who has died violently, pp. 216-222; and there is a short essay and prayer for one who has died for another ("Death in the Service of Life"), which, in three sentences referring to the military, acknowledges that Reclaiming "can respect and honor the courage of those who die for what they believe is right" (pp. 232-233).

7. Some of the local councils of Covenant of the Goddess now have volunteers who specialize in prison ministry and who have gone into prisons to lead rituals on our holy days. In one instance, the priestess involved, who was against the death penalty, established a pen-pal correspondence with a death row inmate. When he was executed, she went to the prison to be with him in the last days before his death.

8. Informal conversations with police officers indicates that departmental policies vary on counseling. In some police

departments, officers are obligated to see a department therapist for several meetings. Other departments offer counseling but do not compel the officer to undergo it. In all cases, the officer must take time off after the shooting incident has occurred. This would be a perfect time to do a ritual, as the officer has more time than normal since he or she doesn't have to be at work during the day.

9. Oz Anderson's essay cited above describes an almost comical situation regarding a Christian burial rite done by the blood-related, 'straight' family of a Witch. It was held for the late Craft Bard Gwydion Pendderwen, who of course was not in the police force, but it underscores the importance of holding our own rituals for those who have died, since the traditional funeral rites are hardly comforting to surviving Craft members.

10. See "Initiation by Ordeal: Military Service as Passage into Adulthood" in *Witchcraft Today Book Two: Modern Rites of Passage*. Chas. S. Clifton, editor; Llewellyn, 1992.

11. White Eagle, Dierdre and Tuitean, Paul, "War Mask Ritual" *Reclaiming Newsletter* #50, Spring, 1993, pp. 26-28.

12. The ritual in question was published after much heated debate, and it had both a disclaimer before it and a rebuttal after it. But was featured because the *Newsletter* staff knew that Witches and Pagans might be fighting in the Persian Gulf War. Printing the ritual provided a ceremony for those who were going into the conflict, and also opened the issue up for discussion. Thus, the *Newsletter* did an enormous service to members of our greater religious community in the armed forces.

13. *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, by Starhawk, pp. 310-1, 332-3, 455, 1993, Bantam Books. (hardback edition)

Leah Samul has been a Witch for over 20 years, is a member of Covenant of the Goddess, and is the author of "Wisdom in the Cards," the companion book to the Hudes Tarot deck, forthcoming from US Games in 2000.

Effeminate Love

by John Yohalem

Recent performances of Handel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* ("Julius Caesar in Egypt") at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and the translated "titles" and staging applied to the opera there, remind one how much the English language, and society, have changed since 1724.

An especially egregious example is the "effeminacy" of Ptolemy ('Tolomeo' in the opera), the villain of the piece. In his first appearance, Tolomeo is taunted by his sister, consort and rival for the throne, Cleopatra, as an "*effeminato amante*", an effeminate lover. Since she goes on to suggest that he devote himself to the joys of women's love rather than to statecraft, she is obviously not suggesting what we nowadays think of as effeminacy. Indeed Tolomeo, if the libretto is to be trusted, seems quite heterosexual. But the staging at the Met takes off from this insult, and perhaps from the fact that this role, composed for a heroic castrato, was sung at the Met by countertenor Brian Asawa—in other modern stagings it has sometimes been given to a bass.

At the Met, Asawa performed the role with dapper charm and an impressively developed bare chest. Effeminacy, however, was imposed on him by the addition of two "super catamites", non-singing muscle-boys and, by implication, male concubines, who crouched at his feet like tame leopards, posing provocatively, whenever Tolomeo appeared. Too, the lines Tolomeo sings aside, to no one, were confided here to a be-

skirted chamberlain, also non-singing, who had no other function. The suggestion was clear: Tolomeo is unworthy to reign because he is gay.

This is certainly not what Handel, and his librettist Nicola Haym, meant by the word "*effeminato*", and the transformation of this concept shows us how far, and along what sort of road, we have come. In renouncing the aristocratic ideals of male behavior that were still in favor, if only as ideals, in Handel's day, we have lost the traditional sense of what properly constitutes manhood, and the behavior proper to a man.

THE PUBLIC FOR WHOM Handel wrote his operas—mostly English and at least somewhat classically educated—had expectations when it came to opera that were very different from ours. Those expectations were aristocratic.

This is not to say that he composed his operas merely for an audience of aristocrats—though it was a group of wealthy aristocrats who created the company for which Handel wrote them. *Opera seria* was an art originally devised for the ruling classes, and its moral compass exalts them. The characters are legendary and formal to an extent Euripides and Shakespeare might have found risible—they are hard to take today, as human beings of any dimension.

In renouncing the aristocratic ideals of male behavior that were still in favor, if only as ideals, in Handel's day, we have lost the traditional sense of what properly constitutes manhood ...



To understand the form as Handel knew it, to feel the force of its drama, we must see the characters as archetypes, individuated (if at all) by the skill of the composer, necessarily enhanced by that of the singer/actor. If the singer lacks such skill, or if the composer is a mediocrity, *opera seria* becomes not merely dull but ridiculous.

Handel, among the greatest composers of his day, did not see fit to challenge the assumptions of the form, to lead it towards a new style, as Gluck and Mozart were to do half a century later. He was content with the structures as he found them, and within their bounds discovered the freedom to express character and drama.

HANDEL'S OPERATIC characters, virtuous or villainous, are stick figures—only the emotional variety created by his music makes them human.

In *Giulio Cesare*, for example, Caesar is not a man of flesh and blood, still less the middle-aged egotist who ruled Rome, but an archetypal “king” and hero.

Cornelia, Pompey's widow, is the archetypal Roman matron as Handel's contemporaries knew her from childhoods spent translating the Roman classics: “beautiful and cold” (as Shakespeare describes Octavia in *Antony and Cleopatra*).

... you would never guess Tolomeo had committed any of the deeds that are regarded as “effeminate” in the 1990s. He lusts for power, he disposes of political opponents and untrustworthy friends, he pursues women insatiably ...

Sesto (Sextus), her son, is an adolescent—not, like Mozart's Cherubino in *Figaro*, overwhelmed by the dawning sex urge, but in the sense of becoming an adult, a warrior, a Roman of the upper classes. When Sesto puts aside his “childish” terrors to take martial action—ultimately slaying the villain who is about to rape Sesto's mother—it is a sign that his father, Pompey, lives again in a “noble Roman” son. The piquancy of this transformation is due to the fact that Sesto, when first seen, is a boy, unsure of his manhood. (The role, sung at the Met by a countertenor, was composed for a woman.)

All these things were understood by Handel's audience, who had been raised on Livy, Plutarch and Vergil, in ways with which the modern opera audience has completely lost touch.

In contrast to these noble, if boring, Romans, we have the Egyptians, or rather (as everyone knew in Handel's day), Egyptianized Greeks: Tolomeo, Cleopatra, Achilla. They boast none of the “Roman” virtues. Ptolemy is lecherous, treacherous, spoiled and violent—the tyrant, self-evidently unfit to rule. Achilla is a traitor, rightly betrayed by the man he trusted—he exists to demonstrate, in dying, just how evil his master is.

Cleopatra is the archetypal sexpot, irresistible, ingenious and corrupt. The libretto rescues her from decadence by making her passion for Caesar genuine and heartfelt instead of political and calculating, as it could easily seem. Tolomeo's viciousness and Cleopatra's true love for Caesar—and her willingness to aid the oppressed Cornelia—condemn the brother and redeem the sister, proving her worthy of the happy ending

inevitable in *opera seria*.

WHEN, IN THEIR first appearance, in a scene that introduces the Egyptian characters (as the previous scene introduced the Romans) and indicate to the audience what traits to expect of them, Cleopatra calls Tolomeo “*effeminato amante*”, she follows the accusation with a mocking aria suggesting that Tolomeo renounce politics for the love of beautiful women. Too, the modern construction of “*effeminato*” is contradicted by Tolomeo's pursuit of Cornelia.

Homosexuality would have been, in any case, entirely unmentionable on the public stage in the eighteenth century, and never was mentioned there, except for very vague references in a few topical comedies. There were no polite words for it, for one thing. The “serious” stage was reserved for refined subjects dealt with in a more exalted manner.

What, then, did “*effeminato amante*” mean, to Handel and his intended audience? What is Cleopatra implying?

TOLOMEO'S BEHAVIOR is not “manly”, as the conventions of *opera seria* understood manliness. “*Effeminato*”, applied to a man, must obviously be a derogation of manhood in some sense, since (before the advent of modern psychology), male and female were seen as, in some sense, divinely ordained opposites—for one to possess the character of the other in any fashion was in some sense “unnatural”, although women, real or legendary, who took on the “masculine” character of ruler or hunter were admired for reasons that would require another article.

Of what, then, was this archetypal manliness supposed to consist? As Caesar is the epitome of manliness in this opera, we can understand it by observing him: Manhood

is expressed by making war or by hunting; in sport and exercise intended to prepare a man for the other two activities; and in taking care of business generally. Kingly behavior is manly behavior elevated to a higher plane: a King does not fight duels, but he invades countries; he does not go out shooting, but leads vast posses on the chase; he does not keep accounts, he presides as a judge.

Tolomeo's behavior conflicts with this on every level: He does not make war; instead, he fawns on a conqueror, Caesar, by assassinating a guest, Pompey, who is Caesar's rival. He makes no reference to the chase or manly exercise. He is faithless to his friends and brutal to women. Too, he is understood to spend much of his time in the harem—that is, making love to women. This is what Cleopatra tells him to run along and do, while she rules the country. This is what she means by “effeminate” behavior.

A “real man”, in the Roman warrior sense, while not immune to sexuality, keeps it in its proper place and does not allow himself to be distracted. When Caesar's tryst with “Lydia” (Cleopatra in disguise) is interrupted, he draws his sword and rushes off to battle without hesitation. Ptolemy, evidently, is not even present at the battle, though he manages to have his victorious general, Achilla, assassinated during the hostilities.

In short, making love to women (or, at any rate, spending too much of one's time among them) is, in this warrior culture, to be “effeminate”.

EVEN IN HANDEL'S TIME, these conventions were more than rusty, as the immediate success of the lampoon, *The Beggars' Opera*, whose popularity drove Handel's company into bankruptcy, makes clear. In that work, rival kings are replaced by rival

corrupt officials, virtuous queens by slutty barmaids, and the whole crowd may expect to be “whipped, hanged or transported” to the penal colonies. The joke was total and delicious; Handel didn’t stand a chance. But the matter was old: knights errant had been figures of fun since Don Quixote, a best-seller throughout Europe over a century before.

But the serious operas of Handel’s era continued to make their effect because, however one might titter at the virtues they extolled, the general worth, the admirability of these things was accepted by the entire audience. They expected heroes to conform to archetype: Kings should be just, Queens virtuous, warriors brave and honorable, children devoted to their parents, witches wicked and wizards wise. This was gratifying to monarchs, the original audience for whom operatic entertainments were devised, but as opera became a public craze, and as monarchs’ personal lives became more generally known through the rise of news media, the contrast between operatic ideal and reality was subtly derogatory to royal prestige. Everyone in Handel’s London knew that George I and George II did not resemble Giulio Cesare—George I had divorced his wife for adultery and locked her up for life; George II hated his father and his son, and was a constant adulterer.

SO NOW WE KNOW: Tolomeo is effeminate because he spends his time seeking “pleasure”, which includes making love to women. Tolomeo must die; therefore, he must be seen to commit offenses to noble and kingly conduct such as will justify regicide—in an aristocratic art form, the most atrocious of crimes. Tolomeo has not only betrayed a guest, deposed a sister, and murdered a friend, he assaults a noble Roman matron, the very archetype of virtue. He is

slain while attempting to rape Cornelia, and by her son, Sesto, who thus attains “manhood”, in his eyes and ours.

From the libretto you would never guess Tolomeo had committed any of the deeds that are regarded as “effeminate” in the 1990s. He lusts for power, he disposes of political opponents and untrustworthy friends, he pursues women insatiably—just the sort of behavior the modern action film, rap music, and the popular myth of the noble Mafia “don” regard as satisfyingly masculine. In the opera, only his alto voice category (often been transposed to bass in twentieth century revivals) and Cleopatra’s slighting recitative would hint of “effeminacy”—by modern definition.

It is the definition of effeminacy that has changed—and the dilemma faced by males in this society in seeking male role models. Indeed, it was changing before the end of Handel’s century. The passing of *opera seria*, which pretty much occurred during Mozart’s short lifetime, in part indicates the change. The aristocracy was losing its place as the most powerful group in society to a bourgeoisie with very different ideals.

The behavior one might expect of a nobleman on the stage had changed by the time Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte wrote their three celebrated collaborations. The behavior of real kings and real nobles was too well known in a world full of inexpensive publications and a broad literacy, the age of Voltaire and de Sade, and the real power was no longer in the hands of those who could punish sly digs at noble authority.

Accordingly, in *Le nozze de Figaro* (1786), we have in Count Almaviva a tyrant constantly outwitted and frustrated, obliged to crave pardon without having committed the adultery that must be forgiven. He is a nobleman who no longer fulfills his ancient

function—he does not take his diplomatic career or judicial responsibilities with the seriousness and energy he brings to seductions and intrigues. He is a nobleman who becomes “effeminate” by avoiding business. And he reaps the just reward of this “effeminacy”—chasing girls has made him unworthy to win them. His own servant, the common barber Figaro, not only wins the girl, he becomes the heroic everyman figure of the opera, perhaps all opera.

IF A NOBLE IS NO LONGER a warrior or a huntsman, he is no longer eligible to be the archetypal king as war-leader or hunter as provider. If he does not fulfil these ancient types of maleness, how does he establish that he is male?

As life became more orderly, as individual energy was reined in or put to the service of the state, males were left without an obvious outlet for this adolescent impulse. With duels banned and hunting turned from a frequent necessity into a rare recreation, traditional maleness was deprived of its ancient function and its ancient *proof*—for if the male sexual act cannot be performed publicly, then its symbolic appearance become all the more important, even necessary. Men needing to prove themselves male—for their own satisfaction and to achieve a place among other males more than to impress women—fell back upon their distinction as the predator sex. The very behavior that Handel’s contemporaries had seen as unworthy of disciplined aristocratic and heroic men became the only behavior that would demonstrate masculinity to themselves. From being abstemious warriors and hunters, they became skirt-chasers. “Effeminacy”, in consequence, was turned on its head,

narrowed in definition to refer to the pursuit of one’s own sex—and, presumably, in the passive role, with its ancient aura (however unrealistic) of assuming, of envying, femininity.

We can see this transformation in action as early as Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (1787). The title character is a gentleman, an aristocrat, trained to all the responsibilities of his position. Yet, from the first moments of the opera, we see him abusing his privileges, putting his skills to evil use, and corrupting the society that has distinguished him. When Don Giovanni places a peasant wedding party under his “protection”, and invites them to his home for refreshment, he is a nobleman, behaving as one should toward social inferiors. When, two minutes later, he attempts to seduce the bride, he is conspicuously violating the ancient social contract—and showing how hollow it had, by that time, become, for the stage does not foretell but only mimics reality.

Don Giovanni gets his comeuppance, to be sure. For one thing, on this one day, his last, every planned seduction goes awry. His attempted conquests are all frustrated. Indeed, we never see him in any “human” relationship except cynical flirtation or the abusive patronage of his servant, Leporello. For a man who claims to love women, he

As “effeminate” has come to mean “queer” (another fine old word impoverished in its usage by the neurotic sexualization of our society), so “manly” has come to mean merely adolescent, horny and unrestrained.

has very little to say to them aside from the clichés of courtship.

Don Giovanni is the nobleman who has irresponsibly renounced every archetypal quality of his rank—pillar of the state, fount of honor, protector of the weak. Yet he never strikes us as “effeminate”. Why? Because he has managed to transform this sensual weakness into the appearance of strength, the manly threat to the enemy becoming a threat to those he is expected to defend. This may seem not as dishonor in Tolomeo’s style but as a rather courageous challenge the authority of society—which is just how certain nineteenth century liberals saw Don Giovanni.

If it is society that has channeled male-ness into the ideal of “gentlemanly” behavior, for its own purposes of order and self-perpetuation, Don Giovanni, a nobleman in a time when the nobility were losing their historic function, discards what remains of the trappings of traditional male-ness, the euphemistic categories of warrior and huntsman, for the naked reality of the sex urge run amok. Unable to be knights errant or lordly providers in a world of citizen armies and bourgeois factories, the nobleman has no way to demonstrate his masculinity but sexual violence. In the nineteenth century, when the hero who defies society was exalted, Don Giovanni was a rare survivor from the past on the operatic stage precisely because its hero seemed outrageous in a way that much of his audience could respond to.

Sexual restraint had ceased to be manly; it had come to seem (as Donna Anna’s fiancé, Don Ottavio, can seem) “effeminate”. Because we have no other outlet for vital energy, Don Giovanni’s brutal sexuality has become the traditional image of male-ness—to the point, indeed, where even homosexual men who take the “receptive”

role are nowadays expected (and expect themselves) to adopt the trappings of exaggerated “macho”.

WHAT DOES THIS EVOLUTION of words say about us? The words we use, the way we use them, guide the processes of our thought. The debasement of “manliness” to frenetic sexual activity and “effeminacy” to any other sort of behavior (sexual and otherwise) says a great deal about the way we think now, and the way we behave now, and the way our society is going.

At the dawn of a new millennium, we have been deprived of what it was that usefully defined manhood from the dawn of recorded history: We no longer fight, we no longer hunt, we no longer “protect the weak”. Manhood no longer stands for principles of self-control and maturity. But instead of beating our swords into plowshares, of becoming stalwart men of peace and balanced behavior, we have turned these adolescent energies into worship of the frivolous: of youth and sexual excess. As “effeminate” has come to mean “queer” (another fine old word impoverished in its usage by the neurotic sexualization of our society), so “manly” has come to mean merely adolescent, horny and unrestrained.

John “Brightshadow” Yohalem is the editor and publisher of Enchanté: The Journal for the Urbane Pagan, which appears to be in a state of suspended animation.

He is working on a collection of essays about the shamanic roots of operatic drama which, as someone once said of Wagner’s music, will be much better than it sounds.

Book Review: A VOICE IN THE FOREST: CONVERSATIONS WITH ALEX SANDERS

by ‘Jimahl’

Trident Publications, P.O. Box 990591,
Boston, Mass. 02199. 1999. 200 pages. \$15.

Although it is written for a narrowly defined audience, *A Voice in the Forest* should interest anyone concerned with issues of mediumship and the establishment of what are sometimes called magical “contacts” within revived Witchcraft. Modern practitioners do frequently refer to the presence of ancestral spirits and deceased Witches who take an interest in their religious descendants’ activities: these persons are often referred to as The Mighty Dead or as The Hidden Company, for example. Yet, paradoxically, modern Witches seem almost embarrassed by their traditions’ founders and elders. Some are too quickly forgotten, such as the science-fiction writer Margaret St. Clair (see *The Pomegranate* #2). Others find themselves on the trash pile of history because their eccentricities seem less charming than obsolete: Gerald Gardner’s alleged sexual kinks are better remembered than his genuine religious creativity.

In this case, the embarrassing elder is Alex Sanders, who blazed a streak through the British news media in the 1960s. According to Patricia Crowther, he boasted “that he could make the front page of the *Manchester Evening Chronicle & News* any time he liked.” Furthermore, he attempted briefly to make money by performing magical rituals in theatres and on nightclub stages. Profiled in June Johns’ *King*

of the Witches (1969) and in Stewart Farrar’s *What Witches Do* (1971), Sanders and his wife Maxine were probably the most-photographed British witches of the 1960s and 1970s, appearing also in the 1970 *Man, Myth and Magic* series and elsewhere. He died in 1988 of lung cancer, having mellowed considerably and having taught the Craft to many students who regarded him with emotions ranging from embarrassment to tolerance to genuine fondness. Stewart and Janet Farrar and others were content to focus on what they believed was his genuine gift for healing.

Morwen, who is Jimahl’s high priestess and who once edited a Pagan journal called *Harvest*, describes Sanders in her introduction to *A Voice in the Forest* as the “arrogant showman” of the Craft: “His goal was to make [the Craft] more accessible, which he certainly did, but detractors were horrified by his pandering to the press and his giving away of the Craft secrets.”

As a literary work, *A Voice in the Forest* is not fully formed. Jimahl’s writing style is sometimes gushy and overloaded with modifiers: fires are “vigorous,” hands “strong,” and November landscapes “distinctly” uninviting. Events and persons are only sketchily contextualized. And like many devotional religious books, it is written only for insiders—not merely for Wiccans, but for those who know who Alex Sanders was. I suspect that today that would mean fewer than half of North American practitioners of the Craft.

But the book has its strengths as well. The narrative pace is quick and the description of the coven’s necromantic ritual on Hallowe’en 1998—and its unintended consequences for one member—is reminiscent of Dion Fortune’s *The Secrets of Dr. Taverner*, albeit more compressed. Most importantly, it raises a question that many if not most Wiccan groups gloss over: the importance of magical “contacts.”



As Alan Richardson, author of two books on Dion Fortune and her associates in ceremonial magic, *Dancers to the Gods* and *Priestess*, defines them, contacts are “discarnate sources of power and intelligence—in short, the so-called Secret Chiefs ... entities of high status who have what is essentially an evolutionary interest in humankind.” The entities favored by ceremonial magicians may be legendary figures like Melchizedek, “Lord of the Flame and also of Mind,” whom Richardson identifies as one of the guides of what was to become Fortune’s Society (later Fraternity) of the Inner Light, or historical figures, such as John Scott, Lord Eldon, chancellor under George III and IV. However, to lose one’s contacts means psychic sterility for the magician: in Richardson’s phrase, he or she “would be like a light bulb in which the electricity has suddenly been shut off,” the filament slowly going to black.

Alex Sanders, and by extension the “Alexandrian” tradition of Wicca which sprang from him, have often been described as more ceremonially oriented than the Gardnerian tradition to which they owed a great deal. (Sanders hounded Gardnerian leaders for initiation, despite the story that he fed to June Johns about being initiated by his grandmother as a boy—the eponymous “grandmother story” of modern Witchcraft.) By contrast, the late Doreen Valiente, who did a great deal to shape the modern Craft in the 1950s, first working with Gerald Gardner’s coven and then with Robert Cochrane’s, actively purged much of the ceremonial magical tone from the Gardnerian rituals as “not really suitable for the Old Craft of the Wise.” Likewise, the Farrars, trained by Alex and Maxine Sanders, sometimes used Cabalistic magic but felt that it was “out of context” in many Wiccan rites.

But communicating with dead elders is not unknown in modern Witchcraft. Valiente, having broken with Gardner and connected with Robert Cochrane’s group, recounted

having received “a series of communications from what purported to be the discarnate spirit of a traditional [which is to say pre-Gardnerian] witch, who gave his name as John Brakespeare.” What began as a vision on the edge of sleep of a group of dark-clad people grouped around a stang (staff) stuck in the ground evolved into a series of impressions, pictures, and conversations recorded during meditative states, leading to a portrait of a group of witches in (possibly) early nineteenth-century Surrey, which Valiente describes in the chapter “A Voice in the Past?” in her 1989 book *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*. Furthermore, she quotes Brakespeare as saying, “We were used to speaking with spirits of the dead, so the Christians could not frighten us with tales of hell-fire, burning pits, devils with pitchforks, and all the bugbears they used to terrify poor yokels.” And she gives two examples of necromantic rituals performed by his coven. Elsewhere, Valiente describes contact with the dead as a hallmark of “traditional” Craft.

Similarly, Patricia Crowther, quoted above, mentions in her recent autobiography, *One Witch’s World*, that Gerald Gardner “has often communicated with us from the World of Spirit.”

At this point, it is tempting to regard communication with the dead as yet another of the rough edges that has been smoothed off modern Wicca. You will not find it in Starhawk’s *The Spiral Dance*, for example, nor in the popular introductory works of the late Scott Cunningham. So it takes an author like Jimahl and a tiny publisher like Trident to remind us that communication with discarnate spiritual ancestors remains important to some modern Witches, even as in Afro-Brazilian religion and many other traditions worldwide. Here is an opportunity for further scholarly investigation that has been little taken up.

Reviewed by Chas S. Clifton

READERS’ FORUM

continued from page 3

at that time offered greater possibilities for influence than Harran ... (I. Hadot, “The Life and Work of Simplicius in Greek and Arabic Sources” in Sorabji, Richard, ed., *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, London: Gerald Duckworth & Co, 1990, p. 284).

However, a difference between intellectual, philosophical Pagans and “uneducated vulgar” idol-worshippers may address Dr Kassiss’ second point:

... once he had referred to himself and his community as a Sabaeen, and the identification was accepted by the Muslims, neither he nor his community could be described as ‘Pagans’, unless one wants to suggest that Ibn Qurrah was not telling the truth.

Far from it; I just suggest that the original intent of the word ‘Sabian’ in the Qur’an may well have been to refer to Neoplatonic/Hermetic ‘pagans’ as opposed to a popular ‘paganism’ perceived as mired in superstition and idolatry. The people of Harran, identified as Sabians and as pagans, had paid the poll tax as ‘people of the book’ for many years prior to the arrival of al-Mamun. Tamara Green notes that “the jurist Abu Hanifa (*d.* 767CE) and two of his disciples had discussed the legal status of the Sabians of Harran in the century before al-Ma’mun’s visit [*c.* 830CE] ... it is indisputable that the Harranians were the representatives of the ancient pagan religion.” (Green, Tamara, *The City of the Moon God: The Religious Traditions of Harran*. Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1992, p. 112) In other words, the Sabians of Harran were recognized as both ‘pagans’ AND ‘people of the book’. The surviving textual evidence supports the conclusion that Muslim scholars of the time (as opposed to today) distinguished between the Sabians of Harran (*ie*,

philosophical, Hermetic/Neoplatonic ‘pagans’ who believed in the One and possessed a revealed text—the *Hermetica*—given by a prophet recognized by Islam) and ‘idolaters’ (*ie*, followers of popular ‘paganism’ as understood at the time).

Such a distinction seems to be supported by the contemporary Muslim author al-Masudi, who visited Harran in 943CE, Ilse-traut Hadot (again, summarizing Michel Tardieu), notes that:

The ‘Sabians of Harran’ who explained to al-Masudi the Syriac inscription engraved on the knocker of their front door [‘Who knows his own essence becomes divine.’] and who considered themselves to be ‘Greek Sabians’, are nothing other than ‘Platonists’ in the strict sense, or rather Neoplatonists. ... al-Masudi grouped the Harranians into two categories: the philosophers ... ‘of a low and vulgar level’, partisans of the pagan religions of the city and the ‘sages in the strict sense’, the heirs of the Greek philosophers. ... al-Masudi distinguishes the cult sites or ‘temples’ of the popular religion perfectly from the magma [meeting place for intellectuals] where the ‘Greek philosophers’ met. As regards the former, he recognizes [at the time of his visit] ... ‘that there remained only one’ ... The second centre, still thriving, of Harranian paganism was the institution of the ‘Greek Sabians’, that is, the Platonists. ... al-Masudi therefore distinguishes perfectly between the ordinary pagans of Harran and the Harranian philosophers’ (Hadot, *op cit*, pp. 282-83).

This distinction comes up again in Mr. Walker’s criticism of the translation of *hanputho* as ‘Pagan’ in one of my quoted passages. Walker states:

... the word Frew’s source gives as ‘Pagan’ is actually *hanputho*. My medieval Arabic is pretty rusty, but this is surely a close relative of *hanith*, the term used in Islam to refer to those who were already on the right path prior to, or without having been formally exposed to, orthodox Prophecy. The primary element of this path, of course, was belief in

the One True God: Abraham is usually given as the classical example of hanith. No polytheistic Pagans could possibly be referred to thus."

I must assume that Mr Walker means *hanif*, as there is no Arabic word '*hanith*'. If so, he is incorrect regarding the use of this word. *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (edited on behalf of the Royal Netherlands Academy by H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, E.J. Brill, 1995) discusses...

... the use of the word [*hanif*] by some authors as the designation not of the pure primitive religion but of the ancient paganism, which preceded the later separate religions. Thus Ya'kubi calls the Philistines, who fought against Saul and David, *hunafa* and adds that they worshipped the stars; and particularly Mas'udi in his *Tanbih* uses the word as identical with *sabi'un* of the people of Persia and the Roman empire, before they adopted Mazdaism and Christianity respectively, and distinguishes this step in religious development as the first *hanifiya* from the pure *hanif* religion. At the same time he says that the word is an arabicised form of the Syriac *hanifu*, in which connection it should be remembered that the Syriac *hanfe* [related to *hanputho*] is actually used particularly of the Sabians (e.g. Bar-hebraeus, *Chron.* p. 176). (Gibb & Kramers, 1995, p.133)

At any rate, I clearly stated in the article that the word *hanputho* is Syriac, not Arabic. Therefore, its meaning and use in Syriac is all that matters. The translation of *hanputho* as 'Pagan' was not mine. The passage in question is a text by Thabit ibn Qurra preserved in Bar Hebraeus' *Chronography*. The translation was made by Walter Scott, editor and translator of what was the standard English edition of the *Hermetica* from 1924 until 1992. Tamara M. Green, Professor of Classical and Oriental Studies at Hunter College (City University of New York) and one of the world's leading authorities on Harranian religion, also reproduces this passage, but she leaves *hanputho* untranslated. After the

quoted passage, Green notes:

'We are the heirs and transmitters of *hanputho*,' Thabit declared, and although this Syriac word, like its Arabic cognate, *hanif*, is often translated as 'pagan' when applied to preislamic religions, it may also have here the same meaning as *hanif* seems to be given in the Qu'ran: 'a possessor of the pure religion.' ... it is not improbable that Thabit, familiar with Muslim doctrine, could have used this word purposefully because of its Qu'ranic associations with Abraham, in order to provide the link between the first hanif and Sabian 'heirs and transmitters' at Harran. (Green, *op cit*, p.114)

Green continues with a lengthy discussion of the Arabic word *hanif* and the cognate Syriac *hanputho*, noting that al-Biruni (d. 1050CE) reports in his *Chronology of Nations* that before the Harranians were known as Sabians "they were called *hanifi*, idolators and Harranians." (Green, *op cit*, p.116) While *hanputho* and *hanif* had somewhat different meanings, the words were indeed related, used interchangeably with 'Sabian', and applied to pagans.

Mr Walker takes me to task for capitalizing the words "Pagan" and 'Paganism' ... in accord with the current standard", but I did not do so. The words are capitalized in the Scott text. This should have been obvious, but Mr. Walker states that he has not read the text in question, saying that "Unfortunately, none of the university libraries to which I have access seem to carry this book." A quick check of MELVYL, the online catalogue of the University of California, turned up the library catalogue listing for the Scott *Hermetica* in the UC Santa Cruz main library. Its call number is PA3998.H5 1985.

Mr Walker takes issue with the edition of the Scott *Hermetica* I cited "having been published in Boulder, Colorado, and being no longer in print." I fail to see the relevance of a publisher's geographic location. Also, the book IS currently in print, in editions from

Shambhala Publications (Lightning editions), Kessinger Publishing Co., and others. Without having examined the text in question, Mr Walker goes on to say that he suspects "that Frew may be relying on a non-standard, possibly sensational, New Age source for information that requires more careful handling." Brian Copenhaver, translator of the *Hermetica* for Cambridge University Press (the current definitive English translation), has this to say about the Scott edition of the *Hermetica*:

... Scott's volumes remain indispensable, and some of his textual insights were brilliantly right, others brilliantly wrong. His commentary is copious and learned, and his collection of testimonies an invaluable resource. ... Scott's four volumes are still in print, but his translation [of the *Hermetica*] is unreliable because it reflects his idiosyncratic texts [i.e. before better source texts were available] ... Anyone who intends to spend a long time with the *Hermetica* should certainly get to know both the Bude and Scott. (Copenhaver, Brian P. trans. and ed., *Hermetica*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. liii & lix-lx)

(Note: The quote from Thabit ibn Qurra is not in a part of the Scott edition with which Copenhaver takes issue, rather it is part of Scott's "copious and learned" commentary.)

Thanks in part to the many positive responses to my article, a survey expedition to the Harranian temple complex of Sumatar Harabesi is now being planned for the 2001 season. I appreciate and encourage those who have offered financial support for archaeological work relating to Harran. This long-ignored center of pagan survival may be revealed yet.

Don Frew
Berkeley, CA

Dear *Pomegranate* Readers,

The article and response by Joan Marler and Brian Hayden in the most recent issue of *The Pomegranate* [#10] was most interesting. Ms

Marler is perhaps being a bit disingenuous in her assertion that those who criticize the Gimbutas paradigm as 'fundamentalist' are simply using the word as a generic term of disapprobation for any strongly held theory or opinion. But although Dr Hayden's response, that fundamentalism is a methodology weighted in favour of pre-existing belief systems, is true as far as it goes, there is more to be said, particularly in regard to the current controversies surrounding Gimbutas and her followers.

Christian fundamentalism is a movement that began in the early years of the 20th century in reaction against the various schools of Biblical criticism that developed during the 19th century, as well as the evolutionary theories of that time. The term itself derives from a series of tracts by eminent evangelical leaders titled *The Fundamentals* which appeared beginning in 1909 and called for the strict adherence to (especially Protestant) orthodoxy in the matter of Biblical interpretation. Modern critics of fundamentalism now use the term to inveigh against those who behave as if the root myths of their religion are scientifically demonstratable facts, and all evidence to the contrary is generated by hostile, heretical, or even demonic agencies.

Many believe that the God of the Israelites created the world in six calendar days, that Jesus of Nazareth was borne of a woman who had never had sexual congress, or that a pan-European, ecumenical Goddess ruled over an Edenic pre-historic civilization that knew neither war, nor poverty, nor crime. But if these beliefs are considered to be empirical facts, then fundamentalism is being practiced. Christian fundamentalists are now setting up special colleges and universities so that believers can study 'creation science' and obtain more-or-less convincing degrees without being exposed to any contradictory evidence. The programs in 'archaeomythology' being offered at schools like CIIS are depressingly similar.



Those Goddess enthusiasts who doubt this assertion should avail themselves of the opportunity to read the many 'creationism' texts now available. The same sort of ad hominem arguments (which Hayden points out in Marler's writing), as well as the 'puffing' of the credentials of synchophanic writers (which your editor cites in the introduction to Dr O'Hara's article), are found in abundance. Overly confident leaps of logic (eg, that fossil remains of sea creatures found high in the mountains are proof of the Flood) will be more than familiar to careful readers of Gimbutas.

I was interested to note that Donna Reed (*Burning Times*, the movie), in an impropu speech at the American Academy of Religion's annual meeting in San Francisco two years ago, referred to Marija Gimbutas as Goddess spirituality's 'first martyred saint'. Gimbutas had been 'martyred', it seems, in spite of living to a ripe old age and dying in her own bed at the height of considerable fame and fortune, by an archaeological establishment which insisted on regularly overturning her theories. Apparently these theories are to be treated as sacred and immutable—but immutability is not a characteristic of scientific theory: to believe otherwise is to practice fundamentalism.

Ms Reed is now engaged, along with her colleague Starhawk, in raising what are reported to be considerable sums of money in order to make a movie about the life of Marija Gimbutas. Considering the level of scholarship apparent in Reed's previous work, it will be no surprise if the purpose of this project is the sanctification of the person of Gimbutas and the canonization of her writings, thereby simultaneously discrediting and demonizing her detractors.

Enthusiasts of the new Paganism might be wise to better understand the failings of the older religions, lest they succeed in replicating them.

Fr Joseph Lawrence
Miami, FL

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Continued from page 1

broader Pagan community. Many, however, have noticed that the tolerance which accompanies the acceptance of a wide range of beliefs and practices as valid and legitimate is often strained, sometimes past the breaking point. In *Pom* #1, Margerian Bridger ("Pagan Deism") pointed out that even within the intimacy of a Circle or Grove, peace is often purchased by the expedient of neither discussing nor asking specific questions about one another's actual beliefs. In this issue, Michael York proposes what may be a partial solution to this problem by offering a tentative working definition of 'Paganism'. Sîan Reid follows with an article about 'Witch wars' (which some of us believe might be better characterized as 'Witch spats'), and Leah Samul cites an instance in which one element of the community has intentionally decided, for ideological and political reasons, not to address the needs of another.

My own article, "Complex and Unpredictable Consequences", on the hazards of intentionally constructed myth, was originally written some years ago as the term paper for a graduate course called "Jewish Responses to Catastrophe". It was only upon my involvement in the current discussions about the historicity of the 'Burning Times' that I realized how many of the issues discussed in the paper were germane to this debate. I'm eager to assure our readers that the more astounding and disturbing observations cited herein represent the opinions of prominent and distinguished Jewish scholars, and have not been pulled 'out of thin air' in order to address a current issue.

We trust that these articles, along with the other shorter pieces in this issue, will engender considerable discussion among our readership.

Fritz Muntean





The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT

Readers' Forum

*Gibbons on the Great Witchhunt,
Pagan Police*

2

Ronald Hutton

Finding a Folklore:

An excerpt from *The Triumph of the Moon*

4

Jenny Blain

Contested Meanings:

Earth Religion Practitioners and the Everyday

15

David Nelson

The Many Faces of Kali

26

Dana Kramer-Rolls

Urth's Well:

A Proposed Northern Cosmology

39

Essay

Embarrassed by Our Origins

Cat Chapin-Bishop & Peter E. Bishop

48



The Pomegranate

Copyright

© 2000 *The Pomegranate*. Copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers.

The selection from *The Triumph of the Moon* by Ronald Hutton is copyright 1999 by Oxford University Press. It is published by arrangement with Oxford University Press, New York.

The Pomegranate

is published quarterly.

ISSN 1528-0268 refers to this Journal.

Subscriptions:

4 issues: US\$20 — 8 issues: US\$37.50
by surface mail anywhere.

Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds,
or Checks drawn on US banks to
The Pomegranate
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019

Subs email: antech@teleport.com

Submissions:

Editorial email: fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca
See the inside back cover for our
Call for Papers.

Ask us for our Writers' Guidelines,
or read it on our website:

www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/

Deadline for submissions:
the Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

Co-Editors:

Fritz Muntean

Diana Tracy

Associate Editor:

Chas S. Clifton

Editorial Assistance:

Melissa Hope

Kara Cunningham

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

We are delighted to offer our readers an excerpt from Ronald Hutton's new book, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. To readers familiar with his previous works, *Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles* and *Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*, Dr Hutton needs no introduction, and new readers are sure to find his ideas provocative and entertaining. We are delighted to see such a book published by the prestigious Oxford University Press. In addition to whatever effect this work might have on the Neopagan community, it has already made its mark on academia. Professor Hutton writes:

You probably haven't heard of the Dictionary of National Biography, which is a huge work in about fifty volumes, begun under Victoria and supposed to include potted lives of everybody who has contributed significantly to British history. It matters a lot to historians, but also to Establishment Brits. Every few decades it gets revised, and the latest revision is under way currently. A hundred top British historians were asked to submit names for possible inclusion. On an impulse I suggested Gerald Gardner and Alex Sanders. The official response was silence, the informal one a not unkindly comment that such people were of significance only to private groups. Last Friday I received a letter from the committee of Oxford dons who edit the work, informing me that following the publication of "*Triumph*" it was apparent that both men had made major contributions to national history, and so should be included. I was asked to write their entries, and shall. It is another step in the coming of age of Paganism in Britain.

Two other writers address the issue of who we are and (even more important) who we think we are. The husband-and-wife team of Cat Chapin-Bishop and Peter Bishop discuss,

in an essay commissioned by *The Pom*, the embarrassing skeletons in the collective closet of even today's more 'out and about' Pagans. Jenny Blain, who has previously contributed several articles on the practice of *seidhr* among today's heathenfolk, has graciously allowed us to publish the paper she presented to the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion last year. She follows a thread that has appeared in several of our previous issues by interviewing a wide variety of Neopagans about their actual belief systems, and exploring the ways in which these words and images relate to the respondents' everyday life experiences.

A fellow practitioner of the Northern Mysteries, Dana Kramer-Rolls, offers a paper originally presented at PantheaCon in San Francisco earlier this year, which is part textual scholarship and part theological discussion. Many scholars of folklore and related fields are now suggesting that with the demise of Frazer's theory of 'survivals' we may need to look beyond conventional Medieval sources—such as Snorri Sturluson—for the spiritual underpinnings of Neopagan beliefs and practices. In doing so, Dr Kramer-Rolls proposes a new model of Northern Cosmology, based on a metaphor of the Well of Wyrð and the World Tree. A shorter version of this article was published in *Idunna: A Journal of Northern Tradition* 42 (Winter 2000).

From another presentation at this year's PantheaCon, we are especially please to offer an excellent article on the Hindu goddess Kali. As Pagans, we often invoke Kali as a kind of generic third-world goddess, without paying too close attention to her complex and sometimes daunting iconography. David Nelson, a member of the Vedanta Society and a translator of sacred Hindu texts, provides us with a coherent and instructive view of Kali and her followers, past and present, East and West.

Persephone's hard-working minions.

The Pomegranate

Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.

KERR CUHULAIN WRITES:

To the Editors:

My thanks to Leah Samul for writing "Death Under Special Circumstances: An Exploration". As Samul pointed out in her article, Starhawk refused to recognise the many Pagans and Wiccans serving in police and military organisations because she did not want her Reclaiming Collective to be seen as "condoning a military mentality or police brutality". I'm a Wiccan police officer in Vancouver, BC, and I am personally offended that a person should stereotype me by assuming that I must be brutal simply because I am a law enforcement officer. I'm a peace officer, not a thug. My job involves managing the violence of others. Occasionally this requires the use of force.

Samul states in her article that she does not know how many Witches are on the police force. When I became fully public about my beliefs a little over a decade ago, there were only two other officers who had done the same. Yet at my public lectures I encountered many more who were not able, at that time and place, to be public themselves. I am happy to report that this situation has improved. I know of quite a few Pagan cops in both the US and Canada, and at least a dozen of these are now publicly Pagan.

Samul is right that police deserve a special category. Not only are we in a dangerous profession, but police work is also a high stress occupation. It isn't just the deadly force incidents that the cop in the street has to worry about. It's the constant strain of vigilance, never knowing if the vehicle you have just pulled over is the one that contains an armed and desperate person. Samul is also correct to point out that deadly force incidents are very traumatic. As a former Emergency Response Team officer and a current child abuse investigator, I can tell you that you never forget a traumatic incident, and you should take advantage of whatever help you can get—including that from your religious community—to come to terms with it and get on with your life.

Samul points out that "even a short ritual can greatly facilitate grounding the emotions and putting them to rest". I agree. She goes on to say that baths or showers should be part of the ritual. I agree with this too, but I would add a word of caution. I have heard too many counsellors tell stressed out field workers that all they need to do after a traumatic day is light candles and have a warm bath. Part of the reason that police departments have mandatory de-briefing sessions following incidents is to allow the participants to express their feelings to others, who understand the demands of the job. As Leah points out, you can't just take a week off and get on with life. Stress is cumulative, and a cop like me needs to take daily steps to deal with it, lest it cause all manner of problems and illness down the road. In this matter as well, the support of my religious community is always welcome.

Thanks again to you, Leah, for addressing this issue and recognising those of us out there who work to keep us all safe.

*Kerr Cuhulain
Vancouver, BC*

EDITORS' NOTE:

Kerr Cuhulain has been a police officer with the Vancouver Police Department for 23 years. During this time he has been assigned to the Emergency Response Team and the Gang Crime Unit. Kerr is currently a child abuse and neglect investigator. He writes about child abuse investigative issues for Law & Order magazine and was a presenter at the International Conference on Children Exposed to Domestic Violence. Kerr has lectured across North America to educate law enforcement officers and the public about the Craft. He is a consultant to law enforcement agencies across North America on 'occult' matters, and was active for years publicly debunking urban legends about satanic conspiracies and abuse. Kerr has contributed greatly to the welfare and safety of all Pagans—'To Serve and Protect', in Kerr's case, has gone far beyond simply managing violence in the streets.

Kerr Cuhulain is the author of The Law Enforcement Guide to Wicca (Horned Owl Publishing, 3rd edition 1997).

His new book, Wiccan Warrior (Llewellyn, 2000), was released at the beginning of March.

JENNY GIBBONS WRITES:

Dear Pomegranate,

I wanted to comment on Max Dashu's response to my article on the Great Hunt. At first glance, the data that Ms Dashu gathers appears to contradict the history of witchcraft that I presented. In fact, it doesn't—when it's taken in context. For the most part, her article elaborates information I summarized in a few sentences.

I mentioned that all European communities appear to have hunted witches in medieval and pre-Christian times. The medieval laws and cases that Dashu cites are exactly the sort of thing I was referring to. However, we cannot understand the significance of this evidence if we ignore its historical context.

The Christian trials and laws which Dashu details are exactly the same as their pagan predecessors. Because it does not discuss witch-hunting in the Roman Empire, her essay gives the false impression that witch-hunting arose with Christianity. It did not. Witchcraft was illegal in pagan Rome and Greece, and witches were persecuted. As a matter of fact, the largest witch-crazes we know of occurred in Rome in 184, 180-79, and 153 BCE. (*Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, p. 254). These enormous crazes were four times as lethal as the largest panics of the Great Hunt, killing an estimated 5,000 men and women in four years. The laws and persecutions that Dashu mentions are terrible—in an absolute sense. But they are not any different from what had happened in the past. We cannot understand Christianity's contribution to the persecution unless we understand what came before it.

A second, critical issue is the definition of 'witchcraft'. These laws prohibit 'witchcraft'. Yet if we do not understand what 'witchcraft' meant to the law-writers, we cannot understand what these laws were meant to prevent. Taken out of context, the laws give the erroneous impression that the authorities were busily hunting down wise-women and traditional healers. However, as I mentioned in my article, up until the 14th century most European societies defined a 'witch' as a person who harmed people with magick. Look closely at any medieval trial, and you will see that it centers on baneful magick and cursing. 'Witch' does not mean the same thing to us as it did to early Europeans. These laws are meant to prohibit magickal crimes. And so when we interpret medieval laws, we must be careful not to project our views of witchcraft onto early materials. The same flaw mars Dashu's discussion of the Inquisition's role in the Great Hunt. I mentioned that the Inquisition hunted

continued on page 55

Finding a Folklore

by Ronald Hutton
University of Bristol

This excerpt from Chapter 7 of Prof Hutton's new book The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft has been edited slightly from the original, working around the personal background details of the various figures discussed in the text. Lacunae are clearly indicated by ellipses. Diligent readers are enthusiastically encouraged to buy the book in order to enjoy this material in greater depth. Triumph of the Moon is copyright 1999 by Oxford University Press and is published by arrangement with Oxford University Press, New York.

In 1996 I published a history of seasonal festivities and rituals in Britain which opened by questioning the view of the subject most commonly propagated by folklorists for most of the 20th century.¹ I identified four main components to this. First, it characterized the only interesting calendar customs as rural, different in quality to the observances of towns and cities. Second, it regarded them as essentially timeless and immemorial, relics of a distant, often pagan, past, surviving like living fossils in the static world of English country people. Third, those people were themselves treated as inarticulate, having long lost or distorted any sense of the meaning of their customary behaviour, which could be recovered only by the research of scholarly outsiders. Fourth, this perception was infused with a wider sense of the countryside as a place of charm and of mystery, resistant to the changes of the modern epoch and repre-

senting to some extent an antidote to their more troubling aspects.

In the course of the book I repeatedly made the point that this construction of calendar customs has been rejected by folklorists since the 1970s, sometimes with savage criticism. I supported that process of revision, by presenting an alternative view of the ritual year as the object of continual evolution and redevelopment, involving both town and country, which adapted its rituals to the changing needs of the social groups concerned in them. In one part of the conclusion I suggested that further study was needed to answer the obvious question of why it was that so many English scholars between 1870 and 1970 were disposed to view the countryside as a timeless place in which immemorial practices were continued from a blind sense of tradition, and in particular practices that were held to be authentic traces of ancient pagan religion. The present chapter will attempt to provide such an answer.

Two other writers have already considered the problem, in different ways, during the past few years. One is a folklorist, Gillian Bennett, who has faced it head-on, by asking why her late Victorian and Edwardian predecessors were so obsessed with the notion of pagan survivals.² She found the answer in the example set by the flagship science of mid-Victorian England, the newly emerged one of geology. Integrated with the equally novel theory of evolution, this provided a view of the Earth's past as recorded in layer after layer of strata, the fossils of which provided evidence of the ascending scale of life-forms. Applied to the development of human culture, the geological model suggested that the minds of all humans worked in essentially the same way, but had developed at different rates, according to culture and class, along the same linear track. Folk customs, therefore, could represent cultural fossils, left over from the earlier stages of civilized societies, and a comparative study of

them could provide a general theory of religious development for the human race. They could in fact act as the equivalent of textual evidence for pre-literate peoples.

This approach was pioneered in Britain in

survivals. As the agricultural customs which he recorded were inevitably concerned overwhelmingly with the produce of humans, livestock, and fields, he tended to overemphasize ancient European religions as concerned with

Wilhelm Mannhardt ... tended to overemphasize ancient European religions as concerned with fertility rites, and made a leap beyond the evidence to assert that they had been focused upon the concept of animating spirits of vegetation.

the 1870s and 1880s by Sir Edward Tylor, and popularized from 1890 onward by Sir James Frazer. It was especially taken up in the 1890s by the leading figures of the newly founded Folk-Lore Society, to whom it promised a way of rescuing the study of popular belief and observances from mere dilettantism and elevating it to the status of a real science. As Dr Bennett has also shown, this promise failed, as folklorists fell through the gap between the emerging disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, both of which found the comparative method and the notion of social fossils, deeply flawed by the 1920s.

Gillian Bennett has thus admirably laid out the intellectual framework which supported the concept of folk customs as pagan survivals, and only two additions to her work need to be made for present purposes. The first is to note that the framework concerned was also an outgrowth of German Romanticism, which in its quest for a unifying national identity generated a new interest in rural culture as a promising hunting-ground for a 'definitive' Germanity. This interest inspired the Prussian scholar Wilhelm Mannhardt to make the first systematic collection of contemporary peasant customs, between 1860 and 1880, and to develop from it the first full-blown version of the theory of

fertility rites, and made a leap beyond the evidence to assert that they had been focused upon the concept of animating spirits of vegetation.³ Mannhardt functioned as a forerunner to Tylor, and a major influence on Frazer.

Dr Bennett's work also resoundingly begged the question of why the notion of pagan survivals continued to grow in popularity, and was sustained by folklorists, even after that framework had collapsed inside the academy. Here an important insight is provided by the other author to touch upon the subject in recent years; the classicist Mary Beard. Her subject was the most ambitious and celebrated of all the works that attempted to create a history of religion by using the comparative method, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which went through three successive and ever larger editions between 1890 and 1915. She suggested that to Sir James himself, the book had represented a journey through an underworld of belief, in which the familiar rituals of the British countryside were integrally linked with savage and foreign rites in an exciting and unsettling way.⁴

An addition which might be proposed to this picture is that Frazer's own golden bough was the light of human reason, guiding him and his readership through primeval chaos and

darkness. The hidden sub-text of both of the greatest British exponents of the comparative method, Tylor and Frazer, was to discredit religion in general, and Christianity in particular, in order to assist the progress of humanity towards a more perfect rationalism. ...

believed in a dying and reviving god, who represented the animating spirit of vegetation postulated by Mannheim and had been represented in human form by sacred kings, who were killed after a set term or when their power of mind or body failed. Frazer's implication was that the figure of Christ had been an

... the theory of survivals itself ... had been a tactic developed by 16th century Protestant polemicists to discredit Roman Catholic modes of worship ... [and] to condemn forms of popular revelry ... by suggesting that they were relics of heathendom.

[Tylor] and his fellow rationalist Andrew Lang (like Frazer, a refugee from Scottish Presbyterianism) issued a joint declaration of intent to 'theologians all to expose'.⁵ Tylor's evangelical roots were never displayed more clearly than in his adoption of the theory of survivals itself, for although its scholarly application may have taken shape in Germany, in its crude form it had been a tactic developed by 16th century Protestant polemicists to discredit Roman Catholic modes of worship. The device consisted of attempting to demonstrate that most of the ceremonies of the medieval Church had derived from pagan practices. It was extended by the same kind of writer to condemn forms of popular revelry which the reformers wished to suppress as immoral and disorderly, by suggesting that they were relics of heathendom.⁶ Tylor was a puritan preacher, recast as a Victorian liberal humanist.

The case of Frazer is more complex. On the one hand, there is no doubt that during his undergraduate years he became a confirmed atheist or agnostic, and that one of the purposes of *The Golden Bough* was to discredit Christianity.⁷ The most important argument of the whole work was that ancient peoples had

outgrowth from this body of (to him erroneous and unnecessary) belief, and he may well have intended it to be the more effective in that it was never made blatantly. ...

In fairness to both men, it must be pointed out that not only were their attitudes typical of the intellectual culture of their place and time, but that they took care to emphasize that humanity represented a single family, of which barbarism and savagery were the childhood. Tylor in particular urged the need to take seriously, and to study, the ways of tribal peoples, because by this process more advanced nations were learning something about themselves.⁸ However patronizing, the language of these scholars was still a liberal and humanitarian one. By contrast, the opposed contemporary discourse which postulated the existence of a golden age of wisdom in the remote past, represented by a single state or people (such as Atlantis), had a more dangerous potential for racism and authoritarianism. ...

The literary impact of *The Golden Bough*, the reviews given to it in popular newspapers,⁹ and the use made of it by later folklorists (to be considered below), all testify that it inspired, in varying proportions, a prurient, sensuous, and

romantic pleasure. Tylor and Frazer arguably did succeed in doing further damage to the status of Christianity, but fostered not so much an enhanced respect for rationalism and progress as a delight in the primitive and the unreasonable. It is time to commence a systematic analysis of why this was so.

The first and most obvious component in the phenomenon is the tremendous idealization of rural England which commenced at the end of the eighteenth century and reached an apogee between 1880 and 1930; indeed, it might be called a plateau, as it has not diminished significantly since. It has been well studied in recent years by Raymond Williams, Martin Wiener, Jan Marsh, W.J. Keith, Alun Howkins, and Gillian Bennett.¹⁰ The shift of emotion involved can be attributed to a single and simple process; that in 1810 about 80 per cent of English people lived in the countryside, and by 1910 about 80 per cent lived in towns. The balance tipped neatly around 1850, and to observers in the late 19th century the speed and scale of this unprecedented change promised a 20th century England consisting of one smoking conurbation from coast to coast.

The new mass urban and industrialized lifestyle was condemned not just because it was frighteningly novel and because its setting was perceived as being ugly, but because it was supposed to be physically and mentally unhealthy. The countryside became credited with all the virtues which were the obverse of those vices. It was not simply regarded as being more beautiful and healthy, but as being stable, dependable, rooted, and timeless. Its working people became credited with a superior wisdom, founded upon generations of living in close contact with nature and inheriting a cumulative hidden knowledge. This organic, immemorial lore was viewed as both a comforting force of resistance to the dramatic and unsettling changes of the 19th century and as a

potential force for redemption. It was a remarkable revolution in perception, for hitherto rustics had usually been portrayed by leaders of literary taste as the principal reservoir of ignorance, blind superstition, brutal manners, and political reaction, within which towns formed islands of liberalism, education, progress, and refinement. Suddenly the urban centres had turned into monsters, destroying the world about them and spreading ill health, pollution, ugliness, and social instability. The shrinking and depopulating countryside—especially the soft arable and downland landscape of southern England—had become the epitome of continuity, community and social harmony.

By the second half of the 19th century, mere contact with the open country could be represented as an act of grace. Between 1878 and 1880 a Londoner called Richard Jeffries turned out five popular books on the delights of rusticity. One of them, *The Amateur Poacher*, concluded with the appeal to 'get out of these indoor narrow modern days, where twelve hours have somehow become shortened, into the sunlight and pure wind. A something the ancients called divine can be found and felt there still.' Yes indeed: as illustrated earlier, many writer of the time called that 'something' Pan, while others spoke of Mother Nature or Mother Earth. Most who worked in the genre did not personify it, but still wrote of the rural landscape with the same fervent sense of an animating spirit. As Jan March has put it: 'Love of Nature helped many late Victorians to dispense with God gradually, as it were, without losing their sense of immanent divinity. Others, who continued to believe, found in Nature and Nature poetry an expression of quasi-religious feeling that fed their spiritual needs'.¹¹ ...

It is important not to overstate the shortcomings of the 'rural myth' or to underestimate the utility of the work which it helped to

inspire. Most of the individuals who collected folklore in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain were not starry-eyed Londoners but people rooted in the localities about which they wrote, and integrated into them. The vast quantities of information which they gathered represent a major primary source for social history, and although by the standards of later scholarship it is usually badly deficient in context and presentation, it is often remarkably comprehensive; the collectors stockpiled hundreds of pieces of evidence that the 'folk' at the time were often far from being as wise, patient, good-humoured, or perceptive as the myth suggested. Jeffries, Hudson, and the other writers to romanticize the countryside also presented much closely observed and accurate detail about it. The problem is, rather, one of interpretation; that the meaning of what these collectors and authors recorded was determined according to a complex of emotions and preconceptions which now appear very questionable. Even those who lived in rural areas were often affected by these, partly because they were responding to a market and to a dominant intellectual metropolitan culture, and partly because they were reacting to the same social and economic processes. The most striking case is probably that of the Edwardian folk-song collector Alfred Williams. He was both rural in origin and working class, being brought up in a village and later making his living in a factory; yet when he published his collections, he romanticized country life as much as any other writer of the time. In the words of his biographer, he 'seemed to possess an ability to ignore anything which was not in keeping with his rose-coloured rural scene'.¹²

At first sight it is still by no means obvious why this sentiment should have attached itself to the notion of *pagan* survivals. After all, Medieval and Tudor England (the period most commonly designated 'merrie') was formally a

Christian society, and its parish churches remain as enduring and often beloved components of the modern rural landscape. They were certainly more constant, solid, and obvious symbols of the communality and stability of the country people of Chaucer's, Shakespeare's, and Victoria's ages alike than maypoles and group dances. The characters of *The Canterbury Tales*, the Robin Hood ballads, and the Arthurian cycle are all presented as Christians of varying degrees of education and devotion. On closer inspection, reasons for the apparent conundrum rapidly appear. The simplest and most obvious is that at no time after 1870 was British intellectual culture prone to a large-scale reaction in favour of established religion. The dominant trends were all in the opposite direction. An equally important, and more subtle, factor in the situation lay in the very nature of a conception of rural England as an organic continuum with ancient roots, preserving timeless wisdom. To foster this, all major upheavals had to be airbrushed out of the picture. The Reformation was one, and the conversion to Christianity another. The old religions were part of the deep humus of experience out of which the eternal England had grown.

Such a notion was articulated successively by three of the early leaders of the Folk-Lore Society. Sidney Hartland got the ball rolling in the first issue of the society's periodical, in 1890, by interpreting the legend of Lady Godiva as an example of a pagan fertility rite later converted into an occasion for Christian civic pride.¹³ The following year, Sir Lawrence Gomme endorsed this opinion, pointing out that most folk tales and fairy stories did not have an obvious religious content and arguing from that (more dubiously) that they therefore had to be pre-Christian. In 1892 he repeated this theory, and made a further extrapolation from it, without actual research—that English commoners remained essentially pagan until

the 17th century, when they were finally converted to Christianity by 'Puritan' evangelism. In his view, therefore, until then the new religion had been understood, and accepted, only by the social elite. To Gomme, the process of conversion was also one of assimilation, the old rites continuing beside the established faith in

son, a medical man and keen local antiquary. In a pair of enthusiastically researched and densely illustrated books, published by university presses, he portrayed an English rural landscape of ageless landmarks—yew trees, trackways, and dew ponds—in which virtually every parish church stands upon a former

... it is still by no means obvious why this sentiment should have attached itself to the notion of pagan survivals. After all, Medieval and Tudor England (the period most commonly designated 'merrie') was formally a Christian society

the form of customary practices. His attitude to the matter was a logical extension of his vision of the English village community, as a unit which 'originated at a stage of development long prior to the political stage' and so was 'of the nature of a survival from prehistoric times'. Thus it incorporated in its beliefs and activities those of 'cave dwellers, hill men, lake dwellers, dolmen builders'.¹⁴

In 1896 his successor as president of the society, Edward Clodd, produced a complementary view of the same theme by asserting that many medieval churches had been built on or near former pagan shrines, providing 'unbroken evidence of the pagan foundation which itself resting upon barbaric bedrock, upholds the structures of classical and Christian faiths'. He extended the message of continuity from the physical buildings to the activities within them, by claiming that many Catholic rituals had been developed from those of the older religions; as evidence for this he drew directly upon the invectives of early modern Protestants, cited above, and in particular upon those of Thomas Hobbes.¹⁵ The ideas of both Gomme and Clodd were developed in the next two decades by Walter John-

pagan shrine, and both religious rituals and secular customs echo the same pre-Christian past.¹⁶

Between the 1920s and 1940s, the same themes were central to the popular works of Harold Massingham. To him, the ancient religions had inculcated a mystical sense of union with nature, and Christianity had added a superior system of social ethics, so that the two combined, symbolized by the superimposition of churches upon pagan holy places, represented a perfect system of faith. This he evoked, against the 'utter darkness and savagery' which he discerned in modern urbanized culture.¹⁷ He coined the slogan: 'Let the Church come back to earth'.¹⁸ Like Gomme and Johnson, he saw the peculiar merit, charm, and power of the English rural landscape as lying in its continuity; in his portrait of the Cotswolds, he traced not merely the region's religion by its social system, economy, and sports, in an unbroken line from the builders of the neolithic long barrows.¹⁹

During the same period such sentiments continued to be expressed by leading folklorists. In 1933, R.R. Marett informed the English Folk Dance and Song Society that folk

customs (at least as interpreted by people like himself) represented 'the higher syntheses that transcends the old, narrow-minded antimony between pagan and Christian modes of hallowing the message of the spring'.²⁰ Feeling of this sort lay behind much of the literary and popular reception of *The Golden Bough*, discussed

ritual monuments, Knowlton, Rudston, and Taplow being the outstanding examples. At the present day, however, the question of whether most stood upon ancient holy places if still open and likely to remain so; specifically, only a very small minority of churches examined by archaeologists have proved to reveal any sign of

It is also absolutely correct that some British folk customs have descended directly from pagan rituals ...The majority, however, are either of doubtful ancient provenance or (more often) developed in the Middle Ages or later.

above. As said, by placing Christ in a context of dying and resurrecting pagan deities, Frazer had hoped to discredit the whole package of religious ideas. Instead, as some of the literary use of the *Bough* indicates, he actually gave some solace to those disillusioned with traditional religion, by allowing them to conflate the figure of Jesus with the natural world, to produce a kinder, greener variety of Christianity. As shown above, the same exercise was simultaneously being carried out by turning Pan into a Christ-figure, but Frazer's animating vegetation spirit provided an easier and less challenging means of accomplishing it.

It should be stressed that many of these ideas rested upon some truth; the problem is that in every case they went far beyond its bounds. There were certainly gods venerated in the ancient world who were believed to die and return, but they were few and localized. Only under the Roman Empire did one of these (that of Attys) develop into a widespread mystery religion, and this attracted a relatively tiny number of adherents; it may, indeed, have been influenced, or even inspired, by Christianity. It is likewise a fact that some English parish churches are associated with pre-Christian

pre-Christian activity on the site, but it is not demonstrable that pagan worship would necessarily have left the sort of traces which archaeology can detect. What must be said is that the confident statements of writers such as Clodd and Johnson have not been borne out by investigation.²¹ It is also absolutely correct that some British folk customs have descended directly from pagan rituals, such as the fires of Beltane and Midsummer Eve, and the giving of presents and decoration of homes with greenery at midwinter. The majority, however, are either of doubtful ancient provenance or (more often) developed in the Middle Ages or later.²² The empirical evidence, therefore, is not sufficient explanation for the excitement and dogmatic certainty with which the concepts of pagan origins and of essential continuity were argued.

Nor, however, is the 'rural myth' itself. Even the 'green' Christianity of a writer such as Massingham did not much interest the bulk of folklorists between 1870 and 1970. Their preoccupation was firmly with the old religions which underlay later civilization. Proponents of the theory of continuity were more likely to distinguish paganism and Christian elements

than to celebrate the blending of them, and the contrast was rarely to the advantage of the latter. In 1894, Gomme himself told the Folk-Lore Society that it should 'educate' the public 'into understanding that there is sometimes more real humanity in a touch of genuine paganism than in some of the platitudes that at present do duty for higher things'.²³ The society's president was himself using the language of radical neopaganism so strident in the early 1890s [Prof Hutton has addressed this issue earlier in the book]. Moreover, the kind of paganism which the folklorists were seeking was not the familiar kind, of the Greek and Roman classics, of Olympian deities, pillared temples, and Homeric hymns. It was, rather, a world of throbbing drums, fertility rites, ritual dances, painted bodies, and deities who represented primary cosmological forces. What was really going on?

What I think to be the answer was perceived by another modern scholar who made a consideration of *The Golden Bough*, and indeed directly provoked that by Mary Beard, quoted above. This was Edmund Leach, back in 1961, who suggested that the popularity of the *Bough* derived from the fact that, before Freud, Frazer 'was already suggesting the existence of a Dionysian, sex-inspired, primitive undercurrent sapping at the roots of conventional Victorian society'.²⁴ Such a view is certainly supported by the bulk of the literary use made of Frazer's work, mentioned above, and also by the reviews of it in newspapers and journals; one of the first of the latter, in *The Daily News* on 2 June 1890, commented that until Frazer wrote, 'we never knew how heathenish we are nor how old our heathenism is'.

This does, I believe, get to the heart of the matter, but to concentrate upon *The Golden Bough* while making such a point is at once to flatter and to blame Frazer unduly. One crucially important element in his vision was that

he was himself a classicist, in the forefront of what was at his time still the most prestigious of the humanities. As such, his views were only part of a general development in his discipline which took place between 1890 and 1910, running parallel to that within folklore studies and essentially at one with it. It consisted of the adoption of the notion that before the opening of history, and the veneration of the familiar pantheon of deities, the ancient Greeks had worshipped a single female deity. This phenomenon was considered in the second chapter of this present work, but it needs now to be set in a wider context. It was crucial to the Edwardian classicists' view of the ancient world that the difference in deities was also one of quality of religion; the historical world of the Olympians had been that of reason and philosophy, while the older and much more mysterious time of the Goddess had been one of darker, earthier, and more ecstatic rites, concerned with magic and propitiation. It was a mirror image of the vision of the folklorists, except that to the latter the succeeding, familiar, and civilized religion was not classical Greek paganism, but Christianity.

This concept was adopted with considerable speed in the first decade of the 20th century, although presaged in the 1890s, and Frazer's University of Cambridge was central to its development. In particular, it was the hallmark of a group of scholars gathered around Jane Ellen Harrison, who has been mentioned earlier. Her own attitude to the ancient world was complex. She was careful to declare her disapproval of paganism: 'I am not an archaeologist—still less anthropologist—the "beastly devices of the heathen" weary and disgust me.' She also described herself as a 'Puritan' and grew to admire Freud only by persevering in the hope that 'below all this sexual mud was something big and real'.²⁵ ...

Of [Harrison's] own Cambridge friends and colleagues, Gilbert Murray and Arthur Bernard

Cook both accepted the model of a female-centred religion of magic and unreason preceding that of classical Greece, at once repulsive and fascinating.²⁶ It was taken up at Oxford by Sir Arthur Evans, who made the Minoans into the exemplars of such a religion, and in France

her that the same ancient religion had survived in secret up until her own time. She did not belong to any magical groups herself; somebody who knew the world of British occultism well, A.E. Waite, accused her of making use of 'cultist fictions'. Whatever the source of her

same phenomenon, of small colonial elites perched upon large native populations which frequently appeared to the former as savage, contemptible, and frightening. Moving into the realm of religious experience, we find the emotional impact of the theory of evolution, with its revelations that humans are umbilically connected to the beasts. Jumping into that of creative literature, we find these themes treated repeatedly in the best-selling novels and short stories of the age: the fear of the animal or demon within us, of the subversion of respectable society by inward enemies, of the hidden forces of destruction and unreason beneath the veneer of civilization. ...

Freud's construction of the id, ego, and superego was to a great extent a rationalization of them, and the whole developing science of psychology might be regarded as another consequence (rather than a cause) of these anxieties. They represented an interlocking set of visions which were at once terrifying and alluring. The dark, unreasonable forces beneath and inside rational, science-based, progressive modern culture were certainly frightening to the representatives of the latter. The guilt and self-hatred which were often also experienced by the more sensitive of them could make those forces seem potentially redemptive, a means of restoring humanity and truth to a civilization cankered by hypocrisy and injustice. This instinct harmonized with the sense of the redemptive power of the countryside, discussed above.

Such a complex of emotions is quite visible among the scholars who have been considered in the present chapter. ... All of them were discovering, imagining, and constructing images of a culture which was the antitheses of the civilization to which they belonged, which had preceded it, and upon which it rested; and which like the bestial nature of humanity, could also be said to be built into it, with a potential to break forth again. This was one aspect of the

most pervasive dream—or nightmare—of late Victorian and Edwardian modernity.

NOTES:

1. *Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year In Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1996).
 2. Gillian Bennett, 'Geologists and Folklorists: Cultural Evolution and the Science of Folklore', *Folklore* 105 (1994), 25-37.
 3. Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Roggenwolf und Rogenhund* (Danzig, 1866), *Die Korn damonen* (Berlin, 1868), *Antike Wald- und Feldkulte* (Berlin, 1877), and *Mythologische Forschungen* (Strasburg, 1884).
 4. Mary Beard, 'Frazer, Leach and Virgil: The Popularity (and Unpopularity) of *The Golden Bough*', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992), 203-24.
 5. Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology 1885-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 78-9.
 6. Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 144-5.
 7. Robert Ackerman, *J.G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1-32, 164-7.
 8. See especially Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (1871), vol. II, 443-53.
 9. Many of which are collected in Trinity College, Cambridge, Frazer MS 22.
 10. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), ch. 21; W.J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition* (Toronto University Press, 1975); Martin Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge University Press, 1981); Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in England from 1880 to 1914* (London: Quartet, 1982); Alun Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 62-88; Gillian Bennett, 'Folklore Studies and the English Rural Myth', *Rural History* 4 (1993), 77-91.
- Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1950-1940', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th series 7 (1997), 155-76, has argued forcefully against an overstatement of this posi-

... the kind of paganism which the folklorists were seeking was not the familiar kind, ... of Olympian deities, pillared temples, and Homeric hymns.

It was, rather, a world of throbbing drums, fertility rites, ... painted bodies, and deities who represented primary cosmological forces.

by Joseph Dechelette, both of whom have been discussed earlier. All these had endorsed the idea by 1914; when Lewis Farnell wrote a student textbook on ancient Greek beliefs in 1920, it was represented as established fact.²⁷ In 1910 another classical scholar, John Cuthbert Lawson, provided a perfect imitation of the work of the folklorists by studying that primal religion in the light of modern Greek peasant customs; in a circular process, the modern customs were used to reconstruct the ancient rituals, and then themselves interpreted according to the significance which those reconstructed rituals were supposed to have possessed.²⁸

Parallel work was carried on between 1894 and 1920 by England's leading scholar of the Arthurian legend, Jessie Weston. Directly inspired by the work of the Folk-Lore Society and the Cambridge classicists, who argued that the main motifs of the legend had descended directly from a pagan mystery religion concerned (in Frazerian fashion) with fertility. Unlike the authors cited above, she supplied no source references and at times openly stated that the vital information was provide by nameless friends with occult knowledge who assured

ideas, they won her a British Academy prize and an honorary doctorate of letters; she seemed to have shown that the greatest literature of medieval England, like its religion, represented a thin Christian screen overlying an essential paganism.²⁹ Such a vision of the past transcended religious loyalties; Harrison and Murray were romantic agnostics, Cook an evangelical Protestant, and Weston a devout conservative Anglican. It was the common property of a generation.

Once again, it must be asked whence it came. Intellectual lineages do not help here; it is easy to cite the probable influence of Nietzsche or Freud, but thinkers such as these were more part of the same mental world than responsible for it. A possible answer can only be achieved by moving sideways, across area after area of late Victorian and Edwardian intellectual culture. Upon entering that of class relations, we find the obsessive fear of a newly expanded and enriched European social elite, balanced precariously on top of a comparatively impoverished and underprivileged, rapidly growing, and potentially dangerous proletariat. Looking at the enormous contemporary expansion of European tropical empires, we find the



- tion, suggesting that the 'rural myth' was the preoccupation of only a section of society, and not dominant in England in general. His words are well taken, and do not diminish my own case, which depends only on the belief that this 'myth' was prevalent in a significant part of the literary culture, and came under no direct attack or opposition at this time. Likewise, John Ashton, 'Beyond Survivalism: Regional Folkloristics in Late-Victorian England', *Folklore* 108 (1997), 19-24, has reminded us that provincial England contained a number of important folklore collectors who did not share the contemporary preoccupation with folk customs as pagan survivals. This does not alter the fact that they did not articulate any alternative theory to challenge the latter, and that 'survivalism' was dominant among the metropolitan scholars who presided over the movement.
11. Marsh, *Back to the Land*, 35.
 12. Ivor Clissold, 'Alfred Williams, Song Collector', *Folk Music Journal* 1.5 (1969), 293-300.
 13. E. Sidney Hartland, 'Peeping Tom and Lady Godiva', *Folk-Lore* 1 (1890), 225.
 14. G.L. Gomme, 'Opening Address', *Folk-Lore* 2 (1891), 5-11; 'Opening Address', *Folk-Lore* 3 (1892), 4.12; *The Village Community* (1890), 2-4.
 15. E. Clodd, 'Presidential Address', *Folk-Lore* 7 (1896), 47-8, 56.
 16. Walter Johnson, *Folk-Memory or the Continuity of British Archaeology* (Oxford University Press, 1908), and *By-Ways in British Archaeology* (Cambridge University Press, 1912).
 17. H.J. Massingham, *Downland Man* (London: Cape, 1926), 327, *The English Countryman* (London: Batsford, 1942), 11-14, and *Remembrance: An Autobiography* (London: Batsford, 1944), 49-68.
 18. H.J. Massingham, *The Tree of Life* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1942), 210.
 19. H.J. Massingham, *Wold Without End* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1932), 40, 47, 86-90, 156, 215. See also his *The English Countryside* (London: Batsford, 1939), 1.
 20. R.R. Marett, 'Survival and Revival', *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 1.2 (1933), 74.
 21. For the latest survey of the evidence see *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future*, eds. John Blair and Carol Pyrah (Council for

British Archaeology Research Report 104, 1996), 6-12, 53.

22. Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, *passim*.
23. G.L. Gomme, 'Opening Address', *Folk-Lore* 5 (1894), 69.
24. Edmund R. Leach, 'Golden Bough or Gilded Twig?', *Daedalus* (Spring 1961), 383.
25. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Reminiscences of a Student's Life* (London: Hogarth, 1925), 81-4.
26. Gilbert Murray, *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), 16-18, 45-6; Arthur Bernard Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 1914), vol. 1, 776-80. See Robert Ackerman, 'The Cambridge Group: Origins and Composition', and Robert L. Fowler, 'Gilbert Murray: Four (five) Stages of Greek Religion', in *The Cambridge Ritualists Reconsidered*, ed. Calder, 1-19 and 79-95.
27. Louis Richard Farnell, *Outline History of Greek Religion* (London: Duckworth, 1920), 16-36.
28. John Cuthbert Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals* (Cambridge, 1910).
29. The best study is Janet Grayson, 'In Quest of Jessie Weston', *Arthurian Literature* 11 (1992), 1-80.

*According to the liner notes,
Triumph of the Moon is 'the first full-scale
scholarly study of the only religion England has
ever given the world; that of modern pagan
witchcraft', and 'presents an authoritative
insight into a hitherto little-known aspect
of modern social history'.*

*Professor of History at the University of
Bristol, Ronald Hutton now has ten admired
books and two PhDs to his credit. Three of these
books, The Pagan Religions of the Ancient
British Isles (Oxford, 1991), The Rise and
Fall of Merry England (Oxford, 1994) and
Stations of the Sun: A History of the
Ritual Year in Britain (Oxford, 1996),
are highly recommended to our readers.*

Contested Meanings: Earth Religion Practitioners and the Everyday

by Jenny Blain
Dalhousie University

*An earlier version of this paper was given at
the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion
annual meeting, Boston, November 1999.*

ABSTRACT:

In many 'traditional' cultures, religion and magic are not easily separated from people's everyday existence. Today, an increasing number of people within North America are drawn to some form of earth-centred spirituality, whether as solitary practitioners or members of Neopagan circles, Wicca covens, Heathen kindreds or Druid groves. For many of these people, religion and spirituality do not form a closed category of their experience: they inform, and are formed by, events of their lives as distinct or diverse as childbirth, gardening, social protest, sexual expression, and everyday occupations of work and leisure.

In investigating discourse and practice, the paper explores some of the sources of knowledge, examples, or inspiration referred to by informants, and attempts to link these with their everyday lives. Practitioners draw on often-contradictory words, images, and solitary and community ritual practice, in constructing 'truths' and identities for themselves as spiritual beings in a postmodern world. Practitioners seek 'holistic', unfragmented lives, but may find contradictions between personal expressions of spirituality and workplace restrictions or family practices and beliefs: their worlds are not seamless, and their quests for empowerment may meet contestation. Discourse and practice may rely on assumptions

that are totalising or essentialist. Yet the focus of the paper acts as a reminder that the everyday can be magical, and everyday actions, transformatory.

An increasing number of people today, within western societies, are drawn to 'earth-centred' religions. The term covers a wide range of meaning. The most visible such religion, at least from a scan of bookstore shelves, is Wicca. However, the variety of expressions of what otherwise gets called 'pagan' or 'neopagan' belief includes those who draw on North American indigenous spiritualities for inspiration, Greco-Roman mythology and pantheon, African belief systems, European 'Goddess' imagery or 'Celtic' or 'Nordic' mythologies, Siberian or circumpolar shamanistic practices and a whole host more. 'Earth-centred' or 'Earth-religion' is hard to define and indeed in this paper I am attempting to work towards such a definition (or at least an approach that indicates a 'fuzzy' bounding of the term).

In this paper I set out to explore 'the sacred in the secular' in the discourses of long-standing adherents of earth-religions. The paper starts from where people are, with the words of ordinary practitioners, interviewed as part of a study of earth-religions and identity. It mentions some means by which people come to think of themselves as attuned with earth-based spiritualities, and how these become part of their perceptions of everyday activities. In it I examine how informants define 'spirit', and investigate ways in which concepts of body, mind and spirit form part of informants' thinking and practices. Dimensions which informants identify as important include associations of body and spirit; connecting with the past and with ancestors; earth-awareness and environmentalism; healing of self and others; power and empowerment of women and men. Importantly, these dimensions encompass many areas of their lives. Often they speak of their religion as something

... many aspects of 'everyday lives' of pagans look and sound very like the 'everyday lives' of non-pagans.

Differences, if and where they exist, are in approach, degree, and underlying assumptions which influence action.

which affects small actions of their lives, viewed as part of a larger whole. As one young man interviewed in Ontario said, "I can't litter any more". For some, recycling and taking out the compost become spiritual practices. For others, everyday gestures become political acts.

In investigating discourse and practice, this paper explores some of the sources of knowledge, examples, or inspiration referred to by informants, attempting to link these with their everyday lives. Participants' discourse moves from today's authors, such as Starhawk, to older literature such as the Icelandic Sagas and Eddas, to accounts of shamanic practitioners either today or previously, and to interpretations of structures and images from earlier periods back to the neolithic and paleolithic 'goddess' figures. Sources are capable of multiple interpretation. In other published work (e.g. Blain, 1999a), I examine how practitioners move between past and present, drawing on (sometimes contradictory) words, images, and solitary and community ritual practice, in constructing truths and identities for themselves as spiritual beings in a postmodern world. Practitioners seek 'holistic', unfragmented lives, but may find contradictions between personal expressions of spirituality and workplace restrictions or family practices and beliefs: their worlds are not seamless, and their quests for empowerment may meet contestation. Interwoven with 'pagan' discourse are pop-

ular and academic concepts, phrases, indexing narratives of being, 'self', and belonging: not all are unproblematic, for the speakers or for others who seek to define themselves as 'pagan' and construct their own relations with Earth and her creatures.

BEGINNING WHERE PEOPLE ARE

Let us begin with some accounts, from practitioners, moving from the more obvious expressions of Pagan spirituali-

ties, to the more private or everyday, and examining how these connect with each other and with Earth. Many pagans—not all—base their expressions of spirituality around seasonal festivals: for many the four quarter days (cross-quarters to the English) known to many in the community as 'Celtic' festivals, and/or four solar festivals; for others a series of days that demarcate historical or quasi-historical events, but still with reference to the turning of the year. For instance, Yule, the winter solstice, is explained with reference to the dark time of the year, the season when light becomes a prized commodity, or at least did so in the days before the century of electricity. Beltane is celebrated by some Wiccans as a fertility festival, for spring. Wiccans generally hold eight celebrations. By contrast, Heathens have four main seasonal events: Winternights, ushering in the season of darkness; Yule, held at the time the Wild Hunt can be heard riding across the skies; Ostara, the start of spring, either followed or preceded by a blessing of field and plough; and Midsummer fires at the solstice. While these festivals may not always be as 'traditional' as their practitioners consider them (see e.g. Hutton 1996), they are none the less part of today's rediscovered—or invented—'traditions', and they have a grounding in recent folklore.

Judith runs a small store in a Maritime town, selling herbs and essential oils, which has

become known, she says, as the witch's shop. She described how, for her and her family, seasonal understandings are expressed through celebration and ritual:

We have our seasonal celebrations. You know the autumn equinox, and with the kids we do solstice ... special things like on winter solstice, my husband and I would stay up all night, and we get the kids up in the morning to see the sun rise. Little things like that. Autumn equinox, that was when our big Thanksgiving dinner would be, and summer solstice is like the end of school for them. So really by just doing the little seasonal celebrations. Not that they have to be anything big, but sort of taking note. But I think even by noticing them—oh yeah, today's summer solstice sort of thing—we do sort of tune in to [the changing] seasons ... you become aware of things, of simple things, like changing tides, and when certain things bloom each year, and weather patterns, and they really connect you to all that.

But pagan attempts to celebrate the cycles of the earth are not necessarily straightforward. Pagan holidays do not always coincide with those of the wider society, although at times they do. And at times this is quite deliberate: Heathens in North America and the UK celebrate the Einherjar (warriors or heroes) on Remembrance Day. Some choose other conventional holidays or celebrations and attach a heathen 'spin' to them: Vali at Valentine's Day (though celebrated by only some heathen groups). Conversely, Lughnasa or Lammass, in Canada, coincides with civic holidays.

Pagans seeking holiday time may be supported or rejected by employers: personnel working shifts, particularly in health care professions and essential services, may find that a wish to take Dec 21st, and work Dec 25th, is very well received. Secretaries, however, have reported being put under pressure to work extra hours around the solstice, in order to clear work before a 'Christmas holiday' period. (In academic life, 'getting the grades in' can be quite a problem.) Spiritual observance and daily work-life intersect in ways that are complex, and these

intersections construct practice and equally construct others' understandings of paganisms and what these are about. Workplace discussions of Samhain or Winternights, for instance, may in one workplace appear 'cool and interesting', but in another attract proselytizing attempts from other religious groups. Some pagans or heathens are more open about their spiritualities than others. Fear of recrimination, attempted 'conversion', dismissal, or simply not being seen as serious citizens, is a contributing factor for those who remain in the closet.

To an outsider, pagans may seem interesting and colourful, set apart by culture and discourse, or by lifestyle choices, depending on how you look at it. However, today's North American and European pagans and neoshamans live in the urban world of the late 20th/early 21st centuries, in environments of plastic and concrete, dealing with information technologies and bureaucratic systems. If even the occasions of community celebration become problematic, how is daily life constructed in the intersections between spirit and structure, nature and technology?

Actualities of daily living are complex, and paganisms involve their practitioners in adjustments and contradictions. Internet discussions often posit pagans in opposition to dominant groups, especially against North America Christians of various types; or against atheists in academia and much of Europe. This can sound like quite a battle. The realities are more complex: members of earth religions work alongside members of other religions, their children attend the same schools, they shop for the same foods, often in the same groceries, or in farmers' markets which could not exist if they were only supported by pagans. That is, many aspects of the 'everyday lives' of pagans look and sound very like the 'everyday lives' of non-pagans. Differences, if and where they exist, are in approach, degree, and underlying assumptions which influence action.

Judith, when asked how her spiritual practice was a part of her family, replied thus:

We're fairly laid back, I would say. If you were to compare us to say, Christian families, we don't do the regular church thing or weekly lessons or anything like that. More like a daily basis with life, we try to fit it in, just relate life to certain beliefs: What you do is what comes back to you, or how you act ... We don't really do anything special besides the seasonal things, and you know, our beliefs. I mean, we do say ... a blessing over the food. You know, we join hands and do a circle, a thing like that. ... I made them dream pillows and they take those at the full moon and just sleep with them for three nights ... Helping me in the garden with herbs. Learning to respect plants, that they are alive. You know, stuff like that.

In starting with differences between her practices and those she perceives as associated with other religions or spiritualities, she moves to daily or monthly routines, and then to events that link the family with other beings or lives. Helping in the garden leads in this description to the importance of her children learning to respect plants. Judith's approach is part of a wider philosophy connecting people and earth. As she says:

... humans aren't just here to conquer the Earth, that we all combine. And of course, we do the recycling, and the composting, the basic sort of ecological things. But I think instilling in them that respect for the Earth, that type of thing.

When asked what her spiritual path meant to her, Judith's reply linked spiritual meaning with daily life:

Well, for me I think it just sort of gives meaning to my life. It just doesn't feel so empty. When I look at people who don't have anything at all I wonder how do they survive ... They seem superficial, or flat ... You know, you don't have any sustenance. They just sort of get up, go to work, spend that money, and get up and go to work ... And don't seem to have any sort of meaning. So for me, it really gives me a lot of meaning. And because it's such an Earth-based [path], you sort of begin to become in touch with the Earth or in tune with the rhythms, you know, the cycles of

the seasons, and of the course the cycles of your body. So it all fits in. So you sort of feel part of the universe, it makes you feel actually connected. That you're not just plunked here on the planet as a separate entity. I think humans sort of see themselves as apart from the world and nature. Not as connected. I think it probably gives you that sense—for me it does, anyways—that sense of connectedness.

These linkings of connectedness, nature, and daily life are central for many pagans, and we will return to them.

Another woman, Summer, also linked seasonal ritual with everyday activity and meaning: seasons are important for her, as they were, she says, for past agricultural peoples. This woman has land outside of the city, and grows herbs as part of her business.

... one thing that I like is that the roots of paganism ... and my European ancestors, the witches and midwives of the ancient European times celebrated the seasons because they were agriculturally based societies and because the fall equinox is very important in terms of our daily sustenance in life as people who are still agricultural whether we admit it or not because without food we aren't and so we must be agricultural. ... so I think that even more so, I mean it's very important to mark the seasons because it helps me to mark my life as someone intimately involved with food and how the seasons of Canada make that happen ... it feels like, the sort of the daily rituals connect me with the wind and the air and the earth and the plants and the bees and the animals. But my seasonal rituals connect me to cultures and peoples and histories and ... they also are a time when I tend to be with other people in ritual. So they are a good excuse to get together.

Summer's discourse indexes a number of narratives common within strands of paganism: linking today's pagan practitioners with "the witches ... of the ancient European times", and these in turn with "midwives". Her words and those of Judith also associated the witch with the wise women, or the herbalist practitioner. These concepts are echoed by Thorgerd, a heathen witch who lives in the city, who speaks of

herbs and healing hands, and has trained as an aromatherapist. She is attempting to start a practice as an alternative healer: when I spoke with her, she had just come from a Sunday spent on a friend's land, preparing it for the onset of winter. Her thoughts are echoed by other practitioners who do not garden, do not heal directly, and have little connection to the land. While Summer's daily rituals connect her directly with "wind and the air and the earth and the plants ...", some others may find that a ritual offering to Landwights or household deities is a reminder to them that, however much they are surrounded by the concrete and steel of the city, they are ultimately dependant on Earth for food, Air for breath, and Water for their bodies' health.

Others make the link more concrete and more practical. Food preparation, or cooking, can be seen as a connection with what heathens call *Disir*—female ancestral spirits. For instance, in Aunt Hilda's Column in the Heathen journal *Idunna*, these ancestors, both recent and ancient, are deliberately invoked in association with daily kitchen ritual.

A recent discussion in a heathen mailing list on whether *Ásatrú* could be considered an earth religion, emphasised this point. While several people stated Earth was an important Goddess, some opined that *Ásatrú* did not mandate its adherents to campaign on environmental issues: therefore it was not an earth religion. However, the consensus eventually reached was that heathenism was involved with land and landspirits, and hence was, in very direct ways that involved everyday life, an 'earth-religion'. I ended up summarising the debate and inserting, of course, my own position. Because others on the list seemed to like it, I include it here as an example or summary:

It seems to me that the concept of earth, relationships with earth, living on the earth is central, at

Pagans are known for polytheistic 'belief'. But in the everyday worlds of these Earth Religion practitioners, deities do not always or necessarily show up very much—or even at all.

least to my being and practice, and to that of many Heathens I know. The mythology is stories about gods and heroes. The content of it is what makes a good story. The people of 1000+ years ago told stories, yes, whenever they could, and gave reverence to the High Gods a couple of times a year. The rest of it was, and for many people today is, personal stuff. As [a list member] so eloquently put it, right relationships.

We had a number of posts on this list recently on trees. Why are trees important? Why are landwights important? Why are other creatures important? They're there, they are what we connect with most directly.

When I do a blot, I ask the spirits of the place for their leave and invite them to partake. When I do *seidhr* (Northern European shamanistic practice), I ask their leave and guardianship. I don't always ask the God/desses! In my daily living I am connecting with Earth in many different ways, as I take out the compost, as I talk to the plants in my garden and greet the trees as I walk, as I look out of the window, as I sit here at my wooden desk with my hands physically typing on the plastic computer keys, doing stuff, being embodied within a given space, being a part of the environment, of the physical Earth of which we are all part.

When I look back into what we know of earlier practice, what I see is people's concern for where they are, and how they relate to the spirits of the place. To me it seems that it's that direct connection that makes for an Earth Religion. The God/desses help us in various ways—often to do with their own connections with Earth, and ways in which they *are*, in senses that I either can't fathom or can't explain, the active principles, the growing of the grain, the construction of relationships between ourselves and where we are.

Pagans celebrate the Greenwood not primarily in its creation (as product of an abstract relationship to a transcendent being), but in its existence ... dynamic patternings of trees and rocks ... predators and prey ... the cycle of life.

This is very different from the sense of dealing with a transcendent 'power' who orders things and 'gets' an inanimate earth to grow stuff, which is what we find in much of the Christian imagery.

SPIRITS, SPIRIT, AND PLACE

A number of issues have now been raised: contested terminologies, 'Gods and Goddesses' who so far have received a bare mention within this paper, the question of 'Spirit', and a suggestion that even the major festivals are (aside from getting dressed up and having a party with friends) not much different from the 'everyday' in terms of sacredness, sanctity, or ability to touch what earth-religion practitioners hold sacred. Relationships with spirits or deities exist in the everyday: Earth is sacred; plants, animals and people are children of Earth, and hence sacred likewise. In work I'm currently planning, I am looking at 'sites' of inscription of meaning, whether these be historical or archaeological, or places of great 'natural beauty'; embodied 'selves'; texts from old or new writings that earth-religion practitioners find compelling, interesting or useful; and events. The meanings so inscribed are constructed within the relationships that pagans create, framed by their existing knowledges.

Pagans are known for polytheistic 'belief'. But in the everyday worlds of these Earth Religion practitioners, deities do not always or nec-

essarily show up very much—or even at all. Many pagans are aware of this: heathen theologian Kveldúlfur Gundarsson points out (in the columns of the heathen magazine *Idunna*, and on internet discussion groups) that this fits within concepts of indigenous religions of Northern Europe, and elsewhere. In the days described by the Icelandic sagas, most had an everyday ongoing relationship with the spirits closest to the people and their daily tasks: those of the land, and ancestors. That Wight who lives in that rock, there, is intimately involved with the productivity of this farm. They were neighbours, helpers, friends and colleagues. According to Gundarsson, the farm people would occasionally approach the high deities, or those conceived of as Elder Kin or more distant relations, just as they would a chieftain. They would approach such deities more often if they were particularly friendly with them, as in the case of poets gifted by Óðhinn or Freyja, whom they might deal with on a daily basis. But the average person, according to Allsherjargodhi Jörmundur Ingi, would greet the High Gods once a year, at the Althing. Important, yes, but not everyday: spirits of rock and stone were local, ancestral, connected, and close. Other beings could be beautiful, and tricky, such as the elves of folklore who are interesting but potentially dangerous to deal with. Some were, and are, closer than others. Michael York, approaching a tentative definition of paganism, frames this as:

... an affirmation of interactive and polymorphic sacred relationship by individual or community with the tangible, sentient and nonempirical. (York, 2000:9).

Affirmations of this sort allow not only deities and elves, but animals, plants, land, water, and air, to become at least partially sacred. This makes it possible for spiritual relationships to form between people and other beings (or

realms of being) which pagan practitioners deal with in the course of their everyday activities.

CULTURE, NATURE: DUALIST CATEGORIES, TOTALISING CONCEPTS?

At times practitioners' discourse reflects a dualism of 'people and nature'. At other times this is more critically examined, and at other times there is a range of mediating beings that form part of the construction of both 'people' and 'nature'. Let us return to Summer, the green-witch previously quoted.

And I guess, I mean, the self of Summer, the farmer, walking on the farm and planting and harvesting and weeding. Sometimes I feel extremely connected. Sometimes I feel completely disconnected from myself, from the earth. Sometimes I feel so ignorant and such a, like I stick out incredibly in this beautiful thing called nature. What are, what are we, we seem so clumsy and so ridiculous in comparison and other times I just feel so connected and ... so myself in relation to it all changes for sure. ... my academic self problematizes the notion of nature. What is nature? Does nature include us? Of course it does, but how do we talk about this entity outside of us without then resigning it to be other than human therefore different from human. ... I think that the reason it hasn't sufficiently ever been problematized academically because it can't be because there is no answer which is something academics hate to admit. So, for a while I was totally into the discourse of environmentalism and I think my spirituality for awhile was more confined than it should have been because I wanted to articulate it in ways that were understandable but it feels that it's coming much more from me, sitting here talking to you about this, and fumbling with words and not actually knowing if I've made any coherent sense than when I was sitting around a table of graduate students trying to articulate it all for my head and it was so out of touch with my body.

These accounts vary between treating people and nature as a dualism, describing 'people in nature', and people as part of 'nature', whatever that may be. They illustrate some of the diversities of paganisms today: they equally illustrate some of the contradictions and tensions present in specific relationships of specific pagans with

their everyday worlds.

Ontario Druid Cathbad speaks of a universal principle of life, and its relation to his spirituality:

For everyday life, nature is constantly expressing its mysteries ... the underlying animating principles or forces ... that give shape and form to all the things that are around, and so wherever you look there's the sense in which a mystery is being brought into expression here. And sometimes when you take the time to sort of think about it and take a still moment through the course of the day, you can experience a mystery. Even if you're looking at a potted plant in your office ... you look through the normal sense presentation of a potted plant and you suddenly see a universal principle of life ... you see the functions of life are taking place in this potted plant as they do everywhere else in the world as well. And I think that there's a marvellous thing about Druidism that enables us to take a still moment to see that, wherever we are. So that's the regular daily practice I guess.

Pagan practitioners speak of nature religions and themselves as connected to nature. Clearly, nature is a constructed concept, and indeed one could examine differing constructions of 'nature' in opposition to 'people' (as has of course been done) and of people as part of 'nature' (as has been done likewise). What practitioners' discourse indicates to me is rather more complicated. First, there is a range of positions that practitioners occupy. Second, practitioners alter their orientation to nature, according to the context of their talk. They often draw on what they know to create effect, in the context of the interview or in the realms of teaching or political life, or on their construction of the self in their communities.

For instance, Anne explicitly links environment, Native spiritualities, and her own political activism:

You read in the Jesuit relations how when [Mi'kmaq chief] Membertou was making the decision about the conversion of the Mi'kmaqs, he went and dug a hole at the base of a tree and sat all day and conversed with the hole in the ground. And of course, the Jesuits wrote this up as another example of stupid, useless, idiotic

superstition. Well, that's a relationship with the Earth that I can't even imagine. However, given that I'm a North American in the 20th century and I can't quite recover that ... When I was doing the spiritual healing stuff, I did learn how to feel when I'm drawing energy out of the Earth and into my feet. Or if I'm lying on the ground and doing it. So I can feel it come and go, to some extent. And it's fast. You just get this feeling that it's this huge, huge, huge! reservoir of energy.

Then you get out into the more political realm where the gardening, the camping and the canoeing have to do with connecting ... And it's amazing ... And then there's the whole business of the environmental movement. Which I'm not connected to very directly, because my more direct connections have been poverty, anti-racism, feminism, anti-heterosexism, that kind of thing. But to my mind, that's all related. Because the relationships between human beings are so integral with our relationship to the Earth. So the whole understanding in political/economic terms of saving the Earth—because it's in desperate straits. ... I see all of the anti-oppression stuff as having a direct relation.

She has an example.

I gave a paper at the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education in 1991—just because it's here in Halifax, and that's my professional association, and usually I can't afford to go—and the theme was the environment. And the thing that I wanted to talk about was saving education for low-income people in an increasingly-privatized education environment. I had no trouble writing that paper at all. The theme was: recovering the Earth means recovering the justice in relationships among human beings. Bang. It was no problem connecting them.

The political nature of paganism has a more personal dimension: embodiment, which appears over and over in pagan publications, yet remains contentious. 'Sacred bodies, sacred sex', are illustrated in some women's publications (e.g. *SageWoman*) with both the nubile young woman and the athletic, naked 'crone'. Gender-mixed publications primarily

depict the first of these. So, while many pagans valorise 'the body' in terms of 'sacred sexuality', a number of women, and men as well, question the insertion of images and discourses of the 'perfect body' which only relate to conventional heterosexuality. Recently, on a nature religions scholars email list, a number of women expressed both irritation and concern over the image of the perfect (female) teenage 'witches' in the media. While pagans pay lip-service to 'anti-ageism' as well as 'anti-sexism', there are few signs that this is generally practised, not simply preached. (A 'joke' about women's body types on the aforesaid list raised some ire—exemplifying this.) Questions of ability and disability are similarly problematic: pagans with disabilities have pointed to problematic assumptions about ways in which they 'should' live, and their relationships with earth. The turning of the seasons or the approach of summer may mean something 'different' to someone who is confined to an apartment and who cannot see a tree from her window.

Sexualities are contested within a number of traditions: Gay heathen shamanic practitioner Jordsvin says that many areas of the heathen community need some education in this matter (Blain and Wallis, In Press). Yet such images also persist in popular concepts of Wicca and some other 'traditions'. Concepts of 'Goddess and God', whether presented as dualism or duality, may be empowering for some practitioners, but disempowering for those who do not see their sexualities reflected. It still happens that gay pagans raising this issue for debate may be accused of 'flaunting' their 'difference'. Pagan communities vary enormously in their awareness of complex interrelationships of body, sexuality, and identity. The 'race issue' evident within some paganisms, and discussed by Gallagher (1999), provides another example. Specific pagans adopt specific stances within prevalent

discourses of 'race', 'ethnicity', and 'identity'; however, these stances may act to obscure complexity and essentialise difference, by removing political and historical process so that (for instance) 'being Celtic' becomes a matter of 'bloodline' (Blain, 2000).

PAGANS AND THE GREENWOOD: IMAGINAL POINTS OF CONNECTION

Graham Harvey (1997) talks about how the Greenwood enters practitioners' discourse. Perhaps in North America 'wilderness' is a more appropriate term. The Greenwood is not only the actuality of forest, grove, or 'where wild things are', but the concept(s) of what this represents for pagans today: places where they can go physically or spiritually to refresh 'self' and to connect with 'nature'. Such places give points of entry that different practitioners can use, and hence ways in which they can access not only the realities of other pagans, but of the other beings within the Greenwood. Cathbad's potted plant, in this sense, is part of the Greenwood. Pagans celebrate the Greenwood not primarily in its creation (as product of an abstract relationship to a transcendent being), but in its existence, continuity of a network of social relationships, dynamic patternings of trees and rocks, plants, and those who eat them, predators and prey, *continuation*, and the cycle of life. Pollution is not merely an eyesore or a problem of resource management, but a disruption to the relationships and networks of being.

People have modified their environments from early times: carving, painting, mining, removing, building, planting and harvesting. Some pagans apply a kind of 'seven generation' rule which they have acquired from accounts of Aboriginal North American spirituality. Others differentiate between the

... the extraordinary is a development of everyday practice, shamanisms ... are culturally rooted, embodied in and by their practitioners ... 'Ordinary' and 'extraordinary' ... inform and transform each other.

resource uses of a rather nebulous 'past' and those of today. They reason that today's scientific awareness of ecology—combined with the sheer numbers of people, the amount of resource use and misuse, and the damage that can be done swiftly—places responsibility on the scientific community, on industrial and political establishments, and on the general public, notably pagans, to act as watchdogs.

Others rationalise that they will do what they can, but that they, as people living within present-day society, also need to eat: tension is apparent between discourse and practice, even in the act of driving out to 'the land' to spend time in relationships with trees and 'nature'. While some pagans have explicitly 'opted out' into a rural existence that is as self-sufficient as can be, often without electricity, most retain their attachment to city life, and in particular to communications technology and the internet. A typical day for many pagans or heathens includes spending some time talking with other pagans electronically. These internet conversations may encompass many areas of life, including ritual, politics, and the Greenwood.

CONCLUSION: PAGANISMS AND NARRATIVES OF THE EVERYDAY

Discourse and narrative analysis attempts to examine how people speak of their daily lives in order to understand how they use social discourses and processes in creating their

A recent trip to Avebury ... showed a collection of ritual litter, primarily candles and wax, that indicated that whatever was foremost in the minds of those who had performed their rituals ... it was not environmental care ...

understanding of these lives. In my work concerning paganisms and shamanisms, I am attempting an integrative understanding of people's constructions of meaning and identity within practices and discourses that they identify as central to their being. In doing this, I acknowledge my own location within the web of meanings. I am a heathen shamanistic practitioner, with links to practices, places and people on two continents, who in my everyday research work is privileged to talk with numerous others about those relations and concepts that to me seem to matter.

This paper stems from my location and understanding, but is not, I believe, limited to my own situated knowledges. George Marcus points out that the challenge of postmodernism's critique of ethnography is leading to a re-emergence of comparison, not in the older sense of direct (controlled) comparing of points or categories, but as juxtaposition which emerges from:

... putting questions to an emergent object of study whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account which has different, complexly connected, real-world sites of investigation (Marcus, 1998:186).

Paganisms or earth-religions today are multi-situated, and I have the multiple task of maintaining and preserving the 'voices' and

narrative of diverse participants, wherever they are, while juxtaposing their accounts to provide a multivocal display of partial meanings that reflects an approach, an orientation which is constructed within the interviews and the events that I observe. Most of my work appears to be on the extraordinary, shamanic practices which appear exotic to the 'outsider's' gaze. Such practices seem strange, different, and entrancing, even to many pagans—and, as I've

said elsewhere (e.g., Blain and Wallis, forthcoming; Blain, 1999), transform the participant in many ways. But the extraordinary is a development of everyday practice. Shamanisms (as opposed to the western abstraction of 'shamanism' as 'primordial' religion) are culturally rooted, embodied in and by their practitioners, emergent from relationships and practices of daily life, and changing with socio/economic and cultural/political relations. 'Ordinary' and 'extraordinary', therefore, inform and transform each other.

The focus on the everyday, in this paper, therefore serves as a reminder that today's pagan spiritualities are developed in the context of everyday, as well as extraordinary, relationships. Everyday activities arise from possibly-contested community and individual understandings of potential, resources, capabilities and relationships. The everyday, the personal, is indeed political. Practices, however developed, have to make sense in the daily lives of their practitioners, and concepts of body, spirit, Greenwood, and 'nature' are constituted and linked by the simplest of actions.

These everyday lives are contested and political: processes of gender, 'race', and sexuality are situated and constituted in daily practice, within the institutional practices and mediated discourses of postmodernity. The

mere label, 'Paganism', is not a guide to political practice, nor is it a guarantee of environmental 'friendliness'. A recent trip to Avebury, on a winter full-moon, showed a collection of ritual litter, primarily candles and wax, that indicated that whatever was foremost in the minds of those who had performed their rituals around specific stones of this great circle the night before, it was not environmental care—at least not in any way that envisaged practitioners' own actions as potentially causing problems. Other pagans will warn about damage to sites, offence to earth spirits. One person's votive offering is another's eyesore. But pagans, of whatever persuasion, are likely to see themselves, and other people, as linked with earth or the beings of earth; their concepts of 'self' include relationships they construct with the 'imaginal' that they describe as 'empowering' or affirming—whatever these are, however they are phrased.

Is it too much to hope that paganisms can encourage perceptions of complexity, and discourage essentialisms? 'What is Nature?' asked Summer. 'Does nature include us?' How does awareness of Earth relate to complex arguments about resource use, pollution, and so forth?

Contestations abound in this area, as in others. Paganism is not a unified movement: no college decrees discourse and practice, no leader issues dictates. People create their ways of being pagan, from observation, example, insertion into practices, reading, and other resources—but most of all from their experiences and everyday understandings of themselves in relation to Earth, spirits, and other people and beings. As a result, to many pagans, trees are real people, and magic is in the everyday.

REFERENCES:

Blain, Jenny, 1999a. "Seidr as Shamanistic Practice: Reconstituting a Tradition of

Ambiguity". *Shaman* 7.2: 99-121.

Blain, Jenny, 1999b. "Speaking shamanistically: seidr, academia and rationality". 'Going Native' conference, Folklore Center, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, May 21, 1999. Forthcoming in *DISKUS*.

Blain, Jenny, 2000. "Shamans, Stones, Authenticity and Appropriation: Contestations of Invention and Meaning". Forthcoming in *New Approaches to the Archaeology of Art, Religion and Folklore: A Permeability of Boundaries?* eds. R.J. Wallis, K. Lymer and S. Crooks. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.

Blain, Jenny and Robert J. Wallis, In Press. "The 'Ergi' Seidman: Contestations of gender, shamanism and sexuality in northern religion past and present". Forthcoming in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*.

Gallagher, Anne-Marie, 1999. "Weaving a Tangled Web? Pagan ethics and issues of history, 'race' and ethnicity in Pagan identity". *The Pomegranate* 10: 19-29

Harvey, Graham, 1997. *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism*.

Hutton, Ronald, 1996. *The Stations of the Sun: a history of the ritual year in Britain*. Oxford University Press.

Marcus, George, 1998. *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*. Princeton: Princeton U.P.

York, Michael, 2000. "Defining Paganism". *The Pomegranate* 11: 4-9.

Jenny Blain is an anthropologist studying Earth Religions, currently as an independant scholar, focusing in particular on seidr and shamanism, gender and contested constructions of meanings and 'identity'. She's exploring ways to investigate these through experiential anthropology and writing (mostly) Heathen poetry; and she's currently working on a book on seidr. An associated research project is on paganisms, politics and postmodernism. She is Heathen, and a seidworker. Her contact address is <jenny.blain@freeuk.com>.

The Many Faces of Kali

by David Nelson

In recent years the spiritual consciousness of the Western world has seen a resurgence of The Goddess, in large part due to the efforts of Neopagans and feminists in reclaiming traditions. In contrast, the Goddess's experience in the East has been markedly different, particularly in the paleopagan religion known as Hinduism. For Hindus, the veneration of female deities is an uninterrupted, living tradition stretching back thousands of years.

Among the Hindu goddesses, Kali is one of the most powerful. How her present identity evolved over more than two millennia should prove instructive to those who would resuscitate Western goddesses after centuries of dormancy. Moreover, Kali's recent transplantation to new environments in the West, outside her original cultural boundaries, creates the possibility of unforeseen changes and opportunities for the Hindu goddess.

In her Indian temples, Kali is worshiped daily from predawn until evening darkness. The black goddess is awakened, bathed, fed, adored by her devotees, and prayed to throughout the day and additionally on the night of the dark moon (*amavasya*). The single most important and elaborate *amavasya* worship (*puja*) falls in the lunar month corresponding to October or November in the Western calendar. This Night of Kali occurs near the time of Samhain, the Celtic sabbat when the veil between the worlds is thinnest, and that is fitting, since Kali is, among many things, the goddess of death.

Written at the end of the 19th century,

Swami Vivekananda's poem, "Kali the Mother," evokes the Night of Kali as a time of pitchy darkness that blots out the stars, while on every side, "a thousand, thousand shades of Death begrimed and black" scatters plagues and sorrows in a mad, joyful dance. In the poet's awesome vision, Terror is the goddess' name, Death is in her breath, and destruction follows every footfall, for she is the relentless power of all-consuming Time.

Little of this characterization would pass in the West as conventional religious sentiment, for Kali is Nature in her raw, exuberant power. The Hindus call this power Mother. To the Western mind, Mother Nature more often evokes visions of abundant harvests, forests teeming with wildlife, majestic mountains and inspiring sunsets; only when she goes on a rampage in the form of a natural disaster do we remember and fear her other side. Goddess-worshipping Hindus, called *Shaktas*, are more likely to recognize her auspicious and destructive aspects in equal measure.

Like the *Shaktas*, Western Pagans also regard life and death as complementary and inseparable arcs in the circle of existence. They acknowledge a triple goddess, characterized as maiden, mother and crone, who reflects the cyclical nature of the world: that everything has a beginning, a middle, an end, and a new beginning. Similarly, for the *Shakta* Hindu, Kali is a powerful and complex goddess with multiple forms. In many household shrines she is worshiped as the gentle *Shyama*, who dispels fear and grants boons. In times of natural disaster she is invoked as the protective *Rakshakali*. As *Shmashanakali* she embodies destructive power and is said to haunt the cremation ground in the company of howling jackals and terrifying female spirits. At the magnificent Dakshineswar Temple in Calcutta, she is revered as the beautiful *Bhavatarini*,

Redeemer of the Universe. And as *Mahakali*, the Great Kali, she is the formless *Shakti*, the immanent primordial power who is not different from the transcendental Absolute.

Kali's followers regard her as the eternal reality in its dynamic mode—the creative, sustaining and destructive energy in and through all things. Philosophically speaking, she has no beginning. As for when her specific forms first entered human consciousness and human history, we simply do not know. Only a few clues survive from the Indian past.

Study of the early history of India is a highly contentious field. Much of the past is irretrievably lost, and attempts to assemble the surviving fragments are all too often colored by feelings of nationalism, ethnic pride, religious belief, lingering resentment of colonialism, and the legacy of the pioneering European

scholars who all too often injected their own Judeo-Christian prejudices and view of history into an area where they clearly do not belong. Today, wildly conflicting theories abound, and even the best are not without serious anomalies, because at present there is simply no way to make sense of all the data at hand.

Nevertheless, it is safe to say that Indian religion, throughout its long history, has always consisted of two intertwining strands, the *Vedic* and the *Tantric*. The *Vedic*, or

orthodox, strand stems from the *Vedas*, India's oldest surviving sacred texts. Composed in Sanskrit, the Vedic hymns are in large part nature poetry written by people overwhelmed by the beauty and power of surrounding nature, which they personified and deified as

a pantheon of gods and goddesses. Four thousand years later, the dazzling imagery of the hymns still conveys the poets' ecstatic response to a world in which everything was seen as divine. The Tantric strand includes everything that is not Vedic. Its origins may be traced to the magical or fertility cults of pre- or non-Vedic peoples. It is entirely possible that Tantra is the surviving Goddess religion of the ancient Indus Valley civilization, with a later admixture of folk magic and tribal shamanism.

As long as Tantric and Vedic religion have coexisted on Indian soil, they have influenced each other. The earliest Vedic

hymns are tinged with Tantric elements, and at the heart of Tantra lies the sublime metaphysical philosophy of the *Upanishads*, which forms the culmination of Vedic thought. This is the cultural matrix from which Kali emerged—a world of Goddess cults, magic, sacrificial rites, the deification of natural forces, and lofty speculation over the nature of reality. In ancient India, as in most of the ancient world, multiple religious cults coexisted more or less peacefully.

There is some archeological and textual

... as manifestations of
the divine creative
ideation, we are created
in the divine image.
At the same time,
we carry that same
creative consciousness
within and use it to
create our own images
of divinity according
to our needs
or understanding.

evidence that Vedic peoples inhabited parts of the Indus Valley as early as the 3rd millennium BCE. At Kalibangan, one of the most ancient cities, archeologists discovered what appears to be a series of seven Vedic fire altars, while years of excavation at the same site have yielded a grand total of two goddess figurines. In contrast, the contemporaneous cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa were centers of thriving goddess cults, attested by the recovery of thousands of goddess images from the ruins.

After a series of natural disasters initiated the gradual collapse of the Indus Valley civilization around 1900 BCE, the great cities were abandoned. The massive displacement and relocation of entire populations led to widespread cultural cross-fertilization, documented in later Vedic texts, particularly in the Brahmanas, which introduce a large number of new goddesses and witness the coalescence of multiple deities with similar attributes into single gods or goddesses. The difficulty in tracing the origins of the non-Vedic or non-Aryan deities is that upon absorption into the Vedic pantheon, they were given Sanskrit names.

Kali is thought to have originated as a tribal goddess indigenous to one of India's inaccessible mountainous regions. The *Matsyapurana* gives her place of origin as Mount Kalanjara in north central India, east of the Indus Valley floodplain. But owing to the late date of the Puranas' composition, this evidence regarding Kali's place of origin cannot

be taken as particularly reliable.

At least thousand years before the Matsyapurana, the name of Kali first appears in Sanskrit literature between the 8th and 5th centuries BCE. The reference (in *Mundakopaniṣad* 1.2.4) names Kali as one of the seven quivering tongues of the fire god Agni, whose flames devour sacrificial oblations and transmit them to the gods. The verse characterizes Agni's seven tongues as black, terrifying, swift as thought, intensely red, smoky colored, sparkling, and radiant. Significantly, the first two adjectives—*kali* and *karali*—"black" and "terrifying," recur in later texts to describe the horrific aspect of the goddess. *Karali* additionally means "having a gaping mouth and protruding teeth." This

verse scarcely suffices to confirm that Kali was a personified goddess during the age of the Upanishads, but it is noteworthy that the adjective that became her name was used to characterize an aspect of the fire god's power. Just as fire dissolves matter into energy, the goddess Kali dissolves the material universe into undifferentiated being at the end of a cosmic cycle.

Kali first appears unequivocally as a goddess in the *Kathaka Grihyasutra*, a ritualistic text that names her in a list of Vedic deities to be invoked with offerings of perfume during the marriage ceremony. Unfortunately, the text reveals nothing more about her.

During the epic period, some time after

... the strong
contemplative focus
of the Vedanta Society,
combined with many
Westerners' early
impressions that
a church or temple is a
place of quiet reverence,
accounts for this Kali
Puja's relative restraint.

the 5th century BCE, Kali emerges better defined in an episode of the *Mahabharata*. When the camp of the heroic Pandava brothers is attacked one night by the sword-wielding Asvatthaman, his deadly assault is seen as the work of "Kali of bloody mouth and eyes, smeared with blood and adorned with garlands, her garment reddened—holding noose in hand—binding men and horses and elephants with her terrible snares of death" (*Mahabharata* 10.8.64-65). Although the passage goes on to describe the slaughter as an act of human warfare, it makes clear that the fierce goddess is ultimately the agent of death who carries off those who are slain.

Kali next appears in the sacred literature during the Puranic age, when new theistic devotional sects displaced the older Brahmanical form of Hinduism. In the 4th and 5th centuries CE the Puranas were written to glorify the great deities Vishnu, Shiva and the Devi—the Goddess—as well as lesser gods. One such Purana, the *Markandeya*, contains within it the foundational text of all subsequent Hindu Goddess religion. This book within a book is known as the *Devimahatmya*, the *Shri Durga Saptashati*, or the *Chandi*.

The *Devimahatmya*'s 7th chapter describes Kali springing forth from the furrowed brow of the goddess Durga in order to slay the demons Chanda and Munda. Here, Kali's horrific form has black, loosely hanging, emaciated flesh that barely conceals her angular bones. Gleaming white fangs protrude from her gaping, blood-stained mouth, framing her lolling red tongue. Sunken, reddened eyes peer out from her black face. She is clad in a tiger's skin and carries a *khatvanga*, a skull-topped staff traditionally associated with tribal shamans and magicians. The *khatvanga* is a clear reminder of Kali's origin among fierce, aboriginal peoples. In the ensuing battle, much attention is placed on her gaping mouth and gnashing teeth, which devour the

demon hordes. At one point Munda hurls thousands of discuses at her, but they enter her mouth "as so many solar orbs vanishing into the denseness of a cloud" (*Devimahatmya* 7.18). With its cosmic allusion, this passage reveals Kali as the abstraction of primal energy and suggests the underlying connection between the black goddess and Kala ('time'), an epithet of Shiva. Kali is the inherent power of ever-turning time, the relentless devourer that brings all created things to an end. Even the gods are said to have their origin and dissolution in her.

The 8th chapter of the *Devimahatmya* paints an even more gruesome portrait. Having slain Chanda and Munda, Kali is now called Chamunda, and she faces an infinitely more powerful adversary in the demon named Raktabija. Whenever a drop of his blood falls to earth, an identical demon springs up. When utter terror seizes the gods, Durga merely laughs and instructs Kali to drink in the drops of blood. While Durga assaults Raktabija so that his blood runs copiously, Kali avidly laps it up. The demons who spring into being from the flow perish between her gnashing teeth until Raktabija topples drained and lifeless to the ground.

Although the Puranas and earlier Sanskrit texts characterize Kali as a hideous, frightening crone who deals death and destruction, her victims symbolize the forces of ignorance and evil, making her in fact a force for good. But later on, secular texts of the medieval period, not always sympathetic to the goddess, paint a lurid and truly horrifying picture of Kali as exacting and receiving human sacrifice.

IN THE 17th CENTURY, Kali's characterization underwent a radical change. As popularized by the Bengali Tantric, Krishnananda Agamavagisha, Kali retains little of her former fierceness. Agamavagisha's *Tantrasara*

[Essence of Tantra] describes several of her innumerable forms, among them Dakshinakali, who fits the standard, present-day idea of the goddess. Dakshinakali has a terrifying appearance, but the cronelike emaciation of the Puranas has given way to voluptuous beauty. And behind every detail of the perhaps unsettling Tantric iconography lies a cosmological abstraction or a lofty spiritual principle.

Kali has a fierce but smiling face. Her red tongue, protruding from her gaping mouth is taken either as a sign of modesty or of her thirst for blood. (Even today goats are sacrificed in most Kali temples, perpetuating ancient ritual practices.) Her untamed hair hints at unrestrained power and boundless freedom. Alternatively, it may symbolize the mystery of death that encircles life (Mookerjee 1985: 128) or the veil of illusion, made of the fabric of space-time (Bandopadhyay 1995: 79). Her three eyes represent omniscience, for she sees past, present and future. The garland of severed heads around her neck represents the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, a Tantric metaphor for creative power. Encircling her waist, a girdle of severed arms indicates that she severs the bonds of karma and frees us from the bondage of accumulated deeds. Her full breasts symbolize nurturance. Her nakedness signifies freedom from the veils of illusion, and her dark skin alludes to the infinitude of the blue-black night sky.

Kali's paradoxical combination of maternal tenderness and destructive terror appears polarized on right and left. Her lower right hand is held in the varada mudra, extended to offer a boon. One of her greatest boons is fearlessness, indicated by her upper right hand, held in the *abhaya* mudra, upright with the palm outward. Her upper left hand brandishes a bloodied curving sword, and her lower left hand dangles a freshly severed head. Behind these apparent symbols of destruction

lies a different story. The sword symbolizes the higher knowledge that cuts through appearances and reveals things as they really are. The severed head represents the human ego, the limiting sense of I-me-and-mine that she slays. Together Kali's four hands seem to say, "Take refuge in me, let go of your existential fear, let me slay your illusion of smallness and separation, and you will merge into my infinite bliss."

Kali haunts the cremation ground, and she is often pictured standing on the chest of the ashen white Shiva, who lies still as a corpse. In some images Shiva is ithyphallic and engages with Kali in a form of sexual intercourse called *viparitarati* or *purushayita*. In this position the female is on top, taking the active role. This inversion sends a message of the Mother Goddess's supremacy. According to Shakta and Tantric cosmology, it is the feminine power that creates, sustains and dissolves the universe while the masculine principle is the static substratum. The sexual union of Shiva and Shakti graphically illustrates that ultimately the two are one, beyond all duality.

That monistic principle found eloquent expression in the poetry of Ramprasad, the greatest of Kali's mystical poets, who lived in the 18th century. After a lifetime of extolling his beloved goddess in human terms as gentle, elusive, playful, or mad, and in cosmic imagery as the all-pervading creative and destructive power, on his final day Ramprasad wrote that at last he understood the supreme mystery that Kali is one with the highest Brahman. Enlightenment brought him to the ultimate consciousness beyond all duality.

Because of the Bengali devotional poets of the 18th century, Kali's human and maternal qualities continue to define the goddess for most of her Indian devotees to this day. In human relationships, the love between mother and child is usually considered the purest and strongest. In the same way, the

love between the Mother Goddess and her human children is considered the closest and tenderest relationship with divinity. Accordingly, Kali's Indian devotees form a particularly intimate and loving bond with her.

Kali's Indian experience reveals that an originally fierce tribal goddess gradually assumed universal characteristics, including those of beneficence and motherhood, and eventually became identified with the cosmic creative energy and the nondual ultimate reality. What will be her developmental trajectory in cultural and religious contexts outside of India?

The experiences of some other deities or semidivine figures who left the confines of their original culture provide a frame of reference or at least

grounds for speculation. Isis, the most powerful and beloved Egyptian goddess for more than three thousand years, saw her worship spread throughout the Mediterranean world after Alexander the Great conquered Egypt, but even in the broader Hellenistic world she remained the tender mother, redemptive savior and immensely powerful queen of heaven until her cult was absorbed by Christianity in the 4th century. In contrast, when the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara traveled from India to China, his defining characteristic of compassion struck the Chinese mind as feminine, and gradually he was transformed

into Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy. In the transition from Judaism to Christianity, a flesh-and-blood prophet named Yeshua became the cosmic redeemer, Jesus Christ. Like Isis, Avalokiteshvara and Yeshua were refashioned to meet their new followers'

needs or expectations.

Nevertheless, in crossing borders Isis, Avalokiteshvara and Yeshua all experienced changes in iconography. For thirty centuries depictions of Isis had conformed to the stylistic conventions of Egyptian art, but her Greco-Roman sculptures are realistic in style and devoid of the distinguishing features seen in Egyptian representations. In China the Indian Avalokiteshvara assumed Chinese racial characteristics. Depending on where in the world Jesus is portrayed, he appears as Asian, African, Nordic

or Mediterranean. That raises a question: Are we created in God's image, or do we create our gods in our own image?

The question is basically that of the old conundrum. Chickens come from eggs and eggs come from chickens—both facts are observable at different places in the cycle of existence. To seek proof, linear style, that one came first is absurd. It engenders a paradigm of either/or dogmatism that shatters the wholeness of the circle. Simply put, as manifestations of the divine creative ideation, we are created in the divine image. At the same time, we carry that same creative conscious-

... Indian religion ... has always consisted of two intertwining strands, the Vedic and the Tantric.

... Tantra [may be] the surviving Goddess religion of the ancient Indus Valley civilization, with a later admixture of folk magic and tribal shamanism.

ness within and use it to create our own images of divinity according to our needs or understanding. Ultimately, in the wholeness of the circle, we and divinity are one.

REGARDING KALI'S PRESENCE in the West, observing her in several settings will indicate whether or how the Hindu goddess has been altered in consideration of new situations or the expectations of new followers outside of India.

The Vedanta Societies in America are affiliated with the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, headquartered in Calcutta. Vedanta arrived in the West in 1893 with Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu delegate to the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Vivekananda was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who spent the better part of his life as a priest of Kali at the Dakshineswar Temple.

For several decades, the Vedanta Society's Hollywood temple was the only place in the United States where a full-scale Kali Puja was held annually, complete with a sculptured image, on the amavasya night in October or November. Strings of red lights customarily outline the temple dome and windows, bespeaking festivity. Inside, the shrine is a blaze of light and activity, while the Swamis chant mantras and adorn the image of the black goddess with flower garlands, jewelry, perfumes and silken finery. Clouds of incense mingle the fragrance of sandalwood with the aromas of lavish food offerings, while music and the ringing of bells fill the air. The ritual

passes through several phases, and in the dead of night come quiet moments of hushed mystery. At ritual's end, the sounds of bells, drums, gongs and raucous conches erupt, followed by a predawn feast.

The puja is conducted in most respects as in India, with some practical concessions. The constraints of time do not allow for worshipers to approach the shrine individually with offerings of fruits, flowers and sweets, and this participatory phase is omitted. The other difference lies in the demeanor of the worshipers. In Indian temples there is a constant buzz of conversation along with rousing devotional singing, hand clapping and the voluble

expression of religious feeling, as if the devotees' enthusiasm will win the deity's attention. In contrast, at the Vedanta Society, devotional music is more often performed by a solo singer while the devotees sit silently in meditation. Possibly the strong contemplative focus of the Vedanta Society, combined with many Westerners' early impressions that a church or temple is a place of quiet reverence, accounts for this Kali Puja's relative restraint.

Following the change of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965, an influx of Indians to America began to change the face of the Vedanta Societies, which until then had been overwhelmingly Western in membership. The resulting Indianization means a strengthening of the outward cultural expressions of Hinduism. Today the Southern California Kali Puja has an increasingly authentic

The goal [of Tantra] is the ultimate freedom of unitary consciousness, which transcends the polarized concepts of spirit and matter, male and female, purity and impurity, and all other dualities.

Indian flavor, even to the serving of goat curry, made from a specially raised and ritually slaughtered animal.

The most authentic experience of Kali Puja in the United States can be had in Laguna Beach, California, at Kali Mandir. This organization was founded in the 1990s by Elizabeth Usha Harding, a member of the Vedanta Society. Here Kali is worshiped daily in the traditional manner and monthly on the dark moon night.

Once every summer, a special two-day Puja is conducted by Sri Haradhan Chakraborti, the head priest of the Dakshineswar Temple in Calcutta and a member of Sri Ramakrishna's family. The image in the Kali Mandir shrine is modeled after the benevolent Bhavatarini, worshiped at Dakshineswar; accordingly, the Laguna Beach Kali is named Ma Dakshineswari.

The puja, lasting for about sixteen hours on the first day and another nine hours on the second, is an exuberant occasion with almost constant, overlapping sounds of ringing bells, Sanskrit chanting, and devotional singing in the traditional call-and-response format by kirtan groups and devotees. As in India, devotees purchase offering baskets and take them to the assistant priest, who offers them to Kali Ma, returns them as sanctified prasada, and marks the devotees' foreheads with vermilion. The many hours of ritual are too long and varied to describe here, but what comes across is the participatory nature of the occasion and the open expression of spiritual fervor.

Theologically, the understanding of Kali at the Vedanta Societies and Kali Mandir is identical, conforming to the Bengali view, as defined by the Shakta poets of the 18th century and as taught by Sri Ramakrishna in the 19th. The only difference between the two groups is one of emphasis. In the private spiritual lives of most members of the Vedanta

Society, Kali remains peripheral. At Kali Mandir, she is central. In both settings, like the Greco-Roman Isis before her, Kali withstands major alterations when her traditional forms of worship are carried out on foreign soil.

Kali finds a somewhat different home at Kashi Ashram in Florida, or wherever else people gather around the highly respected—if controversial—Brooklyn-born guru named Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati. For Kashi Ashram, a nondenominational, interfaith foundation established in the late 1970s, the defining moment came in the early 1980s with the arrival of a then unnamed disease. Because the shadow of AIDS is an ever present reality for many of Ma Jaya's followers, death has particular immediacy at Kashi. Fittingly Kali, the goddess of death who haunts the cremation ground, came to occupy the central place in the interfaith pantheon.

In a setting that respects all religions and draws on the practices of several, Kali remains overwhelmingly authentic, with certain facets of her personality merely emphasized or deemphasized to suit the radically different circumstances of her new followers and surroundings. She is both the maternal goddess praised by Ramprasad and the fierce devourer of the Devimahatmya. Her unconditional love promises her devotees dignity and acceptance regardless of sexual orientation, race, and economic or social standing. Ma Jaya's insistence on service embodies the true Hindu and Buddhist ideal of compassion. It is not enough to feel sympathy for the less fortunate; real compassion means doing something about it.

Kali's intense blackness represents her ability to absorb all the evil and suffering in the world. Like the fierce Camunda Kali of the Devimahatmya, who consumes the flow of Raktabija's demonic blood, Kali consumes

whatever pain and evil is offered to her, while bestowing fearlessness even to those for whom death is imminent. At Kashi the word death signifies not only physical death but also the death of the ego, the finitizing principle that causes the true self within, which is infinite consciousness, to assume all the separateness and limitation of I-me-and-mine. Referring to both kinds of death, Ma Jaya asks, "If you are unready to die, how will you ever be ready to live?" (Bhagavati 1995: 122). The realization that reality is gloriously paradoxical has distinguished the religion of Kali throughout the ages. Though expressed at Kashi Ashram in nontraditional language, the frequent acknowledgement of Kali's paradoxical fierceness and beauty indicates that Hindu Tantra remains true to its essence in this unlikely setting, far removed in time and space from its original home. At Kashi Ashram the Tantric goddess remains fundamentally intact.

Tantric religion is most broadly defined as a complex of ancient magical and folk practices outside the Vedic sphere and more specifically as an esoteric system of spiritual discipline (*sadhana*). Philosophically nondualistic, Tantra views the world as a projection of divine energy and material nature as a transformation of the female creative principle. As a spiritual discipline, Tantra is a rigorous path involving the cultivation of inner and outer purity, control of the mind, meditation, and dedication to a chosen deity. The goal is the ultimate freedom of unitary consciousness, which transcends the polarized concepts of spirit and matter, male and female, purity and impurity, and all other dualities.

While some Hindu sects see the physical body and the restless, desiring mind as entrapping the spirit, Tantra accepts that, paradoxically, the instruments used to overcome the limitations of body, mind and intellect are the body, mind and intellect themselves.

India's Tantric sects are many and diverse, and because their practices are by and large secret to all but initiates, Tantra has been consistently misunderstood and misrepresented. Throughout the centuries it has been sensationalized by critics who indulge in lurid speculation about what goes on behind closed doors. It is only human nature to imagine the worst.

The most infamous practice is the circle ritual, the *chakrasadhana* or *chakrapuja*, which involves the *panchamakara* or "five M's": *mamsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *madya* (alcohol), *mudra* (parched grain) and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse). The meaning of *mudra* or parched grain is uncertain, but it probably refers to a hallucinogenic substance like ergot. Since these five elements are impure or illicit within the socioreligious context of Hindu orthodoxy, indulgence in any of them transgresses the purity code. Exposure results in feelings of shame, disgust or fear (Kripal 1995: 30-32).

All Tantric sects can be classified as either left-handed or right-handed. Followers of the left-handed *vamachara* path physically partake of the five M's in the *chakrasadhana* ritual and are often branded as degenerates by other Hindus. The more respectable adepts of the right-handed *dakshinachara* path interpret the ritual symbolically and perform it either mentally or with nonpolluting substitutes for the forbidden elements. Similarly, some Wiccans physically enact the Great Rite through the sexual union of priest and priestess, but in most circles the Great Rite is celebrated symbolically by the lowering of the athame into the chalice.

The real purpose of the *panchamakara* is not to shock a prudish public, but to break through the social conditioning that can be a mental straightjacket to the spiritual aspirant. For a Hindu the violation of dietary or behavioral taboos, either symbolically or actually, is

one way to overturn the neat and tidy preconceptions of social rigidity and be jolted into an altered state of awareness. Obviously, in other societies the concepts of propriety may differ, but in every case their violation results in the same old shame, disgust and fear. It goes without saying that Tantra, especially the left-handed variety, can be a dangerous course. There is a fine line between rising above duality and falling prey to the delusion that religious attainment puts one above the moral law.

Thus, Indian Tantra is not an invitation to license, and it has nothing to do with the New Age Tantra of the West, which is a slickly marketed package of incense, candlelight and naked bodies gently writhing in soft focus. This New Age phenomenon is generally aimed at enhancing sexual pleasure while

cloaking it under the mantle of religion. One example of this is a 'Tantric Massage Video' for sale to adults only. Under the title a line of smaller print reads "formerly titled 'Erotic Massage Video.'" Possibly these kinds of products derive in part from the Kama Sutra, which is a classic Hindu treatise on love and sex, but the Kama Sutra is not a Tantric text but an *arthashastra*, a book pertaining to practical life. The purpose of Hindu Tantra is to break through the barriers of nescience in order to attain spiritual union with the divine, not to have longer and stronger orgasms.

Another Western phenomenon is the rise of feminist spirituality, or more correctly, feminist spiritualities, which are still developing and reach across a wide spectrum of attitudes and objectives. At one end are the reformers:

women and sympathetic men who work within established religious traditions, usually Christian or Jewish but also Muslim and Buddhist, in order to neutralize gender bias and win the just acknowledgement of female contributions to the tradition throughout its history. At the other end are the radicals: women who refashion existing beliefs, practices and myths or create new ones to fit their own political and social agendas.

Western feminists have attempted to politicize Kali by relating her to the feminist foundational myth. According to that myth, the history

of the world goes something like this: Once upon a time, matriarchy was humankind's natural state, and the original religion was a form of nature-based polytheism that related everything to the Great Mother. At the end of the Paleolithic Age a paradigm shift occurred as Goddess worshipers in Egypt and Crete began directing their gaze heavenward. As the center of power shifted from the Earth Mother to the Sun God, the dominant symbol of divinity became male. Kings arose who ruled by divine right, and the feminine half of creation was subjugated to male narcissism, greed and abuse of power while the

Many Shakta Hindus agree with feminists that deity was originally conceived of as a mother goddess, but they would disagree with feminist writers ... who attempt to force the sweeping epic of Indian history into a framework coming from outside their cultural tradition.

world went to hell (Woodman and Dickson 1996: 204-205).

The interesting thing about this myth is how closely it parallels the Judeo-Christian myth of Adam and Eve, which also posits a former golden age before our present fallen state. Ironically, in attempting to overthrow the old order, many feminists are mimicking the thinking of their oppressors. And whenever the myth is accepted uncritically as dogma, feminist spirituality runs the risk of becoming another faith-based system with the same old linear thought processes. (The parallel between feminist and Judeo-Christian myth is discussed at length in John Michael Greer's "Myth, History and Pagan Origins," *Pomegranate* 9, August 1999.)

Many Shakta Hindus agree with feminists that deity was originally conceived of as a mother goddess, but they would disagree with feminist writers (eg, Kathleen Alexander-Berghorn,

Hallie Iglehart Austen, Paulette Boudreaux, Buffie Johnson, Monica Sjoo, Barbara Mor, and Barbara G. Walker) who attempt to force the sweeping epic of Indian history into a framework coming from outside their cultural tradition.

According to the feminist rewriting of Indian history, at some point in time patriarchal Aryan invaders conquered the matriar-

chal Indus Valley, whereupon Kali's paradoxical wholeness of beneficence and terror was split into dualism by "an act characteristic of patriarchal consciousness." Thereafter demonic manifestations of Kali and other goddesses became a regular feature within the formerly

matriarchal culture (McDermott 1996: 287).

Every point in this revisionist scenario is easily refuted. First, there is no evidence that the peaceful Indus Valley civilization was ever matriarchal. Skeletal and dental remains indicate that the social organization there conformed to a cultural pattern of gender inequality called "son preference/daughter neglect," which is still observed in rural northern India today (Lukacs 1994: 150-152). Next, abundant archeological evidence from the Indus Valley cities and older Neolithic sites confirms that pre-Aryan India venerated its goddesses as well as its male gods in both auspicious and horrific forms. This is not regarded by

Hindus as a sign of patriarchal dualism but as the simple recognition that divinity, though ultimately an undifferentiated unity, manifests in the bipolar phenomenal universe in polarized forms. As for the religion of the Aryans, their own sacred texts are the best source of information. The Rigveda describes a wholly evil and greatly feared goddess of death and destruction named Nirriti—San-

skrit for "decay"—who predates the first mention of Kali by a thousand years. At the same time, the earliest portions of the Rigveda extol a great mother goddess. Her name, Aditi, means "not divided" and clearly indicates that the Aryans equated the supreme female divinity with wholeness. Finally, the earliest Aryan reference to Kali as a personified goddess places her in the company of the high-ranking Vedic gods to be worshiped during the marriage ritual. So much for the supposed Aryan dualization and demonization of Kali.

Turning from revisionism to pragmatism, feminist spirituality devotes considerable attention to multiple forms of the Goddess, mostly drawn from ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern pantheons. The aim is generally not to revive old forms of cultic adoration so much as to employ the goddesses as archetypes for psychological healing and spiritual wholeness. Here Kali enjoys a small but significant presence.

In the book *Dancing in the Flames*, Marion Woodman and Elinor Dickson look at Kali through the lens of Jungian psychology and see her primarily as a transformer. They conclude that true transformation lies in the death of the ego and in releasing all the false values that the ego clings to out of fear.

As praxis they prescribe confronting Kali's blackness, visualized as a vortex from which all creation emerges and to which it returns. In this whirling cosmic dance of perpetual becoming, Kali simultaneously creates and destroys with laughter and abandon, intoxicated with the paradox that death feeds on life and life feeds on death in a ceaseless round. To accept the totality is to be released from fear and vulnerability (Woodman and Dickson 1996: 14-16).

It is necessary to enter the terrifying chaos

and spontaneity of our own true nature, to risk madness and become mad like Kali herself in order to "let go of the familiar landscape of our own restrictions." Change and flux, the decay of the old and the birth of the new, are the feminine rhythm. Embracing the Black Goddess will shatter illusions and reveal that the repressed feminine energies once disparaged as weak, irrational, disorganized or supersensitive are powerful tools for transformation (Woodman and Dickson 1996: 179-180). Kali's healing and empowering energy is not just for women, but also for men wounded by "patriarchy's bludgeonings" (Woodman and Dickson 1996: 88).

Of all Kali's Western settings, her place in feminist spirituality is the least traditional and most vulnerable to reconceptualization, but unlike Avalokiteshvara and Yeshua, the powerful Hindu goddess is in all likelihood too strong to be refashioned for the sake of preconceptions or ideological agendas. Nevertheless, the Kali of Western feminists is not the universal goddess and Divine Mother with whom adoring Shakta Hindus seek transcendental union. For the moment she is one archetypal energy among many goddess energies internalized for various aspects of psychological or spiritual empowerment and healing. She is a transformer, limited to the immediate task of self-actualization in the here and now. It is not that Western feminists have changed Kali but that they have thus far embraced only a small part of her, failing to understand her immensity.

Historically, Kali left her dimly remembered origins as a fierce, indigenous tribal goddess some time during the 1st millennium BCE and was absorbed into the Vedic pantheon. Fierceness remained her defining characteristic for another thousand years or more. As late as the 6th century CE, the Devimahatmya characterized her as the terrifying

... the Kali of Western feminists is not the universal goddess and Divine Mother with whom adoring Shakta Hindus seek transcendental union.
...It is not that Western feminists have changed Kali but that they have thus far embraced only a small part of her, failing to understand her immensity.

cosmic devourer who embodied the wrath of the supreme goddess Durga. The Bengali Tantrics of the 18th century, emphasizing Kali's maternal characteristics, completed the cumulative process by elevating her to the position of universal Divine Mother and ultimate, nondual reality.

In Western contexts where Kali's worship is carried out more or less traditionally, she has thus far kept her character intact. She is multifaceted enough to meet a wide variety of her new followers' needs and expectations without the necessity of adding or subtracting attributes or otherwise changing her already rich personality. Moreover, it is more likely that her all-embracing, paradoxically horrific and tender nature will expand Western theological thinking, and not have a diminishing effect on her as a result of the feminists' partial embrace of her powers. Both Ramprasad and Ramakrishna tried to articulate Kali's totality and inexpressible mystery when they declared that she is both the ever changing form and the eternal, formless energy of creation. Through the imagery of their beloved goddess, they reaffirmed India's age-old philosophy of divine immanence and transcendence.

WORKS CITED

- Pranab Bandyopadhyay, *Gods and Goddesses in Hindu Mythology*. (Calcutta: United Writers, 1995).
- Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati, *Bones and Ash*. (Sebastian, Florida: Jaya Press, 1995).
- Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life of Ramakrishna*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- John R. Lukacs, "'The Osteological Paradox' and the Indus Civilization: Problems Inferring Health from Human Skeletons at Harappa," in *From Sumer to Meluhha: Contributions to the Archaeology of South and West Asia in Memory of George F. Dales, Jr.*, ed. Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, Wisconsin Archaeological Reports, vol. 3 (Madison: Prehistory Press,

1994).

Rachel Fell McDermott, "The Western Kali," in *Devi: Goddesses of India*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

Ajit Mookerjee, *Ritual Art of India*. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1985).

David Nelson, tr., *In Praise of the Goddess: The Devimahatmya in Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, ms.

Swami Vivekananda, *In Search of God and Other Poems*. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968).

Marion Woodman and Elinor Dickson, *Dancing in the Flames: The Dark Goddess in the Transformation of Consciousness*. (Boston: Shambala, 1996).

David Nelson's long association with Hinduism, begun in 1966, includes a 17-month residency in the monastic community of the Vedanta Society of Southern California and nine years at Vedanta Press. As the founder of Records International and an acknowledged specialist in the field of rare music, David spent the 21 years of his professional career writing on classical music and acting as a consultant, researcher and co-producer for several recording companies. Since attending the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993, he has contributed articles on religion and spirituality to journals in India, England and the United States. Last year he completed a translation (with commentary) of the Devimahatmya, the central Sanskrit text of Hindu Goddess religion. As staff writer for Pilgrim Planet, a series of television documentaries now in development, he wrote the series' pilot and the first full-length episode on the Dakshineswar Kali Temple.

Urth's Well: A Proposed Northern Cosmology

by Dana Kramer-Rolls

With the growing practice of *seithr* among the various Northern tradition pagans, or heathens as they prefer to be known, it is perhaps time to take a look at the underlying historical texts and folk traditions that structure the understanding of retrieval of knowledge from the Otherworld. The most common ritual setting is the one practiced and taught by Diana Paxson and the Hrafnar Seidhjallr. Preparation for the seers and seekers at public rituals is established through the use of chants (which have become familiar enough to act as keys to trance induction), through invocations to particular deities of the Norse pantheon, and through a pathworking (guided meditation) to one or another particular place in the mythological landscape. While the references in the chants and meditation are most familiar to the practitioners in the Asatru communities, the ambiance of the ritual and its frequent presentation makes it sufficiently accessible to the general pagan community to create a receptive space in which to work.

Seithr is primarily ancestor work in which the *seithr* practitioner is the medium who goes to Hel's hall, the place of the ancestors, to retrieve answers for those who attend. However a technique has been developed in which three seers act as intermediaries to the three Norns. The Norns are addressed at Urth's Well, a place which is described as being the seat of judgement of the gods, although the Norns, who are a trinity of sisters who control or describe fate or fortune, act as the intermediaries in this cosmic law library. The third

kind of possessory trance or séance manifests one of the gods of the Norse pantheon. In this case the medium, who is usually well versed in eddic and saga literature, may choose to 'travel' to the address of the requested deity and act as a vessel or 'horse' to allow a direct conversation between the deity and the inquirer. This technique is historically justified by several oblique references in the primary material but the technique used is based on the practices taught by the African Diaspora religions.

The notion of a 'traveling seithr show,' which the Hrafnar trained mediums are now doing, is fully supported by the sagas. Late in the Viking Age and after the general Christian conversion, mediums were still sought, although often the medium is identified as a member of the marginalized tribal peoples, the Sámi, who lived in the northernmost parts of Scandinavia from Norway to Russia and who had a reputation for knowledge of the occult arts. For example, in *Eric's Saga*, Thorbiörg, an itinerant female seer required the assistance of a woman, a Christian girl who had to be persuaded to sing the local traditional songs, to call the ancestors particular to the place before she could aid the community with her occult skills. Thomas DuBois's opinion is that the details of Thorbiörg's ritual garments are, in fact, typical of Sámi and Balto-Finnic shamans (DuBois 1999:124).

In a similar manner today, both individual and community questions are asked of the seer. Service to the community is a hallmark of historical shamanism, in contrast to closed or private circles (such as most Wiccan circles) where psychic practice is primarily kept 'in house.' In short, the *seithr* tradition of today is becoming a genuine shamanic tradition within the Norse pagan community, and at public festivals, for the wider pagan community.

But not everybody 'finds a friend in Odin,'

Service to the community is a hallmark of historical shamanism, in contrast to closed or private circles (such as most Wiccan circles) where psychic practice is primarily kept 'in house'.

to paraphrase a Christian gospel song. *Seithr*-like séances have been conducted using other pantheons and other seminal myths of the Otherworld, but the referent is still the Norse practice. As the popularity and power of this public oracular divination grows, the importance of understanding its roots and implications becomes more important. And as the Norse community grows, certain consensus assumptions are becoming integrated into their religious culture and belief system, ones which may or may not have been critically tested.

While 'gods' are generally a focus of neopagan religion, since prayer and worship are familiar to most pagans through family background in the major religions, especially Christianity, neither the importance of fate or the ancestors is well integrated into contemporary Western thought. Also lacking is theological consideration of the spirits of a place, such as a sacred well, mountain or grove. In the spirit of post-modernism it is well to note that the practitioners of *seithr* are themselves coming to this practice with certain post-Christian biases, such as god-centered prayer and unqualified trust in gods. These biases are reified in part by the medieval Scandinavian sources, particularly Snorri Sturluson, which were themselves somewhat removed from the practices which they described, and may ascribe Christian practices and attitudes to their forebearers which cannot be tested, nor should be taken at face value. Fate and ancestors, animal guides and land spirits are seminal to Norse practice in general and oracular practice

in particular.

This paper is an attempt to deconstruct the systematic theology which modern heathens inherited from Snorri, and may not well represent either historical Norse pagan practice nor serve the contemporary Norse heathen well, and suggest a new model which is both more coherent with historical Northern shamanic practice and contemporary social and ethical concerns.

The first problem is 'Where is the font of wisdom?' It does not lie in the gods alone. Three wells are cited in various texts: Urth's Well, a 'heavenly' well tended by the Norns Urth and two sisters, Verdandi and Skuld; Mímir's Well, a font of wisdom near the realm of the void, Gennungegap, tended by Mímir, which was supposed to hide Óðin's eye; and Hvergelmir, filled with serpents and located in the primal realm of the Níffelhiem. Of the three, Urth's Well, or as it is more commonly known in English, Wyrð or Weird's Well, has the most overarching significance. Less idiosyncratic than the notion of fate taken as some sort of cosmic lottery, Urth's Well is the font of laws, both natural and civil, which the gods themselves must consult and to which they must yield. Northern literature often incorporates the workings of fate or Wyrð as a primary force, or providence, driving the unfolding narrative.

Mímir's Well has been given increased mythological importance in contemporary Asatru practice by the interest in and devotion to the god Óðin, and by Óðin's mythic relationship to runecraft, which is being widely

used as a divinatory and magical tool. It is to this well that mediumistic journeys are made to seek the wisdom of the runes.

I will suggest that there was only one well, not three, underlying pre-Christian Nordic religion, and that the separation of the wells is a cultural artifact based on historical gender roles and the dissociation of early medieval Norse society with traditional shamanism. I will further suggest that the Well at the base of Yggdrasil together with the Tree itself form a powerful metaphor for a way of seeing the world in harmony with nature, with kin (living and dead), and with the gods, and is therefore a useful myth structure today.

Paul Bauschatz argues that the Well or cistern of Urth (*Wyrð* in Old English) encompasses all three of the wells named in various texts, and is the realm of the Otherworld (Bauschatz 1982). He also includes material on burial practice and cultural clues gleaned from Anglo-Saxon literature, particularly *Beowulf*, and linguistic support for his thesis. This Well of Urth is the locus of the *orlog*, or primal law, as well as a repository of past wisdom. Bauschatz was interested in seeing how Nordic culture saw time, and how the casting of lots or interpreting of runes might be connected to the Well of Urth. He suggests we picture something like a large potted plant, the canopy of the Tree and the trunk being the created nine realms, and the pot containing the Well, and the Otherworld. The denizens of the created world (humans, gods, dwarves, elves, etc.) may keep to themselves for the most part, but are able to move from 'village to village.' On the other hand, the Otherworld of Urth is timeless and eternal.

He then suggests that we picture this potted tree on its side, only now a seer or seeker replaces the canopy, looking down the trunk toward the pot. This is the temporal understanding of the early Germanic people vis-à-vis divination. The seer doesn't look to

the future. There is no future, only the present, which is perpetually moving backward as the present is formed. On the other hand, the past is not a static thing but a pattern, the pattern of the *orlog* as it is continually woven (and remember that the Norns are, like the various other triple fate goddesses, weavers). The Well is able to reveal the emergent pattern of both social and natural occurrences in the ever-unfolding present. The pattern of the past 'predicts' the logical or ethical future.

The legend that describes the cycle of Urth's Well nourishing the Tree, which in turn rains back the water to the Well, is a model for a balanced ecological cosmology. The animals described around the Tree (hart, squirrel, eagle, etc) further this model by pointing out the natural intimacy of animal (over human) life in the balanced world/Otherworld system. Animals are not 'lesser,' as in Christian theology, but by their very natural harmony with the Tree and adherence to the *orlog* of the Well are closer to the sacred. On the other hand, humans and gods need to apply themselves to achieve this harmonious and 'lawful' balance. All life is therefore interconnected and sacred. The presence of the serpent at the root, who may have originally been a chthonic goddess, suggests natural decay of all created worlds, and is not 'evil,' but a necessary part of the cycle of life and death, as Ragnarok is not the Christian apocalypse, but a description of the transition to a new cycle. This is a holistic model. It is useful to note that all this is in keeping with contemporary evolutionary, geological, and cosmological science.

It is from Snorri Sturluson that we learn of the three wells and nine worlds. Snorri was an ethnologist and folklorist and collected disparate tales. Snorri was a product of the growing scholasticism of the 13th century. He organized his material in a way coherent with the systematic worldview of the Christianity of his time. The degree of organization of his

Norse cosmology is itself suspect since it reflects this very medieval theological and literary notion of order. In addition, duplication is a well-known folkloric device used to establish the importance of a person or event. One dancing princess would do, but why not three, or even nine? As tidy as Snorri's cosmology is, let us try to simplify it to see what emerges.

Probably the earliest text on Urth's Well is from *Volupsá* (19-20). A prose version is found in *Gylfaginning*:

There stands there one beautiful hall under the ash by the well, and out of this hall come three maidens whose names are Weird [Urth], Verdandi, Skuld. These maidens shape men's lives. We call them norns. There are also other norns to visit everyone when they are born to shape their lives, and these are of divine origin ... (15) It is also said that the norns that dwell by Weird's well take water from the well each day and with it the mud that lies round the well and pour it up over the ash so that its branches may not rot, or decay. And this water is so holy that all things that come into that well go as white as the membrane called the skin that lies round inside of an eggshell ... (16)

We know from other texts that this 'water' isn't ordinary, but is the metaphysical source for the *log* or laws (natural and social) which inform and instruct the Aesir. That is, the Tree, and its worlds of various created beings, is 'fed' by the organizational principal that holds the cosmology together, the waters of Urth's Well. Urth's Well is therefore not merely the well of the past, but the well of a past whose patterns do not so much predict the present and future, but build it.

The names of the three primary Norns who tend the Well support this model. *Urthr* is taken from the preterite plural of *vertha*, to become. *Verthandi* is the present participle of the same word (Bauschatz 8, quoting Grimm). *Skuld* in Old Norse, is used to express necessary truths and generalized, universal present (things that happen continuously) (Bauschatz 12-13). Thus we have 'what is, what was, and

what needs to be.' In terms of Northern epic literature, a hero might meet a terrible fate because of nature (he drowned in a storm), or because of the consequences of his acts (he stole another hero's girl friend, or he insulted some unnamed god by his rude behavior). Providence has an intrinsic logic.

One of the tasks assigned to Urth and her two companions is that of 'cutting staves' (*Volupsá* 20). Tacitus describes the practice of divination by drawing lots with wood strips marked with symbols (*Germania* 10), which might well be the same sort of staves cut by Urth and her companions. Thus the practice of rune drawing (in both senses) are in the venue of the Well of Urth.

Now let us look at Mímir's Well as a separate well, holding wisdom and Óthin's spare eye. Snorri, in *Ynglingsaga* (chapters 6-9) describes Óthin as a powerful human war leader and shaman, a combination of talents found among men and women of the Siberian steppes, if grave goods are to be believed. Óthin uses Mímir's head for wisdom and prophecy (*Heimskringla*, chap. 4, Hollander 8). Certainly we know that the continental Celts used heads in this way. Shamans do draconian acts of self-sacrifice to obtain their 'second sight,' and although iconography suggests that Óthin exchanged an actual eye for wisdom, the metaphorical or even mystical meaning seems pretty clear. Óthin already had the wisdom of the Mímir head. What he desired was the 'sight' to be able to see and interpret such Otherworldly knowledge. And for that he required the 'eye' or vision of the sorceress, called Heith or Witch, the eye with which she 'sits out' or trances (cf. *Volupsá* 22-22, 24, and Hollander 5n29).

It is not Mímir's Well he goes to. It is Mímir's head, also a vessel of knowledge. The eye he uses is not a blind eye, the result of self-mutilation, but the inward-looking eye of a shaman, acquired by hanging (deprivation of

I will suggest that there was only one well, not three, underlying pre-Christian Nordic religion, and that the separation of the wells is a cultural artifact based on historical gender roles and the dissociation of early medieval Norse society with traditional shamanism.

oxygen to the brain, also practiced by binding with cords in certain Wiccan traditions even today) and by getting high on mead, probably laced with some herbal hallucinogen. The seeress tells Óthin in *Volupsá* 28 (Hollander 6):

Well know I, Ygg, where thy eye is hidden:
in the wondrous well of Mímir;
each morn Mímir his mead doth drink
out of Fjölfnir's pledge;

A free interpretation for this verse might be something like, 'I know where your vision is hidden, Óthin, in the vessel of Mímir, which each morning is filled with mead which acts as a pledge-cup for you to make your boasts.' Metaphorically drawing on the tradition of noble women and goddesses holding out a mead horn to champions for oaths, boasts, and sacrifices, Heith is offering Óthin the intoxicating liquor of magical language held in the skull-cup of Mímir. It is only Snorri who gives us the literal, rather than metaphorical or poetical (kenning) interpretation of this verse (*Gylfaginning* 14-15, Faulkes 17).

Let us look again at the mead. The origin of the mead is said to be the blood of the slain Kvasir, who was of the Vanir and renown for his wisdom (*Heimskringla*, chap. 4, Hollander 8). He had been an exchange hostage to the Aesir, in exchange for Mímir, who was sent to the Vanir. When the Vanir killed Mímir in a misunderstanding about his wisdom, they returned his head to Óthin, who promptly pickled it into a talking head using his shamanic magic. Kvasir, in turn, was also mur-

dered, and his blood was mixed with honey to make mead (*Skaldskaparmál* 57, Faulkes 62). So that Kvasir's blood and Mímir's head are both magical tools for wisdom seeking. Further, Kvasir's blood was poured out into a cauldron, that is to say a container, just as a well or a skull is a container. This mead was eventually put into the charge of the giantess Gunnloth (*Skaldskaparmál* 57, Faulkes 62) from whom Óthin stole it (*Hávamál* 110). So now Óthin had both mead and head, the two magic objects obtained by the sacrifice of the two hostages. Without a doubt, Óthin is figured as a powerful shaman, one who was given understanding of that most magical of gifts, writing. Why, then, the apparent separation of runecraft and seithcraft?

Thomas A. DuBois makes a provocative suggestion regarding the gender issue of *seiðkonur* (DuBois, chap. 6). A scholar of Sámi and Finnish folklore, he noted that in those cultures males tend to hold the authority as magic workers and seers, in other words, as shamans, although there is evidence of an older tradition of wise women. He suggests that, even correcting for post-Christian misogyny and Christian anti-*galdr* sentiments in the sagas (where we get most of our information), perhaps there was a shift in Norse society back to women seers and magic workers (witches) to balance the very active role of men as warriors. Although there were a few women scalds, poetry was not a woman's thing to do. Poetry was manly. Fortune telling was not. If this were so, then the considerable talents of

The key symbols are all polyvalent, and all point to the same paradigm. In psychological terms, the combined Well of Urth and the Well of Mímir are the interface between the conscious and subconscious mind, while the third Well, with its writhing proto-life is the unconscious.

Óthin as a magician would have to be separated from the magic of women. If his suggestion has any merit, then perhaps the separation of *seithr* to gather wisdom from Urth (*Wyrd*), and the *galdr* of rune spellcraft and poetry coming from another source of wisdom was developed to satisfy a cultural gender expectation. Men may have consulted women who could see into Urth's Well, and they may have lived or died in battle or at sea as a result of Urth's law, but men didn't do the looking (Blain & Wallis 1999:4-16).

But in the modern world gender roles are not cast in stone, and it seems reasonable to assume that the Well of Urth is the same well in which Óthin, as a god or as a shaman, or both, sees the *orlog*, thus keeping order in the world(s), and the well in which the runes were interpreted to him during his initiatory trial on the World Tree. And that same World Tree is rooted in the Well of Urth and is nourished by Urth and her sacred waters, and out of the mead gotten from the cauldron Óthroerir (*Hávamál* 138-42). The key symbols are all polyvalent, and all point to the same paradigm. In psychological terms, the combined Well of Urth and the Well of Mímir are the interface between the conscious and subconscious mind, while the third Well, with its writhing proto-life is the unconscious. But all are part of the one mind, the mind that feeds the created world, which in turn grows out of it.

Bauschatz's interest is in how the early Germanic people perceived time and space, but the modern implication are obvious. The underlying idea that makes Bauschatz's observation relevant to modern heathens is 'The map is not the territory.' Most people use flat maps. Few believe in a flat earth. The Asatru community is inspired by folklore about a past civilization as interpreted by medieval Christians, most of whom were intellectuals and many of whom were well versed in Christian doctrine. These medieval Christian Icelanders also may have had a romantic or nationalistic passion for their past, but they were not men and women of the past. It is useful to approach their texts with a degree of critical suspicion because of their post-Christian origin, and their peculiar admixture of literary conceits and folklore motifs. Fundamentalism is rarely useful.

But neither are modern pagans creatures of the past, and practices such as human sacrifice, to take the extreme example, or restricted gender roles, to take a more mundane one, are not acceptable in the modern world. So we are looking at two levels of deconstruction, one to sort out pre-Christian pagan practice from post-Christian interpretation, no matter how sympathetic it may at first appear, and the second to assess the contemporary value of such practice.

One aspect of *seithr* practice that is not well addressed by the Bauschatz model is wisdom

from the dead, which was and is a seminal part of shamanic and crypto-shamanic work. In historical pagan communities these dead ancestors readily were absorbed into the local landscape as guardian spirits, and if important enough, gods. The claim of the Otherworld on the imagination of the Germanic peoples continued throughout the Christian period in folklore and in remnants of shamanic discourse with the dead. In Christian communities ancestors became local saints, or at least the devout dead who could warn the living or perhaps effect small heterodox acts such as healing or finding. Significantly, these same helpful dead were demonized in periods of Christian instability, notably the Reformation (Behringer 1998).

Norse religion did not have a clear and organized idea of where dead people went. Very few religions do. A notable exception is Christianity, which has a univocal system (the dead go to Heaven, Hell, or, after the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Purgatory). Post-Christian writers, and by Viking Age pagans themselves who had continuous culture contact with Christians, might have been expected to attempt a systematic deposition of spirits/souls. The various halls of the dead associated with gods, Valhalla being the most famous, were undoubtedly genuine heathen beliefs, but how old and how widespread is unclear.

An example of the ambiguity is found in the famous funeral account of a Rus Viking chieftain by Ibn Fadhlān. Although Óthinistic cult elements have been ascribed to this ritual (Simpson 1967:199-200), the Rus (Swedes living in the Baltic region) are believed to have had strong ties to Freyr worship. The slave girl turned wife and seer is ritually married to the dead chieftain. Her intercourse with his intimate friends, bringing their seed to the Otherworld with him and making her the potential mother of his replacement war band and her

sacrificial death, would support the fertility aspects of Freyr worship more than a trip to Valhalla. Death by drowning is described in Vanir sacrifice, although bog mummies have been found with ropes around their necks. Although post-Dumézilian theorists specify death by drowning as a fertility function, there is no reason to believe that the hanging/stabbing act of the Angel of Mercy was necessarily Odinist (Ward 1970:83-122). There are also shamanic elements. The girl, now a *seithkona*, is lifted up, where she sees her own low caste or slave parents and relations waiting for her, and her new 'husband' who is already on 'the other side'. This is coherent with ancestor/ghost veneration, but not coherent with particular and separate realms of the dead based on class or achievement. Bauschatz argues that the sacrifice and description of the afterlife are grounded in the concept that the Well of Urth and the Tree are seminal to the interpenetration between the material world and the Otherworld (Bauschatz 33-36, 64-65). So the question 'Where do the dead go?' is a complex one, and the cultural interpretation is dependent on time and place.

The dead would fit into the One Well model by returning to the Well as part of the collective intelligence of the *orlog* in a sort of Jungian interpretation. This later would be supported by the belief that there are many norms who are personal guardians. The realm of Urth would encompass all of the Otherworld, including the spirits of the dead. Another place of the dead would be in another of these 'villages' of beings (*eg*, elves, dwarves, gods), coexistent but transdimensional from the ordinary world. In this way the dead could 'live' in rocks or trees, as they are said to in Iceland.

In some current *seithr* practices, a totem animal is called as a helper, although wisdom is rarely directly sought from an animal. However, the model that I propose, with its central

... the model that I propose ... admits animal totems as shamanic advisors to the material/spiritual union of the Tree and Well ...[and] puts back into Norse religion the notion of primal goddesses, thus bringing it back in line with most of the other Indo-European religions.

incorporation of animal spirits and recognition of animal sentience (which is only now being explored by animal behaviorists who have up to recently been heavily influenced by Christian thinking regarding *Homo sapiens'* proprietary ownership of conscience and intelligence) easily admits animal totems as shamanic advisors to the material/spiritual union of the Tree and Well, adding yet another valence to the holistic nature of the model. Animals (and their support environment) would then be considered sacred and wise by their very natural intimacy with the *orlog*, and would require respect and protection in the material world as well as in the spiritual. In a world which rapidly is being destroyed by *Homo-centrism*, such a notion would have far reaching and positive ethical implications.

Given that historical Norse religion was heavily influenced by Christianity well before the wave of conversion in the 11th century, it is likely that early religious practice was a synthesis of animistic shamanism and deism, becoming more and more like Christian worship through the building of temples and perhaps by shifts in the perception of the power and function of gods. DuBois suggests that even the testimony of pagan devotion attributed to a character in a saga might reflect the author's desire to paint the portrait of a 'good' person in a Christian frame of reference, rather than depict any historical practice.

The gods were 'other,' beings with whom a

man could make alliances as he did with human chieftains. The fact that there are scant references in the primary literature to the ritual place of goddesses, given the importance that Tacitus gives to Nerthus in the 1st century, furthers the notion of engendered religion. If religion was a 'man's business' (including the collateral participation of the mistress of the household as, for example, cupbearer) and divination was a 'woman's business', then religion would have had to distance itself from the supernatural, just as the attributes of Óðin had to be separated from the attributes of the seers of fate. Through the working of Weird, with its profound kernel of integrated pantheism, religious obligations of honor (sacrifices, oaths, feasts, burial practices) and interpenetration between the natural and supernatural could be played out within a single mythic paradigm.

What does this analysis offer the contemporary Norse pagan practitioner which Snorri's more complex model does not? For one, it tidies up the number of disparate legends upon which the various practices of *galdr* and *seithr* are currently based. It pulls together the quasi-institutional religion which may or may not have existed in the late pre-Christian period in Scandinavia with the older shamanistic practices, which are attributed to Óðin, and which are still extant among the Sámi, Finns and Inuit who live to the north, and in the folk beliefs, especially in Iceland, where land-spirits

are still alive, and, from all reports, still kicking. It contextualizes the use of rune-symbolism and pathworking based on the eddas as mythopoetic, paths to intuition similar to meditation on mandalas, rather than literal maps of either the mythic past or the spiritual world. For another, it puts back into Norse religion the notion of primal goddesses, thus bringing it back in line with most of the other Indo-European religions. Finally it incorporates what has come to be known as Deep Ecology, the Tree representing both the shaman's world pole and a living metaphor for life and death in balance. It unifies the worlds of men, gods and nature. It takes an archaic religion and weaves it to the modern world. It might be fair to compare this model with essential Taoism, that is to say, Taoism stripped of its ritual particularity.

While the construct of the nine worlds and three wells is well and good, certainly romantic and rich in imagery, it limits the practitioner by its presumed historical specificity and verity. By updating this divinatory model, the contemporary pagan can claim a glimpse into Urth's Well, which offers a sense of both majesty and dread, of modern science and mystery, and a basic theology on which to build a life and develop a community of belief.

TRANSLATIONS OF PRIMARY MATERIAL CITED IN-LINE

- Hollander, Lee M, trans. *The Poetic Edda*. Austin: University of Texas, 1962/1994.
- Snorri Sturluson. *Edda*. Anthony Faulkes, ed. Everyman Library. London: J. M. Dent, 1987/1997.
- _____. *Heimskringla*. Lee M. Hollander, trans. Austin: University of Texas, 1964/1995.
- Tacitus. *The Agricola and the Germania*. H. Mattingly and S. A. Handford, trans. London: Penguin Books, 1970.

OTHER SOURCES

- Paul C. Bauschatz, *The Well and the Tree: World and*

Time in Early Germanic Culture. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982).

Wolfgang Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf: Chonrad Stoeckhlin and the Phantoms of the Night*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

Jenny Blain and Robert Wallis, "Men and 'Women's Magic': Gender, Seidhr and 'Ergi'" *Pomegranate* 9 (August 1999).

Thomas A. DuBois, *Nordic Religion in the Viking Age*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Jacqueline Simpson, *Everyday Life in the Viking Age*. (New York: Dorset, 1967).

Donald J. Ward, "The Threefold Death: An Indo-European Trifunctional Sacrifice?" In Jaan Puhvel, ed. *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

Dana Kramer-Rolls holds a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies with an emphasis on Folklore and History/Anthropology of Religions from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. She is currently working on a project in folk religion and the environment, drawing on her background in botanical ecology and evolutionary genetics. By looking at the beliefs surrounding animal/human deities, animal spirit guides and animal shape-changing by the magical practitioner, she wishes to shed light on how contemporary paganism can incorporate theological elements which will be responsive to the complex needs of the new century. She is active in various pagan groups in the San Francisco Bay Area, and supports several animal protection organizations. Dana is a professional science fiction writer with a Star Trek novel to her credit, a knight in the Society for Creative Anachronism, and a student of T'ai Chi. She lives with her husband and three cats.

Embarrassed by Our Origins: Denial and Self-Definition in Modern Witchcraft

by Cat Chapin-Bishop
& Peter E. Bishop

Life as the parent of a thirteen-year-old bears an uncanny resemblance to life as a student and teacher of Wiccan history. Any parents of a teenager know the experience I'm thinking of. You take yourselves out to the local movie, mall, or restaurant, offspring in tow. And as you wait in line, you notice your child slowly edging away from you, trying to look as if she never had met that uncool, middle-aged couple before in her life.

Witches, like adolescents preoccupied with their image, have an astonishing willingness to disavow our roots. We do it in a hundred ways, subtle and not so subtle. It is jarring how many Witches are uncomfortable with 'ceremonial magic' while invoking the Watchtowers, or are utterly unaware that phrases like "So mote it be" derive from Masonic ritual. Witches who are perfectly comfortable with invocations of Tiamat, Loki, Set, or Hecate, quail and run from the notion of a Witch honoring Jesus, Mary, or Jehovah, never mind the bad boy of Middle Eastern religion, Satan. It's not that either of us is in favor of rituals to honor Satan. You may be hard pressed to name the last time one of us invoked Loki in circle, either, but Witches' resistance to the Judeo-Christian Gods of our culture's mainstream is a bit jarring, given the easy, mix-and-match approach we tend to take toward other cultures' Gods. Like our daughter's paranoid fear of being seen as our daughter, Witches' embarrassment is becoming annoying. Per-

haps it's time to give credit where it is due.

Wicca's debt to Crowley is probably the most obvious. By now, the passages in Gardnerian liturgy (including the *Charge of the Goddess*) that were originally Crowley's work are fairly well known. Every time we bless wine with chalice and athame, we pay homage to the Sixth Degree Ritual of the O.T.O. Every time we set our students to memorizing tables of correspondences, we honor Crowley's exhaustive work—in fact, most of Wiccan lore in this area comes straight from him. We know that Gardner was familiar with Crowley's work. *Red Garters Magazine* has published a catalog of Gardner's library, which included at least a dozen of Crowley's books—enough to suggest more than a casual interest. We also know that Gardner met Crowley during his lifetime, and possessed a charter granting him the right to create an O.T.O. Lodge, though both too much and too little has been made of this. On the one hand, there are ardent Thelemites who maintain that all of Gardnerian Wicca is simply a watered down and debased version of Thelema. At the other extreme, some Gardnerians have claimed that the textual parallels between Crowley and Gardner are indeed borrowings—but that Crowley borrowed his ideas and words from the Witches! Crowley's legacy, showing up in the very heart of Wiccan liturgy, clearly makes us uncomfortable.

We did steal from the man, but we followed the time-honored (and still used) Pagan technique of quoting out of context in order to recast the meaning. Wiccan ritual and Crowley's work have very different underlying purposes: Crowley sought to elevate the human, individual spirit to its most godlike realization, while Gardner wanted to reintroduce the Gods and Goddesses of nature into human life. There are great similarities here, but they are not the same things, any more

than the Theosophy of Mme. Blavatsky can be taken as representative of the Hindu or Tibetan Buddhist thought that was her source material.

The downside of acknowledging our spiritual debt to Crowley is obvious. Called "the wickedest man in the world" during his lifetime, Crowley had a positive talent for scandal, and his sexual and narcotic exploits (however exaggerated they may have been by the press) still make us cringe

with embarrassment. Further, as we strive to establish ourselves within our culture as a legitimate religion—something Crowley himself never sought to do—the thousand ways that Crowley delighted in rousing fear and anger in the Christian world become more and more of a burden. When one of us seeks clergy privileges at a local hospital, for instance, it's not pleasant to have to contend with Uncle Aleister's ghost along the way.

Still, there is value in accepting this man as one of our ancestors. Beyond any specific contributions of text and liturgy, Crowley links us to one of the most intriguing and energetic movements of recent times: the occult revival of the 19th century. At first glance, this may not seem like much of a bargain. MacGregor Mathers in full occult regalia looks positively ludicrous today, and Helena Blavatsky's self-serving revelations from the Hidden Masters (perhaps by way of the false back to the cabi-

The concept of polarity ...
proceeds from the
Golden Dawn's way of
working with the
'masculine' and 'feminine'
pillars of the Kabalistic
Tree of Life, and the
magician's absolute need
for a balance between
those influences in performing the Great Work.

net that received the apporportion?) are impossible to take seriously. But this is also the world of William Butler Yeats and Rudyard Kipling, and of the Edwardian cult of Pan, which first introduced into modern culture the idea of the sacredness of natural landscapes. Theosophy brought us, for the first time since the fall of Rome, a worldwide movement urging respect for other religions than that of one's birth. Women's suffrage, vegetarianism, and the drive

toward Indian independence were all ideas represented in the great occult resurgence that began with Spiritualism and came to flower in the Golden Dawn and its successors. Everywhere we look, we see mad idealists, progressives, artists, and folks who longed for the numinous. This is a heritage to honor and treasure, for behind and beyond the work of Crowley, of course, stand the three giant landmarks of the Occult Revival: the Golden Dawn, the Theosophical movement, and, at the very beginning of the 19th century, the Spiritualist movement itself.

Crowley was a breakaway member of the Golden Dawn, and Doreen Valiente saw his popularization of their ideas as his main contribution to the world of the occult: "His great importance ... was that he had wrenched open that treasure chest in which the Order of the Golden Dawn had locked up the secret knowledge of the Western Mystery Tradition

...” (Valiente 61). But the Golden Dawn had done more than lock up the Mysteries; to a very real extent, they had created them like a patchwork quilt from an assembly of fabrics never before pieced together in quite the same way. Both of the founders of the Golden Dawn, Wynn Wescott and S.L. MacGregor Mathers, had contact with Theosophy at various times (indeed, Wescott was a friend of Helena Blavatsky’s), and both had been Masons. It seems clear that some influences from each of those movements were included in the early Golden Dawn. The group claimed a Rosicrucian origin for

itself. But even if this is true, and if the alleged notes from the Rosicrucian Anna Sprengel ever existed, still the coming together of all these influences with the Kabbalah, the remnants of medieval grimoires such as the Key of Solomon, and a superficial polytheism (not unlike Blavatsky’s understanding of Hinduism)—all this was a new synthesis.

The finished product was remarkable, introducing concepts that modern Witches and Pagans take for granted today. The idea of many names for a single wellspring of deity, for instance, proceeds logically from the marriage of rituals invoking and naming Pagan Gods with the Kabbalistic idea of multiple spheres emanating from a single ineffable source. The concept of polarity, too, proceeds

For modern Pagans,
this time when the new
year meets the old is
also a time that the veil
between the worlds is
especially thin, making
it ideal for reverencing
the ancestors and
contacting the dead;
yet it was our medieval
Catholic ancestors
who first made
that association.

contributing influences of Masonry and Theosophy, we find more links to the Wiccan present. Not only is our habit of calling ourselves ‘the Craft’ or our references to our ‘working tools’ of Masonic provenance, but our system of degrees (the Golden Dawn’s as well) originate here. The cable tow, the confrontation with a blade during the initiation, and the very idea of a ‘Charge’ are originally Masonic. And it is no surprise that Gerald Gardner was himself a Mason, through a Co-Masonic lodge that probably combined Masonic ideas with a splash of Theosophy as well. (Co-Masonry as a movement in Britain was begun by Annie Besant, the famous Theosophist.)

The Witches’ circle contains furniture from

from the Golden Dawn’s way of working with the ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ pillars of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, and the magician’s absolute need for a balance between those influences in performing the Great Work. In fact, the whole tidy pairing of Gods and Goddesses into neat little dyads seems more related to ideas about magical balance than the sprawling multiplicity of indigenous polytheistic religions. In a sense, the theology of Witchcraft is just the logical extension of the esoteric ideas of the Golden Dawn.

And if we look farther back in time, to the

the Theosophical attic, too: Our concept of reincarnation is very unlike the Hindu or Buddhist idea, where rebirth is to be avoided. Witches don’t want to escape the wheel of rebirth—we want to use it, in true Theosophical form, to evolve personally across lifetimes. And, what’s more, we want to take lovely vacations between our lives in a place we call the Summerlands. That word, together with terms like ‘other side’ and ‘crossing over’, are taken from the Spiritualist movement that gave rise to Theosophy in its turn. Indeed, Rolla Nordic, a self-described family-tradition Witch, claimed in an interview at the age of 95 that Spiritualism was virtually indistinguishable from modern Witchcraft: “We were not called Witches in those days. We were called Spiritualists” (Wildman 2000).

Of course, as with Crowley himself, a common history and some shared ideas still don’t make us the same thing; Wicca is quite distinct from the occult revival and its zeitgeist in many ways. There is no evidence that Kipling ever believed literally in the magic of ‘oak and ash and thorn’, and the artists and poets who contributed to the growing popularity of Pan as an emblem of nature and wildness did not actually worship Him as a God. What’s more, none of the major occult philosophies of the 19th century moved very far away from the monotheistic ideas of the Christian majority. This is very different from Wiccan practice today; most Witches are dualtheists at least, and very often unapologetic polytheists. While the Golden Dawn evoked Pagan Gods in ritual, they regarded them as merely metaphoric, and few Witches today see our Gods as only metaphors. Still, a family resemblance must be noted. We aren’t polytheistic in quite the way the ancient Greeks or modern Shintoists are, either, and some Witches do sometimes accept a theology based on aspects of a One Transcendent Something, whether we call it Drychten (Gardner’s

term, borrowed from Old English), or Kether, or simply ‘The Goddess’.

Maybe it is because of these lingering monotheistic influences that Witches are uncomfortable acknowledging our debt to Ceremonial Magic—and even less comfortable with the monotheist religions that form the mainstream of our culture. Yet here, too, we owe a debt. As a Wiccan friend of ours likes to say, “I have no quarrel with people who claim that there is an unbroken chain of agricultural rituals brought down from ancient times. It’s called the Catholic Church” (Yohalem 1996).

The wheel of the year is one of the most powerful images in Wicca, symbolizing the cyclical nature of all life and neatly encapsulating our view of reincarnation. Yet when we look closely at that familiar, symmetrical wheel, it breaks apart into a kaleidoscopic image with some real surprises. For instance, the year begins and ends with Samhain, regarded as the Celtic New Year. For modern Pagans, this time when the new year meets the old is also a time that the veil between the worlds is especially thin, making it ideal for reverencing the ancestors and contacting the dead; yet it was our medieval Catholic ancestors who first made that association. Our commonly held belief that the Catholics were Christianizing a pre-existing Pagan custom is a modern misinterpretation that Ronald Hutton traces to Sir James Frazer. Samhain may have been a pre-Christian seasonal festival, but “The dead arrived later” (Hutton 1996:364), and did so within the Church, where the Feast of All Souls was only gradually regularized to the beginning of November. Imbolg, similarly, is reputed among Wiccans to have begun as a celebration of the Goddess giving birth to the new year’s sun God, and to have been co-opted by the Catholic Church as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In fact, though Imbolg is a genuine ancient

Gaelic feast, it seems to have been Mary who first brought to it any associations with recovery from childbirth. The Wiccan Goddess' role in the holiday is "purely and simply a paganization of Christianity" (Hutton 1991:286).

Is this a problem? Many Wiccans and Pagans have a deep emotional dislike for the Christianity or Judaism they were raised in. Others do not, and some even profess to be both. As one Judeo-Pagan friend of ours explains, "The Commandment says, 'Thou shalt have no other Gods before me'—It doesn't say anything about 'after me', or 'a little to one side'..." (Novack 1992). This comment is neither a joke nor a rationalization, but has legitimate roots in Jewish history. The tribal people that wrote the Hebrew Scriptures were not strictly monotheist. They were henotheists; they acknowledged the existence of the Gods of other peoples, but maintained a relationship with only one, whom they gave precedence above all others. Those people today who call themselves Judeo-Pagans or Christo-Pagans seem to hold a similar view. It may be heresy according to Christian orthodoxy, but we as Pagans are not responsible for rooting out heresy in the Christian Church, and as polytheists ourselves, we have no rational basis for rejecting heretical Christians as legitimate Pagans. The names of El Shaddai or YHWH should be no more out of place in a Wiccan ritual than Thor or Aphrodite. None of them were originally Wiccan deities, but there is nothing intrinsic to Wicca that rules out their inclusion.

The same, like it or not, is true of Satan. If Wiccans find it irksome to have roots in the medieval Catholic Church, we are downright scared by our connections to Satanism. In our initial scramble for legitimacy in the 1960s and 70s, we were most eager to distance ourselves from Devil worship (as if Satanists were

somehow not entitled to the same religious freedom we have claimed for ourselves). Again, it's not entirely rational. Pagans can and do invoke Gods as ethically questionable as Loki, Tiamat, and Set in their rituals. We're not saying they do it well, or that it's well advised, but they are still considered Pagan. However, our connections with Satanism do go beyond mere acceptance of Satan as another deity, however dislikable. The root ideas of Wicca and Satanism arose together, from the same occult revival, and only began to differentiate from one another over time.

This fact is painfully clear to anyone who has ever read Leland's *Aradia*. Published in 1890, it is another of our seminal documents, and the source of much that is basic to modern Wicca. Diana as moon-Goddess, the idea of Witchcraft as an underground peasant cult surviving from pagan times, and even the characterization of Witchcraft as 'The Old Religion' all clearly derive from *Aradia*, as does some of the language eventually incorporated into the Gardnerian *Charge of the Goddess*.

Unfortunately, our heritage from Leland comes with some serious baggage. *Aradia* makes frequent reference to baneful magic, including in the source material for the *Charge* itself: "And when ye find a peasant who is rich, / Then ye shall teach the witch, your pupil, how / To ruin all his crops with tempests dire ..." (Leland 130). Worse still, Lucifer is a part of this religion, right along with his 'sister', Diana: "Diana greatly loved her brother Lucifer, the god of the Sun and of the Moon, the god of Light (Splendor), who was so proud of his beauty, and who for his pride was driven from Paradise" (Leland 127). While the mythology is conflated with that of Apollo, still Satan is recognizable from the passage. To acknowledge *Aradia* as the important book it is, we must acknowledge a document that contains more than a hint of Satanic ideas.

This is even more plain in an earlier work,

Jules Michelet's *La Sorcière*. Though less well known, *La Sorcière* was a major influence on Leland, and without it, *Aradia* would probably never have been written. *La Sorcière* presented what might be the very earliest argument that Witchcraft was a Pagan survival led by priestesses. Jules Michelet wrote with passion and poetry, and was less concerned with historical fact than with making a partisan case. He was virulently anti-clerical, and saw Witches as the successors of primitive pagan cults—cults naturally led by

women because the primitive, in his eyes, was naturally feminine. Over time, in reaction to what Michelet saw as the parochialism and bigotry of a Catholic age, he believed this feminine wisdom became debased, and the gentle Nature spirits of the native pagan beliefs were replaced by Satan worship. Other than the inclusion of Satan in the tale, this should be a familiar story: it is very nearly the foundation myth of Wicca. Consider the following passage, which could easily have been published in almost any Llewellyn book of the last twenty years:

The Priest realizes clearly where the danger lies, that an enemy, a menacing rival, is to be feared in this High-priestess of Nature he pretends to despise. Of the old gods she has invented new ones ... For a thousand years the people had one healer and one only—the Sorceress. Emperors and kings and popes, and the richest barons, had sundry Doctors of Salerno, or Moorish and Jewish physicians; but the main

In our initial scramble for legitimacy in the 1960s and 70s, we were most eager to distance ourselves from Devil worship (as if Satanists were somehow not entitled to the same religious freedom we have claimed for ourselves).

body of every State, the whole world we may say, consulted no one but the Saga, the Wise Woman. If her cure failed, they abused her and called her a Witch... Had [she] not earned some reward? Yes! And reward [she] had. [Her] recompense was torture and the stake ... (Michelet x-xi).

Unfortunately, Michelet was not content to rhapsodize over Witches as Nature's Priestesses and medieval healers. To Michelet, the stories of Satan worship and black masses linked to witchcraft were as plausible as the rest of the mythos he was presenting, and Satan is very much a part of his story.

Fraternity of man with man, defiance of the Christians' heaven, worship of Nature's God under unnatural and perverted forms—such was the inner significance of the Black Mass.

The altar was raised to the Spirit of the revolted serf, 'to Him who has suffered wrong, the Proscribed of ancient days, unjustly driven out of Heaven, the Great Creator of the earth, the Master that makes the plants germinate from the soil'. Under such titles as these the Luciferians, his adorers, did him honour...the Sorceress set up her Satan ... While some beheld only an incarnate terror, others were moved by the haughty melancholy that seemed to enfold the Exile of Eternity (Michelet 103-104).

Could a modern Satanist have asked for a better apologist than Michelet?

Satanism, Judaism and Christianity, Theosophy and the Golden Dawn are not ancestors that suit our sense of fashion. We Witches like the idea of our Craft as folk belief, and also the idea of folk belief as timeless wisdom, not

something syncretistic and evolving. We are inclined toward that romantic view of the Edwardian Folklore Society that saw virtually all British folk customs as survivals of ancient fertility cults. But, like real folk everywhere, Witches have always borrowed from any source that couldn't run away fast enough. We've certainly adapted the meanings of our borrowings: modern Witches don't have to be Kabalists to work with polarity, and the *Charge of the Goddess* is not a Satanist manifesto, whatever its origins. But there is beauty as well as accuracy in acknowledging our borrowings and recognizing what they meant in their original contexts.

SO HOW DO THE AUTHORS of this article feel about this skeptical logic we're offering. Is it intended to be disillusioning? Not at all. The fanciful origin myths of Wicca told to us by Margaret Murray, the vastly inflated figure of nine million dead in the burning times—these have long been discredited, and there is general acceptance now that Wicca is primarily a modern reconstruction of what we think might once have been. What hasn't been generally acknowledged yet is the richness of the heritage we do have.

We're like the children of immigrants, embarrassed by our Mother Tongue. But it's possible to enjoy Chinese opera and pizza, to keep a Seder and play basketball. Nothing prevents us from embracing our syncretistic origins while still preserving the unique worldview of modern Wicca except for our own self-consciousness. Our smallness limits us, not our history.

SOURCES

- Greer, Mary, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, Park Street Press, 1995.
Hutton, Ronald, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, Blackwell, 1991.

- Hutton, Ronald, *Stations of the Sun*, Oxford University Press, 1996.
Hutton, Ronald, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft". in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, Bengt Ankarloo & Stuart Clark, eds., University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.
King, Francis, and Isabel Sutherland, *The Rebirth of Magic*, Corgi Books, 1982.
King, Francis, *Modern Ritual Magic*, Prism Press, 1989.
Leland, Charles G., *Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches*, Phoenix Publishing, 1998.
Michelet, Jules, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, and Superstition* (translation of *La Sorcière*), Citadel Press, 1997.
Novack, Michael, personal communication, 1992.
Red Garters Magazine Website, "Gerald Gardner's Library" (www.angelfire.com/ca/redgarters/gbglidix.html)
Valiente, Doreen, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, Phoenix Publishing, 1989.
Wildman, Laura A., personal communication, 2000. Based upon interview with Rolla Nordic in 1992 for the unpublished *Wiccan Oral History Project*. Laura Wildman is the current Project custodian.
Yohalem, John, personal communication, 1996.

Cat Chapin-Bishop is a psychotherapist in private practice in Northampton, MA, and a practitioner of traditional Witchcraft. She is webmaster of a regional education and resources page for Pagans: Stepchild Coven Online, at <<http://welcome.to/stepchild>>. Her articles on Pagan subjects have appeared in Enchanté, Harvest, and Moonrise.

Peter Bishop holds Masters' degrees in nutrition and education, and teaches science and literature in a private middle school. His spiritual identity has passed through a Benedictine monastery, a hippie organic gardening co-op, involvement in Pagan student groups, and eventual training in traditional Witchcraft. He is the former co-editor of the Pagan journal, Moonrise, and hopes to complete his first novel this summer.

READERS' FORUM

continued from page 3

witches, and the evidence Dashu cites is an elaboration of that statement. However, it only presents half of the story. We cannot understand the significance of the Inquisition's actions without examining what the rest of society was doing. Yes, inquisitors wrote most of the early witch hunting manuals. But when the persecution exploded in the 16th century, most manuals were written by secular authors. The Inquisition was indeed more active in the early period of the Great Hunt. Yet this is the period when deaths were lowest. Richard Kieckhefer (*European Witch Trials*) found only 703 definite executions from 1300-1500. Of these, only 137 came from church or inquisitorial courts. So even at the height of the Inquisition's activity, the secular courts were killing far more witches. By the 16th century, the discrepancy was much worse. When the Inquisition was killing less than 1% of accused witches, local secular courts were killing up to 90%, and national courts an average of 30%.

No one argues that the Inquisition's hands were clean, that it did nothing foul. The question is, how did it compare to the rest of society? It would be rankly hypocritical to blame the Inquisition for its failings, yet turn a blind eye to the far worse atrocities carried out by secular authorities. As bad as the Inquisition was, all the evidence shows that it was far more lenient than the secular authorities.

Our discussions of the death toll seem to suffer from some confusion. I am not arguing that trial records are unbiased, or 'reliable' in an absolute sense. They cannot be. They were written by human beings, and we are all affected by our beliefs and prejudices. I would not go so far as to call their authors 'liars', as Dashu does. But they were bigoted, prejudiced, and often mistaken. That does not change the fact that trial records are still infi-

nately better than witch-hunting manuals. Manuals were written by people who 'lied' as much as court scribes. So the question is, which is better: an account by a 'liar' who saw the events he's describing, or by a 'liar' working with rumor and hear-say? And again, consider the purpose of the writing. Court scribes wrote to record evidence and verdicts. Manual authors wrote to 'warn' or persuade people that witchcraft was a dire threat. Neither was an unbiased reporter, but by most people's reckoning an eyewitness account is more reliable than propaganda, even if the witness is a bigot. Nor do I believe trials records are complete. I mentioned that many areas have not been counted and that many records have been lost. That's why the death toll figures are 'estimates' rather than firm figures. However the fact that our evidence is not perfect does not mean that it's useless. As I said, we now have a data-base to base our estimates on—in past generations, people simply guessed. An estimate is not a head-count, but an educated guess is still better than a groundless one, which is what figures like 9,000,000 are. I would agree with Dashu that estimates like 10,000 or 20,000 are ridiculously low. The 10,000 estimate is actually disproved, since we know of almost 15,000 definite executions. Because of the gaps in our evidence, we'll never be able to say anything more firm than 'probably 40,000-60,000, perhaps as many as 100,000'. But that is still a big improvement from wild guesses like nine million.

Another point that we definitely agree on is that neither of our articles had the space to adequately address the role of gender in the trials. That is my biggest regret about my essay: it took so long to cover the basics that I had no room to discuss more controversial questions. And a letter to the editor isn't going to do an adequate job either. But briefly, I believe that gender is one of the most critical issues in the Great Hunt. Feminist historians are doing



ground-breaking work on this issue, some of the most exciting research available. However, at the same time, a simplistic 'witch hunting is woman hunting' theory predominates in many popular feminist works. This is a theory I disagree with sharply, for two reasons.

First, as a feminist I am deeply suspicious of any theory that erases minorities, no matter what gender or race those minorities may be. Both men and women were accused of witchcraft. When we define witchcraft as the exclusive province of women, we imply that male witches are aberrations, unimportant distractions that must be ignored or explained away. I disagree. I don't think we can understand the significance of gender without studying both sexes. We need to construct theories that are broad enough to accommodate all of the evidence—from Central Europe where 90% or more witches were women, to Iceland where the reverse was true. To ignore male witches simply because they were a minority is to replicate the worst errors of patriarchal scholarship.

Second, the 'witch hunting is woman hunting' theory is superficial. It begins with the most obvious fact about witches: that most of them were women. And it goes no further. It makes vague generalizations about women's status in the 16th century and blames the rate of witch-hunting on that. However, since both high and low status can 'cause' witch-hunting, the theory is circular and useless. If women's high status kept witch-hunting low in Spain, why would it increase it in Scotland? And why not in the Scottish Highlands and Ireland, where the women were every bit as strong and independent as their Lowland cousins?

I believe that many of the fluctuations in gender percentages can be explained by looking closely at local views of witchcraft. Simply put, the authorities thought that they were killing witches, not women. So if we wish to understand why women predominated, we need to know what 'witchcraft' meant to the

killers. Projecting our own definitions onto the past merely muddies the picture.

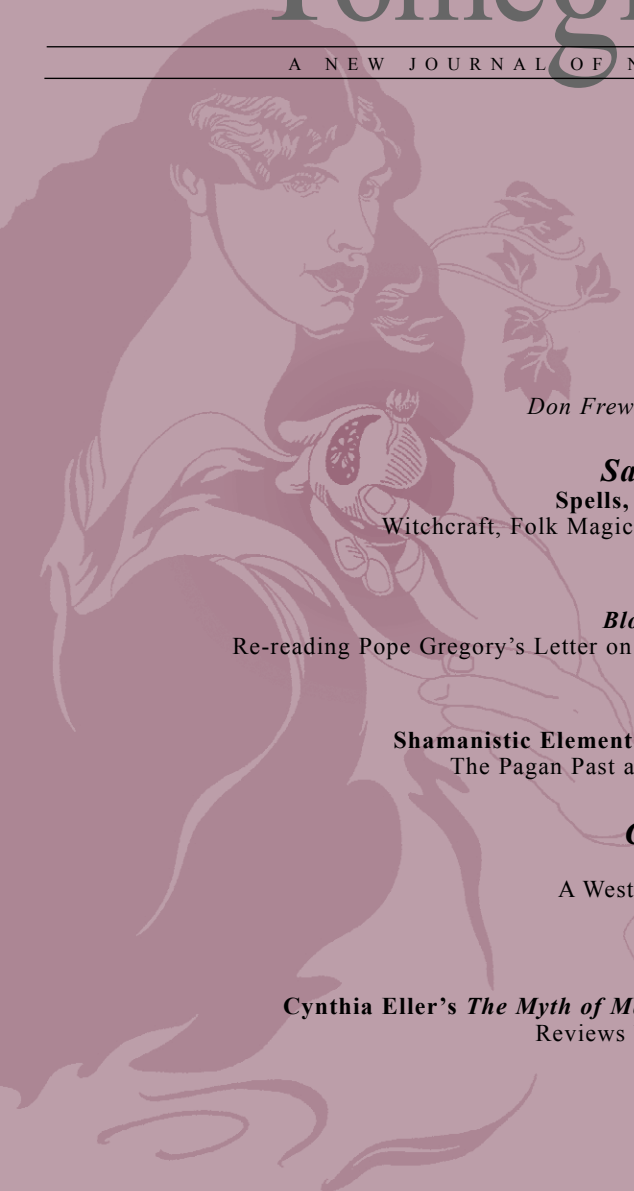
The roots of this question lie in pagan times, in Greek and Roman culture. There is some exciting work going on now that suggests that historically 'magic' is a derogatory word for other people's religions. Supernatural power wielded by one's own authorities is 'religion'; the supernatural power of Outsiders is 'magic'. With the rise of patriarchal city-states in Greece, political power solidified in the hands of free Greek males. The supernatural powers of the disenfranchised (women, slaves, and foreigners) became suspect and dismissed as 'magic', something inferior to true 'religion'. One example: our word 'magic' comes from the Greek word '*mageia*'. Mageia was the teachings of the *magoi*, a class of Persian priest. During Greece's wars with Persia, mageia and magoi became general terms for suspicious or bad supernatural power, and the people who wielded this power. This same pattern shows up in the Great Hunt. Witches tended to be women, lower classes (since slavery had been abolished), and often members of ethnic minorities (such as the Lapps or the Basque). This basic pattern was complicated by a variety of local factors. Where the people (not the elites) believed that witches were heretics, the number of male witches rose. Heresy, after all, is not a sex-linked crime. When misogynist manuals like the *Malleus Maleficarum* were influential, the number of women increased—often dramatically. Local folklore, culture, and history could all influence the gender dynamics of the trials. In summary, witch hunting is not woman hunting. Gender is only one facet of a larger picture. I believe that as long as we allow ourselves to be distracted by superficial generalizations, we will never dig deep enough to uncover the root of the problem.

*Bright Blessings, Jenny Gibbons
Portland, OR*



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Readers' Forum 2
Don Frew's Harran Hypothesis

Sabina Magliocco 4
Spells, Saints, and Streghe:
Witchcraft, Folk Magic, and Healing in Italy

Jeremy Harte 23
Blót on the Landscape:
Re-reading Pope Gregory's Letter on the Heathen Temples

Touraj Daryaee 31
Shamanistic Elements in Zoroastrianism:
The Pagan Past and Modern Reactions

Christine Rhone 38
Mirra Alfassa:
A Western Occultist in India

Book Review 43
Cynthia Eller's *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*
Reviews by Laurel Holmström
and Wendy Griffin



The Pomegranate

Copyright

© 2000 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate

is published quarterly.

ISSN 1528-0268 refers to this Journal.

Subscriptions:

4 issues: US\$20 — 8 issues: US\$37.50
by surface mail anywhere.

Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds,
or Checks drawn on US banks to

The Pomegranate

501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019

Subs email: antech@teleport.com

Submissions:

Editorial email: fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca

See the inside back cover for our
Call for Papers.

Ask us for our Writers' Guidelines,
or read it on our website:

www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/

Deadline for submissions:
the Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

Co-Editors:

Fritz Muntean

Diana Tracy

Associate Editor:

Chas S. Clifton

Editorial Assistance:

Melissa Hope

Kara Cunningham

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

The relationships, both historical and modern, between indigenous spiritual practices and emerging religions with a base of support among the ruling elite has been a fertile ground for study during the last several centuries. While the origins of established religions are normally revealed through the analysis of their surviving texts, the study of native religiosity relies on information derived from folkloric and ethnographic research. All three of these methodologies have become far more powerful and reliable tools than they were even half a century ago, and today's more critical attitudes toward texts, along with more carefully nuanced interpretations of folkloric and ethnographic material, often produce results which may be surprising, but are always instructive.

In the first of three articles which examine the relationship between folk practices and 'establishment' religions, Sabina Magliocco, who recently graced our pages with a review of the new edition of Leland's *Aradia*, provides us with a unique and comprehensive overview of indigenous Italian magical beliefs and practices, contrasting this information with an evaluation of Italian-American Witchcraft or *Stregheria*, as popularized in recent years by writers such as Raven Grimassi and (the late) Leo Martello.

Jeremy Harte, in an article reprinted from *3rd Stone*, England's magazine of alternative antiquarian studies, presents a new interpretation of early Christian attitudes toward the sacred sites of Pagan Britain. This is particularly interesting in light of the recent writings of scholars such as Valerie Flint and Peter Brown concerning the early Church's previ-

ously unacknowledged willingness to absorb both magical practices and elements of the sacred landscape from the Paganism(s) that preceded it. In a third article, Touraj Daryaei, a scholar of Indo-Iranian religion, evaluates the early Zoroastrian admonitions against indigenous shamanic practices—most notably the use of psychotropic 'allies'—in light of the apparent acceptance and widespread utilization of these substances by subsequent generations of Zoroastrians.

Neopagan scholars have often noted that many of our beliefs and practices have their roots in the interface that developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries between Western occultism and Eastern mysticism. Christine Rhone's biographic sketch of Mirra Alfassa, the founder of India's Auroville community, discusses the roles played by several key figures in this important moment in recent religious history.

We are also pleased to offer our readers a pair of reviews of Cynthia Eller's new book, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, by two scholars of Women's Studies and Feminist Theology. We consider both this book and Ronald Hutton's *Triumph of the Moon* to be landmark publishing events. At the same time, we acknowledge that both of these books contain much that is controversial, and we encourage our readers to respond with analytic opinions and critical evaluations of this material.

A few issues ago we announced our intention to establish *The Pomegranate* as a refereed journal. The mechanisms for so doing are now in place, and only the details remain to be worked out and made available to our readers. This issue's feature article, by Dr Magliocco, is the first to have been peer-reviewed, and marks the beginning of *The Pom's* latest efforts to evolve into a more distinguished and acceptable academic publication.

Persephone's hard-working minions

The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.

LEONARD GEORGE WRITES:

Dear Pomegranate:

I would like to commend Donald Frew on his article "Harran: Last Refuge of Classical Paganism" (*Pomegranate* #9), and to offer a few comments. The pagan philosophies of late antiquity can provide a valuable stimulus to the development of modern pagan thought, and Mr Frew performs a service in drawing to our attention Harran's legacy as a preserver and transmitter of ancient wisdom. Theurgical Neoplatonism in particular, which was most likely what those mysterious "Sabians" of Harran were up to, embraced both ritual/contemplative practices and intellectual studies as mutually supportive approaches for deepening pagan life.

Now some neopagans shun anything "Platonic", believing that Platonism sets up a dualism—a pure "realm of Ideas" divided from a corrupt material world from which Platonists try to escape. And indeed there have been scholars (primarily Christian) through the ages who have offered dualistic glosses of Plato. But Iamblichus (c. 240—c. 325 CE), the genius of the theurgical tradition, explicitly rejected this divide. He made the case that Plato and Plotinus (the founder of Neoplatonism) never meant their

work to be understood in dualistic terms. As classical historian Polymnia Athanassiadi put it, Iamblichus spoke "as an expert and fully confident Platonist, who believes in the essential, though incredibly complex, unity of the cosmos. To him duality, let alone plurality, is a figure of speech, not a way of being; for being exists in unity and can only be comprehended by a simple act of intellection, rather than by analytical thinking" ("Dreams, theurgy and freelance divination: The testimony of Iamblichus" *Journal of Roman Studies* (1993) 83, 115-130). Theurgists held that conceptual analysis and ritual performance can remove obstacles to this "simple act" of insight, but cannot directly induce it.

Both of the critical commentators (*Pomegranate* #10) on Mr Frew's piece get caught in a dualism that the theurgical philosophers of Harran would themselves have disavowed. Dr Hanna Kassis alleges that if the Harranian Sabians were acceptable to the Moslems, then they cannot be called 'pagans'. Mr Aaron Walker suggests that if the Harranians were thought to be monotheists, then they could not be polytheistic pagans. Moslem/Sabian, or Monotheist/Polytheist—however you choose to parse the realm of spiritual perception, theurgical Neoplatonists would not have reified the boundaries. All such doctrinal designations are "figures of speech" as Athanassiadi states, not fixed realities. Ideas about the Divine are to be valued according to their effects on the theurgist's maturation, not their supposed accuracy in describing abstract spiritual objects. The disciples of Iamblichus, those relentless monists, happily invoked a whole spectrum of sacred beings: heroes and daimones, angels and archons, goddesses and gods, cosmic souls and transcendent powers, sentient numbers, etc. They felt it was useful to personify the

unity and the multiplicity of reality. Relating to these personifications through ritual helped theurgists to know, and to feel, their own profound inclusion in the paradox of existence: its dual nature as oneness and diversity. Those interested in learning more about theurgical Neoplatonism should consult Gregory Shaw's book *Theurgy and the soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1995) and two of Shaw's papers—"The

Empedocles and Pythagorean tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) and two of his papers, both in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*: "Poismandres: The etymology of the name and the origins of the Hermetica" (1993) 56, 1-24 and "From Pythagoras to the Turba philosophorum: Egypt and Pythagorean tradition" (1994) 57, 1-13.

Mr Frew argues for a "direct line of transmission" from Neoplatonic theurgy to the

Neoplatonic theurgy ... is not very specific to modern witchcraft. Theurgy was a wellspring of the entire Western esoteric current, through the largely Neoplatonic atmosphere of late antique high magic ...

mortality and anonymity of the Iamblichean soul" (*Syllecta Classica* (1998) 8, 177-190), and "Eros and arithmos: Pythagorean theurgy in Iamblichus and Plotinus" (*Ancient Philosophy* (1999) 19, 121-143).

Harran was undoubtedly a crucial link in the transmission of pagan philosophy to both Moslem and Byzantine civilizations (and thence to the West). But Mr Frew's description of Harran as classical paganism's "last refuge" and "last haven" might overstate the case a little. There also seems to have been a vital preservation of pagan doctrine and practice in the Egyptian city of Panopolis (later known as Akhmim) at the time of Harran's supposed lastness. Panopolis and Harran were what Hakim Bey refers to as "temporary autonomous zones", domains of radical tolerance. Concerning Panopolis and the Egyptian transmission in general I recommend the excellent scholarship of Peter Kingsley. Everyone interested in these matters should read his book *Ancient philosophy, mystery, and magic:*

inception of modern witchcraft. This may be true, but only in a broad sense—the "direct line" is not very specific to modern witchcraft. Theurgy was a wellspring of the entire Western esoteric current, through the largely Neoplatonic atmosphere of late antique high magic, later through the seminal grimoire *Picatrix* and later still through that sage of the Florentine Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino (who translated Iamblichus' only complete surviving work, *De Mysteriorum*, into Latin; the Greek manuscript he worked from came to Florence from Constantinople, but its ultimate origin was probably Harran). Insofar as modern witchcraft is one of the latter-day eddies of western occultism it is in the "direct line of transmission" in this very general way. As Mr Frew notes, Gerald Gardner quoted the Neoplatonist Sallustius approvingly. But almost any Western esotericist could do so with respect to whatever his/her tradition is. Also contra Mr Frew's
continued on page 53

Spells, Saints, and *Streghe*: Witchcraft, Folk Magic, and Healing in Italy

by Sabina Magliocco
California State University, Northridge

The expansion of Neopaganism and revival Witchcraft in North America during the last decade has brought about a renewed interest in ethnic forms of folk magic, and a corresponding proliferation of books and websites dedicated to the magical practices of various ethnic groups. Italian folk magic is among those which have received considerable attention. Raven Grimassi, Leo Martello and Lori Bruno are some of the more visible Italian-American Witches who have re-worked elements of ethnic folk magic into vibrant new traditions. The re-discovery (and recent re-publication) of Charles G. Leland's *Aradia, or the Gospel of Witches* (1890, 1990, 1998), about an alleged Tuscan witch cult in the late 1800s, has also sparked renewed interest in the possible Mediterranean roots of contemporary Witchcraft. Yet neither Leland's material nor emerging Italian-American Witchcraft traditions bear a strong resemblance to Italian folk magical practice as documented in the ethnographic record of the last 100 years. Italian-American Witchcraft or *Stregheria* traditions differ from Italian folk magical practice in several important ways: 1) Italian folk magic is not an organized or unified religion, but a varied set of beliefs and practices; 2) while it has deep historical roots, it is not a survival of an ancient religion, but an integral part of a rural peasant economy and way of life, highly syncretized with folk Catholicism; 3) knowledge

of magical practices was at one time diffused throughout the rural population, rather than limited to a secret group of magical practitioners.

There is a rich body of ethnographic data on folk magical practices and beliefs from Italy, but for the most part Italian-American Witches have not drawn from this in re-creating their traditions. I believe this is mostly because outside a few works of ethnography and history (e.g. Falassi, 1980; Ginzburg, 1983, 1991), there is relatively little material on Italian folklore available to English readers. Many Italian-American Witches do not read Italian, and what little Italian scholarship is available in North America is often difficult to get outside university libraries. And, as I will demonstrate, the context of Italian folk magical practice differs considerably from that of contemporary Italian-American revival Witchcraft, so that materials are not always easily transferable from one system to another. In this article I hope to show English readers a glimpse of Italian folk belief and practice in their original cultural contexts, and to illustrate some of the ways that they differ from *Stregheria*, or Italian-American revival Witchcraft. Of course, any such attempt, especially in a short article, is bound to be limited in scope. Italian folklore scholarship spans over 100 years and 20 separate regions, each with its own dialects and cultures; this overview cannot pretend to be comprehensive. However, for those interested in Italian folk magic and popular religion, I hope I can provide a point of departure from which to evaluate existing sources and discover new ones.

My own interest in this topic stems from my personal background as well as my field experience. But although I grew up in Italy and the United States and maintain ongoing ties with Italy through frequent visits, I cannot make any claims to a family tradition

of magical practice. Most of my knowledge of Italian folk magic comes from ethnographic research and fieldwork in Sardinia, an island off the western coast of Italy where I spent 18 months living in a highland community of sheep and goat pastoralists between 1986 and 1990 (Magliocco, 1993). I approach the study of folk magic from the perspective of

my training in folklore and anthropology. I tend to look at the social and economic contexts of phenomena, and to interpret folk practices not only in light of their historical roots, but of their current cultural roles. I look for multiple documentation of the existence and meaning of a custom in order to confirm its widespread practice, rather than relying on a single informant's report. Consequently, my approach differs significantly from authors whose aims lie more in the direction of revival or revitalization.

I want to make very clear that my goal is *not* to authenticate or de-authenticate anyone's spiritual practice. Contemporary folklorists and anthropologists have recognized that authenticity is always a cultural construct (Bendix, 1997; Handler and Linnekin, 1983): what is considered "authentic" is a result of how we construe our relationship to the past, and how we interpret that past in light of present concerns. Moreover, all traditions are perpetually in flux as their bearers constantly re-interpret and re-invent them with each individual performance. Revival and revitalization are part of the process of

tradition, even when the result is different from the "original" practice itself. Thus *all* traditions are authentic, and the historicity of a tradition has nothing to do with its efficacy for any given group of people.

STREGHERIA, OR ITALIAN- AMERICAN WITCHCRAFT

While Leo Martello and Lori Bruno were among the first Italian-Americans to allude to their practice of Italian Witchcraft as a Pagan religion (Martello, 1973:7-14; 1975; Hopman and Bond, 1996:119-126), the real architect of Italian-American revival Witchcraft is Raven Grimassi. His works *The Ways of the Strega* (1995) and *Hereditary Witchcraft* (1999) lay out in detail a system of beliefs, rituals and practices which he claims are practiced by North American Witches of Italian descent, but which hearken back to the Old Religion which "survived

relatively intact throughout Italy" (Grimassi, 1995:xiv). He accepts at face value Leland's story of Aradia as Diana's daughter and messenger on earth, seeing her as a 14th century revivalist of *la Vecchia Religione* (the Old Religion). Not content to simply pass on some Italian-American spells and folk practices, his intent is to "restore the original Tradition [sic] which Aradia had returned to the people" (1995:xviii)—that is, to recreate the ancient religion of the Etruscan and pre-Etruscan Italic peoples.

Much of what Grimassi presents is drawn from reliable historical or ethnographic

There is a rich body
of ethnographic data
on folk magical
practices and beliefs
from Italy, but for
the most part Italian-
American Witches
have not drawn from
this in re-creating
their traditions.

sources: the deities of the ancient Etruscans (what little we know from later Roman texts), the importance of ancestor spirits in early Italic religion, the Inquisitorial reports of the society of Diana and the Benandanti as preserving aspects of pre-Christian belief, legends about the walnut tree of Benevento as the

meeting place of witches, spells to turn away the evil eye—all these are a part of Italy's magical heritage. But Grimassi, like many other Neo-Pagan authors, is not primarily interested in an ethnographic field study; instead he attempts to construct a coherent system that contemporary Pagans can adapt for their own magical practice. He presents Italian Witchcraft as consisting of three traditions: the northern Italian *Fanarra* and the central Italian *Janarra* and *Tanarra* (*Ianara* is one word for “witch” in the

dialect of Campania; I could find no evidence of the words *Tanarra* or *Fanarra* in any dialect dictionary). One must wonder what happened to southern Italian traditions, especially since the largest percentage of Italian immigrants to North America came from the southern regions. Each is led by a *Grimas*, or leader (for the record, there is no such word in the most comprehensive dictionary of the Italian language; the closest is the adjective *grimo*, “wrinkled, wizened” or “poor, wretched” [Zingarelli-Zanichelli, 1977:777]), and organized into groves, or *boschetti*. The

Italian tradition of North America descends from a branch of the Naples-based *Tanarra* tradition. Grimassi adds a great deal of 20th century Wiccan and magical materials to the folklore he presents, and ties it all together with dubious 19th century survivalist theories and New Age concepts such as reincarnation

and self-actualization. To be fair, Grimassi never claims to be reproducing exactly what was practiced by Italian immigrants to North America; he admits Italian-American Witches “have adapted a few Wiccan elements into their ways” (1995:xviii), and acknowledges that he has expanded upon the traditions he learned from his Italian mother in order to restore the tradition to its original state (Grimassi, pers. comm., 1996). But in attempting to restore an ancient tradition, Grimassi has in fact created a

new one: a potpourri of folklore, revised history, and contemporary magical practice that bears little resemblance to anything that was ever practiced in Italy, before or after the Inquisition. While it is not my intention to deconstruct Grimassi's *Stregheria* point by point, I will concentrate, for the purposes of this article, on several major features of his work which make Italian-American *Stregheria* incompatible with what we know about witchcraft, folk magic and belief in rural Italy from the ethnographic record.

... my goal is not to
authenticate or
de-authenticate anyone's
spiritual practice. ...
Revival and revitalization
are part of the process of
tradition ... all traditions
are authentic, and the
historicity of a tradition
has nothing to do with
its efficacy ...

PROBLEMS WITH THE CONCEPT OF AN ORGANIZED “ITALIAN” WITCHCRAFT

One of the problems with the idea of a unified organization of Italian Witches is that Italy as a national and cultural entity is a relatively recent construct. Until 1861, Italy as a nation did not exist at all. The peninsula was divided into a plethora of large and small fiefdoms interspersed with Church-owned territories. Communications and travel between the various regions of Italy were difficult at best due to the mountainous terrain and lack of roads. Centuries of incursions and domination by foreign political powers led to the development of very distinct regional cultures and dialects, such that a person from Palermo (Sicily) literally could not communicate with one from Torino (Piemonte). People could not always move freely about between regions because of the wars and political conflicts that divided them. The Italian peninsula could not be said to have anything resembling an integrated culture between the end of the Roman Empire (453CE) and the beginning of the 20th century, making the existence of a secret, organized Italian witch cult nearly impossible. There was a certain conformity of beliefs about witches and folk magical practices, but on a fairly general level which also extended to other areas in Europe. It is more useful to look at the development of broad culture areas within which one can find a certain range of traits: northern Italy, comprising the regions along the Alps and the coastal Venezia-Giulia; central Italy, consisting of areas in Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, and the northern sections of Umbria and Lazio; and southern Italy, from Civitavecchia (just north of Rome) down to the tip of the boot, including the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. Of course, within these divisions, there exist even finer boundaries, so that each individual region, city, town and small village has its own unique dialect and

folk culture. Italy is part of a broader geographic and cultural region encompassing the western Mediterranean; within this area, regional cultures form distinct clusters, so that for example Friuli, which borders on Austria and Slovenia and was long dominated by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, has more in common culturally with Austria and the Balkans than with many other Italian regions. It is no accident that the medieval Friulian folk beliefs about Benandanti documented by Carlo Ginzburg (1983) have analogues in Balkan folklore about *calusari* (Kligman, 1981). But these beliefs were confined to the area of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, and were not found in other regions of the peninsula. In the same way, we find in the *tarantismo* of Puglia and the *argismo* of Sardinia (both ecstatic dance therapies for the bites of venomous spiders) evidence of cultural similarities with the *zar* possession cults of the north African rim. Thus Italy is by no means homogenous; each region is unique in dialect and culture, and within each region, there are multiple sub-dialects which are often mutually unintelligible. Just as an example, Sardinia, an island slightly smaller than the state of Indiana, has no less than three major dialects, only two of which are somewhat mutually intelligible, plus Catalan, which is spoken only in the town of Alghero and is completely unintelligible to speakers of any of the three major dialect groups. This makes the development of a unified Italian system of ritual magic, diffused through oral tradition on a popular level, unlikely before the 20th century; in fact, any generalizations about an “Italian” folk culture need to be treated with great caution.

THE SURVIVALIST BIAS

Like Leland before them, Martello, Grimassi and other Italian revivalists have a tendency to see Italian folk practices as vestiges of ancient religions—either the Etruscan religion (in the

case of Leland and Grimassi) or the Greek-influenced religion of the ancient Sikels, whom Martello eventually conflates with the Etruscans (Martello, 1975:144-155). Leland's survivalism is understandable in a historical context. Late 19th century folklore scholarship was heavily influenced by evolutionist anthropological theories which saw all folklore as "survivals" of primitive practices and beliefs which were destined to disappear under the influence of modernization. But during the second half of the 20th century, anthropologists and folklorists rejected the racist, ethnocentric theories of unilinear cultural evolution which had spawned the notion of survivals, and began to document how traditional practices and beliefs changed in response to social transformation. The result was a new awareness of just how sensitive folklore is to any type of social change, and of how all beliefs and practices are products of unique interactions between individual performers and their audiences. More thorough historical research also began to unearth how many customs which appeared to exist from time immemorial were in fact of rather recent invention (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

The trouble with seeing Italian folk practices as "survivals" of Neolithic or ancient Etruscan practices (besides the fact that relatively little is known about religion in these ancient periods) is that it ignores the many cultural changes which have swept Italy since the early Bronze Age, as well as folklore's extraordinary ability to adapt to cultural change. This is not to deny the historicity of many folk traditions. It is unquestionable that many contemporary customs have their roots in pre-Christian practices of great antiquity.

For example, the people of "Monteruju," the community in Sardinia where I did fieldwork, plant wheat or lentil seeds on Ash Wednesday and grow them in the dark until the Thursday before Easter, when the etiolated

sprouts, known as *sos sepulchos* ("the buried ones"), are placed in brightly-decorated yogurt containers and carried to church. Folklorists recognize in this custom a version of a number of similar ancient circum-Mediterranean practices, from the "Gardens of Adonis" described by classical authors to the small sarcophagi filled with sprouts which have been found in Egyptian pyramids. The adaptation of this practice to Easter is particularly appropriate, as Christ can be seen as just another dying and resurrecting god, much like Adonis or Osiris. But the difficulty with interpreting this practice only as a survival is that it does violence to the way practitioners perceive themselves. It is important to remember that practitioners think of themselves as *Catholic*. Monteruvians were furious when the local priest frowned on their Easter custom as a pagan vestige; as far as they were concerned, they were observing Easter with a very concrete symbol of Christ's death and resurrection. The folk practice is similar, but its *meaning* has changed through the centuries to reflect Christian mythology and values.

The survivalist bias allows revivalists to interpret many ordinary items of folklore as signs of Witchcraft, in the sense of "evidence of pre-Christian practice," and anyone who practices them as a Witch. Thus for example Leland sees the children's rhyme to attract fireflies in "The Conjurament of Meal" as "derived from witch-lore, in which the *lucciola* [firefly] is put under a glass and conjured to give by its light certain answers" (Leland, 1890/1990:107); Martello explains that the *mano fica* gesture was used by magicians to turn back spells (Martello, 1972:71); and Grimassi interprets the wearing of amulets such as the *cimaruta* as emblems of belonging to the *vecchia religione*. But according to this paradigm, most Italians would be considered Witches, a categorization they would vehemently deny. Practices can easily change to adapt to new

belief systems, as the Monteruvian example illustrates. This is not necessarily a sign that practitioners are "hiding" their true pagan beliefs. The presence of folk practices of historical depth does not equal acceptance of the belief systems in which they first existed. Of course, the survivalist interpretation is handy for contemporary Italian-American Pagans, who can find in just about any folk practice maintained in their family evidence of an ancient mystical religion, and who can then claim to be hereditary Witches.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The ambivalent attitude of Italians towards the Catholic church is sometimes interpreted by revivalists as evidence that their relatives were hiding paganism under a veneer of Christianity. But while this might have in fact been the case in the Church's

earliest years, intervening millennia ensured an almost complete penetration of Christian discourse into everyday life.

Before the emergence of the nation-state, the Roman Catholic church was the most important social institution uniting Italians. It permeated almost every aspect of the individual's life from the cradle to the grave, and divided the year cycle into spiritually significant times which brought the entire community together. So powerful was its influence that nearly all traditional folk magic and heal-

ing has a Catholic veneer. In fact Grimassi gives a spell to St Anthony for reclaiming lost objects (1995:201) and another to Sts Peter and Blaise for blessing a holy stone (1999:56), both of which have many analogues in Italian and American folklore archives, attesting to their wide diffusion and popularity. In contrast, Leland's conjurations to Diana, which reproduce, in structure and feel, some Catholic folk prayers, seem to be unique.

Nonetheless, many Italians have historically had mixed feelings about the Catholic Church as an institution. The Church has traditionally been allied with the state and the elite classes, leading many non-elites to see it as collaborating in their economic and cultural oppression. Especially in rural areas, many people practiced folk Catholicism, a syncretic mixture of some pre-Christian elements

with a dose of Catholic flavoring, while remaining relatively resistant to aspects of official doctrine, either due to a lack of understanding (until 1962, Masses were held in Latin, which the majority did not understand) or to skepticism about the Church's motives.

Italian folk Catholicism tends to be orthopractic rather than orthodox; relations with God, the Virgin Mary and the saints are quid-pro-quo, and punishment for violated contracts cut both ways. In this context, Leland's conjurations, which strike Pagans today as

... during the second half of the 20th century, anthropologists and folklorists rejected ... the notion of survivals ... historical research also began to unearth how many customs which appeared to exist from time immemorial were in fact of rather recent invention.

petulant, demanding and irreverent, are in fact well within the spirit of the tradition. When certain Sardinian villages suffered a drought, the patron saint's statue was brought out, decorated, and venerated until the rains came. But if the rains did not arrive, it was not uncommon for angry villagers to "punish" the saint by plunging its statue head first into the well. We see the same attitude towards divinity in many of the charms and conjurations in Leland's *Aradia*, which threaten Diana if she does not accede to the conjurer's demands. These attitudes, which reflected clientilistic social relationships in parts of Italy, are completely absent from the works of Martello and Grimassi, where a different, more synergetic attitude between seeker and deity are evident. This new outlook reflects important shifts in social structure and organization between Italy of the late 19th century and today's New Age culture, where an egalitarian spirit prevails even in relations of social inequality.

What of the claim that many practitioners of the *vecchia religione* hid under the eyes of priests by becoming priests themselves, or by becoming involved in Catholic organizations? Again, this is a slight distortion of what is still a common pattern. In my fieldwork I observed that some individuals were attracted

to religiosity in whatever form it took, official or unofficial. These people often became involved in religious fraternities and sororities which maintained various calendar customs and saint's shrines, while at the same time running a lively practice in folk healing on the

side. They did not see these practices as incompatible, since their cures all involved some sort of invocation to the saints, although they were well aware that the priest usually disapproved. Still, they did not see themselves as practicing a pre-Christian religion, but as good practicing Catholics who happened to do very sensible things of which the priest disapproved. Their disobedience of the priest did not trouble them overmuch; priests also disapproved of many other ordinary activities, such as drinking, celebration, the use of birth control and premarital sex, in which they also continued to engage. Anticlericalism has always

been rife in Italy, especially among men; priests, as voluntarily celibate men with access to local women in the confessional, are objects of mistrust and derision, preserved in countless folk narratives, rhymes and songs.

We have seen how three flaws in the reasoning of Italian-American revival Witches often leads them to make dubious claims or interpretations about the origins of their prac-

... their cures all involved some sort of invocation to the saints, although they were well aware that the priest usually disapproved. Still, they did not see themselves as practicing a pre-Christian religion, but as good practicing Catholics who happened to do very sensible things ...

tices. These include the projection of modern Italian national identity into the historical past; the uncritical interpretation of folklore as "survivals" from a pre-Christian era; and an oversimplification of the complex relationship between official and folk Catholicism which can lead to an erasure of Christian elements from popular belief and practice. But Italian culture has a rich body of folk magical beliefs and practices documented in the ethnographic record of the last 100 years. These are the kinds of practices and beliefs brought to North America by the Italian immigrants who arrived on our shores between 1890 and 1960, and which are likely to have survived in the families of contemporary Italian-American Neopagans. They form the basis of contemporary Italian-American revival Witchcraft.

THE CONTEXT OF TRADITIONAL ITALIAN FOLK MAGICAL PRACTICE

One of the difficulties with adapting folk materials to contemporary practice is that the socio-economic context and worldview of contemporary North American Pagans and Italian peasants are worlds apart. The motifs of self-actualization and fulfillment, the environmental bent, even the "harm none" ethic of contemporary revival Witchcraft are very different from the worldview of Italian peasants. Revivalist works tend to give a rather idealized picture of life in the Mediterranean which differs markedly from the realities of Italian peasant life.

Italian folk magical practice is rooted in a worldview which developed in small-scale, rural communities where life was difficult and precarious. Until after the second World War, the bulk of the Italian population resided mostly in small, agricultural towns and villages. They farmed, herded livestock, and, in coastal areas, fished; the majority were *contadini*, or peasants—sharecroppers who worked for the profit of their landlord. Rural condi-

tions varied widely depending on the region, but for most *contadini*, living conditions were harsh. In the south, especially, the thin Mediterranean topsoil was depleted by centuries of exploitation. Many families barely eked out a living, and that was during a good year. Bad years, caused by ever-present droughts, brought famine; families had scarcely enough to eat and could not afford to give the landlord his share of the crops or livestock products. While some landlords insisted on payment, leaving their tenants to starve, many simply added the year's share to what was due for the following year. This system left most families perpetually in debt to the landowners. There was often no way out of this feudal arrangement: debts grew until they became impossible to pay off, and children inherited the debts of their parents and grandparents.

Families lived clustered in small villages and towns, while the agricultural areas and pastures were scattered at some distance from the town center, requiring a daily commute. Small-town life meant intense social relations which often became strained, leading to quarrels and feuds. Strong loyalty to the family became a survival strategy. Sicily, Campania and Calabria saw the emergence of secret societies such as the Mafia and the Camorra which originally served to protect peasants against the depredations of greedy landlords. Households tended to be matrifocal, but socially, women remained under the control of their male relatives, and strict rules regarding chastity kept their movements circumscribed.

Before the unification of Italy, public education was non-existent; *contadini* were usually illiterate, and relied on oral tradition to maintain their folkways. This makes the transmission of a text such as Leland's *Vangelo* rather unlikely. Because medical doctors were rare and expensive until 1866, when government-funded physicians were stationed in

every small town and hamlet, ordinary people relied on folk healers to cure their ailments and on local midwives to deliver their babies. These women often had extensive knowledge of herbs and their uses, and were able to alleviate a number of minor illnesses, although they could do nothing against the tuberculosis, malaria and Mediterranean anemia that were endemic in the population. Their knowledge was fragmentary and mixed with a good dose of popular magic and folk Catholicism, and death rates remained high. There was a sense that life was a precarious enterprise, full of dangers at every turn; magic was one of many protective strategies people employed to ensure their survival and that of their family members.

Against this background, most peasants maintained a magical view of the world. Their universe was an interconnected whole, and tweaking one part of the fabric was likely to bring about changes in another. Rural people were thoroughly familiar with their environment; each feature of the landscape had its own name and legends. They knew well how to exploit it—where to cut wild beet greens in the spring before there were other vegetables to harvest, or where to find land snails to supplement their diet. They planted, harvested and butchered according to the phases of the moon and its position in the sky, believing that this affected the success of their enterprises, and therefore their ability to survive in harsh conditions (Cattabiani, 1988). The world was animated by a variety of local spirits, as well as by angels, demons and saints; these beings could be invoked to aid survival, but could also be dangerous at times. Invoking or appeasing these beings was not considered witchcraft, but common sense; it was not limited to a small group of people in a village, but was widely practiced.

THE FOLKLORIC WITCH

It is nearly impossible to understand Italian folk magic without reference to the evil, malevolent witch, a figure revivalists attribute to distortions of the Inquisition. Yet belief in witchcraft—that is, that certain individuals, both male and female, had supernatural powers to heal or harm—was widespread in all regions of Italy. The witch has always been an ambiguous figure in the popular imagination. On one hand, the witch was essential as a healer and counter-hexer in a society that had little access to, and much distrust of, formal medicine. Yet witches were also feared for their supernatural powers and their reputed ability to do harm. Witches were therefore both real individuals living in communities and frightening supernatural figures, and these categories overlapped considerably in people's minds, sometimes giving rise to specific accusations of witchcraft.

It is clear that many activities attributed to witches were folkloric in nature—that is, no living member of any community, even traditional magic-workers, practiced them. Following Davies' recent work on witch belief in Britain (1999), I call these the province of the *folkloric witch*—the supernatural figure of legends and folktales. The word *strega* (plural *streghe*), from the Latin *strix*, "screech-owl," is often used in Italian to refer to the folkloric witch, and the word has ancient negative connotations. Pliny the Elder wrote about *striges* (plural of *strix*), women who could transform into birds of prey by means of magic, and who would fly at night looking for infants in their cradles to slaughter (Pliny the Elder, cited in Cattabiani, 1994:207-208). The *strega* therefore is not just a bogey created by the Inquisition, but a dangerous character with deep roots in Mediterranean folklore.

The folkloric witch appears predominantly in legends (accounts about supernatural events that were told as true) and folktales (purely

fictional accounts set in a magical world). In Italian folklore she is usually female. Folkloric witches perform feats that are obviously supernatural: they can transform into animals (wolves, hares, lizards and cats are popular choices), fly through the night sky on the backs of animals, tangle people's hair in their sleep, steal milk from nursing mothers and livestock, suck blood from living beings, and torment their enemies by paralyzing them in their beds at night (DeMartino, 1966/83: 71; cf. Hufford, 1982). Folkloric witches' activities sometimes overlap with those of fairies and the dead: in Italian folklore, noisy night raids and circle-dancing in the cemetery or church square are attributed to all three.

Clearly, the folkloric witch is fictional; she represents an embodiment of rural peoples' worst fears, and her actions do not correspond to any real folk practices documented by ethnographers. Nevertheless, the presence of this character in Italian folklore from all regions indicates the ambivalent feelings villagers had towards those who practiced traditional magic and who just *might* be dangerous *streghe*.

IL MALOCCHIO, OR THE EVIL EYE, AND ITS RELATIONS

Streghe were especially feared for their powers

to give the evil eye, or *il malocchio*. According to the distinguished ethnographer Ernesto De Martino, much of Italian folk magic and healing centers around the evil eye belief complex, a set of interrelated beliefs and practices focused around the idea that an individual can psychically harm another person through the

gaze (De Martino, 1966/87:15). The evil eye belief complex encompassed a range of phenomena, from the often inadvertent *malocchio* (evil eye) to more intentional magical attacks, known as *attaccatura* ("attachment"), *fascino* or *legatura* ("binding"), and *fattura* ("fixing") (De Martino, 1966/87:15).

These latter terms graphically suggest the domination of the victim's body and mind by the attacker. One did not need to be a witch to give the evil eye, as it could happen accidentally; but trafficking in the more complex forms of ritual magic necessary to bind or fix another involved greater magical knowledge and intent, and

was often attributed to witches and folk healers.

The evil eye belief complex is one of the most widespread in the world, spanning the area from the western Mediterranean to North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. According to most scholarship (De Martino, 1966/1987; Dundes, 1980), the evil eye is the

... the socio-economic context and worldview of contemporary North American Pagans and Italian peasants are worlds apart. The motifs of self-actualization and fulfillment, the environmental bent, even the "harm none" ethic of contemporary revival Witchcraft are very different from the worldview of Italian peasants.

envious eye. The harsh economic conditions under which most peasants struggled gave rise to a worldview of "limited good" (Foster, 1965) in which the good in the world (fertility, prosperity, etc.) was thought to exist only in limited quantity. Therefore, whatever good one had was at the expense of one's neighbor, and vice versa. In the dry Mediterranean climate, good was often associated with moisture: wetness meant fertility, while dryness signified barrenness. In Roman slang, the expression *non mi seccare [le palle]*, literally "don't dry up my testicles," or "don't annoy me," is a current reflection of this underlying system of binary oppositions. Similarly, the Roman slang expression *rimanerci secco*, "to dry up of it," is a euphemism for dying. This symbolic system extended to the human body: youth was relatively "wet," while old age was "dry," and bodily fluids such as semen, milk and blood were symbols of the

capacity to reproduce and nurture. Those in a condition of "wetness," or fecundity, were particularly vulnerable to the envious looks of strangers because they had what others did not. Newborn babies, young livestock, new brides, pregnant women and nursing mothers were thought to be especially susceptible. Conversely, those who had cause to feel envy were thought to be able to give the evil eye. In Naples, priests—men who had renounced sexuality and fatherhood—and hunchbacked women, who suffered from a disability that perhaps had made them less than desirable

marriage partners, were avoided because they were believed to be intrinsic casters of the evil eye, or *jettatori* in Neapolitan.

The evil eye need not be intentionally given; in many regions, people believe that it can be given accidentally just by admiring something. When I was in the field, I was cautioned never to express admiration for any

living thing—a child, a lamb, even a houseplant!—without taking pains to remove any evil eye I might have inadvertently placed upon it by touching it and saying *che Dio lolla benedica*, "may God bless him/her/it." The evil eye can also be avoided by ritually spitting (no saliva is ejected, but a "p" sound is made three times with the lips) after admiring something, symbolically demonstrating one's possession of surplus bodily fluids to avert the drying powers of envy.

There are literally thousands of spells to turn back the evil eye in Italian folklore; in fact, many of

Leland's *scongiurazioni* to Diana are in fact spells against the *malocchio*. Grimassi gives two in *Ways of the Strega* (1995:200-201) and another in *Hereditary Witchcraft* (1999:56-57). Many cures for the evil eye, appropriately enough, involve water: typically, some matter (wheat seeds, salt, oil, or molten lead) is dropped into a bowl of water and the resulting shapes are interpreted to see whether an "eye" forms. This diagnosis is often the cure as well, although some cures also involve prayers. Often, mothers and grandmothers knew how to resolve simple cases of the evil eye at home,

since children were always falling prey to this folk ailment. More complicated cases require the intervention of a folk healer or specialist. It was far preferable to prevent the evil eye in the first place by using amulets, and folk magical practice throughout Italy, from ancient times forward, is rife with these devices.

AMULETS AND PROTECTIVE DEVICES
It is profoundly ironic that Italian-American Witchcraft revivalists, beginning with Martello, interpret amulets against the evil eye as emblems of belonging to the witch cult, when in practice they are intended to repel witches. Amulets are very common in Italian folklore, and knowledge of their use is neither secret nor limited to a group of practitioners of the old religion.

Since the evil eye is fundamentally about the lack of fecundity, it should not be surprising that some of the oldest amulets against it are symbols of fertility and regeneration. The most obvious of these is the phallus. The phallus was a common motif in Roman art and sculpture, where its purpose was to bring good luck. This custom has persisted in charms and amulets found throughout Italy well into the 20th century. It is most often carved in coral, but can also be made of other materials, and is hung on a charm worn around the neck. Phallic symbols such as fish, roosters, daggers, snakes and keys are also commonly found on protective amulets. Many of these are also euphemisms for the penis in folk speech (e.g. *il pesce*, "the fish"; *l'uccello*, "the bird"; and *chi-avare*, "to 'key', to screw").

The horn or *corno* is a closely related symbol. It represents the sexual potency of the mature male herd animal, usually the goat or ram. Horn amulets in bronze and bone, identical in shape to contemporary ones, have been found in numerous Etruscan and Roman-era tombs, attesting to its continuous presence since very ancient times (Bellucci, 1983:50).

Mediterranean coral, because of its blood-red color, has long been associated with potency and good fortune; horn-shaped amulets were often made of this material, a tradition which continues today. The cheap red plastic horns from souvenir stands that hang ubiquitously from the rear-view mirrors of Italian cars are the modern-day versions of the older coral horns, although they have now become general good luck charms or, in North America, symbols of ethnic pride (Malpezzi and Clements, 1992:121).

The *mano fica*, a fist with the thumb caught between the bent first and second fingers, is another common symbol found in amulets against the evil eye. The gesture represents the phallus inside the female genitalia (*fica*), a graphic opposition to the power of the evil eye. Martello alone among the revivalists mentions this gesture. Like the phallus, it can be made of coral, silver, tin, plastic and other materials, and is worn as a charm around the neck, on a bracelet or keychain, or, today, hung on the rear view mirror of a car. The *mano cornuta* or horned hand—a fist with the first and little fingers extended—has long been used as a gesture to avert the evil eye, usually with the fingers pointing upwards and the hand waving side to side. This symbol needs to be deployed with care as it has other meanings, however. Jabbed towards another with the fingers pointing at them, this gesture is a powerful insult meaning "cuckold." I have personally seen a driver leap out of his truck and physically assault another driver who had made *le corna* (the horns) at him, such was the challenge he felt to his masculinity.

The naturally branching shape of coral lent itself to the creation of multi-pronged amulets. Rare today, these were more common in the 18th and 19th centuries. Since according to the logic of magic, more is always better, each branch of the small coral charms was carved with a different protective symbol.

**It is profoundly ironic
that Italian-American
Witchcraft revivalists,
beginning with
Martello, interpret
amulets against the evil
eye as emblems of
belonging to the witch
cult, when in practice
they are intended to
repel witches.**

Perhaps it is from these multi-pronged coral charms, as well as from an attempt to craft a likeness of the rue flower, that the multi-branched *cimaruta* evolved. Cimaruta means "top of the rue [plant]"; these amulets, usually made of silver or tin, had a different symbol on the tip of each branch. These might include phalli, horns, solar disks and crescent moons (symbols of fertility and increase), fish (a symbol of Christ, but also a euphemistic term for the phallus), a key (to protect against epilepsy, but also a phallic symbol), the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and numerous others. Such charms were generally worn under clothing, and were meant to protect from witchcraft, not to identify magical practitioners as Grimassi claims.

Ruta graveolens or rue, a medicinal herb native to the Mediterranean with emmenagogue and abortifacient properties (Stuart, 1979:256-57), was used by folk healers to treat colic, stomach ailments and skin eruptions. It was so beneficial that it was believed to protect against witchcraft and the evil eye as well. Rue was often combined with lavender in *brevi*, small packets or bags made of fabric and worn around the neck next to the skin. Mothers often made these for their children. In addition to the beneficial herbs, they might contain garlic, salt, apotropaic stones, prayers, saint's images, ashes from sacred fires (for example, the burned remains of palm fronds and olive branches from Palm Sunday), flowers grown near churches, and of course amulets such as those described above (Di Nola, 1993:14-15). They may be related to the *bullae* Roman mothers hung around their children's necks (Di Nola, 1993:15), which often contained phallic objects. Grimassi's "Nanta Bag" seems to be a rendition of this tradition in a Neopagan context (Grimassi, 1995:102-103).

In *Aradia*, Leland includes a conjuration for a holy stone (1890/1990:21) which Gri-

massi reproduces almost verbatim in *Hereditary Witchcraft* (1999:55-56). In fact, a number of naturally-occurring stones and found objects were thought to have apotropaic qualities, and were carried in the pocket as protection or incorporated into other amulets. For example, arrow or spear points from paleolithic sites, known as *pietre della saetta*, were believed to be the physical manifestations of lightning, and to be both the cause of and a form of protection against strokes (Bellucci, 1983:80-85). In some areas of southern Italy, women would find round or kidney-shaped stones of iron-rich clay that rattled from the loose minerals trapped inside. Through sympathetic magic, these became known as *pietre della gravidanza*, or pregnancy stones, and were believed to protect pregnant women and allow them to successfully carry to term (Bellucci, 1983:92). *Pietre del sangue*, or blood-stones, were red-spotted jasper thought to stop bleeding if applied to a wound (Bellucci, 1983:87), while *pietre stregonie* (witch stones) or *pietre stellari* (star stones), polyporic pebbles whose tiny spots were popularly interpreted as "stars," were thought to protect against witchcraft. These stones were sometimes carved into cross-shaped amulets and combined with figures of Christian saints, the Virgin Mary or Jesus to enhance their powers (Bellucci, 1983:100). Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) was known as *legno stregonio* (witch wood), and was carved into crosses for protection against witchcraft. Once again, rather than being evidence of being a witch, carrying such objects was evidence of belief in the evil powers of folkloric witches.

WITCHCRAFT AS FOLK HEALING

At one time, many villages had a number of folk healers who could cure a variety of illnesses. They ranged from those who cured with herbs, magic formulas and prayers to professional sorcerers who were called in seri-

ous cases of magical attack. In practice, however, these practitioners overlapped, since almost any illness could be judged to be the result of a magical working. Folk healers seldom referred to themselves as *streghe* (although their neighbors might call them such), but as *fattucchiere*, "fixers," *maghi* (masculine plural; singular *mago*), *maghe* (feminine plural; sing. *maga*), "magic-workers." This latter term has nothing to do with the Latin word *imago*, "image," but derives from the Latin *magus*, ultimately from the Persian *magush*, "magic worker, mage" (Zingarelli 1970:993). In Sardinia they are simply known as *praticos* ("knowledgeable ones," akin to the English "cunning-folk"). Most inherit their craft from a relative, although occasionally a healer will acquire power directly from a saint. This was the case of an old woman in Castellammare di Stabia (Campania), who in the 1970s told a folklorist how she obtained her healing powers as a child by

falling into a deep trance. Her parents believed her dead, but St Rita "touched her mouth, bestowing power onto her" (Di Nola, 1993:40; my translation), and she miraculously recovered. Another folk healer from central Sardinia told a researcher that one could acquire magic powers by going to a sacred place (a cemetery or church) and receiving *su sinzale* (a sign), although the

nature of the sign was not specified (Selis, 1978:139).

Some folk healers worked in a state of trance. DeMartino movingly describes how one such healer diagnosed and treated supernatural illness:

During the course of her recitation [of the prayer], the healer immerses herself in a controlled dream-like state, and in this condition she merges with the psychic condition of her client, and suffers with him: the altered state causes the healer to yawn, and her suffering with her patient causes her to shed tears. When the healer does not yawn or weep, it means that she was not able to discern any spell in effect, and thus her client is not bewitched, but his illness depends on other causes (DeMartino, 1966/87:17; my translation).

In the late 1970s, folklorist Luisa Selis interviewed "Antonia," a 75-year old *maghiarja* (sorceress) from central highland Sardinia. Antonia reported being possessed by three spirits who helped her with her healing work: a priest, who helped her foretell

the future; a physician, who helped her cure illnesses; and a bandit, who helped her recover lost livestock (Selis, 1978:141). Trancing healers and diviners like Antonia demonstrate a clear link with pre-Christian practices that was often recognized by their fellow villagers. About one such healer, an informant of De Martino surmised "... these are people who were born before Jesus

Bellucci presents a series of amulets to heal epilepsy associated with San Donato, many of which show clearly pagan roots. Among the most common are lunar crescents and frogs, originally symbols of cyclicity and fecundity sacred to the goddess Diana.

Christ. ... [they] know ancient science, and maybe remember something that [they] tell us now" (De Martino, 1966/87:70-71).

Trancing healers might be consulted to discover whether an illness was caused by witchcraft, to find lost or stolen livestock, or for love magic; but ordinary people could also possess healing knowledge, often in the form of magic formulas and prayers. In any one village, formulas are secret and proprietary; they belong to individuals in the community. For example, in Monteruju, Tiu Basiliu possessed *sa meikina* ("the medicine," cure) for warts, while Tia Minnia could cure styes and chalazions, and Tiu Dominigu could cure the evil eye. These people belonged to different families (*Tiu* and *Tia*, meaning "uncle" and "aunt," may be used as honorifics before the name of an elder in Sardo), and thus the cures,

rather than being concentrated in one individual, would be diffused throughout the population. Healing formulas are passed on from one family member to another at calendrically significant times of year such as Christmas Eve or St. John's Eve (June 23). The owner of the formula passes on the power along with the knowledge; once they have been transmitted, the original owner ceases to practice. Often it is only certain family members who can receive the knowl-

edge; for example, a descendent of the opposite sex, or the youngest daughter. It is commonly believed that folk healers cannot die until they have passed on their knowledge. For the most part, folk healers of all types did not require cash payments, but accepted whatever clients or their families could give.

The nature of folk cures is quite varied; I can include only a small sample here. Many remedies were mixtures of olive oil and various herbs. De Martino reports that in Lucania, wounds and sores were treated with a mixture of olive oil or animal fat and rue (De Martino, 1966/87:38-39), while Antonia, the Sardinian folk healer, treated boils with an infusion of mallow leaves and olive oil (Selis, 1978:143). For maximum efficacy, herbs were to be gathered on St. John's Eve before sunrise.

Many cures demonstrate the syncretism between pre-Christian

and Christian content, but perhaps none so clearly as the charms against epilepsy. Epilepsy, known as *il mal caduco* (the falling sickness), *il male di San Donato* (St. Donato's sickness) in the south, or *il male di San Valentino* (St. Valentine's sickness) in the north, was greatly feared and misunderstood in rural Italy, where it had long been considered of supernatural or divine provenance (Di Nola, 1993:114). Iron was considered a protective amulet against attacks, and epilep-

tics often carried iron keys or nails to ward off the illness; but since epilepsy was believed to have a supernatural cause, only the saints could cure it. Bellucci (1983:113-117) presents a series of amulets to heal epilepsy associated with San Donato, many of which show clearly pagan roots. Among the most common are lunar crescents and frogs, originally symbols of cyclicity and fecundity sacred to the goddess Diana. These were thought to cure epilepsy because the illness was believed to be cyclical in nature, following the phases of the moon. Eventually, in much of the Italian south, these symbols came to be associated with San Donato. As this took place, the amulets began to change: pagan symbols were combined with figures of the saint, who is shown holding or standing on the crescent moon (Bellucci, 1983:116).

MAGIC AND COUNTER-MAGIC

Not all magic was healing magic. The ethnographic record is rich with instances of manipulative or aggressive magic, usually in response to claims of sorcery done against the client. *Attaccature*, *fascini*, *legature* and *fatture* are examples of this type of magical working, and share an emphasis on the domination of the victim's body through attachment, binding or fixing. While an important part of Italian folk magic, these spells are entirely absent from Italian-American revivalist literature, as modern Witches are likely to find them both unethical and disturbing. The structural features of these spells were often similar, whether they were used for love or to cause illness or death. Love spells often involved the manufacture of philters or potions using menstrual blood or semen. In Syracuse (Sicily), a woman would give her straying husband food in which she had placed a few drops of her menstrual blood, usually on Christmas Eve or St. John's Eve (Di Nola, 1993:45). In Naples, a man could gain a

woman's affections by mixing a few drops of his semen into her coffee (ibid.).

A number of spells made use of the transformative power of the moment of the elevation of the host during Mass. A Sicilian spell to make an enemy fall ill entails taking a lemon or an orange to midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, removing a bit of peel, and piercing it with pins while reciting "*Tanti spilli infiggo in quest'arancia, tanti mali ti calino addosso*" ("As many pins as I stick in this orange, may as many ills befall you"). The fruit is then thrown into a well or cistern (Di Nola, 1993:49; He gives this incantation in Italian and not in Sicilian). A number of spells from Italy reproduce this basic format, with variations only in the object being pierced; in fact this is quite similar to Leland's "Conjuration of Lemon and Pins" (Leland, 1890/1990:29-32). Some scholars interpret these similarities as evidence that the spells may derive from the Roman practice of making *defixionum tabellae*, lead tablets often stuck with nails and engraved with verses dedicating one's enemies to underworld deities in order to provoke their decline (Di Nola, 1993:42).

Some cases of grave illness are still attributed to magic. As recently as the 1980s, folklorist Luisa Del Giudice documents that her brother-in-law's congenital blood disorder was interpreted by a folk healer in Terracina (Lazio) as the result of *sangue legato*, "bound blood" caused by a spell put on him by a former girlfriend (Luisa Del Giudice, pers. comm., 1999). This diagnosis points to the fraught nature of social relations in small communities that frequently led to accusations of witchcraft and counter-witchcraft. The folk healer's diagnosis re-opened an unresolved social conflict and raised suspicions about a person—the former girlfriend—who in all likelihood was perfectly innocent of any wrongdoing. This case also

The ethnographic record is rich with instances of manipulative or aggressive magic ... an important part of Italian folk magic, these spells are entirely absent from Italian-American revivalist literature, as modern Witches are likely to find them both unethical and disturbing.

illustrates the pervasive idea that anger and ill-will alone are enough to unleash psychic and physical harm. As De Martino demonstrates, folk healers may themselves become caught in this dangerous web:

“... people go to [the folk healer] to have *fat-ture* undone; but they also believe the old mage can weave evil spells, especially in matters of love, and occasionally he finds himself in the embarrassing situation of having to undo magic he himself made” (De Martino, 1966/87:71; my translation).

THE FATE OF TRADITIONAL FOLK BELIEFS

Today, the social changes of the late 20th century have profoundly transformed the self-sufficient, rural villages of Italy and have begun to integrate them into a global economy. In much of Italy, post-war urbanization and immigration stripped the villages of half their population. Legal reforms abolished the old, exploitative land-holding systems that strangled *contadini*; contemporary agriculturalists practice their trade only part-time, working in factories or in the expanding service economy as well. Women now fill positions in the labor market and in politics that the emigrating men left empty, and mass tourism, cable TV, and now the Internet have introduced new models of identity and consumption. The old sense of the precariousness of human life has lightened somewhat as a result of better conditions and new opportunities, bringing a decline in evil eye belief and witchcraft accusations. While some customs remain—many young mothers still put their babies’ undershirts on inside-out—the explanations have changed: instead of saying this is to keep away the evil eye, my informants now tell me the purpose of this custom is to protect babies’ delicate skin from the chafing of the seams. But magic and occultism are not dead in Italy; they are finding new expressions in a plethora of New Age

religions and practices, mostly concentrated in urban areas, that build upon Italy’s magical heritage (Gatto-Trocchi, 1990).

While many folk beliefs and practices were brought to the New World by Italian immigrants (Malpezzi and Clements, 1992:113-147), few endured among the second and third American-born generations. In part, this was due to language loss; formulas, prayers and narrative cures no longer made sense once the dialect ceased to be spoken. The end of the traditional rural way of life also meant that customs associated with agriculture and pastoralism, the collection and preparation of herbs, and the protection of crops and livestock were forgotten. Italian immigrants’ increasing acceptance of a more Irish-American Catholic piety and doctrine, as well as the influence of American education and consumerism, with its ideology of unlimited good, also led to a decline in traditional folk beliefs and practices (Malpezzi and Clements, 1992:131). Belief in the evil eye surfaces occasionally among the American born, but only in times of crisis (*ibid.*, 128).

This state of affairs, along with the lack of ethnographic evidence to corroborate the reports of Martello, Bruno and Grimassi, makes the existence of an Italian witch cult among Italian-Americans extremely unlikely. Even if practitioners were sworn to secrecy, the likelihood of secret societies remaining hidden for long is low; other secret societies such as the Mafia have not been very successful in keeping out of the limelight. What we have instead is the re-discovery, on the part of second, third- and fourth-generation ethnics, of aspects of traditional folk belief and practice, and their transformation by creative interpreters such as Grimassi into coherent magical systems that serve the needs of contemporary people for spiritual connection and a sense of ethnic pride and distinctiveness.

We have seen how the folk beliefs and magical practices of Italy differ substantially from contemporary Italian-American Witchcraft. Despite some common themes across regions and culture areas, they never constituted a unified religion. Cultural and linguistic differences and obstacles to communication

prevented the development of an organized Italian folk religion until very recent times. While the pre-Christian roots of Italian folk magical practice are still quite evident, over the course of nearly 2000 years, it has become highly syncretized with Catholicism, so that it becomes difficult to tease out the pagan elements from their Christian interpretations and uses. Moreover, interpreting modern practices as pagan survivals violates the ways their practitioners interpret themselves, and does not acknowledge impor-

tant aspects of their own identity and beliefs. We must not confuse Italian and Italian-American anti-clericalism with paganism; these are part of a pattern of opposition and resistance to authority rooted in centuries of hegemonic domination and exploitation. This system of domination created the harsh economic and social conditions under which Italian peasants struggled for centuries; magical practices were an inseparable part of this integrated cosmos. While folk magic could become a form of resistance, especially for

women, who had few other means to acquire authority outside the domestic sphere, the relationship of folk magic to the structures of domination was never a simple one; resistance, as Foucault suggests, is inextricably intertwined with the power system that produces it (Foucault, 1984:295). Because it was

We must not confuse
Italian and Italian-
American anti-clericalism
with paganism ... the
relationship of folk magic
to the structures of
domination was never a
simple one; resistance, as
Foucault suggests, is
inextricably intertwined
with the power system
that produces it

considered a necessary survival technique, folk magical practice was diffused throughout the population, rather than limited to an elite body of secret practitioners. Specialized folk healers existed, to be sure, often using trance-healing techniques and inheriting their powers from a family member. Yet these individuals themselves sometimes worked aggressive or manipulative magic, and were subject to the mistrust of their fellow villagers and to accusations of witchcraft.

Even when folk magical practices described by contemporary Ital-

ian-American Neopagan writers come from ethnographic sources or family tradition, they are de-contextualized from the traditional way of life in which they once existed. In a contemporary Neopagan context, these items acquire a different meaning—one related to the maintenance of ethnic identity in the face of increasing cultural homogenization. Why and how this is happening in the Pagan community are topics that I continue to investigate.

REFERENCES CITED

- Cattabiani, Alfredo. 1994. *Lunario: dodici mesi di miti, feste, leggende e tradizioni popolari d'Italia*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Davies, Owen. 1999. *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736-1951*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- De Martino, Ernesto. 1987 [1966]. *Sud e magia*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Di Nola, Alfonso. 1993. *Lo specchio e l'olio: le superstizioni italiane*. Bari: Laterza.
- Dundes, Alan. 1980. "Wet and Dry: the Evil Eye," in *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 93-133.
- Falassi, Alessandro. 1980. *Folklore by the Fireside*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Foster, George M. 1965. "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good." *American Anthropologist* 67: 293-315.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. "Preface to *The History of Sexuality, Volume II*," in *Foucault: a Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gatto Trocchi, Cecilia. 1990. *Magia ed esoterismo in Italia*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. 1991. *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*. Translated by Raymond Rosenthal. New York: Pantheon Books.
- . 1983. *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the 16th and 17th Centuries*. Translated by John and Anne Tedeschi. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Grimassi, Raven. 1995. *The Ways of the Strega*. St. Paul: Llewellyn.
- . 1999. *Hereditary Witchcraft: Secrets of the Old Religion*. St. Paul: Llewellyn.
- Handler, Richard and Jocelyn Linnekin. 1984. "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious." *Journal of American Folklore* 97/385:273-290.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terrence Ranger, ed. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hopman, Ellen E. and Lawrence Bond. 1996. *People of the Earth: the New Pagans Speak Out*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books.
- Hufford, David J. 1982. *The Terror that Comes in the Night: an Experience-Centered Approach to Supernatural Assault Traditions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Kligman, Gail. 1977 [1981]. *Calus: Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Leland, Charles G. 1990 [1890]. *Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches*. Custer, Washington: Phoenix Publishing.
- Magliocco, Sabina. 1993. *The Two Madonnas: the Politics of Festival in a Sardinian Community*. New York: Lang.
- Malpezzi, Frances M. and William M. Clements. 1992. *Italian American Folklore*. Little Rock, Arkansas: August House.
- Martello, Leo. 1972. *Weird Ways of Witchcraft*. Secaucus, NJ: Castle Books.
- . 1973. *Black Magic, Satanism and Voodoo*. Secaucus, NJ: Castle Books.
- . 1975. *Witchcraft, the Old Religion*. Secaucus, NJ: Castle Books.
- Selis, Luisa. 1978. "Prime ricerche sulla presenza delle streghe in Sardegna oggi," in *L'erba delle donne: maghe, streghe, guaritrici*. Roma: Roberto Napoleone Editore, 137-147.
- Stuart, Malcolm, ed. 1979. *The Encyclopedia of Herbs and Herbalism*. New York: Crescent Books.
- Zingarelli, Nicola. 1977. *Vocabolario della lingua italiana*. 10th edition. Milano: Zanichelli.

Sabina Magliocco is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at California State University, Northridge. She grew up in Italy and the United States and has done field research on traditional Sardinian festivals and socio-economic change, as well as on Pagan groups in the San Francisco Bay area. She is currently completing a book on Neopagan sacred art and altars. She is the author of several articles on Paganism, the guest editor of the special issue of Ethnologies devoted to Wicca, and has also published extensively on Italian folklore. During the course of her Pagan research, she became a Gardnerian initiate.

Blót on the Landscape: Re-reading Pope Gregory's Letter on the Heathen Temples

by Jeremy Harte

Pope Gregory's letter written to Abbot Mellitus in the year 601 is often cited as evidence for the widespread Christianisation of pagan British monuments. Jeremy Harte examines this celebrated text and reviews its impact on modern notions of site continuity. This article is reprinted from 3rd Stone 34 (April-June 1999). 3rd Stone magazine is enthusiastically recommended to our readers, who are encouraged to visit its website at <www.thirdstone.demon.co.uk>.

People are fascinated by the pagan origins of the English church. I remember a television series on the subject which began, for some reason, among the stones at Castlerigg. Dark, ominous chords—suggestive of heathen goings-on—were succeeded on the soundtrack by melodious chanting as a party of monks climbed up the hill. This was followed by a short period in which the camera waved about violently, presumably to indicate that important historical events were taking place, and when it finally settled down again, the stone circle contained a polystyrene model of the Ruthwell cross.

Clearly site continuity can mean different things to different people. It embraces things as diverse as Egyptian hermits squatting in rock-cut tombs, popes fitting crosses onto the obelisks in Roman plazas, and English country vicars giving churchyard burial to the people whom they had

disinterred from barrows (Grinsell 1986). Only recently has attention moved from the general concept of continuity, or re-use, to the different social contexts within which it has occurred. And there is nothing to show what leaders of the Church thought of this process—nothing, that is, apart from Pope Gregory's letter to Abbot Mellitus. This celebrated text has been employed many times by writers struggling to clarify their thoughts on Christianity and paganism. It is easy to forget that it represents the views of one man, in a particular historical situation.

Gregory dictated his correspondence. A secretary sat on a folding stool, taking the words down in shorthand; from the rooms beyond there came an echo of scratching pens as the papal clerks wrote the letters out in full. After finishing the fair copy and sealing it for dispatch, they prepared a file copy for the Vatican archives. At the end of the year, these were bound up into a single codex, which is how come the letter with which we are concerned found its way into volume 11 of the register, covering the year 601. Only a fraction of Gregory's correspondence survives. The letter to Mellitus—or to Augustine, for Mellitus was only acting as a messenger—is the 56th surviving entry for that year, and it will be convenient to refer to it as letter 56.

Most of the letters in the Register are replies to queries from other correspondents. This one is unusual. It represents the pope's own dictation, rather than the standard wording of the papal scrinium. It was initiated by him after he had given long thought to Augustine's mission in England: *diu de causa Anglorum cogitans*. Uniquely, it was forwarded by special messenger (Markus 1997: 183). Whatever Gregory had to say, he clearly thought it

City-dwellers in Egypt learned to keep out of the way when monks swarmed in from the desert, like brownshirts in sackcloth, intent on breaking up the altars of the ungodly.

was important.

Once the fair copy had been sealed, it was handed to a servant who rode down to the port at Ostia and took ship for southern Gaul. Four weeks earlier, Mellitus had followed the same route with his companions. This party had been laden down with chests containing chalices and patens, vestments, altar frontals and relics—all the equipment needed to re-establish church worship in Britain (Bede I: 29). The original instructions had been to construct new buildings for worship, but letter 56 changes all this to allow the altars and relics to be placed in converted pagan structures—*altaria construantur, reliquiae ponantur*. Together with the precious gospels and lectionaries, Mellitus also carried a sheaf of 24 letters, all dated 22nd June. The clerks of the scrinium had been hard at work. He was to hand these over in a dozen towns throughout Gaul, as well as seeking out the Frankish nobility who were underwriting the English project with their political support. It would be a long process, allowing plenty of time for the messenger to catch up with this final letter.

Mellitus' journey retraced the route followed by Augustine four years earlier. The original missionary party had sailed from Rome to the neighbourhood of Marseilles, stopping off for spiritual refreshment at

the island monastery of Lérins (Dudden 1905: 2.105). There they would have seen the tomb of Honoratus, who had founded the site two centuries earlier when it was a wilderness of snakes and brambles. They would have been told how he placed its foundations on the ruins of an old heathen temple; a significant touch. From Lérins, Augustine and his company passed

northwards, pausing at Tours. Here they could pray at the newly built shrine of Martin, the charismatic figure who had done so much to bring the faith to the illiterate rustics of Gaul. After his death in 395, Martin had become venerated throughout Christendom. The youthful Benedict, later to become the father of western monasticism, had known of him in his isolation at Monte Cassino. Here he cleared a site for the future community by throwing down a temple of Apollo, and on its ruins he built a chapel instead, dedicating it to Martin. Gregory had mentioned this incident in the *Dialogues*, written when he was abbot of his own monastery on the Coelian Hill, where Augustine was prior. So the two men had already shared thoughts on the treatment of pagan temples, many years before the English mission.

At last Augustine reached the channel ports and took ship for Thanet, where he was to meet Æthelberht of Kent. The queen, Bertha, was herself a daughter of the Frankish royal house and a Christian. On her marriage in 570, she had brought with her a chaplain, Liudhard, who could minister to her and to any other believers at the court. East of the ruined city of Canterbury was an abandoned mausoleum, pointed out by tradition as that of a Christian nobleman in the days before

the English came (Wallace-Hadrill 1988: 37). Liudhard fitted it up as a chapel and dedicated it to Martin, the scourge of the pagans. This was as far as he seems to have got in converting the English.

Back in Rome, pagans were not a problem. In 365 the worship of idols had been made punishable by death, with subsequent offences incurring disenfranchisement from public office. Despite these twin threats, pagan priesthoods had continued to officiate, and they were still rich enough for their assets to be worth confiscating in 382. Successive emperors stepped up the actions against paganism for another fifty years until the old faith was stamped out, at least among the upper classes (Chuvin 1990). Gregory never encountered an educated man who was not a Christian or a Jew.

But the departing pagans had left their cultural heritage behind. There had been some acts of destruction. In the eastern Empire, temples had made easy targets for fanatics from the 340s onwards (Fox 1986: 672). City-dwellers in Egypt learned to keep out of the way when monks swarmed in from the desert, like brownshirts in sackcloth, intent on breaking up the altars of the ungodly. The Serapeion of Alexandria was gutted and the church of John the Baptist was built on its ruins. But the governors of cities, themselves often pagan or with pagan connections, were alarmed at the prospect of violence. In 342 Theodosius decreed that urban temples were to be maintained as ancient monuments, a convenient place for works of art. Custodians had to be appointed to throw out visitors who were caught praying to the statuary. In 399 it was re-enacted that 'temples which are situated in cities or towns or outside the towns shall be vindicated to public use'. Justinian repeated the order in

451 (Greenhalgh 1989: 91).

If temples were to survive in the streetscape, their conversion to churches must have seemed a logical step. After all, big public buildings of any kind were in short supply in the 6th century. In letter 56, Gregory says that the temples of the English are to be converted if they are well-built—*si bene constructa sunt*—and this may reflect the situation in Rome. But in practice there was no great rush to convert pagan shrines to the new faith. The most famous of them all, the Parthenon, spent many years lying derelict before it was overhauled and rededicated to the Virgin Mary. Another temple of Athena, at Syracuse, was made into a cathedral, but this did not happen until after 597. In the cities of central Italy there were no site conversions at all until after the time of Gregory. The Forum was still lined with temples, as it had been in the great days of Rome, but they stood empty while churches were fitted into the gaps between them—one accommodated in a disused granary, another in the library of an abandoned palace (Greenhalgh 1989: 95). The unspoken ban on temple conversion was not lifted until 608, when Gregory's successor Boniface IV turned the Pantheon into the church of All Saints.

Things were different in the countryside. City temples had been part of the urban elite's display of wealth and power. The little shrines which clustered around groves and crossroads were for devotion only, with no pretensions to high art, and they had correspondingly few friends. There were still those who opposed their vandalism. 'If anyone with a thought of God wants to burn the wood of these shrines or to tear to pieces and destroy the diabolical altars, they become angry... They even go so far as to dare to strike

those who out of love for God are trying to overthrow the wicked idols', as Caesarius of Arles saw it in the 500s (Fletcher 1997: 51).

Under these circumstances, setting fire to temples was the safest and quickest way for religious enthusiasts to make their point. You can see why the owners of neighbouring properties objected, regardless of their religion. Martin of Tours had left a trail of incinerated temples in his campaign against rural paganism, and on one occasion flames from the targeted building were about to engulf the house next door. Being a holy man, Martin simply stood on the roof and ordered the fire to head the other way. Human opponents were less tractable, and in one village near Bourges the bishop was roughly treated when he tried to destroy their temple. Kneeling in prayer, he became aware of two tall figures in shining armour. They stood guard over him while he returned to the work of demolition. Martin assumed that these were angels who had taken on the form of soldiers, but they may equally well have been soldiers who resembled angels. Either possibility could be regarded as a miracle (Fletcher 1997: 43). Martin frequently built churches on the ruins of the temples he had destroyed, and at Mont-Beuvray the shrine of Bibracte, abandoned in about 375, has been found under one of his chapels (Mâle 1950: 32). Today it is the continuity of the site which interests us, but the destruction of the fabric must have made a greater impression at the time.

Letter 56 stands alone in condemning the policies of rural evangelisation to which Martin had devoted such energy (Markus 1970). There is to be no destruction, vandalism or confrontation; instead, the old buildings are to be retained for the

new worship, and the change is to be as imperceptible as possible. The festival at which the English sacrificed oxen—presumably the annual *blót* which took place in November—is to be replaced by a feast on the day of the saint whose relics have consecrated the church. Given his background, Augustine may have wanted to initiate his mission by tearing down a few heathen temples, but he would soon have realised that in Saxon Kent there were no soldiers, heavenly or otherwise, to protect him.

Conditions in Britain—and indeed in northern Gaul—must have come as something of a shock to the missionaries. There is nothing to suggest that Gregory had prepared them for the complete breakdown of Roman rule in these parts: probably the pope was unaware of it himself. His ideas on the province were vague in the extreme. In a passage written after the first mission reports, he described the English as Britons, living at 'the extremities of the earth' (Dudden 1905: 2.147)—a literary cliché with a pedigree going back before the Claudian invasion. Gregory assumed that the prefectures of Upper and Lower Britain still existed, with their provincial capitals at York and London, and that Augustine would be able to pass between them, stopping off at two dozen cities where he could found bishoprics. The reality was more disappointing.

Gregory was as unaware of English weather as he was of English politics. He sketches out a picture of the new converts holding outdoor feasts under shelters thatched with the branches of trees. This is not (*pace* Hutton 1991: 272) a detail of existing pagan practices. Gregory was thinking of the picnics which took place around the shrines of saints and martyrs in the Mediterranean countryside, where

sunscreens are essential to comfort. They would have offered little protection against an English November.

Gregory's ideas about the temples of the English were influenced by the situation as he knew it in the Italian countryside, but even more so by the language of the Bible. Had not Ezekiel said: 'In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease' (6: 6)? Gregory had preached a series of homilies on the prophet, whose messages of devastation struck a responsive chord in abandoned Rome. Of course altars and cult statues did exist in Italy and Gaul as well as in Palestine, and could be smashed up in suitably Biblical fashion. But there is nothing to suggest that they were current among the Anglo-Saxons. When Gregory refers to the English as worshippers of stocks and stones, his thoughts are on Isaiah 40:20 and not on the facts (if any) of tree and megalith cults.

Behind Gregory's ideas about idols is a theology of pride and humility. The things of this world, like Job's prosperity, are given in order to excite thankfulness to the creator (Straw 1988: 238). Christians, who understand the right use of the creation, return thanks to God, the giver of all good, just as the converted English will follow their alfresco barbecues with a prayer of thanks—*donatori omnium de satietate sua gratias referant*.

At the same time, Gregory had retained an ascetic view of the world from his days as a monk. The body was an untrustworthy vessel, pinning down the spirit with its

Letter 56 stands alone in condemning the policies of rural evangelisation ... There is to be no destruction, vandalism or confrontation; instead, the old buildings are to be retained for the new worship, and the change is to be as imperceptible as possible.

demands for food and sex. Ezekiel, like the other prophets, repeatedly describes idolatry in terms of sexuality. 'The pollution of idols' was a stock phrase, and significantly it was usually ascetics who were most obsessed with breaking up the white limbs of cult statues. Christian writers developed the literary figure of the virgin martyr, miraculously preserved from seduction either by the pagans themselves or by their idols. What is remarkable about Gregory, given his generally pessimistic view of the flesh, is the latitude which he allowed to the English mission on questions of pollution and purity.

Instead of a purgative destruction by fire, the English temples are to be cleansed with holy water—*aqua benedicta fiat, in eisdem fanis aspergatur*. Then they can be consecrated with altars and relics for the service of the Church. This matches with Gregory's thoughts on purity in the *Responsa*, a series of instructions sent four weeks earlier with the main party. In his missionary duties, Augustine had encountered aspects of life which had never troubled him in the Coelian monastery—pregnant women turning up to be bap-

When Gregory refers to the English as worshippers of stocks and stones, his thoughts are on Isaiah 40:20 and not on the facts (if any) of tree and megalith cults.

tised, couples coming to church after having had sex (but before having washed), women receiving communion during their periods or after childbirth. His instincts were to keep all these disturbing reminders of the human condition at bay, but Gregory would have none of it. 'The workings of nature cannot be considered culpable': fault could only lie in the human will, which was redeemed by grace (Bede I: 27). Gregory was making a decisive break with the earlier Christian tradition, which had sought to protect sacred places from ritual impurity (Brown 1981: 434). The body, temple of the Holy Spirit, could be made clean by faith alone. So, presumably, could those other temples which had been polluted by idols. This was a flexible theology, intended to bring converts into the fold. It seems to have worked.

Gregory viewed the growth of the English Church through the lens of Biblical history. The old law, preoccupied by ritual, was to give way to a new dispensation of inward values. Even after their initial rescue from the clutches of the demons, he knew, the English would still be preoccupied with external pleasures in the feasts—*aliqua exterius gaudia*—but they would gradually learn about spiritual joys—*interiora gaudia*. The Christian life was always striving to move from action to contem-

plation (Markus 1997: 17). When the Jews came out of Egypt, they had been allowed to keep external observances, such as sacrifices, but these were no longer the same—*sacrificia ipsa non essent*. This was not just because they were now being offered to the true God rather than to idols, but because they had acquired symbolic meaning, being types of the real sacrifice, the offering of Christ.

In the same way, Gregory draws on the instructions of Leviticus 23 to sketch out the festive arrangements which will replace the heathen *blót* (Hulse 1998). Like the Israelites, the English have come from an Egypt of diabolical bondage. Now they can gather for an annual feast in which they will kill animals and remember God with thanks. They will construct tabernacula—'ye shall dwell in booths', 23: 42. These will be thatched with tree branches, *de ramis arborum*, just as their Old Testament counterparts used 'the boughs of goodly trees', 23: 40. At one level this is simply a scriptural exegesis of what was common practice around Mediterranean churches. It seems, from the flow of ideas in the letter, that Gregory came up with this England-Israel analogy virtually in the course of dictation. But it fits into a theology of type and antitype. The most familiar tabernaculum was that of Moses and Aaron, which was to be translated into the Jerusalem Temple. And the Temple is a type of Christian community. The pagan English are not just turning their *fana* into churches, they are being encouraged to turn themselves into a Church.

Letter 56 is meant to be practical. Gregory hadn't sent a special messenger hotfooting through Gaul just to offer theological musings, or to share his experiences in

town planning. He is aware that he is contradicting his own previous instructions; on 22nd June Æthelberht had been instructed, in standard fashion, to suppress the worship of idols and wreck their shrines. Now no attempt whatsoever is to be made to destroy them—*fana destrui minime debeant* is peremptory language.

It is not certain how many shrines were in fact converted. The survival of 7th century placenames with the element *bearg*, often at ecclesiastical sites, suggests that this was the class of buildings being targeted. The *beargs* of the Gumeningas (Harrow) and of the Besingas (unknown: somewhere in Surrey) would have been the places where people assembled for the annual *blót*, and where after the conversion they were to gather for a yearly festival in which they could be catechised and baptised (Morris 1989: 69). In any case, the missionaries had limited resources. The church furnishings brought by Mellitus and his company were too intricate to be replicated by Kentish craftsmen, and they had a limited supply of relics, which were certainly not renewable. Perhaps there were enough in their saddlebags to supply a dozen churches, whether on pagan sites or not.

Æthelberht had been more than accommodating to Augustine. The abbot had arrived with forty men, no small drain on the resources of a small Dark Age kingdom, and had stayed for four years. The king was their friend, but there was a snag—'he would not compel anyone to accept Christianity'. We have this on the authority of Bede (I: 26), who thought it was an admirable policy, but it may be doubted whether Augustine felt the same way. God had raised up kings to safeguard the Church, not to promote some kind of liberal pluralism. Without the active, coer-

cive power of the state (such as it was) Augustine could end up like Liudhard, a lonely figure ministering to voluntary believers. Gregory had no time for a policy of religious toleration, either. His letter to the king exhorts him to extend the faith among his subjects, whether they like it or not, in imitation of the good emperor Constantine. Admittedly Constantine had governed most of the known world, while Æthelberht was only really secure in his home base of east Kent, but the facts of power were the same in both cases.

Gregory had no compunctions about urging his correspondents to use their authority against rural paganism. Clerics or laymen, it made no difference. The bishop of Terracina had gone soft on tree-worship: Maurus the vice-comes was to lean on him to make sure he inflicted more severe punishments. Landowners in Sardinia should be made responsible for the souls of their tenants, preferably by jacking up the rents of the few remaining pagans until they too came into the fold. 'You have received God's enemies into your power', wrote Gregory indignantly, 'and yet you disdain to subdue and recall them to him'. Spiritual exhortation was the right way to begin, but if that got nowhere they should proceed to whipping for the slaves and imprisonment for the free men (Dudden 1905: 2.148; Markus 1997: 81). John the Deacon, Gregory's biographer, described his hero as spreading the faith by sermons and the lash (*Vita* III: 1). This was not meant to be critical.

There is no doubt that Gregory would have liked Æthelberht to suppress paganism by force, just as he had encouraged Brunhild on the other side of the Channel to restrain her subjects 'by a moderate discipline' from the worship of trees and animal sacrifice (Dudden 1905: 2.62). The

flexible policy outlined in letter 56 was a temporary expedient, a response to Æthelberht's obstinately English liberalism. Gregory assumed, correctly enough, that after a transitional stage the kings of Kent would employ coercion rather than persuasion to spread the gospel. In 640, Æthelberht ordered the destruction of idols, 'enforcing his decrees by suitable penalties for disobedience' (Bede III: 8). The time for accommodation was at an end.

Gregory's flexibility proved an embarrassment to future generations—not in the matter of the temples, since most missionaries went on following Martin's confrontational attitude, but in the more delicate matter of sexual morals. When Pope Zacharias learned that his predecessor had been prepared to allow the marriage of second cousins, at first he was shocked. Still, *autres temps, autres mœurs*; 'we are prepared to believe that he allowed this because they were as yet uncivilised and were being invited to the faith' (Fletcher 1997: 283). And this just about sums up the context of Gregory's letter on the heathen temples: a document which has received much more attention among historians than it probably ever got among the hard-pressed missionaries of 601AD.

REFERENCES

- Brown, Peter, 1989, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Faber & Faber.
- Chuvin, Pierre, 1990, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*—tr. John Raffan, Harvard University Press.
- Dudden, F. Hornes, 1905, *Gregory the Great: His Place in History and Thought*, Longmans Green & Co.
- Fletcher, Richard, 1997, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity 371-1386 AD*, Harper

Collins.

- Fox, Robin Lane, 1986, *Pagans and Christians*, Penguin.
- Greenhalgh, Michael, 1989, *The Survival of Roman Antiquities in the Middle Ages*, Duckworth.
- Grinsell, Leslie, 1986, 'The Christianisation of prehistoric and other pagan sites', *Landscape History* 8, 27-37.
- Hulse, Tristan Gray, 1998, Correspondence, *Source* 5, 41-3.
- Hutton, Ronald, 1991, *The Pagan Religions of the British Isles*, Blackwell.
- Mâle, Emile, 1950, *La Fin du Paganisme en Gaule*, Paris.
- Markus, R.A., 1970, 'Gregory the Great and the origins of a papal mission strategy', *Studies in Church History* 6, 29-38.
- Markus, R.A., 1997, *Gregory the Great and His World*, Cambridge University Press.
- Morris, Richard, 1989, *Churches in the Landscape*, Dent.
- Straw, Carole, 1988, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection*, University of California Press.
- Wallace-Hadrill, J.M., 1988, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary*, Clarendon.

Shamanistic Elements in Zoroastrianism: The Pagan Past and Modern Reactions

by Touraj Daryaei

California State University, Fullerton

Please note that in this paper diacritical marks have not been used for Indo-Iranian words

The parameters of the Shamanistic tradition has been fully outlined in the work of Eliade, where the Zoroastrian traditions has been given its due attention (Eliade 1970). One should begin by stating that the word Shaman itself appears to be connected with the Zoroastrian tradition, where its origin is assigned to eastern Iran/Central Asia, from the Sogdian language (Gershevitch 1954: 159). In Sanskrit the word appears as *sramana* and in Middle Persian and Modern Persian appears as *shaman*, when it entered into Siberia (Russell 1990: 192). Not only the word but also the concept of Shamanistic voyage to the netherworld is clearly present in the Zoroastrian tradition, and the Zoroastrian literature does not betray this fact. Still, the study of this tradition has caused modern Zoroastrians trouble and outrage and some scholars have denounced any clear connections. This essay attempts to delineate some of the functions of the Shamanistic voyage in the Zoroastrian tradition and some modern reactions to this issue.

The shamanistic voyage in the Zoroastrian tradition had dual functions which were not necessarily distinct from one another. The first type of voyage was that

which was made to gain knowledge of the future and was apocalyptic and eschatological in nature. The second type of voyage was geared toward discovering the truth about the religion, correctly performing the rites and rituals, and finally visiting heaven and hell. By accomplishing either or both of these types of voyages, the messenger was able to come back to earth and inform the co-religionists as well as the non-believers of what was going to come and how to act so that they would not end up in the pits of hell. These ideas certainly predated Zoroaster, whose exact time period is unclear and is estimated as living between 1100 and 600 BCE in Central Asia. The Indians in their tradition also clearly manifest the idea of visionary activity by taking sacred hallucinogens to gain access into and knowledge of the netherworld (Gonda 1963). Among the Iranian speaking people, the Avestan people (Central Asia) have left us the oldest Iranian sacred poems, suggesting the practice of this visionary journey. Zoroaster's poems are the oldest known compositions in the Avestan language and his ideas can give us an understanding of the nature of these activities among the pagan Indo-Iranians.

From what can be gathered from the Indo-Iranian poems is that certain classes of pagan priests, such as Usijs, Kavis and Karapans, partook in the drinking and burning of a sacred hallucinogen which is called in Sanskrit *Soma*, and in Avestan *Haoma*. There is much debate in regard to the exact nature of this substance, whether it brought hallucination or exhilaration, or whether it was a plant or type of mushroom (Schwartz 1985). It is clear, however, that *Soma/Haoma* brought some form of vision which enabled man to meet with the gods, such as Mithra, and

compose poems about the pagan and other Indo-Iranian deities. Mithra is one of the important Indo-Iranian or Indo-European gods who has made an indelible mark on ancient India, Iran, Armenia, Anatolia, and the Roman Empire.

From what Zoroaster claims to have been the now abandoned pagan tradition, the pagan priests used this Indo-Iranian hallucinogen to receive visions of the netherworld and thus promote their evil ways. In his poetry Zoroaster condemns such practices (Yasna 48.10):

“When, O Wise One, will (some) honorable persons take up their positions side by side with the reciter? When will (someone) kick over the (vessel of) urine of that (demon of) intoxication [meaning the drink Haoma] with which the Karapans [pagan priest] harmfully cause racking pain, and with which the bad rulers of the countries (do that as well), (inspired) by their (bad) intellect.” (Humbach 1991; I.178)

Although there are no uniform opinions, most scholars have suggested that the “urine of that intoxication” in this passage refers to Haoma (Humbach 1991; II.203). The word used for this intoxicating drink in the passage is (Avestan) *madu* which in Middle Persian and Modern Persian renders *may*, “wine,” but originally meant any intoxicating drink or substance. It was probably this intoxicating drink which gave visions to pagan poets who were able to journey to the netherworld and see the gods or demons (*ahuras* & *daivas*), speak with them and return to tell the adheres of their conference with the gods. Now then, Zoroaster appears to have condemned such practices, not only because of the way the Haoma was prepared, but also because it promoted the worship of pagan deities, the most prominent being Mithra. Zoroaster formulated

his thoughts in poetic form, which are some of the most profound ideas in the history of humanity, but his reforms were not to be long lasting even among his followers. His poems today are known as the Old Avestan Hymns.

A series of other poems were added to the Avesta after Zoroaster’s passing. These sacred Zoroastrian hymns are called the Younger Avestan hymns. But in reality the Younger Avesta contains many of the pre-Zoroastrian concepts, gods and practices. This means that some of the pagan gods and rituals were reintroduced into the Zoroastrian religion and were placed in the Younger Avesta as the word of the prophet. While we know that the important Indo-Iranian god Mithra was demonized and set aside by Zoroaster, in the Younger Avesta one of the longest hymns is dedicated to the worship of this very god (Gershevitch 1959).

Following this, the cult of Haoma was again introduced into Zoroastrianism. It is not clear if Zoroaster condemned its usage altogether, but certainly its burning or different ways of preparation was condemned. The epithet of Haoma in the Avesta is *duraosha* which now appears to mean “difficult to burn” and consequently “death-resistant” or “providing immortality” (Humbach 1991; I.70). This idea suggests that the sacred Haoma induced visions of immortality where its usage was popular among the Indo-Iranian priests. In fact in the Younger Avesta a hymn known as the *Hom Yasht* (Haoma Worship) was inserted where it is stated that the plant of Haoma was mixed with milk by Zoroaster. By this time, Haoma had achieved a status of deification as a drink, and it is possible that this was an old tradition. Its burning may also have been practiced against the injunctions of

Zoroaster. Still today, the Iranian people use what is known as *Isfand* which was the epithet of Haoma in the Avesta (*spenta* “sacred”). By using Isfand, they believe it will deter evil from one’s dwelling and destroy the evil eye, an Avestan idea today in an Islamic garb (Schwartz 1985; 141-142).

The use of intoxicants to induce visions was then to remain in the Zoroas-

Yasn 1995; 3.6). This meant his vision was so strong that he was able to see the minutest details of every living being.

Others would also partake in these practices. Zoroaster’s patron and king, Wishtasp, is also said to have been able to receive visions with the aid of Zoroaster. In this episode of the Shamanistic journey, Wishtasp received wine (one is reminded here of the Avestan word for

While Zoroaster may have had banned the specific burning and abuse of the Haoma plant, after his passing away pagan ideas and ceremonies reentered the Zoroastrian tradition to defend its tenants.

trian religion, against all the warning that the prophet had made to its adherents in the Old Avestan hymns. Even in the later tradition other visionary/hallucinatory substances were used either to make the journey to the future or to have the knowledge of the netherworld, heaven and hell. Zoroaster himself did not have a part in the pagan reintroduction of vision and journey into the netherworld, but now it was assigned to him and his adherents. In an apocalyptic text it is stated that Zoroaster was given the (Middle Persian) *xrad i harwisp agahih* “all-knowing wisdom” in the form of water poured onto his hands to drink which induced a deep sleep for seven days and nights. By doing this Zoroaster was able to see the future and what would come to be, how the end of the world would appear and finally the victory of righteousness over evil. This drink was so strong that one texts states he was able to see and count each hair of men and animals on their backs and their heads (Zand i Wahman

intoxicant: *may*) with a narcotic substance known as *mang* which has been suggested to have been hemp, probably hashish (Bartholomae 1904; 1447; Nyberg 1974; 125). After drinking the concoction, he fell into a deep sleep where his soul journeyed to heaven and returned (West 1897; 70-73). This drink which gave visions became so popular that other later Zoroastrian personages also took it, and it received the name *mang i Wishtasp*, “hemp of Wishtasp.” The most famous personage to take this “hemp of Wishtasp” is a man by the name of Wiraz. The *Arda Wiraz Namag* (The Book of Righteous Wiraz) is about the journey of Wiraz into heaven and hell, which comprises the second function of Shamanistic voyage. This was done at the behest of the Zoroastrian priests who had become weary of the truth of the religion and were plagued by heresy. Someone was needed to make the journey to the netherworld to see for himself and to bring back the news. He was placed 30

steps away from the fire-temple, where he was cleansed, clothed with clean cloths and perfumed on a bed. He was then given the "hemp of Wishtasp" in a cup, which after drinking caused him to fall into a sleep for seven days and nights. While he was sleeping, the priests at the fire-temple recited the liturgy to keep his soul safe during the voyage (Arda Wiraz Namag 1986; 193). During that time

and takes him to the pits of hell and peaks of heaven, where he learns about the truth of the religion (Skjærvø 1983; Gignoux 1991; 73-77). He also has another inscription in which he tells us that he visited heaven and hell and found out about the Zoroastrian religion and how to correctly perform rituals. He warned the readers that those who do not believe that there is a heaven and hell

In an apocalyptic text it is stated that Zoroaster was given ... "all-knowing wisdom" in the form of water poured onto his hands to drink ... his vision was so strong that he was able to see the minutest details of every living being.

Wiraz visited heaven and hell, seeing those who were enjoying the afterlife and those being tormented in hell, each telling him their pious work or their sins which caused their fate.

The last episode under consideration is in regard to the 3rd century Zoroastrian priest, Kerdir. During the Sasanian period (224-651 CE), Zoroastrianism became the official state religion and Kerdir is credited as the person who furthered Zoroastrianism at the expense of other religions. He has left us several inscriptions which have very interesting narratives about his visionary journey, demonstrating the vigor of the shamanistic tradition even in the late antiquity in Iran. It is not said that he specifically took a hallucinogen, but from the context we can make this assumption. He asks the gods to give him the ability to visit heaven and hell, which is granted by them. His double in the form of a beautiful lady appears to him

should now do so, because Kerdir had made the journey and was now back on earth to share it with the people (Gignoux 1991; 36-39). Upon becoming certain of his ideas, he proceeded to persecute other religious groups such as the Jews, Christians, Manichaeans, and Buddhists. Interestingly, here he applied the word Shaman (Middle Persian inscription) *shmny* to the Buddhists. He also forced the Zoroastrian priests who did not agree with his ideas to reform themselves and take on his position. There are other episodes of visionary journeys, but the examples mentioned will suffice to demonstrate that it had a long tradition in the Iranian world.

What can we conclude from these journeys by Zoroastrian personages? What are the implications for Zoroastrianism? We can state that Zoroastrianism used what can be called pagan ideas which were prevalent in the Indo-Iranian

period, i.e., the shamanistic voyage, to justify its position against opponents who also made these voyages and took on induced visions through the burning/drinking of the sacred Indo-Iranian hallucinogen, Soma/Haoma. While Zoroaster may have had banned the specific burning and abuse of the Haoma plant, after his passing away pagan ideas and ceremonies reentered the Zoroastrian tradition to defend its tenants. This included the worship of pagan gods, such as Mithra, and the making of the journey through the taking of Haoma, but later also other substances such as *mang*, *bang* and *may* (also note that some Sufis in the Islamic tradition in Persia and Pakistan drink a vision inducing drink called *Dugh i Wahdat* which its basic substance is probably *bang*). These substances were used to justify the position of the Zoroastrian church against the group of priests who used these drugs for visions to compose poems which had been rejected by Zoroaster. These voyages later were also taken to uphold the Zoroastrian religion during late antiquity, when other confessional religions such as Christianity and Manichaeism in the 3rd century were popular. This is especially true of Manichaeism where its prophet, Mani, also received his revelations from his "twin-spirit" and was able to make similar types of journey to establish the truth of his ideas (Russell 1990; 185; Skjærvø, 1994: 282).

Thus in late antiquity different religious groups were making shamanistic journeys to establish their religions and to compete with each other. While paganism was being attacked by the very same religions, pagan ideas were used for this struggle. One of the last groups of people who held out against these competing

religions were the Sabians of Harran. They were pagans who had been able to practice their ideas and rituals freely in this town at the center of the Fertile Crescent (Fowden 1993: 62-63).

Others, however, were sucked into the monotheistic traditions of Christianity, Manichaeism and the dualism of Zoroastrianism. For the Zoroastrians to hold their own, they had to innovate and introduce new ways of making this journey and while propping up a tradition that Zoroaster also had taken part in these ceremonies, taking the hallucinogenic drinks, as did his patron, King Wishtasp. "Wishtasp's hemp" became an important means of inducing voyages. Two journeys (those of Wishtasp and Wiraz) we know of for certain, and Kerdir probably took the same drink. Thus the Zoroastrians had to take *mang*, "hemp", which in modern Persian has come to mean "giddy" with its alternative form, *bang*, "hashish." Later Wiraz was sent on the voyage which King Wishtasp had made to reaffirm the religion of Zoroastrianism, and finally Kerdir also made a shamanistic voyage (Gignoux 1981; 245) in the same tradition, in order to combat the competing religions.

Now this may be a hard medicine for modern day Zoroastrians to swallow. How could the prophet of the religion and its most important religious figures have partaken in pagan or shamanistic activities? Well, we can not say that Zoroaster took part in these activities and it is only the later Zoroastrian tradition that makes such an attribution to the prophet. The same is true for bringing back the pagan gods of the Indo-Iranians into the Zoroastrian pantheon and the reintroduction of the Haoma ceremony. These voyages ensured that pagans would

be warned of what awaits them in the other world. Some of these voyages, of course, were geared towards those pagans who did not believe in heaven and hell and the idea of an afterlife. In the Zoroastrian texts, no real term exists for a pagan, only those who practice evil religions, ie,

The second group were experts in ancient languages and religions, as was Nyberg himself. W.B. Henning made the most fierce attack among this group which accused Nyberg of making Zoroaster into a witch-doctor who took drugs and composed poetry in that mental state (Hen-

One of the last groups of people who held out against these competing religions were the Sabians of Harran. They were pagans who had been able to practice their ideas and rituals freely in this town at the center of the Fertile Crescent.

heretics or devil worshiper. It is under the latter term that we find a host of religious groups and in one Zoroastrian text of late antiquity we realize that this meant pagans who did not believe in an afterlife (Meno-ye Xrad 1364; 41.59-60):

The wise asked the Spirit of Wisdom, how many types of people are there? The Spirit of Wisdom answered: There are three kinds; one the man, another half-man and one half-demon ... Half-demon is he who with the exception of the name of man and being born from humanity, in every other matter resembles the two legged demon. He neither recognizes the material world, nor the spiritual world. Neither knows good work, nor sin. Neither recognizes heaven, nor hell and does not even think of his deeds for the sake of his soul.

In the 1930s, S.H. Nyberg attempted to give the outlines of the shamanistic tradition and its influence on the Zoroastrian religion. He was bitterly attacked from three different fronts. The first group were the Zoroastrians who only latter were exposed to his ideas, because the book was published first in German.

ning 1951). The last group were spearheaded by the Nazis of the early 20th century who were infatuated with the pure Aryan race theory. For them, putting Zoroaster and the Avestan tradition in its historical context and discussing aspects of the religion within the parameters of shamanism was not only impossible, but down right blasphemy for their race and history (Wüst 1939-1940; 248-249). Still, some of Nyberg's basic ideas seem to have withstood the test of time and that is that Shamanism was an important aspect of the Iranian priestly world.

I think it is time to look at the issue of the shamanistic voyage in the Zoroastrian tradition afresh, especially when much ground breaking work has been achieved by the scholars of Indo-Iranian languages and religions. It is time to give credit where credit is due, and sift the different elements which helped this religion to survive and produce some of the most interesting literature in ancient times. Zoroastrians will have a difficult time

reading these words, but it is time to separate the message and ideas of Zoroaster from that of the later Zoroastrian tradition which survives till today and is the product of the pagan Indo-Iranian elements along with the reforms of the prophet of that religion.

WORKS CITED:

- Ch. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, Strassburg, 1904.
- C. Cereti, *Zand i Wahman Yasn*. Azoroastrian Apocalypse, Istituto Italiano per il medio ed estremo oriente, Rome, 1995.
- M. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Princeton UP, 1970.
- G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth, consequences of Monotheism in late antiquity*, Princeton UP, 1993.
- I. Gershevitch, *A Grammar of Manichaean Sogdian*, Oxford, 1954.
- I. Gershevitch, *The Avestan Hymns to Mithra*, Cambridge UP, 1959.
- Ph. Gignoux, "Les voyages chamaniques dans le monde iranien," *Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne*, vol. I, Leiden, 1981, pp. 244-265.
- Ph. Gignoux, *Les quatre inscriptions de mage kirdr*, Studia Iranica—cahier 9, Peeters, Leuven, 1991.
- J. Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, The Hague, Mouton, 1963.
- W.B. Henning, *Zoroaster, Politician or Witch-Doctor*, Ratanbai Katrak Lectures, Oxford, 1951.
- H. Humbach, *The Gathas of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts*, Part I, Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg, 1991.
- S.H. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des Alten Iran*, Osnabrück, Otto Zeller, reprint 1966.
- S.H. Nyberg, *A Manual of Pahlavi*, Part II: Glossary, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1974.
- J.R. Russell, "Kartir and Mani: A Shamanistic Model of their Conflict," *Papers in Honor of Professor E. Yarshater*, Acta Iranica, E.J. Brill, 1990, pp. 180-193.

M. Schwartz & D. Flattery, *Haoma and Harmaline, the botanical identity of the Indo-Iranian sacred hallucinogen "soma" and its legacy in religion, languages and Middle Eastern folklore*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1985.

- P.O. Skjærvø, "Kirdir's Vision: Translation and Analysis," *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, vol. 16, 1983, pp. 269-306.
- P.O. Skjærvø, "Iranian Elements in Manichaeism," *Au Carrefour des Religions. Mélanges offerts à Philippe Gignoux*, Res Orientales VII, 1994, pp. 263-284.
- A. Tafazzoli, *Meno-ye Xrad*, Tus Publishers, Tehran, 1364.
- F. Vahman, *Arda Wiraz Namag, The Iranian "Divina Commedia"*, Curzon Press, London and Malmo, 1986.
- W.E. West, *Pahlavi Texts, Part V, Marvels of Zoroastrianism*, Oxford University Press, 1897 (Delhi reprint 1994).
- W. Wüst, "Review of S.H. Nyberg, Die Religionen des Alten Iran," in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, vol. 36, 1939-1940, pp. 248-249.

Touraj Daryaei was born in Iran and studied both there and in Greece. He received his PhD in History from UCLA, concentrating on both Ancient and Medieval History and Indo-Iranian Languages and Religions. He is now Assistant Professor of Ancient and Medieval History at California State University, Fullerton, and his current project is on a 9th century Middle Persian text which deals with history, geography and mythology.

Mirra Alfassa: A Western Occultist in India

by Christine Rhone

Mirra Alfassa (1878-1973) was a Parisian who spent thirty years in India with Sri Aurobindo, a major figure in Indian literature and spirituality, honored as one of the country's early freedom fighters. Together they created a synthesis called the Integral Yoga. Alfassa, today revered by thousands as an incarnation of the Divine Mother, had previously trained in Algeria as an occultist and psychic with Max Theon and contributed many of his teachings to the Integral Yoga. Auroville, the idealistic community in South India begun by Alfassa in the late 60s, is still thriving.

The last quarter of the 19th century and the first of the 20th saw many fertile cross-seedings between the spiritual and esoteric traditions of Europe and India. Pivotal in these was Mirra Alfassa. She was born in Paris in 1878, and today is revered as an *avatar* or incarnation of the Divine Mother by thousands of people East and West. She spent more than fifty years in India working to realize a synthesis called the Integral Yoga with Sri Aurobindo, who is honored today as an early freedom fighter and a giant in the fields of spirituality and literature. An extraordinary temple, the Matrimandir, stands in South India as a monument to Alfassa's achievement: a piece of visionary architecture that is unique in the world.

The Western esoteric seeds that Mirra

Alfassa brought to India, where they were implanted in Sri Aurobindo's mystic philosophy, had come to her through contact with Max and Alma Theon, the moving spirits behind two important occultist groups in Europe, the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor and the Groupe Cosmique. Mirra, who had had spontaneous psychic and spiritual experiences from childhood, trained intensively with the Theons during two long stays at their home in Tlemcen, Algeria. The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, known as the H B of L, went public in England in 1884 as a school of practical occultism. In this it differed from the Theosophical Society, whose teachings were more philosophical, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which was more social and ceremonial. The Groupe Cosmique evolved at the turn of the century as a continuation of the H B of L and had a profound influence, especially in France. Through Mirra Alfassa it has left its imprint on the Integral Yoga, whose teachings are closely connected with the Theons' philosophy of the period around 1900.

Max Theon was a shadowy figure, so elusive that the best scholars today remain unable to identify his precise origins or name. Of all the variants that appear on official documents, his original name was most likely Louis Bimstein, probably born in 1847 in Poland or Russia. He himself always said he was Jewish. It is definitely known that Theon was active in Poland toward the time of the insurrections of 1863, when many Jews were demonstrating against Russian dominance. Theon must have spent much of his life under false names and identity papers to escape Tsarist or Austrian repression, but when exactly he left his country, and whether he had to flee

because he was Jewish or else wanted to avoid military conscription is unresolved. His work suggests that he was an initiate of Hasidic circles; it is entirely impregnated with Kaballah. There are important theoretical and practical elements of sex magic in the H B of L, whose source was Paschal Beverly Randolph's teachings in The Brotherhood of Eulis and more distantly, the *Zohar*. Theon declared that he had

received full initiation at the exceptionally young age of eighteen. Presumably, he travelled widely, although information on this is not explicit and comes from accounts by his successors in the Groupe Cosmique. After Theon's initiations in European or Hasidic circles, he must have received initiation into Indian or Tibetan-Indian wisdom. Mirra Alfassa said that he knew the *Rig Veda* in depth and Sanskrit and that he claimed to have been the heir to a tradition antedating the Kaballah and the *Vedas*.

Theon's marriage to Alma, formerly Mary Ware, who was English, took place shortly after the first public notice of the H B of L. Alma was a medium, an occultist, and a successful lecturer, whose own Universal Philosophical Society, founded under the pseudonym Una, anticipated the future Philosophie Cosmique. Mirra Alfassa was lavish in her praise of Alma's immense occult powers,

“Pathotisme”, which Theon said meant magnetism in antiquity, is a practice where two persons, one psychically sensitive or a medium, and the other a protector and guide, work together to obtain occult knowledge.

which she said were even greater than Max's.

The Philosophie Cosmique is thus a synthesis of esoteric streams issuing from Hasidic Kaballism and Indian or Tibetan-Indian sources, blended with knowledge of Western spiritualism that the Theons probably gained primarily from their own explorations of magnetism. So, in moving from the H B of L to the Philosophie Cosmique, the elements of sex magic were dropped, and Indian ingredi-

ents were added along with mediumistic activities which Max Theon termed “pathotisme”.

“Pathotisme”, which Theon said meant magnetism in antiquity, is a practice where two persons, one psychically sensitive or a medium, and the other a protector and guide, work together to obtain occult knowledge. This operation works best when the force of polarity is used, one active and the other receptive, or male and female. The information and visions channelled by the sensitive, who speaks in trance while exteriorized from her body, is subjected to intellectual control by the protector, who also ensures that the sensitive is not endangered by encounters with diabolical forces and does not lose her way while voyaging in the subtle planes. The Theons collaborated in this way for many years and used the material thus obtained to write the texts of the Philosophie Cosmique, which

total more than 10,000 pages. Among their contemporaries were other couples who used similar methods, such as S.L. MacGregor Matthews and his wife Moina Bergson, whose collaboration produced the rituals of the Golden Dawn in 1891-92. This was a process that Mirra Alfassa also trained in, according to passages in her transcribed conversations. Sri Aurobindo's epic poem, *Savitri*, which runs to 800 pages, is, among other things, a description of Mirra's spiritual experiences as she travelled in the subtle realms.

The keystone of the whole system of the Philosophie Cosmique is the concept that physical mortality of the human being is not inevitable. One of its basic axioms is, "Mortality is the result of imbalance: it is accidental and temporary." Nor is immortality something for the far distant future, after a long wait for some form of resurrection of the dead. It is something to be attained right now. Closely associated with this is a concept of evolution, stated in another axiom that says, "The perpetual evolution toward perfection is the eternal and natural means to arrive at earthly Immortality." The "glorious body", which is immortal and made of spiritual light, is our birthright. The Theons supported these concepts with examples taken mainly from the Bible and the Kaballah, since they were

From the Integral
Yoga perspective,
Mirra was working
on the spiritual and
occult planes for the
benefit of all
humanity and of
matter, to hasten the
process of evolution
toward the new
species.

writing for people brought up in Judeo-Christian traditions, but also had recourse to quotations from their translation of the *Rig Veda*. Marshalled for support were the esoteric currents of Alchemy, Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, plus Socrates (Theon's name, incidentally, was a reflection of Alma's predilection for ancient Greece). When Alma unexpectedly passed away from illness in 1908, Max was deeply shaken and never fully recovered. Their *Revue Cosmique* ceased publication that same year.

When he himself reached old age, some of his disciples, perhaps intimidated by the boldness of their leader, must have tried a cover-up, because the words "earthly Immortality" in the aforementioned axiom, meaning physical immortality, were changed to "Immortality of the earthly consciousness", which is much more limited.

Mirra first met the Theons through her brother, whose good friend was a close associate of theirs. The Philosophie Cosmique came as a deep affirmation of her inner experiences, for which she had been starved in her upbringing in a materialistic and rationalistic household. The Theons' occult knowledge and techniques provided her with the tools she needed for her psychic and spiritual development, which proved invaluable in later years when she was in charge of the Sri

Aurobindo Ashram and School. An apt and eager student, within a couple of years Mirra became an editor of the *Revue Cosmique*. While later recognizing that the Theons' philosophy had followed the same lines as Sri Aurobindo's and arrived at the same conclusions by different paths, she also qualified Max Theon as an *asura* (demon) and incarnation of the Lord of Death.

It was indirectly through the *Revue Cosmique* that she eventually met Sri Aurobindo. Mirra first went to India in 1914 with her second husband, Paul Richard, a barrister in Paris who had interests in politics and philosophy, and a reader of the *Revue Cosmique*. His reason for going was two-fold: he wanted to meet an authentic Indian yogi, and he had political interests in the elections to be held in the French territories. It was in the sleepy seaside town of Pondicherry that they met Aurobindo Ghose, who had already made a name for himself as a fiery revolutionary against the British Raj. In fact, Aurobindo was in French territory to get away from the British, who had thrown him in jail for a year, and had already retired from the political field to concentrate solely on his spiritual work.

In her youth, Mirra had received teachings from guides seen in her dreams. She instantly recognized Sri Aurobindo as the main guide she had been in contact with. The three had many long conversations and began to publish a review, *Arya*, in which Sri Aurobindo laid many of the foundation texts of the Integral Yoga. World War One soon broke out, and the Richards had to leave. Mirra was not to return to India until 1920, but when she did go back, it was for good. She separated from her husband and stayed with Sri Aurobindo, working with him for

more than thirty years until his death in 1950. A few years after she came to stay, she became known as the Mother.

The two contributed the best of their knowledge and experience to their philosophical synthesis, adapting the Theons' Philosophie Cosmique symbol for their own organization and making use of some of its terminology. Sri Aurobindo found little to reject in these teachings, and recognized Max Theon as a remarkably intuitive pioneer. Educated at the best schools in England, Sri Aurobindo wrote prolifically in a complex and rich English style to reinterpret the heritage of Vedanta and Yoga traditions. The motto of his synthesis is, "All life is yoga." He rejected the doctrine of *maya* (illusion), and embraced a concept of the evolution of spirit in nature and history. Other thinkers of his generation also treated the concept of evolution, an influence from science, although classical Indian thought contains similar ideas. Powered by an aspiration that is inbuilt, humanity is inevitably progressing toward a higher form of consciousness, which will finally result in the divinization of humanity and matter. The aim of yoga is not liberation for one single individual, but the integration of all people, the Earth, and matter itself with highest consciousness. The race that is evolving will be a new species whose immortal bodies are made of supramental light.

From at least 1958 on, Mirra concentrated on something she called "the yoga of the body" or "yoga of the cells" and underwent many physical disorders and psychic attacks in the process. From the Integral Yoga perspective, Mirra was working on the spiritual and occult planes for the benefit of all humanity and of matter, to hasten the process of evolu-

tion toward the new species. From the perspective of the history of Western esotericism, this phase of her work was an extension and development of the Theons' teaching that the human body can be made immortal. Regardless of Theon, there was enough misunderstanding and confusion among some of her disciples on this issue anyway to cause a wave of disillusionment to ripple through their ranks when she physically died in 1973, at the ripe age of ninety-five. Mirra's biographers often devote some discussion to reconciling the upheavals of this period. The experiences and visions of her last years are recorded in the *Mother's Agenda*, a collection of conversations transcribed by her disciple Satprem which make fascinating reading.

Unlike other associates of Theon's who tried to found idealistic or utopian communities, such as Peter Davidson's ill-fated "colony" in Georgia (USA) in 1886, Mirra was successful in establishing an international township, Auroville, which has been growing fitfully but fruitfully since 1968. Its aims include echoes of immortality and an overt evolutionary purpose: "Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages"; "The whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species, and Auroville wants to work consciously to hasten this advent."

More than a century has passed since the heyday of Max and Alma Theon. The influence of the H B of L on subsequent occultist groups has been profound, both in Europe and in the USA. Its threads can be traced through the activities of some its leading members, such as the Rev. William Ayton, F.-Ch. Barlet, Peter Davidson, and Thomas Henry Burgoyne. Its teachings were part of the esoteric core

of French occultism, whose driving force was Papus, head of the Martinist Order. Of all the students of the Philosophie Cosmique, the most illustrious is no doubt Mirra Alfassa, who became the Mother of the Integral Yoga: Auroville has achieved much, especially in ecology and architecture, while the Sri Aurobindo Ashrams in Pondicherry and Delhi are thriving.

WORKS CITED:

Christian Chanel, "De la 'Fraternité de Louxor' au 'Mouvement cosmique': l'oeuvre de Max Théon...", Doctorat d'Etat (E.P.H.E., Section Ve, 1994).

J. Godwin, C. Chanel and J. P. Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor* (Samuel Weiser, 1995).

Georges van Vrekhem, *Beyond Man* (HarperCollins, New Delhi, 1997).

Christine Rhone is the author, with John Michell, of Twelve Tribe Nations (Thames & Hudson, 1991), the translator of Jean Richer's Sacred Geography of the Ancient Greeks (SUNY Press, 1994), and the translator of Antoine Faivre's Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition (SUNY Press, 2000). She is a contributor to many small press magazines and journals in the UK and the US and a priestess in the Fellowship of Isis. She resides in London.

BOOK REVIEWS

Two Reviews of *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Will Not Give Women a Future*. By Cynthia Eller. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000. 276 pages. \$26.00 paper.

Revoew by Laurel Holmström
Sonoma State University

Reviewed by Wendy Griffin
California State University, Long Beach

CYNTHIA ELLER, WHO WROTE the first sociological study on the Feminist Goddess movement, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, now gives us her critique of the central mythos of the movement in her newest work, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*. The subtitle of the book alerts readers to her perspective immediately—*why an invented past will not give women a future*. Eller's main critique of the mythos is that its purported political agenda—the liberation of women—will not be gained through a revising of prehistory, as the myth makers claim. Eller's book critiques the archeological arguments associated with this mythos as well as the conclusions drawn from those arguments. She frames her discussion in the context of the entire feminist movement.

Eller does an excellent job of presenting the mythos of the Feminist Goddess movement in great detail through examples found in literature, art, music, group travel packages and scholarship. Eller is amazed at the proliferation of this mythology during the last fifteen years or so and the level of unquestioning acceptance it has received among many women and men participating in the Goddess movement. Yet she recognizes the myths' tremendous power to transform individual women's lives in the present. "Many women ... have experienced the story of our matriarchal past as profoundly empowering, and as a firm foundation from which to call for, and believe in, a better future for us all" (p. 7). In spite of this she believes it is useful to critique the mythos on the grounds

continued on next page

SLIPPING OFF THE SACRED LAP

Cynthia Eller's latest book is intended to be confrontational, as can be seen in the title, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an invented past won't give women a future*. Eller begins by arguing that the sacred history of Goddess Spirituality, the myth of a golden matriarchal prehistory, is what unites an extremely diverse "feminist spirituality" movement. She refers to those who believe in this myth, regardless of their spiritual practice, as "feminist matriarchalists." Although she admits that the myth may function temporarily in a feminist way by empowering individual women, she posits that it leaves sexist assumptions unchallenged and ultimately works against women as a group. The approach used by Eller to support her arguments is both interesting and ambitious and, unlike the work of many academics, her excellent writing skills make her ideas accessible to both scholars and the lay public, if they can get past the book's title.

The book, however, is not without problems, beginning with her continued use of the label "feminist spirituality." If this term was ever a useful way to delineate Goddess Spirituality, it has long since ceased to be so. As has been argued elsewhere (for examples, see Griffin 2000; Gottschall 2000), there are many practitioners of this spiritual path who are not and would not call themselves feminists. The motives underlying and the goals of their practice may not even be feminist; they are

continued on page 48

that "it is my feminist movement too, and when I see it going down a road which, however inviting, looks like the wrong way to me, I feel an obligation to speak up" (p. 7).

At the onset she provides a brief history of the term matriarchy (leaving a more rigorous analysis for her next book) and decides that matriarchy can be defined as "a shorthand description for any society in which women's power is equal or superior to men's and in which the culture centers around values and life events described as 'feminine'" (p. 13). She rightly reports that proponents of the myth of matriarchal prehistory do not, in general, use the term matriarchy themselves, but argues that this shorthand is useful for the discussion. What she terms Feminist Matriarchalists I and others see as Feminist Goddess religion. Here is an indication of the youth of Feminist Goddess discourse. We still do not agree on what to call this new religion.

Eller's critique encompasses two broad areas: 1) an analysis that the feminist matriarchalist mythos actually supports patriarchal gender roles, and 2) a concerted attack on the historical and pre-historical claims the mythos embodies. The first area is the most interesting and in my opinion, the most useful of her critiques. I was disappointed that this section of the book was the smallest. She reviews ideas in the field of sex differences to support her argument that there are actually more similarities

between men and women than differences. Eller believes such a finding undermines the Feminist Goddess movement's emphasis on the "feminine". She points out that the Feminist Goddess movement's use of traditional categories of femininity, such as motherhood, childbirth, nurturing, and women's association with the body and nature, though extolling these as positive, powerful aspects, are still using the same categories that have been associated with women for centuries. She questions whether using the categories ascribed by a patriarchal society should be used at all in the cause of liberating women from subjugation. She also places herself in the camp of feminists who argue for the abolition of gender altogether and even goes so far as to suggest that gender itself is a construct of patriarchal society and not an intrinsic aspect of human experience. She concludes that gender is a category that we might well do without.

After a short chapter describing the difficulty doing archeology with gender in mind and offering her scientific methodology for this discussion, Eller dissects the pre-historical and historical content of the matriarchal prehistory mythos. This material comprises the majority of the book. She organizes her "case against matriarchies" into the themes of reproduction and kinship; Goddess worship as evidence of matriarchy; work and the status of women; war and peace; prehistoric art and architecture; and evidence for a patriarchal revolution. These categories are drawn from the Feminist Matriarchalists' discourse itself. She draws on a substantial amount of material and research and, in general, her arguments about the sloppy use of archeological and historical data by matriarchalists are well-grounded.

In her conclusion she does suggest that we see the feminist matriarchalist

theories about prehistory as myth and not history, but offers why she thinks this proposal is unsound. Origin myths about sexism "are not tailored to specific cultural environments, but rather to a totalizing image of 'patriarchy'" (p. 183). Also, thinking about origins creates a notion of the "natural" state of human existence which she argues is a useless idea since no human experience is "uncontaminated" (her quotes) by culture. If prehistory is not going to be able to answer questions about the roots of sexism, then this myth, she states, must serve feminist political purposes. But myth that describes sexism through universalizing notions about sex differences will not serve those purposes according to Eller. Instead she proposes that "if we have no inherent barriers to women's equality" (p. 187) then moral choices are our best prospect for creating a more just society for women. She concludes that "we do not need matriarchal myth to tell us sexism is bad or that change is possible" (p. 188).

As a teacher of Feminist Theology and Women's Spirituality intimately involved for the past ten years with the subject of Eller's book, I hoped that her analysis of the central mythos of the Feminist Goddess movement would deepen the dialogue about Feminist Goddess religion. Unfortunately, my desire for this dialogue was unsatisfied, but Eller's book is not without value. Eller is a sociologist, but I approach her book as a theologian with a background in anthropology. I also situate myself as a former proponent of the myth of matriarchal prehistory who has since come to be skeptical about its historical accuracy, but am still fascinated by its tremendous theological power. I approach this work as a theologian as I believe we are witnessing the creation of a new religion in the Feminist Goddess movement. Certainly religions can be analyzed as social phenomena, but I suggest that her critiques would be better couched as theological

arguments. It will be easy for Goddess Feminists to dismiss her work as another "male-identified scholar". Additionally, feminist anthropologists have made similar critiques of matriarchal prehistory theories previous to Eller and this had not deterred the Goddess Feminists. What follows is a proposal for confronting Eller's critiques in a theological manner which I believe may be ultimately more useful to Goddess Feminists and the Feminist movement as a whole.

While Eller's argument that gender itself is a patriarchal construct is provocative, I do not find it convincing. Gender as a category of reality was recognized and constructed by feminists to critique patriarchal social values. Cross-cultural ethnographic evidence as well supports the notion that sex differences symbolized through gender categories are apparently a very human trait, despite the wide variation in the content of those symbols. Eller argues that it is through the performance of gender that patriarchy is expressed and women are oppressed. I counter that what is at the root of oppression is not gender categories themselves, but the value we place on them. The feminist challenge is to find ways to categorize without hierarchies. I would argue for multiple and more flexible genders as a possible solution to the sexist construction of the categories of feminine and masculine since gender *is* an intrinsic aspect of human experience. I also believe what we can learn from trans-gendered people may be key to resolving this very complex issue. Still, I agree that the feminist Goddess movement could benefit from symbolizing Goddesses and women themselves in broader categories than motherhood, etc, and I would welcome more discussion on this point from Eller and feminist theologians.

From a theological perspective, the feminist matriarchal myth's perspectives on gender difference show modern women's hunger for pos-

I agree that the Feminist Goddess movement could benefit from symbolizing Goddesses and women themselves in broader categories than motherhood ...



itive images of women in the spiritual realm. Certainly in the history of Judaism and Christianity the supposed inferior spiritual identity of women has been thoroughly described. It is not unusual for oppressed people to re-value the words and symbols that have been used to oppress them into a positive light. Lesbian women reclaiming the word *dyke* is good example of this process. Can we argue that Feminist Matriarchalists emphasis on traditional “feminine” attributes gives us another example of the depths to which patriarchal culture has influenced us? Can we use this knowledge to find new categories, new attributes, new ways of talking about gender? Can the discussion move on from here? For myself, I have been seeking such a conversation for many years now and perhaps Eller’s book will contribute to its genesis.

I do understand Eller’s discomfort with the fact that the matriarchal prehistory mythos is so flimsy historically. From a theological perspective, if your faith is based on *history*, what will happen to it when people, such as Eller, are able to show that such a history probably never existed? As we look at all the religions that have had a strong influence on European and American cultures—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc—we find that all of them make claims to some sort of historicity

for their mythos. Perhaps validating religious belief through history is not a tactic feminists should emulate. Can we *know* we are creating a sacred story and still have a meaningful emotional/spiritual experience when we hear it in ritual? How do we enter an unconscious and subconscious process as conscious feminists? This is an area Eller does not discuss, but seems to me one of the essential questions that Feminist Goddess theology needs to address. Current discussions about religious historicity among Neopagans might be useful here.

Further, the majority of Goddess feminists are white, middle class women of European ancestry. I suspect that women who identify as feminists have some notion of racism as well as sexism. For white women, racism can be an uncomfortable subject and the privileges of white people in the U.S. can become a source of guilt. The feminist matriarchal mythos projects back into the past a time when white people were tribal, peaceful, and essentially *good*. Thus this mythos may owe some of its power to the implicit redemptive quality it holds for white women conscious of racism. From this perspective, we can then ask, is the theological value of the mythos useful as it is, or could some other theological activity provide the same function? Should white women seek spiritual ease from the knowledge of racism? This example shows how a theological approach to the feminist matriarchal mythos opens up the possibility for a deeper dialogue about Goddess feminism while continuing to address feminist political concerns.

Eller uses the standard social scientific method to critique this myth (p. 91). I doubt any myth could withstand this sort of treatment. Science does not adequately deal with symbols and visions. Eller uses the biblical examples of the Passion narratives in the New Testament and the Exodus

story in the Hebrew bible to argue that myths need not be historically accurate, but *historically plausible*. The example of these stories is hardly worthwhile in this discussion since they have been related as historical events for almost 2000 years and thus carry enormous symbolic weight. If one wanted to argue their historicity, it would not be any more difficult than what Eller has done with the matriarchal prehistory mythos. The evidence for the existence of an actual person named Jesus who lived in the Middle East 2000 years ago is contained primarily in the gospels. Is that source sufficient for historical accuracy? And the Exodus story is only attested in the Hebrew Bible itself. If such a large group of people were migrating and wandering around for 40 years we might think we would find some remark about it from people living in the same area other than Hebrews. However, this is not the case. I recognize the amount of work and rigor Eller has put into her book, but she has set her sights on a easy target. It seems to me that scholars need to be careful with what techniques and perspectives they use to discuss this new religion.

What I find most disappointing about Eller’s book is that she seems to downplay the fact that the Feminist Goddess movement is a *new religion*. Primarily what we are observing in the feminist Goddess movement is the creation of a *woman-centered religion*, not a new scientific theory of prehistory. This may be the *first time* such a religion has appeared in human history. While I am certainly not opposed to critiquing the movement theologically, as feminists we must also consider how to nurture this effort as well. Eller’s proposal to base feminist goals for equality on moral grounds alone instead of spurious historical/mythical stories is missing the point of this new religion. Certainly, moral arguments are necessary for creating a more just society for all people. But the feminist Goddess move-

ment (and other feminist theologies) are an attempt by women to describe what is *real*. This aspect of the role religion plays in our lives is extremely important. We need to be cautious how we critique women’s attempts to define reality for ourselves. I’m not proposing that we validate aspects of the mythos that are problematic. However, I can suggest that we look at the figurines from Neolithic times and affirm that they speak to us in the present, that the intention of the original carvers is not important. What is important is the act of women now validating their own inner authority and claiming it as a *modern* symbol of the Goddess.

Goddess Feminists argue that spirituality is an important component to a feminist life and many women, myself included, have found resourcement in feminist spirituality to continue our hard and frustrating political work. Even though I have rejected the matriarchal prehistory mythos as history in my own life I do not think that Eller’s approach to critiquing the Feminist Goddess movement is ultimately helpful. Yes, we need to find a more solid basis for constructing mythology for the Feminist Goddess movement, but I believe alternative proposals are greatly needed before we completely destroy what has coalesced in the past fifteen years.

Laurel Holmström is a graduate student in History at Sonoma State University and has been teaching Feminist Theology/Women’s Spirituality for the past 10 years at the same institution. She has been a Pagan since 1983 and is currently studying Stregheria. She is a reverend in the Church of Natural Grace which emphasizes knowledge of the spiritual (and physical) self through psychic awareness.

[Eller] seems to downplay the fact that the Feminist Goddess movement is a *new religion*. ... what we are observing in the feminist Goddess movement is the creation of a *woman-centered religion*, not a new scientific theory of prehistory.

simply people who believe in a primary female divinity. Feminism is not the point, and to label their practice as feminist spirituality is reductionist. To complicate matters, there are many profoundly spiritual feminists who have remained within the boundaries of their traditional religions, though they may stretch them a bit. Some of these women envision Deity as female, many as both female and male simultaneously. The needs, goals and methods of these individuals may be very feminist indeed (for example, see Northup 1993). While this may seem to be a minor point, it is not atypical of strategies that Eller occasionally employs here.

The book is an examination of widely diverse literature from different academic disciplines and non-academic scholars, as well as religious tracts, novels, popular magazines, videos, librettos, poetry, newspaper articles, how-to books, and catalogues of Goddess merchandise. Roughly speaking, the over 500 sources she cites can be divided into materials that support belief in the sacred history and the interdisciplinary academic scholarship she uses to critique it. In its challenging examination of the discourse of the myth and the review of scholarly literature across academic boundaries, this book is unique.

Eller acknowledges that religious truth claims are rarely worth arguing but makes the point that they must be at least plausible to be meaningful. Leaving aside the plausibility of Yahweh providing Moses with the ten commandments neatly carved in stone, the virgin birth and physical resurrection from the dead of Jesus, and the Angel Gabriel's gift of instant literacy to Muhammad, Eller claims that the myth of matriarchal prehistory is simply not believable. The myth consists of two major threads: what life was like in "pre-patriarchal prehistory" and what happened to that way of life and why.

THE MYTH ACCORDING TO ELLER:

The first part of the myth tells us that during the Neolithic Period in Old Europe, the Near East and the Mediterranean, human societies were matrifocal and matrilocal, centering around values we describe today as feminine and worshipping a primary female divinity in a form of goddess monotheism. Eller is careful to stress that this is not strictly speaking *matriarchal*, although she says believers usually use the word matriarchal to describe their understanding of pre-patriarchal prehistory.

These cultures may have been fairly egalitarian according to the myth; however, when it came right down to it, mothers had the power and handled it "delicately and benevolently" precisely because they were mothers. Women invented agriculture and the relationship between people and nature was harmonious. Childbirth received central attention and all women were mothers to all the children in the community. Sexuality was sacred and not limited by age nor orientation, and men's contribution to reproduction unknown. Women, as a reflection of the Goddess, mediated between the Divine and humanity in the roles of priestess, healer, diviner, sage, etc.. Life was peaceful and relatively prosperous. Even men were happy during matriarchal prehistory, though their sense of inadequacy had to be carefully contained.

The second strand of the myth deals with what happened to this utopian prehistory. Believers claim that a patriarchal revolution overthrew the Goddess cultures about 3000BCE and plunged the world into war and barbarism. This is typically explained by invasions by patriarchal warriors and/or critical changes within the Goddess cultures themselves. Indo-European warriors, usually understood as the Kurgans discussed by Marija Gimbutas, brought with them their pantheon of patriarchal deities. The "great matriarchal goddess" was split into lesser goddesses and married off

to Kurgan gods. Human women were removed from positions of religious leadership and eventually reduced to an oppressed class. The internal changes that helped to bring about patriarchy include men's discovery of biological paternity, their seizing of those aspects of reproduction they could control, and their demeaning of those they could not. An additional cause suggested is that the advent of plow agriculture required upper body strength that only men could provide. They then seized the means of production and began to amass property and social power. With the ascendancy of one male god, patriarchy reigned supreme.

As prehistory deals with human experience before the invention of writing, believers rely largely on traces in classical mythology, art, the work of Gimbutas, and the writings of 19th and early 20th century romantic writers to validate their myth. In so doing, they assume a relatively stable set of meanings attached to femaleness that spans cultures, geography and time.

THE EVIDENCE:

An examination of the discourse necessarily involves a tremendous amount of work and is long overdue. For that, Eller is to be congratulated. The myth may be controversial, but she believes it serves today as a cultural resource. At the same time, lumping together materials as dramatically different as novels, academic research and catalogues of Goddess merchandise is not unproblematic. Although scholarship may have been the point of departure for some of the materials from which Eller draws, most of these are untroubled by academic attempts at historical accuracy. She writes that she finds the differences among these sources to be minimized by the consistency of their narrative and has chosen to focus on offerings by those who have considerable invest-

ment in the myth. While I understand her logic, I believe this methodology oversimplifies the discourse, ignoring important contradictions and differences. Nor is it possible to judge in this manner how widely spread a particular belief is. For example, she cites a novel as evidence for the belief that women in "Goddess Cultures" pooled their children. However, in the 12 years since I began to study Goddess Spirituality, I have yet to meet a practitioner who actually believes that, or even to hear one mention it, and I have never encountered the argument about men's upper body strength.

The book presents considerable scholarship to disprove the existence of Goddess Cultures in the Neolithic. I will not go into details of Eller's critique of Gimbutas, as *The Pomegranate* has covered the Gimbutas debate in considerable depth within the last year. For those who missed it, a severe distillation of the arguments might result in one position that holds Gimbutas developed a new interdisciplinary methodology called archaeomythology that, unlike traditional androcentric scholarship, successfully examines the non-material aspects of prehistoric cultures, especially as these relate to gender. A second position argues that Gimbutas consistently ignored significant data that contradicted her ideas and constructed an extremely subjective methodology that fails to stand up to scientific study. Eller's position is along the lines of the latter. In a footnote, she

**Gender is socially constructed,
not biologically, which means that
it is culturally and historically
specific and exists only through
constant reinforcement
and repetition.**



notes that Gimbutas had an “impressive record of excavation and publication” (209), while in the text she argues that “Gimbutas’ status in archeology was peripheral” and her colleagues considered her “embarrassingly” passé (90). The omission of Gimbutas’ strengths in the text is, at the very least, misleading.

The author does a better job of reviewing literature that shows how data from the Neolithic have been selectively interpreted by believers to support the myth. For example, the fact that Mellaart found figures he identified as representations of “a male deity” in his excavations at Catalhoyuk is rarely mentioned by believers, and female figurines, usually identified as representations of Goddess worship, are present in the later levels but lacking in the early levels of this site. Supporters of the myth argue that the presence of Goddess worship is indicative of women’s high status in a society and, therefore, the female figures suggest a Goddess Culture with all the mythic trappings.

Here, I find Eller less successful in her arguments. She relies on the work of anthropologist Martin Whyte from the late 1970s to argue that the only variable in religion that correlates with women’s status is equally elaborate funerals for women and men. She does mention in another footnote that anthropologist Peggy Sanday (1981) had different findings. Sanday, in fact, found a strong correlation between the secular power of women and the cultures’ origin myths in her study of 150 tribal societies. To bury this

in a footnote suggests a consensus among anthropologists that does not exist. Instead she points to the status of women in lands dominated by Catholicism, Buddhism and Hinduism to indicate religious veneration of female figures, even goddesses, does not ensure women’s power. But to use as examples three religions, all of which began in times and cultures that were firmly under male domination, begs the question. She refers again to anthropologists in the 1970s who declared that the search for egalitarian culture had proved fruitless, that women’s secondary status was a true universal, a “pan-cultural fact” (35). In addition, she presents research that concludes that there is no reliable connection between forms of subsistence and women’s statuses, and that economics play no role in women’s status either. Regardless of what women’s work is in a particular culture and how much it is valued, there is no correlation between it and women’s social status in that society, according to this research presented by the author.

However, both archeologists and anthropologists have become much more sophisticated in their analysis of gender since Whyte published. There is considerable research to show that the undervaluing of whatever work to which women are assigned in any society can be both a cause and an effect of women’s lower status and power (see Burn 2000). Few, if any, significant social patterns are determined by a single variable, and the tendency today is to look for a constellation of variables to explain gender systems (Agarwal 1999). There are contemporary enclaves within larger male dominated cultures where women do have considerable power and their economic activities contribute to their status. For example, in the Zapotec town of Juchitan in Oaxaca, Mexico, and in the village of Lugu Lake in southern China, women run the local economies and are fairly

autonomous. Those who choose to marry exercise the power within the family, though many choose without censure to have children but no permanent husband. Men, on the other hand, hold most of the formal political posts and deal with the outside world. Although the women’s work is unlikely to be *the* causal variable, women in both locales point to their economic activities as making their status different from that of women in neighboring towns (Darling 1995; Farley 1998).

The book argues against a patriarchal revolution by examining the research on the supposed invasions of patriarchal Kurgans. Eller summarizes evidence from archeology, linguistics, genetics, early writing systems and mythology and argues convincingly that it is simply impossible to conclude from the available data that, beginning with the 4th millennium, warlike Indo-Europeans invaded and imposed their patriarchal culture on the peaceful, Goddess worshipping cultures of the Near East.

However, she does admit that social organization became more patriarchal, hierarchical and warlike in southeastern Europe and the Near East shortly after this time (157). Since she correctly dismisses the sudden womb-envy argument, we are left with wondering what on earth happened and why. She answers this primarily by saying there never were matriarchies as understood by believers. But in a fairly short time in human history, there were dramatic changes in the way people organized their world, in both material and nonmaterial culture. Her response to this fails to address the issue adequately.

One of the book’s major strategies and strengths is the exploration of contemporary understandings of gender. Some scholars focus on the official ideology concerning what is expected of members of either sex in a particular culture, others look at what actually goes on in day-to-day living. Gender is socially con-

structed, not biologically, which means that it is culturally and historically specific and exists only through constant reinforcement and repetition. At the same time, gender is very real in the power it has to shape our lives. Eller argues effectively that the myth presents a reductive notion of sex differences and is “rooted in a particular vision of female embodiedness” (56). Ironically, although gender may be seen as a social construct, femininity is not. It is seen as unbounded by time or culture, and is all that patriarchy sees as positive about women. But femininity cannot exist outside of culture. The myth’s limited view of what it means to be a woman is based largely on the positive aspects of middle class stereotypes from today’s Western and male-dominated world. That fact alone should be enough to make feminists question it.

And some have, even some who believe in the myth. But Eller glosses over these voices. As an example of her approach, she cites *The Great Cosmic Mother*, Sjoö’s and Mor’s 1981 epic that links the “Neolithic Great Goddess” with the Bronze Age “Mother Goddesses” to demonstrate the belief in the universal worship of “the Great Mother.” In one sentence, she mentions that the focus on childbirth has bothered “even” some feminist matriarchalists, but emphasizes that childbirth is the “hallmark of virtually all feminist reconstructions of matriarchal society” (45). The reader doesn’t learn that Asphodel Long, respected scholar and co-founder of Britain’s first Matriarchy Study Group, almost immediately published a critique of linking women’s spirituality and creativity primarily to her reproductive functions (in King 1989). This is a significant omission and shows there was a diversity of belief from the very beginning.

Eller’s final point is that the myth, even when accepted as sacred history and not historical truth, will not help women. It reduces prehistory to timeless archetypes, arranges the

... she admits the myth has inspired many women to make significant, empowering changes in their lives, and many of these women have gone on to empower other women ...

world into a duality which is “supposed” to be a patriarchal form of thinking, and tells an emotionally compelling story that simply raises new questions rather than providing answers for the future. We don’t need a mythic explanation for sexism and other oppressions, she argues, in order to know they are wrong and to work toward ending them. Given that she admits the myth has inspired many women to make significant, empowering changes in their lives, and many of these women have gone on to empower other women, this chapter is regrettably short. Her passion for social justice is clear, but she doesn’t tell us how to achieve it, just that the sacred myth is not the way. As all religions mythologize their origins, most contemporary religions are gendered, and religion is a key player in teaching and maintaining gender roles and social order, I wonder then what suggestions she would offer. Like the myth she critiques, Eller raises new questions rather than providing answers for the future.

Given that I agree with many of Eller’s conclusions, I was surprised not to be more enthusiastic about the book. But in critiquing the metanarrative that she calls the myth of matriarchy, Eller comes perilously close to constructing a metanarrative herself. Although she acknowledges the diversity of belief even among those who hold the myth dear, she typically does this briefly in a footnote and goes right on to treat both the myth itself and the acceptance of it as monolithic. This strategy not only oversimplifies the myth, but it tends to overstate the evidence against it.

In spite of the fact that this book says nothing dramatically new, as the first to examine the discourse in any detail and bring together an extensive body of interdisciplinary scholarly research to do so, I believe it makes a significant contribution. Her first book, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess* (1993), established her as one of a very few experts in the field of Goddess Spirituality today. In this book, Eller has taken

some risks and asked some important questions. Because she is a respected scholar, this book will be closely examined, and because of its scope and interdisciplinary nature, the dialogue has been raised to a new level.

WORKS CITED:

- Burn, Shawn Meghan. 2000. *Women Across Cultures*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
- Claassen, Cheryl. 1999. *The Way We Were: Gender and Archeology*. NWSA Journal. Vol. 11, no. 2. pp. 185-191.
- Darling, Juanita. 1995, March 31. “The women who run Juchitan” *Los Angeles Times*. pp. A1, A11, A13.
- Farley, Maggie. 1998, December 26. “In Lugo Lake, marriage is a ticklish affair” *Los Angeles Times*. pp. A1, A5-6.
- Griffin, Wendy. 2000. “Crafting the Boundaries: Goddess narrative as incantation” in *Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, Identity and Empowerment*. Griffin, editor. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press. pp. 73-88.
- Gottschall, Marilyn. 2000. “The Mutable Goddess: Particularity and Eclecticism within the Goddess Public” in *Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, Identity and Empowerment*. Griffin, editor. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press. pp. 59-72.
- King, Ursula. 1989 (revised 1993). *Women and Spirituality: Voices of protest and promise*. London: McMillan.
- Northup, Leslie. 1993. *Women and Religious Ritual*. Northup, editor. Washington DC: Pastoral Press.

Wendy Griffin is Associate Professor of Women’s Studies at California State University, Long Beach. Her most recent work in this field includes *Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, Identity & Empowerment*. 2000 (editor) AltaMira Press, and “Returning to the Mother of Us All: Goddess Spirituality in the West.” 2001, in *Through Her Eyes: Women’s Perspectives on World Religions*. Arvind Sharma and Katherine Young (editors). Westview Press

READERS’ FORUM

continued from page 3

assertion of directness, Athanassiadi states that the transmission via Harran was a “clearly definable—if not direct—line” (“Persecution and response in late paganism: The evidence of Damascus”, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* (1993) 113, 1-29).

All quibbles aside, Mr Frew deserves great praise for doing more than reading and talking about Harran. He went to the site and is attempting to raise interest in saving it from imminent damage. I also enjoyed Mr Frew’s deliciously restrained tone in his response, especially concerning Mr Walker. Bravo.

Leonard George
Vancouver, BC

CHAS CLIFTON WRITES:

To the Editors:

Don Frew (“Harran: Last Refuge of Classical Paganism” #9) provided an interesting insight into the survival of Neoplatonism in the Muslim world. Indeed, the persistence of Neoplatonic-influenced magical world views into the last two centuries is frequently overlooked by historians of religion, with the ironic

rightly points out that Frew’s agenda is to establish a continuity from ‘Pagan’ Harran to ‘Pagans’ today. Frew responds by digressions on transliteration from Syriac and Arabic but misses the larger points. One might be that while the Harranians were—or presented themselves as—‘people of the book,’ many modern Pagans proudly do without official scripture of any sort. What has changed? How much continuity is there? Frew writes of a ‘gap’ between the 6th and 11th centuries, but what about the gap (or how much of a gap is there?) between Neoplatonism and much revived Paganism today?

When Frew writes, for instance, “The idea of Shi’ite Muslims protecting [medieval Middle Eastern Neoplatonist] Pagans from oppression will no doubt surprise many Pagans today,” he implies through his choice of words an equivalency that may or may not exist. I suspect that it does not, and that the Harranians would not pass the membership litmus test of, say, the Covenant of the Goddess. We could equally ask whether the ‘Paganism’ of Harran, especially of its Sabian intellectual elite, should be described as ‘Classical,’ a term more usually reserved for the polytheistic state cults of the

I see much of the Craft ... moving away from [the] theurgical model, a purge that began with Doreen Valiente’s pruning of ceremonial magical forms from the Gardnerian Book of Shadows in the 1950s.

exception of Mormon scholars such as D. Michael Quinn (*Early Mormonism and the Magical World View*) who must account for the divination and crying of Joseph Smith.

Frew’s response to critics such as Aaron Walker (Readers’ Forum #10), however, tend to show a preoccupation with minutiae rather than a response to broader challenges. Walker

Hellenistic and Roman empires.

While I have no doubt that there is a “direct line of transmission ... from the Hermetic and Neoplatonic theurgy of late antiquity to the beginnings of the modern Craft movement in the 1930s” (C.R.F. Seymour, for one, openly admitted his reliance on Iamblichus), I see much of the Craft, particularly in its nativized

and shamanic forms, moving away from that theurgical model, a purge that began with Doreen Valiente's pruning of ceremonial magical forms from the Gardnerian Book of Shadows in the 1950s. Harran perhaps played a part in the conservation of Neoplatonic philosophy, but I doubt that its ruins hold traces of the Old Religion in Margaret Murray's sense.

Chas S. Clifton
University of Southern Colorado

DON FREW RESPONDS:

Chas Clifton makes interesting and challenging points about the Harranians.

I ignored Mr Walker's 'broader challenges' because they had nothing to do with my article. The evidence for a connection with the origins of modern Craft was not a part of that article and so was not presented. Its future presentation will require more consideration than is possible in a journal article

I did indeed focus on 'minutiae' in responding to Mr Walker, as his criticisms involved the

rate observation of the centrality of the Book of Shadows within the Gardnerian tradition. The core teachings of a tradition do not have to be considered 'scripture' per se to qualify as such a book. The Harranians presented the *Hermetica* as their 'book' and there is no evidence that the *Hermetica* was considered 'scripture'.

Prof Clifton is right to ask how much of a gap there is "between Neoplatonism and much revived Paganism today." The realization that set me on this path of research in the first place was that the theurgical practices and cosmological underpinnings of the late Neoplatonic theurgists were almost identical to the Gardnerian Craft that I learned from my teachers and from the Book of Shadows. The differences between them seemed largely superficial; Greco-Roman versus 'Celtic' names and terms. Upon further study of the earliest Gardnerian documents, I found that the shift from the former to the latter was easily explained by known historical events in this century.

Valiente's influence moved the Craft away from a theurgical model towards a more devotional and Celtic one. This ... has obscured the Neoplatonic origins to which I refer from the eyes of modern scholars

fine points of the etymology of some very unusual non-English words. Too much Neopagan scholarship has ignored or glossed over just such minutiae, resulting in poorly supported and erroneous conclusions.

The concept of 'people of the book' is not as foreign to many modern traditional Craft groups as it might appear. Certainly, Gardnerians are often kidded within the Craft for being 'people of the book', or called 'the Jesuits of the Craft'. Such comments are based on the accu-

My choice to use 'Pagans' with a capital 'P' to describe both the Harranians and modern Neopagans might imply an 'equivalency', however such was not my intent. The word *is* applied to both groups by most scholars, and I capitalized it purely out of respect for both traditions as religious paths, as one would 'Christians' or 'Muslims'.

Prof Clifton asks if the Harranians would qualify for membership in the Covenant of the Goddess. An interesting question! There are 9

criteria for membership in CoG. (see www.cog.org) The Neoplatonic theurgists of Harran would obviously not call themselves 'Witches' or use a term like 'coven'—at least not until the terms were explained to them, after which they might. None of the other 8 criteria would bar them from membership. So, yes, the Neoplatonic theurgists of Harran probably *could* pass the 'membership litmus test' of CoG. Certainly, as I said above, I see no significant difference between their theology and that of my own Gardnerian coven, and we qualify.

Modern scholarship uses 'Classical' to encompass a broader religious context than just the 'state cults', including popular piety, folk religion, and the mystery religions, all of which were present at Harran. The Pagans who fled to Harran from Athens were certainly 'Classical' Pagans, whose 'Classical' Paganism had been outlawed by the Christian authorities. I described the Paganism of late Harran as a fusion of the indigenous cult of the Moon God, philosophical and theurgical Neoplatonism and Hermeticism, *and* the Classical Paganism brought by the Athenians and Alexandrians.

It is interesting that Prof Clifton should pick C.R.F. Seymour as an example of a connection between "Hermetic and Neoplatonic theurgy of late antiquity [and] the beginnings of the modern Craft movement in the 1930s", as there is strong evidence that Seymour was directly involved with those beginnings. Seymour's unpublished private magical papers from the 1930s include shared passages with the then-unpublished Charge of the Goddess. Who was quoting whom is unclear, but is also irrelevant to prove the basic point that Seymour was in close contact with the New Forest group, if not a member.

I completely agree that Valiente's influence moved the Craft away from a theurgical model towards a more devotional and Celtic one.

This, more than anything else, has obscured the Neoplatonic origins to which I refer from the eyes of modern scholars, leading to statements such as Prof Clifton's doubt "that ... [Harran's] ruins hold traces of the Old Religion in Margaret Murray's sense." An over-reliance on Murray has misled investigators into Craft origins for many years. I discuss this at some length in "Methodological Flaws in Recent Studies of Historical and Modern Witchcraft" (*Ethnologies*, vol. 20, no. 1-2, 1998). Suffice to say here that the oldest documents and accounts of the 'Wica' that Gardner joined in 1939 betray absolutely no influence from Murray! A connection with Murray's 'Old Religion' of the British Isles was first speculated by Gardner, then adopted wholesale as an origin myth by those after him, eventually becoming the basis for Valiente's widescale, often 'Celtic' revisions and rewrites.

Before one can intelligently investigate and discuss the origins of a thing, one must have a clear idea of what that thing is. In the case of (Gardnerian) Craft origins, a fuzzy idea of Craft based on its current, popular, 'Celticized' forms is hopelessly muddling the search. It is essential to get back to the 'Wica' practiced by the group that Gardner joined before one can even begin a reasonable inquiry.

I would like to thank Leonard George for his very kind words and his eloquent explanation of some of the fine points of Neoplatonic theurgy and doctrine. I, too, heartily recommend all of his cited sources to all Neopagans.

Dr George's comments about the fluid nature of the Neoplatonists' approach to terms and categories are well taken, but another important viewpoint is that of the Qur'an. As Qur'anic scholar D. Gimaret notes in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (CD-ROM Edition v. 1.0, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1999, vol. IX, pp. 484b-485b), Qur'anic scholars clearly distinguished between unacceptable polytheists, i.e. idolators, and acceptable polytheists, i.e.



'people of the book'. Qur'anic scholars of the time considered Christians to be polytheists due to their assertion that God was fundamentally three: the Trinity. What made the Christians 'acceptable' polytheists was that they *also* asserted that God was One. I have already pointed out in my earlier response to Dr Kassis that Muslim scholars of the time distinguished

this 'direct line' indeed leads to many, if not most, other Western occult groups. To the extent that it remained adamantly non-Christian, as asserted by its practitioners, it leads to modern Craft. With all due respect to Prof Athanassiadi, I doubt that she has studied the origins of modern Craft sufficiently to be aware of the connections between it and

An over-reliance on Murray has misled investigators into Craft origins for many years. ... the oldest documents and accounts of the 'Wica' that Gardner joined in 1939 betray absolutely no influence from Murray!

between two Pagan groups at Harran, loosely described as the idolators and the philosophers, the latter being the Neoplatonists/Hermeticists—the 'Sabians' of my article. These Sabians, therefore, through their focus on the One beyond the Gods, could easily have been listed among the 'people of the book' in the Qur'an.

I echo Dr George's comments about Panopolis, but still believe that Harran played a more central role to this particular transmission. I discussed this with Kingsley, who also pointed out the similar role of Jundi-Shapur and Borsippa, but as I recall he agreed that Harran was most prominent for the transmission of Neoplatonic/Hermetic material to the West.

As I mentioned above, it was never my intent to present my argument for a 'direct line of transmission' from Harran to modern Craft in this article. That argument and its supporting evidence forms the body of a substantial book on Craft origins on which I am currently working. However, I do believe there is a specific 'direct line of transmission' from Harran to modern Craft in a particular sense. To the extent that Christian mysticism and Jewish Kabbalah were added to the material over time,

Harran. At any rate, I am unclear what distinguishes a 'clearly definable' line from a 'direct' one.

Once again, I would like to thank Dr George for his thoughtful and helpful comments and Prof Clifton for his probing remarks and questions. I am very glad to see discussion of these topics opening up in the Neopagan community.

*Donald H. Frew
Berkeley*

Don Frew represented the Craft at the 1999 Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town South Africa and was a delegate to the 2000 Global Summit of the United Religions Initiative, attending the URI Charter signing ceremony in Pittsburgh last month. He has recently joined the Board of Directors of San Francisco's Interfaith Center at the Presidio. In August, he will be at the annual meeting of the North American Interfaith Network in Fullerton CA, discussing how interfaith groups can best relate to New Religious Movements.



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Readers Forum

*Cynthia Eller on
The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory* 2

Jo Pearson

Wicca, Esotericism and Living Nature:
Assessing Wicca as a Nature Religion 4

Ellen C. Friedman

Psychotherapist and Wiccan Clergy:
The Ethics of a Dual Relationship 16

Sarah M. Pike

The Burning Man Festival:
Pre-Apocalypse Party or Postmodern Kingdom of God? 26

Leslie Ellen Jones

The Folklore of *The Wicker Man* 38

Book Reviews

Ronald Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon* 43

Reviews by Gina O Connor
and Sarah Whedon

Cynthia Eller's *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*

Review by Brian Hayden

Thomas DuBois' *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*

Review by Cara Hoglund



The Pomegranate

Copyright
© 2000 *The Pomegranate*. In every case,
copyright returns to the authors of articles
and letters. Permission to reprint must be
granted by these writers,
and we will be happy
to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate
is published quarterly.
ISSN 1528-0268 refers to this Journal.

Subscriptions:
4 issues: US\$20 — 8 issues: US\$37.50
by surface mail anywhere.
Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds,
or Checks drawn on US banks to
The Pomegranate
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019
Subs email: antech@teleport.com

Submissions:
Editorial email: fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca
See the inside back cover for our
Call for Papers.
Ask us for our Writers' Guidelines,
or read it on our website:
www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/
Deadline for submissions:
the Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.

The Cover:
Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

Co-Editors:

Fritz Muntean

Diana Tracy

Associate Editor:

Chas S. Clifton

Editorial Assistance:

Melissa Hope

Kara Cunningham

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

In the final chapter of *The Triumph of the Moon*, Ronald Hutton discusses at length how Neopaganism—particularly Neopagan Witchcraft—might fit in the various classifications proposed for it by scholars of religion. Some, such as 'sect' and 'cult', are dismissed out of hand, while others, like 'New Religious Movement' and 'native' or 'post-modern' religion, are rejected as being either inaccurate or insufficiently inclusive. In this latter category, Prof Hutton includes 'Nature Religion', a term favoured by many American academics since the publication of Catherine Albanese's *Nature Religion in America* (Chicago UP, 1990). In the course of this discussion, the work of Jo Pearson is mentioned on several occasions, and *The Pomegranate* is delighted to be able to offer a seminal article by Dr Pearson on the subject. The editors hope that this will stimulate further discussion, particularly among those readers who have recently suggested that the term 'Nature Religion' be substituted for 'Neopaganism' in the subtitle of this magazine.

Two reviews of *Triumph of the Moon* are also included in this issue. Other reviews, letters, and articles on the subject of this book are actively solicited.

Our second article, by Ellen Friedman, addresses the ethical dilemmas faced by those attempting to simultaneously fill the roles of clergy and psychotherapist in the context of coven leadership. This paper reiterates and expands on several related issues raised in Judy Harrow's new book, *Wiccan Covens* (Citadel, 1999), which is highly recommended to our readers. Watch for a review of *Wiccan Covens* in an upcoming issue of *The Pomegranate*.

In recent years, the burning of large hominular sculptures has become a feature of several Pagan gatherings, at Beltaine, Lammas, or the post-Samheinn celebration of Guy Fawkes Day. The flagship event of this genre, of course, is the Burning Man Festival, held for several years now in the Nevada desert on Labour Day Weekend. We're delighted to present an in-depth analysis of this visually stunning and culturally challenging event, along with a companion article on the modern icon of antiquity which may be credited with inspiring this trend: the British movie *The Wicker Man*.

In our previous issue, we included two reviews of Cynthia Eller's *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*. In this issue Prof Eller responds to these reviews, and we offer yet another review which commends Eller's command of the anthropological and ethnological literature and praises her conclusions about the status of women in other cultures, both present and past. At the same time, Eller's assertion that there are no important patterns of differences between the behaviour of women and men is challenged. The popular feminist conflation of female/male with the feminine/masculine, combined with the militant assumption that any attempt to differentiate between women and men must necessarily denigrate and disenfranchise the former, is a subject of a future *Pomegranate* article. In the meanwhile, we hope that this review will draw responses from both Prof Eller and our other interested readers.

This issue concludes with a review of Thomas DuBois' *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*, in which today's readers are once again cautioned to take those descriptions of pagan cultures and religions derived from 12th and 13th century documents with more than the usual grain of salt.

Persephone's hard-working minions

The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.

CYNTHIA ELLER WRITES:

Dear Editor:

My thanks to Laurel Holmström and Wendy Griffin for their recent reviews of my book, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, and to the editors of *The Pomegranate*, who requested a response from me. It's rewarding to read reviews from those who are invested in the subject matter and who have thought critically about it.

Both reviewers raised questions about terminology. Griffin says that I claim that "believers usually use the word matriarchal to describe their understanding of prepatriarchal prehistory," while Holmström, in contrast, says that I claim that "proponents of the myth of matriarchal prehistory do not, in general, use the term matriarchy themselves." Holmström is correct on this point (see pp. 12-13).

More pressing terminological questions revolve around the appellations "feminist matriarchalists" and "spiritual feminists." I apologize for any confusion I may have caused on this point, but I don't believe these are coextensive categories (see p. 10). Many spiritual feminists do not believe in the literal truth of matriarchal myth, and perhaps more importantly, many feminist matriarchalists have no interest in ritual, magic, or goddess worship, caring only for this singular story about prehistory. It is feminist matriarchalists that I'm critiquing in

this book. Apart from its affection for matriarchal myth, I think feminist spirituality has much to recommend itself (a point I'll come to again later in this response).

I definitely believe, as Holmström says, that feminist spirituality is a new religion, or I wouldn't have bothered to write a book about it (*Living in the Lap of the Goddess*). I don't, however, think that it is wise—as Griffin apparently does—to conflate "feminist spirituality" and "Goddess spirituality." As Griffin herself points out, many practitioners of Goddess spirituality are not feminists. I want to distinguish their spirituality from that of those who, in Holmström's words, are creating "a woman-centred religion." Readers of *The Pomegranate* are better able to comment on this than I am, but it is my observation that feminist practice of Goddess spirituality is different from Goddess spirituality per se, and the two are often the subject of separate retreats, rituals, covens, newsletters, and so on. In any case, in this book, I am interested in the phenomenon of feminists telling stories about prehistoric matrifocal and goddess-worshipping societies, whether or not this happens in a spiritual or ritual context.

Both reviewers make the point that I don't dissect the purported historicity of the Exodus or Passion narratives, which I refer to in the text. They imply that I have unfairly singled out matriarchal myth for critical attention. But I believe I have made it clear why I am taking the time to refute this myth rather than others. Most of those who champion matriarchal myth claim that it is history: that it does not need to be taken with some degree of faith, but can be apprehended by any sincere and unbiased investigator of prehistoric human society, using only the usual implements of scientific and historical research. This is a grander claim than, for example, the one that the Angel Gabriel gifted Mohammed with instant literacy.

However, my more important reason for criticizing matriarchal myth is because I am a

feminist who believes that matriarchal myth runs counter to feminist interests.

I don't believe that critiquing the historicity of matriarchal myth necessitates doing away with it entirely. I would answer Holmström's question, "Can we know we are creating a sacred story and still have a meaningful emotional/spiritual experience when we hear it in

this is not my religion.

Holmström's point that matriarchal myth may be a strategy through which white feminists manage racial guilt is well taken. I have addressed this issue in my forthcoming article "White Women and the Dark Mother" (*Religion*, Fall 2000).

Perhaps I can clarify this by returning to my

I am a feminist who believes that matriarchal myth runs counter to feminist interests.

ritual?" with a definite yes. Indeed, I believe that some spiritual feminists (and neopagans) do just that. This is why I've thought it crucial to criticize matriarchal myth on additional grounds, namely its underlying notions of femaleness.

Holmström has zeroed in on this as a key point of disagreement between us: that I view gender categories as problematic in and of themselves, while she sees difficulties lying rather in how certain gender traits or categories are valued (though the fact that she wants to see "multiple and more flexible genders" suggests to me that she's somewhat ambivalent about this). Holmström is exactly right here, and this explains why, in spite of some very attractive aspects to feminist spirituality, I'm unlikely to ever count myself as a spiritual feminist.

Because I do not count myself as a spiritual feminist, I don't feel any obligation to do what both Griffin and Holmström want me to do, namely to offer some constructive alternative to matriarchal myth. I think Griffin and Holmström are searching—appropriately enough—for ways of empowering women spiritually and escaping the pervasive maleness of most traditional religions, without at the same time handcuffing themselves to a potentially burdensome (because unconvincing) myth. If I critique the myth, they seem to say, I should tell them what they can do instead. But I am not a theologian;

earlier distinction between spiritual feminists and feminist matriarchalists. Some feminist matriarchalists (many, I would argue) are not practicing any alternative religion, nor do they have more than a hazy idea of what such a religion would be. For them, matriarchal myth serves the same function—that of inspiring and directing political action—as what Holmström calls my "proposal to base feminist goals for equality on moral grounds." At that level, I believe I am offering a constructive alternative to matriarchal myth. But feminist spirituality is operating on many more levels than this. It is not just a mouthpiece for a mythology (or worse, an ideology in historical disguise), it is a religion. It involves worship, ritual, meditation, magic, community, political vision, theology. And as I said before, it could, arguably, flourish without recourse to matriarchal myth.

Though I am not a spiritual feminist, I believe the movement is engaged in some important work. Moreover, as a feminist, I feel that I have a vested interest in where the feminist spirituality movement goes. But it is not my work. At least not yet.

Sincerely,
Cynthia Eller

Editors' Note: For a review of Dr Eller's book from the perspective of Archaeological scholarship, please turn to page 52.

Wicca, Esotericism and Living Nature: Assessing Wicca as Nature Religion

by Jo Pearson
The Open University

This article was first presented as a paper at the recent International Association for the History of Religion (IAHR) XVIII Quinquennial Congress, held in Durban in August 2000. The theme of the congress was 'History of Religions: Origins and Visions'. For the first time, the IAHR congress included a series of sessions on Nature Religion, organised by Bron Taylor and also including papers by Graham Harvey, Tim Jensen, Bron Taylor, and Michael York.

ABSTRACT

'Living Nature', whereby "Nature is seen, known, and experienced as essentially alive in all its parts, often inhabited and traversed by a light or hidden fire circulating through it", is one of the four fundamental characteristics of the Western Esoteric Tradition identified by Antoine Faivre (1994:11), and delineates a certain Hermetic view of the world. In this paper we consider Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca (as practiced in the UK) as a current manifestation of the Western Esoteric Tradition, outlining Wicca's magical heritage and indicating the affinities between Wicca and esotericism. We then proceed to an investigation of the application of central esoteric doctrines concerning nature in contemporary Wicca, in order to assess Wicca as nature religion.

During the 1970s, environmentalism itself became a kind of religion, significant in that it points,

according to Seyyed Nasr, 'to the need in the souls of human beings for the religious understanding of nature eclipsed in the West by modern science and neglected until quite recently by the mainstream religions' (1996: 194-5). This turning of environmentalism into religion has affected not only traditional religions but also the development of Wicca and Paganism, and so-called 'nature religions'. 'Nature Religion' is a relatively recent academic construct under which a variety of religions have been grouped including, for example, Paganism, eco-spirituality, and indigenous religions. It is also popular with Wiccans—103 out of the 120 (86%) Wiccans represented in my 1995 survey told me that they regarded their religion as 'nature religion'.

Yet at present, 'nature religion' is a contested designation, and is, like Wicca and Paganism, an emerging field of study. The current academic use of the term 'nature religion' stems most often from Catherine Albanese's usage in her book *Nature Religion in America* (1990), in which nature religion is defined as beliefs, behaviours and values which make nature a 'symbolic centre'. Whilst recognising the value of the construct in bringing to light the diversity of religious practices which do take nature as a symbolic referent, Albanese's term has been criticised as too broad to be of practical use. Bron Taylor suggests instead that we use phrases such as 'the natural dimension of religion', or 'nature influenced religion' to distinguish those religions which see nature as important but not sacred, and keep 'nature religion' exclusively for reference to religions which regard nature as sacred.

But what exactly do we mean by this phrase, 'nature as sacred'? What is 'nature as symbolic centre'? The questions so far

seem to miss a whole dimension of the religious understanding of nature, and to dismiss the difference in perception between nature (small 'n') and Nature (capitalised); or, as Seyyed Nasr would have it, fail to grasp that 'nexus between the order of nature as ordinarily understood and the Divine Nature, Infinite and Eternal, that encompasses the order of nature and is yet ubiquitous at every point of cosmic manifestation' (1996: 104).

Wiccans do regard nature as sacred, as we shall see later in this paper. However, their response to nature is often confused, revealing both intimacy and distance as they shape nature with the Wheel of the Year, sacred circles and ritual to suit their own needs for relationship with the earth. The nature/culture duality thus persists in nature religion, reflecting a turn to nature as a source of revitalisation, attempting to re-engage with a nature from which participants feel estranged, to re-enchant the natural world which has been exploited and dominated. Since Wicca is not a salvation religion, it does not reject the world or the everyday reality of living in the world, but seeks rather to enhance life on earth. Earthly existence is not regarded as fundamentally sinful or binding, with a need for salvation or escape. But how much one takes this as a need to defend and protect the earth is open to question.

Whilst Wicca claims an almost primor-

dial relationship with nature and markets itself as 'green religion', the disjunction between sign and signified remains very real. Nature, as Nasr reminds us, 'is not only a symbol of spiritual realities but is those realities not by a reduction of the spiritual essences to material forms but by an inner identity among those who share

the primordial perspective between the symbol and the symbolized. Hence, in such worlds nature herself is the supreme cathedral. Her order is the Divine Order and her laws divine laws without there being in any sense a naturalism or animism in the pejorative sense of those terms ...' (1996: 21). Do Wiccan attitudes and practices concerning Nature, then, reflect this perspective, a perspective reflected in esoteric

influences or, as Wouter Hanegraaff has suggested with reference to the New Age, does Wicca 'produce merely shallow caricatures of profound teachings'? (1998: 31).

THE CATEGORISATION OF WICCA

As a brief aside, it might be worth touching on the ways in which Wicca is categorised at this point in the paper. Wicca occupies a somewhat ambiguous position vis à vis contemporary religiosity, yet it has appeared to be easily assimilable to the so-called 'sociology of the occult', the New Age Movement, and NRMs, as well as new designations such as 'revived religion' and

'Nature Religion' is a relatively recent academic construct under which a variety of religions have been grouped including ... Paganism, eco-spirituality, and indigenous religions.

'nature religion', which may in time prove to be more applicable as terms of categorisation. There are forms of witchcraft which claim to predate the emergence of Wicca in England, most notably Traditional and Hereditary witchcraft. However, since there is no evidence to support these claims, we follow Ronald Hutton's assertion that Wicca is the classic, earliest known form of modern witchcraft (Hutton 1999). Concentrating on the combined Alexandrian/Gardnerian version of Wicca as it has emerged in the UK in the 1990s, I have assessed Wicca as a form of esoteric spirituality, which I regard as an appropriate category for this specific type. In particular, I engaged with the field of western esotericism as delineated by Antoine Faivre and, following him, Wouter Hanegraaff. It is as a means of taking this research further that this paper seeks to question the application of esoteric doctrines on nature within this specific branch of Wicca.

ACADEMIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF ESOTERICISM

Antoine Faivre, the foremost scholar in the field of western esotericism, defines esotericism as a form of thought expressed through exemplifying currents, rather than a specific genre (1994: 4). Faivre identifies six components of esotericism, which he has identified from the corpus of writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus: corre-

spondences, living nature, imagination and meditations, experience of transmutation, the praxis of concordance, and transmission (ibid.: 10-15). Of these, the first four are essential to a definition of a tradition as esoteric whilst the latter two Faivre considers to be 'relative' elements, frequently occurring in combination with the four fundamental characteristics but unnecessary to the categorisation of a practice as esoteric (1994: 14). Due to the constraints of time, this paper will engage only with the four fundamental characteristics, which contain esoteric doctrines concerning nature. Indeed, we should remember that the division of these characteristics into four is artificial, merely an academic device; rather, they need to be read as one.

Real and symbolic correspondences are believed to exist throughout all parts of the universe, both visible and invisible: '[t]hese correspondences, considered more or less veiled at first sight, are ... intended to be read and deciphered. The entire universe is a huge theater [sic] of mirrors, an ensemble of hieroglyphs to be decoded. Everything is a sign; everything conceals and exudes mystery; every object hides a secret' (Faivre 1994: 10). The fifth characteristic, the praxis of the concordance, is understood as a 'consistent tendency to try to establish common denominators between two different traditions or even more, among all traditions, in the hope of obtaining an

illumination, a gnosis, of superior quality' (Faivre 1994: 14). This characteristic is taken to its extreme in the discourse of the perennialists who postulate the existence of a primordial tradition which overarches all other religious or esoteric traditions of humanity. This *philosophia perennis* became the 'Tradition', constituted by a chain of mythical or historical representatives including Moses, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, the Sibyls, Pythagoras and Plato. The sixth characteristic is transmission, which refers to the possibility or necessity of teaching being transmitted from master to disciple following a pre-established channel. Inherent in this characteristic is the insistence that 'a person cannot initiate himself any way he chooses but must go through the hands of an initiator', and that both the initiator and the initiate must be attached to an authentic tradition (Faivre 1994: 14-15). But, Faivre warns, the presence of correspondences alone does not necessarily indicate esotericism, for doctrines of correspondence can be found in many philosophical and religious currents.

The notion of correspondences was also, of course, popular in *fin de siècle* writings, for example, Baudelaire's sonnet, 'Correspondences' which, 'reassigns to the poet his ancient role of *vates*, of soothsayer, who by his intuition of the concrete, of immediately perceived things, is led to the idea of these things, to the intricate system of "correspondences"' (Fowlie 1990: 29). Freeman (1999: 139) points out that Arthur Symonds, in *London: A Book of Aspects* (1909), works along similar lines, 'picking his way through what Baudelaire termed *'des forêts de symboles'* in order to perceive deeper truths'. In accordance with the theory of correspondences, the cosmos is regarded as complex, plural

and hierarchical, and nature, or living nature, thus occupies an essential place within it: 'Nature is seen, known, and experienced as essentially alive in all its parts, often inhabited and traversed by a light or hidden fire circulating through it' (ibid.: 11). This spiritual force permeating nature is exemplified in the Renaissance understanding of *magia naturalis*, a 'complex notion at the crossroads of magic and science' by which both knowledge of the networks of sympathies and antipathies that link the things of Nature and the concrete operation of this knowledge is indicated.

It is the imaginative faculty in humans that allows the use of intermediaries such as symbols and images 'to develop a gnosis, to penetrate the hieroglyphs of Nature, to put the theory of correspondences into active practice and to uncover, to see, and to know the mediating entities between Nature and the divine world' (ibid.: 12). The imagination is therefore regarded as far more than mere fantasy—it is the 'organ of the soul, thanks to which humanity can establish a cognitive and visionary relationship with an intermediary world', what Henry Corbin called the *mundus imaginalis*. The eventual consequence of working with the first three characteristics is the experience of transmutation. The alchemical term 'transmutation' is used to define the initiatory path of development by which 'the esotericist gains insight into the hidden mysteries of cosmos, self and God' (Hanegraaff 1995: 112). As transmutation implies a change in the very substance of a thing or person (As opposed to mere 'transformation', which implies a change more or less limited to outward appearance), there is, according to Faivre, no separation between knowledge (gnosis) and inner experience,

Whilst Wicca claims an almost primordial relationship with nature and markets itself as 'green religion', the disjunction between sign and signified remains very real.

or between intellectual activity and active imagination (1994: 13).

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL CONTINUITY

The six characteristics, according to Faivre, are not doctrinal but serve rather as receptacles into which various types of experiences are distributed. Although the six components can be positioned unequally, the first four must all be simultaneously present in order for something to be considered esoteric. Yet this alone is not enough. According to Hanegraaff (1995: 121), it is also crucial that we demonstrate how the original contents and associations of esotericism that originated in the Renaissance are reinterpreted. Following and developing Faivre's work, Hanegraaff defines an esoteric tradition as an 'historical continuity in which individuals and/or groups are demonstrably influenced in their life and thinking by the esoteric ideas formulated earlier, which they use and develop according to the specific demands and cultural context of their own period' (1995: 118). Hanegraaff outlines the historical perspective of esotericism as a 'container concept encompassing a complex of interrelated currents and traditions from the early modern period up to the present day, the historical origin and foundation of which lies in the syncretistic phenomenon of Renaissance hermeticism' (1999: 4). He goes on to trace this esotericism through the later developments of alchemy, Paracelsianism, Rosicrucianism, kabbalah, Theosophical and Illuminist currents, and 'various occultist and related developments during the 19th and 20th century' (ibid.: 4) many of which, I have argued, are the direct precursors of Wicca. So how has contemporary Wicca, after Hanegraaff (1995: 118),

used and developed the esoteric ideas formulated earlier according to the specific demands and cultural context of their own period? And how did Wicca come to be regarded as Nature Religion in the first place?

HOW DID WICCA COME TO BE REGARDED AS NATURE RELIGION?

Perhaps the most obvious answer to this question lies in Wicca's associations with contemporary Paganism. 'Pagan' has often been taken to refer to 'country-dweller', an interpretation which seems to have developed mainly with the Romantic literature of the 19th century and Victorian urban growth. However, as Robin Lane Fox and Pierre Chuvin have pointed out, most town-dwellers were in fact pagan at the time the term 'pagan' was coined. Thabit ibn Qurra, a Sabian from Harran (835-901CE) praised ancient paganism to the Caliph of Baghdad with the following words, which clearly have nothing to do with a rustic existence:

Who else have civilised the world, and built the cities, if not the nobles and kings of Paganism? ... They have filled the earth with settled forms of government, and with wisdom, which is the highest good. Without Paganism the world would be empty and miserable (Scott 1985: 105).

Furthermore, Freeman (1999: 11) stresses that 'the majority of major Victorian poets and artists confronted the modern city with a marked lack of enthusiasm—it was a filthy and dehumanising environment and poor soil for their sensitive plants'. He cites Browning's willingness to provide representations of Renaissance urbanisation whilst largely avoiding the Victorian conurbation, and the artistic radicals of the 1860s (such as Swinburne, Rossetti and William Morris) who forsook their own time for a largely

imaginary past.

According to the Census of 1851, the English urban population outnumbered the rural for the first time. Between 1821 and 1841, the population of London rose by 20%, Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield increased by 40%, while Bradford rose by an incredible 65% (Williams 1975: 188). As Nick Freeman has pointed out, 'no London memoirist from the Victorian period (or indeed, ever since) can resist lamenting the disappearance of the 'countryside' in and around the city' (1999: 13). The growing interest in the environment, and the urge to leave behind the towns and cities and enter once more into communion with 'nature' as 'the countryside' encouraged popular usage of the term 'pagan' as one who dwells in the rustic areas. Ronald Hutton, overstating the case somewhat, suggests that the growth of urban areas during the Victorian era caused 'an almost hysterical celebration of rural England' from the 1870s onwards. Pan as great god of nature became one of the most prevalent ancient images to be drawn upon. We might cite as examples Arthur Machen's 1894 novel *The Great God Pan*, and Saki's *The Music on the Hill* (1911), both of which feature Pan as a central figure, whilst Kenneth

Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1907), and J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* made Pan accessible to children. Russell (1990: 137) interprets Pan, god of wild nature, as a deliberately chosen symbol of opposition to Christianity among occultists,

due to Christian associations of Pan's characteristics (cloven hooves, horns) with their image of the Devil. Certainly this is true of the infamous Aleister Crowley, whose *Hymn to Pan* provoked storms of outrage when it was read out at his funeral in 1947. At the same time, enthusiasm for Gaia as Mother Nature and Mother Earth was such that by 1900, 'the poetic vision of the English, when contemplating the rural world, was dominated as never before by the great goddess and the horned god' (Hutton 1996: 9), and the great goddess (Isis,

Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter) and the horned god (Herne, Pan, Cernunnos) have remained deities of central importance within today's Wicca and Paganism.

That there is little evidence for the kind of mass appeal Hutton describes does not detract from the engagement of poets and authors with the country/city opposition, and this certainly influenced the development of Wicca. However, we should not forget that it is the very

'Pagan' has often been taken to refer to 'country-dweller', an interpretation which seems to have developed mainly with the Romantic literature of the 19th century and Victorian urban growth. However, most town-dwellers were in fact pagan at the time the term 'pagan' was coined.

growth of the city which accounts for what is primarily urban Wicca, at the same time as it provides a focus for discontent and an opposition to idealised nature. We can see in Wicca a nostalgia for something never known, and might do well to question the role of imaginative fiction in turning people on to nature. In an urbanised life, does Tolkien's description of the woods of Lothlórien in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), for instance, provide a more real experience of the magic of a woodland than a walk in the real woods? It is, I think, a valid question but not one I intend to answer at the present time.

In terms of recent decades, Vivianne Crowley has outlined a change in emphasis within Wicca from nature veneration to nature preservation in her chapter 'Wicca as Nature Religion' in *Nature Religion Today*. Crowley asserts the centrality of the veneration of nature, which is 'considered to be ensouled, alive, 'divine' ... The divine [being seen] as a 'force' or 'energy' and as manifest in the world of nature' (1998: 170). She further points out that the processes of nature—'conception, birth, mating, parenthood, maturation, death'—are portrayed in the seasonal myth cycle known as the Wheel of the Year; thus, '[t]hemes and symbols drawn from nature are central ... to

Wiccan belief and practice' (ibid.: 170).

Initially, we are told, Gardner's Wicca was described as a fertility cult rather than as 'nature religion' but, as the opening declamation of this paper shows, direct links existed between the Wiccan

perception of the goddess and the world of nature. The late Doreen Valiente, Gardner's one-time High Priestess and collaborator, pointed out that Wicca is concerned, not so much with literal fertility as with vitality, and with finding one's harmony with Nature. 'What witches seek for in celebrating these seasonal festivals is a sense of oneness with Nature ... People today need this because they are aware of the tendency of modern life to cut them off from their kinship with the world of living Nature ...

They want to get back to Nature, and be human beings again' (in Crowley 1998: 173-5).

This cutting off from nature as a part of modern life has certainly had its part to play in attracting people to Wicca in the last 30 years, largely as a result of environmental awareness. 'A nature religion implies a nature to worship', claims Crowley, and 'in the 1970s environmental pollution became the rallying cause. Nature was on the agenda' (1998: 176). With this influx of environmentally aware people, the ethos of Wicca began to

evolve from nature veneration to nature preservation: 'Wicca had moved out of the darkness, the occult world of witchery, to occupy the moral high ground—environmentalism' (ibid: 177).

But going behind environmentalism, back to this need to feel again that contact with nature which, according to Valiente, makes us 'human beings', how does Wicca interact with nature? Both Crowley and Valiente point to the most obvious interaction, that of ritual, and particularly those rituals which make up the mythic cycle of the Wheel of the Year. Certainly, the Wheel of the Year with its eight sabbats reflects the turning cycle of nature, but to what extent does the Wheel turn the seasons instead of the seasons turning the Wheel? There are some Wiccans who celebrate Imbolc, for example, only once the first snowdrops have appeared; but chaotic nature has her own timing, and is not regarded as conducive to modern life and its responsibilities. The practicalities of getting a group of people together thus takes precedence over nature's timing of the seasons, and in order to facilitate Wicca a grid of external references—the eight-spoked Wheel of the Year—is dropped onto nature. Thus, Wicca imposes correspondences rather than allowing correspondences to emerge from living nature and then reading them back into it, and these correspondences become merely standardised lists, memorised information rather than any true gnosis gleaned from the hieroglyphs of nature through imagination and meditation.

Such formalisation may provide a means to increased intimacy with nature for some practitioners, but it surely operates as a distancing mechanism for many others, and it certainly removes from

Wicca the influence of its esoteric heritage. If figurative language and ritual are used always to point to something beyond human experience—if a walk in the woods always necessitates a glimpse of dryads and nymphs, if rituals always necessitate a yearning towards the divine—does this then risk removing the awe and wonder from nature herself? The Wiccan circle, it is claimed, exists as a space 'between the worlds', between the divine realm and the human. An over-emphasis on that which lies beyond, that which is above, i.e. the divine, may therefore miss the means by which that beyond might be approached, decoded, and known (in the sense of gnosis), i.e. through nature, through that which is below. Too much 'heaven' and not enough 'earth' encompasses far more than a superficial response to the environmental crises affecting both us and nature. As Nasr goes to some lengths to point out,

There is need to rediscover those laws and principles governing human ethics as well as the cosmos, to bring out the interconnectedness between man and nature in the light of the Divine, an interaction not based on sentimentality or even ethical concern related to the realm of action alone, but one founded upon a knowledge whose forgetting has now brought human beings to the edge of the precipice of annihilation of both the natural order and themselves (1996: 223).

Activism, it seems, is not enough—Wicca needs to go deeper and have a knowledge base of the natural order to which it so often only pays lip service. So, to paraphrase Hanegraaff's question posed earlier in this paper, does Wicca produce merely a shallow caricature of profound teachings? How is living Nature actually manifest in Wiccan understanding and practice?

We might do well to
question the role of
imaginative fiction in
turning people on to
nature. ... does
Tolkien's description
of the woods of
Lothlórien provide a
more real experience
of the magic of a
woodland than a walk
in the real woods?

HOW DOES NATURE MANIFEST ITSELF IN WICCAN UNDERSTANDING?

The veneration of nature in Wicca, the concern for the earth as deity, and the pantheism of seeing the divine in all of nature has led Wiccans to maintain an attitude of reverence for the wild, untamed countryside on the one hand, and of sadness or revulsion at human estrangement from this ideal, living in towns and cities away from the land, on the other.

For some Wiccans, veneration of nature and identification as 'Wiccan' and/or 'Pagan' manifests as a romantic attachment to the countryside, a dream of living away from the towns and nurturing a closer relationship with nature. For a few, direct action against the destruction of the environment—at road protests, proposed building sites, Manchester Airport's second runway, or simply to protect an old tree—is the favoured means of expressing their concern for nature and their belief that nature is divine, ensouled, or, at the very least, alive. Others, however, see nature as all-inclusive, regarding all that we do as 'natural' for we, as humans, are also part of nature. However, it remains a fact that most Pagans live in urban areas, and very few depend directly upon the land for their living: as Jeffrey Russell (1991: 171) pointed out, 'most are urban, as is usually true of those who love nature (the farmers are too busy fighting it)'.

Wiccan use of nature imagery appears to be on a cosmological scale rather than located in a particular environment. There appears to be a resistance to putting boundaries around nature, yet at the same time British Wiccans try to link themselves with the energy of the land at quite a local level. However, this only goes so far—few seem to involve themselves with road protests and other areas of environ-

mental activism, and Wicca is thus not heavily represented at environmental protests. A Wiccan view was expressed by a priestess in her early 30s, who told me:

I do resent the occasional implication that unless you've spent time up a tree to protect it, you are not a true Witch ... Craft is one thing, eco-activism is another ... I do not think they automatically go hand in hand (Hweorfa, 15th October 1998).

Dalua, a Norwegian Gardnerian/Alexandrian High Priest, told me (personal comment, October 1998), 'I personally prefer not to go as far as, for example, Starhawk has done, making the Craft into some sort of action group for political, environmental or humanitarian purposes (in most cases we have good choices outside of the Craft)'. Environmentalism as a part of Wiccan spirituality, then, is not high on the agenda. It seems to be regarded as quite distinct from religion.

However, the portrayal of nature in Pagan and Wiccan rituals is often nothing more than imagery—of idealised nature, or of cosmological nature. This romantic ideal on the part of urban Wiccans has little in common with the reality of living on the land, where nature is anything but romantic. The Pagan/Wiccan ideal of nature thus often seems to stem from a genuine desire to be in harmony with nature and, to an extent, to preserve nature, whilst at the same time the cosmology suggests that nature is but a reflection of a greater divine reality. This is in keeping with the Hermetic maxim 'As above, so below', yet the impact of environmental awareness and activism begs the question as to whether Wiccan attitudes towards nature are relevant to the esoteric concept of 'living nature', or whether they are merely a religious rendering of secular concerns. In any case, the concept of

'nature' is itself diffuse and fractured, and it may be for this reason that Wiccan attitudes to nature as sacred incorporates nature as the universe/cosmos, nature as deity, and also human as part of nature.

The refusal to place boundaries around a constructed 'nature' necessarily leaves the observer with the impression of a confused and ill thought-out response to the natural world.

CONCLUSION

To return to the role of imaginative fiction which I mentioned earlier, I would like to read you a passage from a book called *Lolly Willowes, or The Loving Huntsman* by Sylvia Townsend-Warner, published in 1926. In this book, Lolly has moved to Great Mop. She is a witch, not a Wiccan, since Wicca *per se* did not exist at this time (although Margaret Murray's book *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921) certainly did, and Townsend-Warner may well have read this). Lolly doesn't attend the sabbats because they are not sophisticated enough, they don't give her what she needs, and instead she goes to the essence of witchcraft which, for her, is nature. In this passage, she has been joined in Great Mop by her nephew, Titus. It is a rather long passage, but I make no apologies for that: I think the whole passage is relevant and helps to illustrate the points I have made in this paper.

When they went for walks together he would sometimes fall silent, turning his head from side to side to browse the warm scent of a clover field. Once, as they stood on the ridge that guarded the valley from the south-east, he said: 'I should like to stroke it'—and he

waved his hand towards the pattern of rounded hills embossed with rounded beech-woods. She felt a cold shiver at his words, and turned away her eyes from the landscape that she loved so jealously. Titus could never have spoken so if he had not loved it too. Love it as he might, with all the deep Willowes love for country sights and smells, love he never so intimately and soberly, his love must be a horror to her. It was different in kind from hers. It was comfortable, it was portable, it was a reasonable, appreciative appetite, a possessive and masculine love. It almost estranged her from Great Mop that he should be able to love it so well, and express his love so easily. He loved the countryside as though it were a body.

She had not loved it so. For days at a time she had been unconscious of its outward aspect, for long before she saw it she had loved it and blessed it. With no earnest but a name, a few lines and letters on a map, and a spray of beech-leaves, she had trusted the place and staked everything on her trust. She had struggled to come, but there had been no such struggle for Titus. It was as easy for him to quit Bloomsbury for the Chilterns as for a cat to jump from a hard chair to a soft. Now, after a little scrabbling and exploration, he was curled up in the green lap and purring over the landscape. The green lap was comfortable. He meant to stay in it, for he knew where he was well off. It was so comfortable that he could afford to wax loving, praise its kindly slopes, stretch out a discriminating paw and pat it. But Great Mop

...the impact of
environmental awareness
and activism begs the
question as to whether
Wiccan attitudes towards
nature are relevant to the
esoteric concept of
'living nature', or
whether they are merely
a religious rendering of
secular concerns.

was no more to him than any other likable country lap. He liked it because he was in possession. His comfort apart, it was a place like any other place.

Laura hated him for daring to love it so. She hated him for daring to love it at all. Most of all she hated him for daring to impose his kind of love on her. Since he had come to Great Mop she had not been allowed to love in her own way.

Commenting, pointing out, appreciating, Titus tweaked her senses one after another as if they were so many bell-ropes. He was a good judge of country things; little escaped him, he understood the points of a landscape as James his father had understood the points of a horse. This was not her way. She was ashamed at paying the countryside these horse-coping compliments. Day by day the spirit of the place withdrew itself further from her. The woods judged her by her company, and hushed their talk as she passed by with Titus. Silence heard them coming, and fled out of the fields, the hills locked up their thoughts, and became so many grassy mounds to be walked up and walked down. She was being boycotted, and she knew it. Presently she would not know it anymore. For her too, Great Mop would be a place like any other place, a pastoral landscape where an aunt walked out with her nephew. (Townsend-Warner, [1926], 2000: 159-162).

Now, I do not intend to suggest that there is a male/female divide in responses to nature, though for all I know that may be the case. Neither do I want to suggest that all Wiccans respond to nature in the way that Titus does. Rather, the passage highlights two different responses to nature, perhaps one to nature with a small 'n', and one to Nature with a capital 'N'. Undoubtedly, some Wiccans respond to nature as Titus does, and some do not. It is a vexing but nevertheless exciting fact that Wiccan covens and practitioners are

extremely different from each other, and therefore generalisations are not easy to either discover or to sustain. Yet, in studying particular forms of Wicca, we cannot help but take note of those questions which do not appear to be being asked, of those areas which seem to be taken for granted. Nature, I would argue, is one of these areas.

... a grid of external references—the eight-spoked Wheel of the Year—is dropped onto nature. Thus, Wicca imposes correspondences rather than allowing correspondences to emerge from living nature ...

far more questions that I have provided answers. In so doing, I hope to have opened up another area for debate, and to perhaps answer some of my own questions where time and space allows, in published form.

REFERENCES:

- Albanese, Catherine (1990), *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Barrie, J.M. (1906), 'Peter Pan in Kensington Garden' in *The Little White Bird*, London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Baudelaire, Charles (1992), *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, translated by P. E. Charvet, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Baudelaire, Charles (1989), *The Poems in Prose*, edited and translated by Francis Scarfe, London: Anvil Press.
- Corbin, Henry ([1958], 1969), *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (published originally in French as *L'Imagination créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi*, Paris: Flammarion).
- Crowley, Vivianne (1998), 'Wicca as Nature Religion' in Pearson, J. et al (eds), *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 170-179.
- Faivre, Antoine (1994), *Access to Western Esotericism*, New York: SUNY.
- Fowlie, Wallace (1900), *Poem and Symbol: A Brief History of French Symbolism*, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press.
- Fox, Robin Lane (1988), *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean world from the second century AD to the conversion of Constantine*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Freeman, Nicholas P. (1999), *Literary Representations of London, 1905-1909: A Study of Ford Madox Ford, Arthur Symonds, John Davidson and Henry James*, University of Bristol: unpublished PhD thesis.
- Grahame, Kenneth (1908), *The Wind in the Willows*, London: Methuen & Co.
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J. (1999), 'Some Remarks on the Study of Western Esotericism' in *Esoterica* 1 (1), 3-19 [Available from <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/>].
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J. (1998), 'Reflections on New Age and the Secularisation of Nature' in Pearson et al. (eds), *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 22-32.
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J. (1995), 'Empirical method and the study of esotericism' in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 7 (2), 99-129.
- Hutton, Ronald, (1999), *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Hutton, Ronald (1996), 'The Roots of Modern Paganism' in Harvey, Graham & Charlotte Hardman (eds), *Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, the Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-First Century*, London: Thorsons, 3-15.
- Machen, Arthur ([1894], 1993), *The Great God Pan*, London: Creation Books.
- Murray, Margaret A. (1921), *The Witch Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (1996), *Religion and the Order of Nature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Russell, Jeffrey B. ([1980], 1991), *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*, London: Thames & Hudson.
- Saki (1982), 'The Music on the Hill' from *The Chronicles of Clovis* (1911), in *The Complete Saki*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 161-6.
- Scott, Walter (ed.) (1985), *Hermetica: the Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which contain Religious or Philosophical Teachings ascribed to Hermes Trimegistus*, Boston: Shambala.
- Starhawk ([1979], 1989), *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Symons, Arthur (1908), *London: A Book of Aspects*, Minneapolis: Privately printed, Edward D. Brooks.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. (1954), *The Fellowship of the Ring*, London: Unwin.
- Townsend-Warner, Sylvia ([1926], 2000), *Lolly Willows, or The Loving Huntsman*, London: Virago Press.
- Williams, Raymond (1975), *The Country and the City*, St. Albans: Paladin.

Jo Pearson has a PhD in Religious Studies from Lancaster University, UK, and is Research Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at The Open University, UK. She is co-editor (with Professors Richard Roberts and Geoffrey Samuel) of Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World (Edinburgh UP, 1998), and is particularly interested in the continual development of Wicca and in the relationship between religion and magic. She is currently working on Wicca: Witchcraft in Britain, to be published by Routledge, and completing A Popular Dictionary of Paganism for Curzon Press.

Psychotherapist and Wiccan Clergy: The Ethics of a Dual Relationship

by Ellen C. Friedman
City University

ABSTRACT:

Wiccan clergy psychotherapists encounter complex ethical dilemmas due to dual roles. In an attempt to understand the extreme complexity of the multiple roles, this discourse begins with an examination of current ethical codes of the professional societies. Recent literature related to dual relationships in rural and small communities is surveyed, as well as decision-making models effective in these situations. Common ethical complexities experienced by clergy psychotherapists are reviewed. Informal communication with Wiccan clergy psychotherapists confirms the multidimensional nature of the ethics. Options for Wiccan clergy psychotherapists are considered.

In the course of studying ethics as a candidate for a master's degree in counselling, I became aware of complex ethical dilemmas when considering the implications of the fact that in the near future I will practice as both therapist and Wiccan priestess. The point of this discourse is to identify the current views held by counselling professional societies and to review recent literature relevant to the dilemmas encountered by Wiccan clergy psychotherapists in their practice. Since no literature was available on the specific topic under consideration, I conducted informal research with people currently fulfilling the dual roles.

DUAL RELATIONSHIP DILEMMAS

A dual relationship exists when a psychotherapist serves in the capacity of both therapist and at least one other role with the same client. Most commonly the second relationship is social, financial, or professional and may be concurrent or subsequent to the therapeutic relationship. In 1992, the American Psychological Association published research on common ethical dilemmas experienced by their members. Dilemmas arising from "blurred, dual, or conflictual relationships" were the second most frequent ethical dilemma cited by 679 psychologists (as cited in Pope & Vasquez, 1998, p. 27). "Dual relationships form the major basis of licensing disciplinary actions, financial losses in malpractice suits involving psychologists, and ethics complaints against psychologists" (Pope & Vasquez, 1998, p. 195). The Code of Ethics for the American Counselling Association (ACA) strongly advises avoidance of harmful dual relationships whenever possible:

Counsellors are aware of their influential positions with respect to clients, and they avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients. Counsellors make every effort to avoid dual relationships with clients that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of harm to clients. When a dual relationship cannot be avoided, counsellors take appropriate professional precautions such as informed consent, consultation, supervision, and documentation to ensure that judgment is not impaired and no exploitation occurs (ACA, 1995, Standard A. 6.a.).

The ethics code for the American Psychological Association (1992) states that multiple relationships may be unavoidable and recommends that therapists remain aware of the potentially harmful

... the American Psychological Association published research on common ethical dilemmas experienced by their members. Dilemmas arising from "blurred, dual, or conflictual relationships" were the second most frequent ethical dilemma cited by 679 psychologists.

consequences. They recommend refraining from multiple relationships if harm may occur. The ethics codes of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (1998), National Association of Social Workers (1998), and the American Association of Pastoral Counsellors (1994) recommend avoidance of multiple relationships that exploit or harm clients. All of the above codes strictly prohibit sexual activity between therapist and client. All but the AAPT code warns against superior/subordinate dual relationships such as when a therapist has an administrative, supervisory, or evaluative role with a client.

Pope and Vasquez identify common ethical concerns about dual relationships (1998, p. 193-195). Dual relationships can erode and distort the professional nature of the therapeutic relationship. They may create conflicts of interest that compromise professional judgement or create situations where the therapist is engaged in meeting his or her own social, financial, or other personal needs, rather than putting the welfare of the client foremost. Dual relationships can affect the current and future benefits of therapy. Pope and Vasquez claim that the power differential between a therapist and client is one of the main reasons that exploitation and harm can occur. They

also mention the concern that the therapist is held legally liable and may be called to testify in court regarding the patient's diagnosis, treatment, or prognosis. They admit that not all dual roles are avoidable, and caution therapists to take steps to minimize harm when multiple relationships do occur by utilizing informed consent, negotiation, and professional consultation.

Pearson and Piazza (1997) classify dual relationships into five categories in order to aid the decision making process of whether or not a dual relationship will cause harm: circumstantial roles, structured multiple professional roles, shifts in professional roles, personal and professional role conflicts, and the predatory professional. Circumstantial multiple roles are those that occur by pure coincidence, such as running into a client at their sales job in the mall. Structured multiple professional roles are acceptable if the nature of all the relationships is professional. Shifts in professional roles include difficulties that arise when a teacher or supervisor counsels a student. Personal and professional role conflicts include sexual or romantic, social, and peer-like relationships, such as occur when collaborating on publications or engaging in a shared pastime. The predatory professional is a

... clergy are particularly vulnerable to unethical behavior due to their lack of professional ethics education ... a tendency to be idealized by the public, poorly defined job descriptions and expectations, and the expectation of warm and friendly social interactions.

therapist who exploits the therapeutic relationship to meet personal needs rather than client needs. Pearson and Piazza do not agree that dual relationships are inherently unethical: "Multiple professional roles such as advisor-instructor, supervisor-mentor, counselor-advocate, and others enhance our effectiveness as counsellors and educators. However, risk of harm, or the perception of harm, seems to increase as both level of intimacy and power differential increase. In addition, the influence of the power differential is not always obvious" (1997).

The ban and demonization of dual relationships has come from an attempt to protect the public from exploiting therapists. Regretfully, it has emerged as a simplistic solution to a wide and complex problem. Even worse, the ban on dual relationships and the isolation it imposes on the therapeutic encounter tends to increase the chance of exploitation and decrease the effectiveness of treatment. It enables incompetent therapists to wield their power without witnesses and accountability. In addition, it buys into the general cultural trend towards isolation and disconnection (Zur, 2000).

Offer Zur, one of the most outspoken supporters of the benefits of dual relationships, states that the term "dual relationship" has been used interchangeably

with "exploitation", "harm", "abuse", "damage", and "sexual abuse" (1999). He cautions us to remember that neither dual relationships nor any relationship with a differential of power (i.e., parent-child, teacher-student) are inherently exploitative (2000). Dr Zur states that behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, and existential therapies do not consider dual relationships harmful, and that some therapies, like Family Systems therapy, rely on the inherent duality of relationships that exists. He recognizes that for some clients dual relationships cause anxiety and other difficulties, necessitating the need to consider each dual relationship on an individual basis. Dr Zur developed extensive clinical recommendations to aid therapists in negotiating boundaries prior to entering a dual relationship, to help in developing treatment plans, and to ensure clinical integrity and effectiveness (1999). Dr Zur finds dual relationships frequently aid the therapeutic relationship and outcome: "for the most part it has significantly increased my effectiveness, reduced the length of treatment and enhanced my ability to care for my clients" (2000).

In a healthy society, people not only admit to, but celebrate their complex mutual reliance on each other. The more

multiple relationships, the richer and more profound the individual experience. In a healthy society, the witch doctor, the wise elder, and the practical neighbor are all part of the fabric of advice and guidance, of physical and spiritual support. In administering to the needs of the members of a healthy society, therefore, its healers, rabbis, priests, or therapists will not shun dual relationships, but rather rely on them for the insight and intimate knowledge that such relationships provide (Zur, 1999).

DUAL RELATIONSHIPS IN RURAL AND SMALL COMMUNITIES

In rural and small communities, multiple relationships are unavoidable and are not considered inherently unethical (Brownlee, 1996; Schank and Skovolt, 1997). "Due to the lack of anonymity, rural psychologists are inherently active participants in the community. They have a more holistic view of clients and must balance the accepted and more easily defined single role of an urban setting versus the complexity of simultaneous relationships in a rural or small-community" (Schank and Skovolt, 1997). Schank and Skovolt (1997) published qualitative research produced through interviews with sixteen psychologists who live and practice in rural areas and small communities. All of the psychologists identify dilemmas involving professional boundaries as a significant concern. Emerging themes include the reality of overlapping social relationships, the reality of overlapping business relationships, the effects of overlapping relationships on members of the psychologist's own family, and the dilemmas of working with more than one family member as clients or with others who have friendships with individual clients. All sixteen therapists state that dual relationships are the most frequent and

complicated of all ethical dilemmas that they face in daily practice. Three different criteria are cited by the psychologists to make decisions about whether to see a client when a dual role exists. Some psychologists use their own comfort level to gauge whether they could successfully manage the overlapping relationship. The type and severity of the clients' presenting problems is also used as an indicator when deciding to enter a dual relationship. Therapists are more likely to enter a dual relationship if the client is seeking problem-solving and would likely avoid a dual relationship with a client if they suspected a complex issue such as a personality disorder. Other therapists involve prospective clients in the decision-making process to decide if the benefits of entering into a dual relationship outweigh the risk. Schank and Skovolt conclude by suggesting safeguards to minimize the risks when entering into dual relationships which include ongoing consultation, setting clear expectations and boundaries, informed consent, and documentation.

Keith Brownlee (1996) describes ethical decision making models especially suitable for rural therapists since the complete avoidance of dual relationships is not a realistic option. "Pivotal to any decision making based on the codes are the two central principles: impaired objectivity, and risk of exploitation. Both of these principles are very broad and the counsellor is left to judge for him or herself what kind of relationship would qualify as impairing objectivity or increasing risk". He cites Kitchener's ethical decision making model, which is based on role conflict and three variables associated with increasing risk of harm. First, the risk of harm increases as

the extent of incompatibility of expectations between roles increases. Second, the risk of divided loyalties increases and objectivity decreases as the obligations associated with each of the roles diverge. Third, the risk of exploitation increases as the difference in prestige and power between the therapist and client increases.

Brownlee (1996) cites Gottlieb's ethical decision making model, which is based on three dimensions: power, duration, and termination. The model recognizes that relationships have a power differential ranging from low to high (minimal to profound personal influence). Duration refers to the length of therapy (brief or long-term). Termination refers to whether a specific time span for therapy can be decided upon or whether the client is likely to require therapy for an indefinite period. Gottlieb's model involves the following five steps:

1. Assess the current relationship in relation to power, duration, and termination.
2. Assess future relationships in relation to power, duration, and termination.
3. Counsellor makes decision upon the role incompatibility of these relationships. Gottlieb suggests a decision to proceed with the dual relationships if the relationship between counsellor and the client in question appears to be mid-range to low in power differential and conflict.
4. Seek professional consultation on decision.
5. Discuss the possible ramifications that could emerge from a dual relationship with the potential client, utilizing treatment contracts, and

negotiation of boundaries to aid in making ethical decisions.

DILEMMAS SPECIAL TO THE PRACTICE OF CLERGY PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

"The legacy of dual training, insufficient attention to professional ethics, as well as differing role expectations and professional socializations as clergy and counsellor make it imperative for clergy psychotherapists to be particularly thoughtful about boundary issues in counselling" (Haug, 1999). "A 1994 report by the Maryland state regulatory board indicated that 40% of the psychologists accused of sexually inappropriate behavior were also ordained ministers" (as cited in Haug, 1999). Haug states the power differentials are particularly high for clergy psychotherapists: "Client's vulnerability might be heightened when they consult clergy psychotherapists. Due to the ministerial background of clergy therapists, clients may have exaggerated expectations of their ethical conduct and of the safety, if not 'sacredness', of the counselling relationship". Haug stresses the importance of setting, communicating and maintaining distinct boundaries in order to maintain the integrity of both roles:

Clergy psychotherapists who work both as pastors, priests, rabbis, and so forth, and as therapists, face more complexities negotiating what constitutes appropriate behavior in which context. It is crucial for counsellors, particularly clergy psychotherapists, to ask themselves these questions: Who will benefit from this boundary crossing? Who really needs this hug, this financial advice, this get-together outside the counselling room? What are the possible negative, unintended consequences for clients and those close to them, for the public, and for the

Harrow recommends that coven leaders meet their own needs in other social relationships, not through the coven. ... the matter is further complicated because covens also serve many Wiccans as families of choice.

profession at large? Am I satisfying personal needs, for instance for services, social contact, self-revelation, financial stability, and so on, that might and should be met otherwise? Could this multiple relationship be avoided? Am I rationalizing away my concerns? Am I comfortable having this course of action made public?

Haug maintains that clergy are particularly vulnerable to unethical behavior due to their lack of professional ethics education, gender inequalities in some religions, a tendency to be idealized by the public, poorly defined job descriptions and expectations, and the expectation of warm and friendly social interactions. Haug identifies common boundary dilemmas which include non-sexual multiple relationships, sexual and sexualized multiple relationships, confidentiality issues, and issues related to client autonomy. Dr Haug concludes with recommendations to prevent abuse of power and boundary violations which include ethics education, professional consultation with other clergy psychotherapists, and personal therapy. "Awareness of the differences in what is expected and deemed professional and ethical in the two professions, however, is the first step toward preventing a lapse in ethical conduct and client harm" (Haug, 1999).

SPECIAL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY WICCAN CLERGY PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

Dual relationship dilemmas faced by Wiccan clergy psychotherapists are similar to dilemmas identified concerning practice in small and rural communities, and by clergy psychotherapists, but there are concerns and complications specific to practicing in Wiccan communities. The structure of Wiccan community consists of autonomous clergy serving and leading autonomous covens. Covens are small worshipping and teaching congregations (generally three to twenty persons). The larger Wiccan community could include as little as a handful to as many as a few thousand members. In some places the community expands to include the pagan community, which is comprised of countless magickal traditions, orders, religions, and autonomous individuals with little common ground.

"The dual nature of our covens makes the situation even more complex. They are not simply worshipping congregations, kept small to maintain personal intimacy and spiritual intensity. They are also, by tradition, the places where we train and develop our future clergy. This places the coven leader in two roles that are almost directly contradictory: mentoring and evaluating" (Harrow, 1996). "If you see coven as a support group for the psycho-spiritual healing

Wiccan clergy psychotherapists appear particularly vulnerable to ethical dilemmas caused by dual relationships. ... The lack of professional training for Wiccan clergy and the adolescent development of Wiccan ethics is a considerable problem.

and growth of the members, which it is, then the leader serves as facilitator, mentor and counsellor" (Harrow, 1996). Harrow recommends that coven leaders meet their own needs in other social relationships, not through the coven. Harrow points out that the matter is further complicated because covens also serve many Wiccans as families of choice.

Oakwood, a non-clinical psychologist and Witch, commented that "given the hopefully intimate relationships inherent in covening, there might be a role conflict, as there would be in counselling one's best friend. However, I do not see a role conflict inherent in counselling someone the therapist is less intimately related to, for example, a member of the community at large, or, in some traditions, the outer court" (personal communication, July 27, 2000). She recommends open discussion of boundaries: "It should be clear to the client that the counsellor may be showing up for rituals, or even running them. If the client is not comfortable with that from the beginning, then you should not accept them as a client. You should choose that course rather than choosing to stay away from a ritual you would normally attend or run." Oakwood stresses that radically altering your life for the comfort of a client only leads to resentments, which will negatively

impact the therapeutic experience.

"Running into your therapist in the grocery store, a restaurant, or even at the same political demonstration is not the same as encountering them in a ritual context," explains Cat Chapin-Bishop, a psychotherapist and Wiccan priestess (personal communication, August 2, 2000). "Ritual settings and Pagan gatherings tend to encourage intimate connection. Therapy too is intimate, but in a very different way: for one thing, in a therapy session, my clients have my undivided attention. Coming into a ritual setting where I am present, many of my Pagan clients have brought that expectation into the new setting—after all, all around are people hugging, connecting, telling one another deeply personal stories. The setting (unlike a restaurant) conveys the legitimacy of pursuing connection, and the therapy has given rise to the expectation of how that intimacy 'should' feel." She continues, "Undivided attention rarely happens for anybody, but folks often feel abandoned and rejected when it is suddenly taken away, and in ways that prove very disruptive to the therapy afterwards." At this time, she sees Pagans and Wiccans in a pastoral setting but not a psychotherapeutic one.

Chapin-Bishop identified the importance of the type and severity of client presenting problems in consideration of

a dual relationship: "Smoking cessation, behavioral desensitization, or short-term couples' counselling evoke very different transference issues than long-term trauma and grief work." The presence of clients dealing with abuse issues at rituals she leads would impede her performance as a priestess. Wiccan clergy need to be in a safe and controlled space in order to perform the skills required of their ritual role, which can include trance possession by deity, commonly known in Wiccan circles as "Drawing Down the Moon". Chapin-Bishop expresses a need to minimize the role stressing: "If I therefore adopt a detached, non-intimate stance toward my community and my Gods, so that I can manage the transference issues of any clients who are present, I cheat myself of my main source of spiritual nourishment."

Chapin-Bishop recognizes that clergy therapists are idealized: "If you are in a dual wisdom role, both the all-powerful priestess and the all-compassionate therapist, you're on the pedestal before you even properly begin your work." From her viewpoint:

We are, as Pagan clergy, members of our communities in a way that Christian pastoral counsellors are not. Our community and ritual structure favors intimacy and connectedness, and while many of our priests are talented and charismatic, our pews do not face forward. We don't favor group structures that create the kind of emotional detachment that would keep transference issues from becoming noticeable. Quite the reverse: our drive toward connection, as whole persons, one member with another as equals, tumbles us together in ways that almost ensure that people's idealized expectations will meet with disillusionment. It's bad enough to be a High Priestess who is 'caught' yelling at her child. To be both Pagan clergy and psychotherapist to the

same subject is to be at ground zero for some positively nuclear pyrotechnics.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The professional societies of the helping professions agree that sexual dual relationships between therapists and clients are unethical (AAMFT, 1991; AAPC, 1994; ACA, 1995; APA, 1992; NASW, 1996). These codes agree that therapists should not meet their own needs through relationships with clients. The AAMFT, ACA, APA, and the NASW strongly caution therapists against supervisory and evaluative dual relationships with clients. As far as non-sexual dual relationships, the codes caution therapists to avoid harmful and exploitative dual relationships, and when relationships cannot be avoided, they obligate the therapist to employ methods to minimize harm.

Abuse of the power differential and loss of objectivity is at the heart of the risk of harm (Brownlee, 1996; Haug, 1999; Pearson and Piazza, 1997; Pope & Vasquez, 1998). While far from suggesting that all dual relationships are beneficial, Ofer Zur (1999, 2000) strongly supports the use of dual relationships to enhance the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship and minimize exploitation. Brownlee (1996) and Schank and Skovolt (1997) agree that dual relationships are not inherently exploitative and that they are unavoidable in rural and small communities. Clergy psychotherapists are especially at risk of unethical behavior and face complicated dilemmas when entering into dual relationships (Haug, 1999). There is strong agreement in the literature that the therapist should employ ethical decision making models, professional con-

sultation, informed consent through open discussion of benefits and ramifications, and case documentation in order to decide whether or not to enter into a specific dual relationship, and to minimize risk when the relationship is unavoidable or consensual (Brownlee, 1996; Haug, 1999; Pearson & Piazza, 1997; Schank & Skovolt, 1997; Zur, 1999; Zur 2000).

Wiccan clergy psychotherapists appear particularly vulnerable to ethical dilemmas caused by dual relationships. Complications unique to Wicca include the intimacy required of its clergy within the ritual context and within their covens. Covens serve not only as congregations, but also as seminaries and, in some instances, as families of choice. The lack of professional training for Wiccan clergy and the adolescent development of Wiccan ethics are considerable problems. Wicca is a young religion and has yet to develop in these areas to the extent found in older religions. Ethical decision-making often relies on an intuitive grasp of the "Wiccan Rede", which states "An' it harm none, do as ye will".

Wiccan clergy psychotherapists will need to ask themselves many questions in order to find their own boundaries concerning dual relationships. What type of relationship does the clergy therapist have with the Wiccan community? What type of therapy does the clergy therapist practice? Does the clergy therapist meet personal needs through their community membership or are they isolated from social contact with the community? How will the therapeutic relationship affect their family or coven members who also live in the community? Options for Wiccan clergy psychotherapists include:

1. Avoid dilemmas as much as possible by not seeing clients who are also Wiccan or Pagan. Cease any therapeutic relationship if client becomes a member of the Wiccan and Pagan community.
2. Practice low power, short-term, advice-oriented, solution-focused or pastoral counselling within community. Avoid high power, long-term psychotherapeutic relationships.
3. Practice deep psychotherapy with community members and negotiate each relationship on a case-by-case basis. This may necessitate that the therapist has less socially intimate relationships within the community. There may be a need for therapists to practice within their religion since some prospective clients seek out therapists of the same faith. I recommend that Wiccan clergy therapists avoid counselling coveners. The role conflicts encountered in this situation include existing teacher-student relationships, and possible familial relationships since covens foster reliance and intimacy in order to facilitate deep personal spiritual work.
4. When consciously entering into a multiple relationship, use the ethical decision making models and guidelines available (Brownlee, 1996; Zur, 1999). Employ consultation and supervision with other Wiccan clergy psychotherapists, and with other psychotherapists who are not also Wiccan clergy. Openly discuss role boundaries with clients, obtain informed consent, and document the agreements. Be aware of the reasons why you choose to enter a dual relationship.

I do not believe that dual relation-

ships are inherently harmful. Personal experience has proven a wealth of opportunities for growth to exist within consensual dual relationships. As both clergy and future therapist, I am aware that these waters can be muddy and require careful navigation. For nineteen years, I have lived my life openly in the local Wiccan community. I will not deny myself the nourishment and intimacy I receive from my spiritual family and home. Due to the fact that I meet personal needs in the Wiccan community, and that I prefer to err on the side of caution as I embark on my career as a therapist, at this time I will continue to function as a priestess and pastoral counsellor and in the future will likely avoid most psychotherapeutic relationships in the Wiccan community. As counsellor and clergy, my primary responsibility is to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of those that I serve. As a human being, I also have responsibilities to my own welfare. Occasionally, these obligations may conflict. I am thankful that my dual training provides me with exceptional resources and tools with which to navigate these waters.

REFERENCES

- American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. (1991). *AAMFT code of ethics*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- American Association of Pastoral Counsellors. (1994). *Code of ethics*. Fairfax, VA: Author.
- American Counselling Association. (1995). *Code of ethics and standards of practice*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- American Psychological Association. (1992). *Ethical principles for psychologists*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Brownlee, K. (1996). *Ethics in community mental health care: The ethics of non-*

sexual dual relationships: A dilemma for the rural mental health profession. Community Mental Health Journal, 32(5), 497-503.

- Harrow, J. (1996). *The dual-role dilemma*. Available: http://members.aol.com/JehanaS/c_basics/c_bas8.html.
- Haug, I. (1999). *Boundaries and the Use and Misuse of Power and Authority: Ethical Complexities for Clergy Psychotherapists*. Journal of Counselling & Development, 77(4), 411-417.
- National Association of Social Workers. (1996). *NASW Code of Ethics*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Pearson, B. & Piazza, N. (1997). *Counsellor preparation: Classification of dual relationships in the helping professions*. Counsellor Education & Supervision, 37(2), 89-99.
- Pope, K. S., & Vasquez, M. J. (1998). *Ethics in psychotherapy and counselling* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schank, J. & Skovholt, T. (1997). "Dual-relationship dilemmas of rural and small-community psychologists" *Professional Psychology: Research & Practice*, 28(1), 44-49.
- Zur, O. (2000). *In celebration of dual relationships*. Available: <http://www.division42.org/PublicArea/IPSp00/Ethics/Zur.html>.
- Zur, O. (1999). "The demonization of dual relationships", *Independent Thinking Review*, Critical Thinking About Psychology Series, Monograph #2. Oakland, CA: Resources for Independent Thinking.

Ellen C. Friedman is currently writing her thesis on ethics and Wicca for a Master's in mental health counselling at City University in Seattle. A practitioner of Wicca for 19 years, Ellen can be reached at <rivercat@swbell.net>.

The Burning Man Festival: Pre-Apocalypse Party or Post-modern Kingdom of God?

by Sarah M. Pike
California State University, Chico

A sculpture composed of mud and chicken wire and dedicated to the Vedic god Rudra burnt spectacularly in the Nevada night sky on Labor Day weekend, 1998. The fire sacrifice to Rudra consisted of a two-hour-long 'opera,' during which professional opera singers and classically trained musicians as well as dozens of costumed dancers and drummers paid homage to the god, while thousands of participants at the Burning Man festival sat watching in a circle on the prehistoric lakebed of Black Rock Desert. And this was only a warm-up for the festival's main event the following night when a forty-foot tall wooden effigy—the Man—also went up in flames to the drumming and cheers of ten thousand festival-goers. As I left behind the burning remains of the man and walked towards the lights of our temporary city of 10,000, I saw artists torching sculptures that I had wandered by many times over the past several days. Then suddenly, along the distant horizon, a galloping horse (a bicycle cleverly covered with electroluminescent strips) appeared, followed by a huge dragonfly with flashing wings. A feast for the senses, Burning Man merges the enchantment and playfulness of children's worlds with adult content, and it is this mix of elements which draws participants of all ages from across the country, from New York to nearby Reno.

As many commentators note, Burning Man started in 1986 as a small gathering of

friends on a San Francisco beach, before it became too large and wild to escape the attention of city police, necessitating its move to the desert. Larry Harvey burnt a wooden effigy at the end of a relationship and the 'Burning Man' soon became an important rallying point for a small community of artists, musicians and interested onlookers. Burning Man first came to the Black Rock Desert in 1990. Every year the festival attracted more participants, and as this happened, the organizers began to describe their vision for this event and established a few rules, such as 'leave no trace.' By 1997 and 1998, the years I attended Burning Man, it had become a week-long festival involving weeks of advance preparation and clean-up afterwards, mostly done by volunteer crews. A "Public Works" crew creates 'streets' that mark out the half-moon shaped city—'Black Rock City'—that comes to life as festival-goers arrive with camping gear, pavilions, art installations, and a range of temporary desert homes. The city borders the 'playa' as a real city might develop along a lake front. Out on the playa are large sculptures, including the Man himself, and installations, but no campers. Concerts, performance art and other events are scheduled every day and night of the festival, but most festival-goers spend their hours wandering around the temporary city looking at art and visiting 'theme camps,' which are a blend of campsite and interactive art installation. Both years I attended, the festival attracted around 10,000 men and women. Many, but by no means all, participants were white, middle-class, "twentysomething ravers, fiftysomething hippies and thirtysomething computer whizzes" (Lelyveld, 1998, n.p.).

Seeking their dispersed community on the Burning Man Internet bulletin board (<http://bbs.burningman.com>) several days after the festival was over, participants

mourned the end of Burning Man and discussed its impact on their lives: "It was life-changing and the most spiritual experience I've ever had," wrote Shannon (b.b., 2 September 1997). And another message promised, "In the dust I found my family, In the dust I found my clan, In the dust I found hope for us all. Until we burn again I will hold my screams inside, I will keep the ashes burning until again I join my tribe" (Kaosangel, b.b., 2 September 1997). Peri agrees that Burning Man is a place of belonging: "In the Black Rock Desert, I've found a new hometown, where my imagination can sail without limits and bounds... where the aliens and the child-adults find common ground" (b.b., 28 September 1998). In the *Black Rock Gazette*, Burning Man's official newspaper, artist Charlie Gadeken said, "sometimes I feel like my real life exists for 10 days a year and the rest is a bad dream" (Black Rock Gazette, 9/5/98). In his poetic tribute to the festival, I Shambat declares "When life returns to the desert Humanity is rejuvenated/ with dew on our lips and paint on our bodies we enter the kingdom of god" (b.b., 11 September 1998).

This charged language sharply contrasts with journalists' accounts of the festival. While participants focused on the sacred or life-changing experiences that they brought home, *U.S. News and World Report* called it "the anarchist's holiday of choice" (Marks 1997); *Life* reported it as "the largest wienie roast ever" (Dowling 1997); Wired editor Kevin Kelly writing in *Time* designated Burning Man a "meaningless but mesmerizing ritual" (Kelly 1997); the *Print* called it a "pre-apocalypse party" (Kabat and Ivinski 1997); and the *San Francisco Chronicle* described it as an "eccentric six-day art festival in the Nevada desert" (Whiting 1997). News stories tended to focus on the art and

This festival is an important cultural and religious site that exemplifies the migration of religious meaning-making activities out of American temples and churches into other spaces.

elements of debauchery: "measured in terms of artistic and sexual freedom, there is no place else like Black Rock City [the festival encampment of tents, performance stages, and theme camps]," claimed Sam Whiting in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (ibid.). However, what most intrigued me about the festival was that for many participants Burning Man was an event of religious significance, characterized by powerful ritual, myth and symbol; experiences of transcendence or ritual ecstasy; experiences of personal transformation; a sense of shared community; relationship to deity/divine power, and, perhaps most importantly, sacred space.

Burning Man is open to anyone who will pay the gate price (\$65 in 1998) and follow a few rules, such as 'Do Not Drive Your Car in Camp' and 'All Participants Are Required to Remove Their Own Trash and Garbage.' It provides a locus where cultural problems, and especially problems of ultimate meaning, are expressed, analyzed and played with. This festival is an important cultural and religious site that exemplifies the migration of religious meaning-making activities out of American temples and churches into other spaces. Scholars of American religion have judged the decline in church attendance to signal a disestablishment (Hammond 1992), or the increasing personalization of religion (Bellah et al. 1985; Roof 1993), while others have noted the shift from mainline churches

If Burning Man art and ritual feel apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic, as many observers and participants have remarked, this is because fire and sacrifice are their central idioms.

to conservative, experiential forms of Protestantism such as Pentecostalism and independent evangelical churches (Cox 1995). I want to explore the ways in which festival participants create the sacred space that makes transformative and intense experiences possible. I will then explore the ways in which Burning Man reveals crucial tensions in contemporary American life that emerge because of the unique space that the festival creates. In so doing, I want to suggest that popular religious sites like the Burning Man festival are essential to an understanding of contemporary issues and future trends in American cultural and religious life.

THE FESTIVAL AS A PLACE APART

Burning Man belongs to a growing trend (since the late 1960s) of large-scale cultural and religious events that offer alternatives or place themselves in critical opposition to ordinary life. Neo-Pagan festivals, raves, women's music festivals such as Lilith Fair, and rainbow gatherings all offer participants sacred space and ritual. Burning Man and these other events fit David Chidester's characterization of American sacred space: "sacred meaning and significance, holy awe and desire, can coalesce in any place that becomes, even if only temporarily, a site for intensive interpretation" (1995: 14). It also belongs to a tradition of collective occasions

which (to borrow historian Jon Butler's phrase) first flourished in the 'spiritual hothouse' of the 19th century. Chautauquas, outdoor revivals, camp meetings, lyceum programs, and Spiritualist conventions were all intended to transform the minds and spirits of 19th century men and women (Moore 1994). As in descriptions of their 19th century forbearers, accounts of Burning Man have in common the impression that festivals

are not like the everyday world in which most of us live and work. Black Rock City comes to be a place of powerful and transformative experiences that cannot be had elsewhere. What is it about this festival that produces such powerful impressions in participants? How does Burning Man come to be imagined and experienced as such a different place than the world outside? Or, in the words of geographer Yi Fu-Tuan, how does a "space" which is "open and undefined" become a "secure and familiar ... place" for festival-goers (Tuan 1977: 6)? The festival is transformed into a sacred space that contrasts to the outside world in a number of ways. Festival participants create what cultural theorist Rob Shields calls 'place-myths,' composites of rumors, images, and experiences that make particular places fascinating. Burning Man participants tell stories designed to locate the festival in what Shields describes as "an imaginary geography vis-a-vis the place-myths of other towns and regions which form the contrast which established its reputation as a liminal destination" (Shields 1991: 112). Participants work before, during and after festivals at making an experience set apart from their lives 'back home.'

Much of the advance planning and networking as well as post-festival discussions takes place on the Internet, where contact information, festival journals, photographs,

and short videos are shared. Cyberfiction writer Bruce Sterling notes in his report from Burning Man that the festival has evolved into "a physical version of the Internet" (1996: 198). An extended festival narrative of words and pictures exists through links from website to website, allowing festival participants to keep their community alive across the country. The World Wide Web, notes Janet Murray, "is becoming a global autobiography project ... pushing digital narrative closer to the mainstream" (Murray 1997: 252; see also Turkle 1995). Burning Man is just one of many real world events that are extending their life through the Internet and creating new forums for narrative. At the 9th Annual Be-In in January 1997, Larry Harvey discussed the similarities and differences between Burning Man and cyberspace: on the one hand, says Harvey, Burning Man is a compelling physical analog for cyberspace because "it is possible to reinvent oneself and one's world aided only by a few modest props and an active imagination," but on the other, Burning Man, unlike cyberspace, is an experience which heightens awareness of the body (Burning Man website, www.burningman.com).

Its life on the Internet contributes to the sense that Burning Man is not like the churches and homes of ordinary life, it is a marginal site or 'heterotopia,' to borrow Michel Foucault's term. There are places in every culture, says Foucault, "which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which ... all the other real sites... are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (1986: 24). At Burning Man, Mark writes to the bulletin board, "I felt as if I *belonged* somewhere, a sensation that is curiously difficult to maintain in the Midwest" (12 September 1998). Like many others, Pan-o'-Playa regrets his return to ordinary life: "I'm trying not to let

the tar, nicotine and sludge of this, the Outer World, drag me down" (b.b., 15 September 1998). Festival-goers reject and vilify the outside world in order to heighten their sense of the festival as a more important reality. I noticed this when I returned from Burning Man '98 and began reading messages on the Burning Man bulletin board, many of which expressed a longing to return to Burning Man and contempt for normal life: "Buddy, this is our church, this is our respite from suffering through 358 days of christian-inspired, bore-me-to-death society with all its mind-numbing institutions, corporations, and television. This is where we pray, this is our sacred place," wrote Mark (b.b., 2 September 1997). Like Mark, many festival goers describe their Burning Man experience in such a way as to protest the ordinary world outside festival bounds. After Burning Man '98, I Shambat described the contrast between being in the outside world and being at the festival in a long poem he wrote to the bulletin board: "Come, disaffected/ suburbanites/ Souls like oil-splattered rags/ Minds torn up in the clock:/ Come, take your mind-rags/ and heart-rags/ And let desert/ Cleanse them/ With Holy Fire" (b.b., 11 September 1998). In this view, the outside world has corrupted and oppressed the men and women who arrive at Black Rock City to be cleansed, renewed, and initiated into a different reality.

The festival is conducive to powerful experiences because it is imagined as a blank canvas, a frontier of possibilities and unrealized potential—"the vacant heart of the Wild West" as one observer put it (Van Rhey, 1998). Larry Harvey instructs festival-goers to "Imagine the land and the looming lakebed of the playa as a vast blank screen, a limitless ground of being" (Harvey, Burning Man website, 8/97). And *Piss Clear*, Black Rock City's other newspaper, reminds festi-

val-goers: "all that lays before us is the wide open playa floor. It is our palette and canvas, to create the world we can't enjoy at home." The land is thought of as something passive that human imaginings can be projected upon, and at the same time as a living force that must be dealt with. In 'Burning Man and the Environment,' Harvey explains the relationship between Black Rock Desert and the festival: "We have discovered a new land; it is a place, a home, a living earth we can possess. And just as surely as our sweat will saturate this soil, it will possess us" (BM web-site). The construction of Burning Man as a place apart is facilitated by its remote location in a desert about 110 miles north of Reno, near the tiny town of Gerlach. Black Rock Country, a small portion of the Great Basin, is surrounded by the Granite, Calico, Black Rock, and Selenite mountain ranges. In the Nevada desert survival is an issue; scorching sun, sandstorms and sudden rain make the environment challenging for city-dwellers. Storms wreak havoc on campsites and art work at the same time that they bring together festival-goers in the common project of keeping their tents up and sheltering each other from the elements. The challenges and opportunities posed by this desert space encourage festival-goers to work together creating shrines, art work, communal spaces and ritual events.

One of the most effective ways that Burning Man establishes itself as a 'church' of sorts is through anti-religious art and the subversive appropriation of familiar symbols. One example of festival-goers' playful irony is the Temple of Idle Worship at Burning Man '98. A sign at the temple instructed visitors: "you can light candles and prostrate yourself all you want, but your prayers won't be answered: the Deity is napping" (*Black Rock Gazette*, 1997). In the 'What, Where, When of Burning Man '98,' a guide to festival

events and exhibits, the Temple of Idle Worship is described as a "spiritual power point on the playa," but visitors to the temple are warned that "it makes no difference in what way you recognize this power as all forms of ritual and observance are meaningless here." In "Festival: A Sociological Approach," Jean Duvignaud writes that "all observers agree that festival involves a powerful denial of the established order" (1976: 19). Folklorist Beverly Stoeltje explains that "in the festival environment principles of reversal, repetition, juxtaposition, condensation, and excess flourish ..." (1992: 268). These principles are everywhere apparent at Burning Man and help to give participants memorable experiences through contrasts between everyday life and the festival.

Although festival-goers contrast their Burning Man experience to life in the outside world, they borrow the idioms of that world in order to criticize organized religion, consumerism and social mores. During Burning Man '98 I came upon a confessional in the shape of a large wooden nun painted colorfully with flames coming up from the bottom of her robe and words along her head reading 'Sacred Disorder of the Enigmata!?' and 'Confess Your Conformities!' In front of the nun confessional a framed sign, 'the Enigmatic Psalm of Eural,' was written in biblical language, but its meaning intentionally obscured. When I walked through the confessional's curtains I was faced by a round mirror decorated and painted with the message: 'Be Your Own Messiah.' The appropriation of religious symbolism both reifies and critically comments on Catholic practice. It is a playful display, yet serious in its underlying critique, an attitude mimicked in dozens of other festival appropriations of religious symbolism. On my first day at Burning Man '97, I noticed a two-foot statue of the Virgin Mary squirting out a stream of water for

thirsty festival-goers. In the Burning Man world, all religions and traditions are up for grabs and authenticity, authority, and purity are not at issue.

In the eclectic world of Burning Man, artists and performers also borrow from non-Christian religions and cultures that are foreign to most Americans. An advance notice of 'performances' published on the Burning Man site two weeks before the 1997 festival described the 'daughters of Ishtar,' a lavish production of opera, music, dance and ritual: "This ritual of death and resurrection is a revival of an ancient Sumerian cult, after 3,000 years of latency." Another announcement, this one for 'Blue Girl,' promises: "The intergalactic Fertility Goddess from the 16th Dimension will arrive to seduce you with eerie multilingual arias; her ship is fueled by drummers and such cult leaders as the Buddha, Krishna, L. Ron Hubbard and the Easter Bunny." Here futuristic thinking—'intergalactic'—is grounded in the ancient notion of a fertility goddess, and juxtaposed with cultural figures as serious as the Buddha and as marketable as the Easter Bunny. Many theme camps included signs with religious references like 'Buddha's Seaside Den of Iniquity,' 'Confess Your Sins!' and 'Repent.' If sin is not exactly celebrated at the festival, its meaning is called into question by festival-goers' playful irony and an atmosphere of revelry.

Religious idioms are decontextualized in order to make fun of and protest religious institutions of the outside world, but they can also be appropriated for constructive purposes and made to serve the festival community. On my first afternoon exploring the playa by bike I spotted a series of signs with sketches of churches on them that directed people to an orange tent called 'The Cathed-

The themes of sacrifice and redemption, death and rebirth, disintegration and creation suggest that for many participants the festival's impact is profound. But the symbolic significance of the Man's demise is still up for grabs ...

dral of the Wholly Sacred.' In front of the tent opening was a hand-painted sign that read, "Offer something, leave anything, anything sacred to you, your dog, our time here on the playa, the desert, Jewel, Leo Trotsky, whatever. (Sanctity is Contingent.)" I stepped inside the carpeted tent, glad for some relief from the desert heat. An altar, covered with Indian-print cloth and candles as well as a variety of objects left by visitors, served as the Cathedral's centerpiece. Offerings left in front of the altar included good luck candles, incense, a basket with chili peppers, chapstick, tobacco, a conch shell, silver sandals, a mother goddess statuette, clay figures fashioned of clay left out for visitors to use, sunglasses, and necklaces. Visitors had written messages in a small notebook left out for that purpose: 'free to be you and me'; "Death, abandonment, pain, sorrow—Burning Man show me happiness again"; "the desert exposes us—shows our true nature and forces us to learn lessons. I pray that I am strong enough to endure even when there is despair. Love, freedom, life"; "I give thanks to the ancestors"; and other notes. Like a traditional church or shrine, the 'Cathedral' offered a space of contemplation in which festival-goers could share with each other their thoughts about the festival, and the

If sin is not exactly celebrated at the festival, its meaning is called into question by festival-goers' playful irony and an atmosphere of revelry.

altar within the shrine created a focal point for visitors' reflections.

Altar art is one of the most ubiquitous forms of expression throughout the festival and the smallest of sacred spaces. Public altars invite participation by the whole community and are specifically designed to contribute to the festival experience. One of the altars I saw in 1997 was covered with photos, a plastic skull, bottles of beer, candles for saints and other odd objects, with a sign instructing people to 'alter the altar.' This community altar made possible a conversation between participants who might never meet each other face to face. It also gave them an opportunity to help create the meaning of Burning Man with their shared prayers and confessions. Participation is a key festival theme: 'No Spectators' is one of Burning Man's slogans, and festival-goers are constantly reminded that they are responsible for the production of festival space. Altars and other sacred places are self-consciously designed to bring together individual and community. They serve diverse purposes and accumulate meanings over a short period of time by providing points of focus in the midst of the visual complexity of festivals.

SACRIFICE AND TRANSFORMATION

Many altars, shrines, rituals and art at Burning Man play with apocalyptic themes and Christian sacrificial metaphors. If Burning Man art and ritual feel apocalyptic or post-

apocalyptic, as many observers and participants have remarked, this is because fire and sacrifice are their central idioms. "Nevada's sixth-largest city was torched Sunday night as the Burning Man spit sparks and fell over backward onto the desert floor" (Whiting 1997).

Crosses dot the Burning Man landscape and are played with and re-defined by festival-goers. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that before the actual burning of the man, "a man named Highway Hal stood naked on a motorized cross" (ibid.). Fred describes his experience this way: "the man burnt and so did my outer skin giving me space and movement to grow into another year" (b.b., 2 September 1997). Fire symbolically strips off the self at the same time that it is physically felt, furthering the purification the festival is expected to bring about. Shady Backflash explains the symbolism of the Burning Man: "It felt like the collective fears, rage and frustrations of everyone there were going up in smoke" (b.b., 11 September 1998). "The Man," writes Bruce Sterling, "becomes a striking neon symbol of pretty much everything that matters." It is ironic that the sacrificed Man stands at the center of the festival, a community that celebrates its opposition to Christianity. The sacrificial meaning of Burning Man varies from person to person. It may aid the cause of personal renewal, cleanse self and community, or provide a means of creating a new self and world out of the ashes of the old.

Sacrifice and transformation are furthered by the expectation that attending the festival is a pilgrimage to a different kind of world that offers new and exciting experiences. Festival-goers embark on a kind of pilgrimage as they leave behind the ordinary world and travel to the desert to be transformed—"pil-

grims to a new land" the 1997 web guidelines called them. Festival-goers travel toward Black Rock City with expectations built up in earlier conversations about the festival and then maintained by festival rituals and works of art that their lives will be changed by the festival experience. "As pilgrims to a new land, each of us becomes a founder" notes Larry Harvey (8/7/97). Festival-goers' accounts of their preparations and trips to festivals are similar to the stories of other religious people described in studies of pilgrimage (Turner and Turner 1978; Orsi 1991; Crumrine and Morinis, eds., 1991; Morinis, ed., 1992; Haberman 1994; Myerhoff 1974). Burning Man, George points out on the bulletin board, is "what today's faithful experience in Mecca or Rome, only without all that burdensome dogma" (b.b., 2 September 1997). In his introduction to a collection of essays on pilgrimage, Alan Morinis explains that what is essential to pilgrimage is a quest for what is sacred, especially the valued ideas and images of communal and personal perfection (1992: 18-21). Burning Man participants set off from home hoping to experience ideal communities and to discover new selves at the festival, which then becomes for them a sacred space of unlimited possibilities.

The journey is often described by festival-goers as one of personal transformation and healing. Because identity is malleable in festival space, self-transformation comes more easily. Hanuman tells other bulletin board readers: "My old self has been torched! I am reborn!" (b.b., 2 September 1997). Participants create the festival with art, dance, and ritual, but Burning Man also acts on them in ways that open up the possibility for natural and supernatural experiences otherwise unavailable: "I can't believe the power that all of you have helped me see within myself," writes Pamela (b.b., 2 September 1997). Many reports from Burning Man mention

the ways in which it is a life-changing and initiatory experience. Some festival-goers wish for friends and community to be renewed as well as for self-transformation. In the journal where visitors to the 'Temple of the Wholly Sacred' put down their thoughts about the festival, one person wrote: "May men find their gentleness as they rise phoenix-like from this fire here. The new face of power." Self-transformation is mirrored in the hybrid art forms that abound at Burning Man, such as art cars and bicycles masquerading as giant insects or horses, or the life-like figures that seemed to be emerging out of the playa dust (or sinking into it). "Cars morph into bugs and software programmers into painted pagans" reported Jennifer Kabat in *Print* (1997). The boundaries between human and nature as well as between human and machine are open to question and experimentation during the festival.

Festivals promote creative self-expression and sensual enjoyment, and in so doing, enable festival-goers to go beyond their usual ways of carrying themselves and acting towards others. In order to create a 'super-real' festival world of meanings absent from the workplace and urban landscape, festival-goers highlight what is lacking for them outside, such as sexual freedom. Bodily changes such as moving more slowly help festival-goers to forget the fast pace of their everyday lives. They speak of the festival as a place of enhanced sensory perceptions or altered awareness. Even time is lived differently at the festival, as Pan-o'-Playa points out in a diary-like message to the bulletin board: "I am very quickly slowing down to a Playa clock and mindset" (b.b., 23 September 1998). This slowing down, the sense that festival space and time are different from ordinary life, is experienced through the body, and it is the body as much as the mind that

is changed by Burning Man. One participant, in her third year of law school, remarks on the contrast: "after spending the year in the oppressive confines of a rigorous brain-washing, soul-crushing enterprise like law school, Burning Man brings me back to myself. I remember what it feels to laugh until I cry! ... to dance until I fall down ... to make friends with people I have no immediate reason to distrust ... to walk around naked and love it, never feeling ashamed of my body, but rather being fully present in it" (Julie, b.b., 5 September 1997). Layney, a first-time festival-goer, gives thanks for "the chance to be part of something that really makes sense.... I have it in my bones." She describes the physical changes and heightened awareness of being in her body and moving differently that resulted from dancing around a fire late at night: "I danced myself into a new existence ... I ground myself into the sweet desert earth and set free to a blazing fire" (b.b., 2 September 1997). The body is simultaneously liberated and constrained. The hot and dry festival environment constantly reminds festival-goers of their embodied existence. But nudity, dancing, body paint and costuming can liberate the body as well as insist on its presence.

CONCLUSIONS

In the many ways I have suggested, Burning Man participants establish—through narrative, ritual, and fantasy—a contrast between the festival world and everyday society, in which the former takes on a heightened reality and represents for participants a world made over by festival-goers' views of economics (barter system), law enforcement (tolerant and self-policing), gender, ecology, and the nature of the divine. Mike explains that for him, Burning Man was "idol worship in the purest sense," rather than "a media-created god or goddess" (b.b., 2 September 1997).

Anthropologist Margaret Thompson Drewel, building on the earlier work of Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, writes that in Yoruba culture, "rituals operate not merely as models of and for society that somehow stand timelessly alongside 'real' life. Rather they construct what reality is and how it is experienced and understood" (1992, 174). Burning Man works hard to represent itself as a new reality. Festival organizers' website statement, "Building Burning Man: The Official Journal of the Burning Man Project," begins by explaining that the festival is a critical response to corporate America and an antidote to consumerism, then asks rhetorically, "Where else, but in America, would people be invited to pack their belongings, journey into a desert wilderness, and there create the portrait of a visionary world?" (winter 1998) There is an expectation and excitement in the festival atmosphere that makes participants feel that they are contributing to a powerful social force. Festival literature and art installations underscore this aspect of the festival with their apocalyptic language of sacrifice and redemption.

The themes of sacrifice and redemption, death and rebirth, disintegration and creation suggest that for many participants the festival's impact is profound. But the symbolic significance of the Man's demise is still up for grabs: "meaning' is dog meat in the face of experiment and experience" is how *Village Voice* writer Erik Davis sums up festival-goers' attitudes towards interpretations of Burning Man (1995). In fact, festival-goers debate the festival's meaning before, during, and after Burning Man. The most striking characteristic of Burning Man literature and bulletin board discussions about Burning Man are the conflicts that emerge as participants and organizers create festival space, experience the festival, deconstruct their

experiences after the fact, and plan for next year's festival. Criticism as well as praise of the festival appeared on the bulletin board and fueled debates over intrusive photographers, 'gawkers,' neighborliness, and environmental issues. Concern for the festival's environmental impact have threatened the festival's future at this site. Other bulletin board readers responded by urging everyone to focus on the positive, life-affirming aspects of Burning Man, rather than its failures. By emphasizing first their separation from the outside world and, second, their unity as tribe and family, the Burning Man community tries to downplay inner differences and contradictions.

Participants expect Burning Man to embody their ideals, but the festival does not always live up to such expectations. In fact, it may perpetuate the social problems festival-goers say they want most to change, such as wastefulness and rigid organizational structures. "Like it or not, Burning Man is not about survival. At its most extreme, it's about projecting our God-fearing red-blooded American values of waste, greed and debauchery on an empty canvas of dust and air. And at its most innocent, it's an escape valve from the societal rules that bear down on us daily" (McKenzie, *Piss Clear*, 1997). Thus the opposition between festival and outer worlds is often complicated by the many differences between festival-goers, and the realization that instead of leaving the outer world behind, they have brought its problems with them. Tripper, for instance, understands Burning Man somewhat differently than the "many airheads" who "gush on about what a utopian experience Black Rock City is, when all it really is is an amalgam of twisted reflections, magnifications, and rejections of the culture we purport to

... when Americans describe their spirituality they talk most about personal empowerment and self-expression rather than the requirements of community ...

leave behind" (b.b., 23 September 1998). Controversies at Burning Man follow a pattern described in an extensive literature by folklorists and anthropologists on festivals as places where conflicts are worked on and resolved. Roger D. Abrahams argues that public events provide opportunities for 'perilous play': confrontation, negotiation and creative responses to social tensions. Festivals and fairs, explain Abrahams "in part dramatize and reinforce the existing social structure," but they also, as in the case of Burning Man, "insist ... that such structure be ignored or inverted, or flatly denied" (1982a: 304).

An uneasy dynamic develops at Burning Man which reveals the tensions between individual and community that the festival is intended to harmonize. Festival-goers gather to share a common experience, but in so doing they may discover the many differences that separate them and threaten their efforts at community-building. Of all the tensions and contradictions that characterize Burning Man, none is as charged as the relationship between self and community. In "The Year of Community—You are a Founder," Larry Harvey describes his understanding of Burning Man: "Ours is a society of activists and your experience of our community will be defined by two essential elements: radical self-expression and a shared struggle to survive" (BM website, 1997). Burning Man participants engage in self-

exploration and commune with nature at festivals, but they also establish important friendships and intimate relationships with other festival-goers. Observers of the relationship between self and community in the contemporary United States have argued that Americans tend to emphasize the needs of the self over those of the community. Robert Bellah and his colleagues point out that when Americans describe their spirituality they talk most about personal empowerment and self-expression rather than the requirements of community (1985; see also Roof 1993; Anderson 1990). In contrast, Burning Man emphasizes both the needs of the self and the creation of community. Self-expression is encouraged but must be constantly tempered by consideration for one's neighbors.

If the festival is a site for life-changing experiences of self and community, for the creation of new religious and cultural visions, then, for these reasons, it is a contested site. The festival works its transformative magic on participants because of a set of contradictions that exist within it: they imagine the desert as a 'blank canvas' as well as a 'living land'; the language of 'tribes' and 'villages' coexists with advanced electronic technologies; festival-goers constantly negotiate between self-expression and the needs of community; in festival art and ritual they express desire for both sacrifice and salvation; and Burning Man's apocalyptic overtones are meant to both describe the disenchantment and decay of American life today and envision a future that is rejuvenative as well as destructive. It is the creative work that characterizes Burning Man—playing with symbolic meanings and creating new rituals from old—in response to these sets of dilemmas, that transforms the festival into places of meaning.

WORKS CITED:

- Abrahams, Roger D. 1982a. "Shouting Match at the Border: The Folklore of Display Events." in *And Other Neighborly Names: Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore*, ed. Richard Bauman and Roger D. Abrahams, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press: 303-321.
- Anderson, Walter Truett. 1990. *Reality Isn't What It Used To Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-To-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Bellah, Robert N., et al. 1985. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Chidester, David. 1995. "Introduction" in *American Sacred Space*, eds. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 1-42.
- Cox, Harvey. 1995. *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishers.
- Crumrine, N. Ross, and Alan Morinis, eds. 1991. *Pilgrimage in Latin America*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Davis, Erik. 1995. "Terminal Beach Party: Warming Up to the Burning Man." *Village Voice* (31 October): 31 - 34.
- Dowling, Claudia. 1997. "Life Goes to the Burning Man Festival." *Life* (August): 16-18.
- Drewel, Margaret Thompson. 1992. *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Duvignaud, Jean. 1976. "Festivals: A Sociological Approach." *Cultures* 3, no. 1: 13-25.
- Foucault, Michel. 1986. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 22-27.
- Haberman, David L. 1994. *Journey Through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hammond, Phillip E. 1992. *Religion and Personal Autonomy: The Third Disestablishment in America*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press.
- Kabat, Jennifer, and Pamela A. Ivinski. 1997. "Operation Desert Swarm." *Print* (September/October): 4 - 5.
- Kelly, Kevin. 1997. "Bonfire of the Techies." *Time* (25 August): 60 -62.
- Lelyveld, Nita. "Wild Westfest." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (9 September 1998, phillynews.com/inquirer/98/Sep/09/lifestyle): n.p.
- Marks, John. 1997. "Burning Man Meets Capitalism." *U.S. News and World Report* (28 July): 46 - 47.
- Moore, R. Laurence. 1994. *Selling God: American Religion on the Cultural Marketplace*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morinis, Alan, ed. 1992. *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Murray, Janet H. 1997. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York: The Free Press.
- Myerhoff, Barbara G. 1982. "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox." In *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, ed., Victor Turner, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press: 109-135.
- Orsi, Robert A. 1991. "The Center Out There, In Here, and Everywhere Else: The Nature of Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Saint Jude, 1929-1965." *Journal of Social History* 25, no. 2 (Winter): 213-232.
- Roof, Wade Clark. 1993. *A Generation of Seekers*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Shields, Rob. 1991. *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. New York: Routledge.
- Sterling, Bruce. 1996. "Greetings from Burning Man." *Wired* 4 (November): 196-207.
- Stoeltje, Beverly. 1992. "Festival." in *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centred Handbook*, ed. Richard Bauman, Oxford: Oxford UP: 266-269.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1977. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Turkle, Sherry. 1995. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Turner, Victor and Edith Turner. 1978. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Van Rhey, Darryl. 1998. "The New American Holiday" in "Building Burning Man: The Official Journal of the Burning Man Project", Burning Man website, winter.
- Whiting, Sam. 1997. "A Blaze of Glory." *San Francisco Chronicle* (2 September): E1-E2.

Sarah Pike has a PhD in Religious Studies from Indiana University with a minor in Women's Studies. She is currently Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at California State University, Chico. Dr Pike has contributed the entries on "Apocalypticism", "Psychic", and "Dowsing" in The Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Religion, ed. W.C. Roof (NY: Macmillan, 2000), and the articles "Rationalizing the Margins: A Review of Scholarly Research on Neo-Paganism", and "Forging Magical Selves: Gendered Bodies and Ritual Fires at Neo-Pagan Festivals", in Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: SUNY, 1996). Look for her forthcoming publications, Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: The Search for Community in Contemporary Paganism. (Berkeley: UC Press, January 2001), and "Desert Gods, Apocalyptic Art, and the Making of Sacred Space at the Burning Man Festival" in God in the Details: American Religion in Everyday Life, ed. K. McCarthy and E. Mazur (NY: Routledge, 2001).

The Folklore of *The Wicker Man*

by Leslie Ellen Jones

This article explores that very modern icon of antiquity, The Wicker Man, and is reprinted from 3rd Stone 36. 3rd Stone magazine is enthusiastically recommended to our readers, who are encouraged to visit its website at <www.thirdstone.demon.co.uk>.

A holier-than-thou policeman travels to a remote Scottish island to investigate the alleged disappearance of a young girl. He is faced with all the conventions of an outsider in a rural village: the uncommunicative locals who all seem to be in on a joke that's beyond his ken, the peculiar customs of an isolated community, the sinister nobleman (tall, dark and handsome, of course), the luscious wench (blonde, buxom and bare-assed, ditto), all leading to the universal climax of the Trickster Rube tale type, whether played for chills or laughs: the city boy may think he knows it all, but the country bumpkin can outsmart him every time. Stories of this type usually don't go so far as burning the snotty outlander to death in a huge, human-shaped wicker cage as a desperate attempt to restore fertility to the blighted crops, but there you are.

The Wicker Man (1973), written by Anthony Shaffer and directed by Robin Hardy, starring Edward Woodward and Christopher Lee, is a staple of virtually every video store's Cult Classics section, along with the collected oeuvre of David Lynch, Ken Russell, and Ed Wood. Nonetheless, the BFI

just ranked *The Wicker Man* number 96 in its list of the 100 best British films of the century. I have made it required viewing for classes on Celtic Paganism taught at UCLA and Harvard, only to discover that at least half of the class has already seen it and is eager to see it, and discuss it, again. The pivotal theme in these discussions is the nature of human sacrifice, and its role in the confrontation of two opposing religious systems, one based on the symbolic recreation of the single, voluntary sacrifice made by Jesus as the manifestation of God in human form, and the other based (as Sgt Howie discovers all too late) on the occasional but literal sacrifice of a common mortal, as one among many animals, to jump-start the cyclical renewal of all natural life.

The islanders, we are told, have reverted to their original religion, the one they practiced before the coming of Christianity, and the gods they worship bear Celtic names: Nuada, the king of the divine Tuatha De Danann of the Irish, and Afallenau, an untested but appropriate goddess whose Welsh name means simply apples. The island itself is an island of apples like the Arthurian Avalon, an Otherworldly paradise of non-commercialism, free love, and a balmy climate. The islanders' worship of their pagan gods comprises British Folklore's Greatest Hits: dancing around the May Pole, leaping over bonfires, masking, Morris dancing, pouring liquor into the sea and, of course, burning the Wicker Man. All of these customs are noted in the folklore literature of the 19th and early 20th century, particularly within the pages of James George Frazer's *Golden Bough*. Nearly all of them are attested as actually occurring somewhere in Britain well into the 20th century. Except, of course, the practice of burning people alive. That, the film implies, is a last fleeting survival or revival from the time when men were strong,

women were soft, sheep were scared, and Celts were Celts.

Julius Caesar made the earliest known reference to what, for lack of a better term, we now know as the Wicker Man, an immense structure in human form which, he claims, the Gauls of 1st century BCE France would stuff full of malefactors and set alight as a sacrifice to the gods. His allegations were echoed by Strabo, who added several other quaint Gaulish idiosyncrasies to the list: stabbing men in the back, shooting them with arrows or impaling them, and taking divinations from their death-throes. Burning and impaling are also mentioned by Diodorus Siculus as methods of sacrificing criminals, and impaling turns up in Dio Cassius as part of Boudicca's bag of tricks. Pliny adds cannibalism to the charges. Lucan, in the *Pharsalia*, mentions three Gaulish gods, Teutates (the God of the Tribe), Esus (possibly the Lord or the Master), and Taranis (the Thunderer), and states that each had a favourite form of sacrifice: drowning, hanging, and burning respectively (Kendrick 1966; Chadwick 1966; and Piggott 1975 summarize and reproduce the Classical material; for comment on the commentators see Jones 1998: 1-30).

The question of whether the Celts practiced human sacrifice has a long and contentious history. Did any of the Celtic tribes of Iron Age Europe practice human sacrifice?

The emergence of Neopaganism in the second half of the 20th century seems to be leading to a shift in the emotional associations of the wicker man image, inspired, I believe, in a large part by the cult popularity of *The Wicker Man*.

All of them, or only the Gauls? All of the Gauls, or some of the Gauls? All Gauls all the time, or only under special circumstances? Was this actually human sacrifice or merely a misinterpretation of an ancient means of capital punishment? A slander generated by Caesar to whip up support for his Gaulish campaigns, and repeated by others to forward similar political agendas? A commonplace of the Posidonian ethnographic tradition mindlessly parroted by his followers? A stereotypical accusation against The Other as Savage Barbarian (as opposed to The Other as Noble Savage)? If the Celts did practice human sacrifice, where were the bodies buried?

As it turns out, one of them was buried in Lindow Moss, outside of present-day Manchester. Outside of the pages of Classical ethnography, Lindow Man is the single best evidence of Celtic human sacrifice in Britain, and this is to say, he is the best because he is pretty much the only. One problem of identifying human sacrifice, of course, is that it is often difficult to distinguish between a corpse that was murdered or killed in battle and one that was dispatched by ritual means. The reason that Lindow Man can be identified as a sacrificial victim is that archaeologically-determined circumstances leading up to his death, the method of his killing, and the disposal of his body all indicate a deliberate

ritual that is in conformity with what we know of the symbolic systems of the Iron Age tribes of Western Europe, on the one hand, and of the Celtic-speaking peoples of medieval Britain and Ireland, on the other (Ross & Robins 1989).

Lindow Man was struck on the back of the skull with a heavy instrument, garrotted, stabbed in the jugular, and deposited in a shallow pool. If his body had not been preserved in the peat and only his skeleton recovered, wouldn't he have just been marked down as another victim of battle with a cracked skull and a broken neck? In con-

ceptual terms, his death seems to accord with Lucan's account of the sacrificial methods appropriate to his divine triumvirate (Ward 1970 discusses the variation between striking and burning as appropriate sacrifices to a god of thunder). Anne Ross has interpreted the strip of fox fur that is Lindow Man's only adornment as a clue to his name, which she suggests is *Livornios*, a name attested among Continental Celts meaning 'fox'. I am inclined to see it instead as a tagging of the victim as an outlaw, in conformity with the observation that the Celts preferred to sacrifice criminals. The Celts, as so many other peoples, regarded the fox as an outlaw animal. Compare, for instance, the folkloric version of Patrick's letter to the British king Coroticus which, by condemning his harass-

The team that created *The Wicker Man* have stated quite plainly that their starting point for the script was *The Golden Bough*. ... it is this modern mythology, rather than any literal survivals from the pre-Christian past, that underlies contemporary Neopaganism.

& Rees 1961:326-41). These deaths are not human sacrifices per se, but neither can they be dismissed as merely domestic murders or deaths in battle. The death of Lleu Llaw Gyffes in the Middle Welsh tale of Math vab Mathonwy (not easy to accomplish, as Lleu himself points out) requires him to be shot through with a spear worked on only during the time that Mass is being performed—and the word used for Mass in the text is *aberth*, literally 'sacrifice', as opposed to the more common word *offeren* for [Catholic] Mass (Williams 1982: 86)—while standing on the edge of a tub in which he has just bathed, uniting the themes of impaling and drowning. Surely a simple *crime passionnel* wouldn't require such elaborate, Rube Goldberg preparations? The plot twists necessary to

ment of Christians, caused him to turn into a fox and flee from the human world into the wild (see Nagy 1998: 104-5 for a discussion of this episode). The effect of outlawry is to place the individual outside of human society, making him an excellent symbolic mediator between the realms of the human and the supernatural as he simultaneously belongs to both and neither.

While Lindow Man's death harks back to the forms of sacrifice alleged in real life on the Continent, it also resonates with ritual deaths described in the medieval literature of Ireland and Wales (Rees

manoeuvre Diarmat mac Cerbaill (OGrady 1892: 2:76-88) into a tub full of ale in a burning house with a spear in his chest so that he can be conveniently pole-axed by a falling burning beam likewise suggest something more than a verdict of death by misadventure. Especially since another tale tells us that virtually the same fate befell Muirertach mac Erca (Cross & Slover 1969: 519-32).

Indeed, the phrase *guin 7 báudud 7 loscud*, "wounding and drowning and burning" is a standard description for a peculiarly ritually death in medieval Irish literature, even when the king in question hasn't actually suffered all three fates (see Dalton 1970, O Cuiv 1973, and Radner 1983; Ward 1970 offers a broader Indo-European context). Joan Radner (1983: 184-5) has pointed out that whatever its historical context, the Threefold Death constitutes what she calls a riddle death, in which an apparently self-contradictory prophecy or series of prophecies is fulfilled by the bizarre nature of his final fate. Not only kings but religious figures with both pagan and Christian affinities such as Suibhne Geilt, Myrddin, and Lailoken suffer these fates (Tolstoy 1985:170-86) whose narration is really concerned with not so much the nature of death as the nature of prophecy. Riddle deaths express a blasting of the certainties of either/or thinking, placing the victim in a cognitive liminal zone that allows him to show that you can get There from Here. Why, after all, does one commit a sacrifice, human or otherwise? Isn't the whole point to communicate with the gods, to send them a message and a request? Perhaps the peculiar potency of human sacrifice lies in the perception that a human messenger is the most lucid vehicle for the request. The medium is the message.

While no medieval tale makes mention of a burning wicker structure, suspicious deaths and miraculous escapes from burning houses

occur fairly frequently. In two cases, Mesca Ulaid (Cross & Slover 1969:215-38) and Branwen verch Lyr (Jones & Jones 1974:24-40), far from being easily-combustible wicker, the houses in question are made of iron, and at least some of the inhabitants escape due to their exceptional strength. Conaire Mór, at the end of Togail Bruidne Da Derga (Cross & Slover 1969: 93-126), escapes the burning hostel, only to discover that all the waters of Ireland have dried up in signification of the loss of his sovereignty. His hero, Mac Cecht, finally arrives with water to discover Conaire's head being struck off and dashes the water over the mutilated neck, which in true severed-head form thanks him for it. Finally, St Patrick himself utilizes the motif of the burning house as the climax of his first battle of miracles with the forces of pagan druidry. He sends his proxy, Benignus, into one half of a wooden house clad in the druid's robe, while the druid Luccet Mael enters the other half dressed in Benignus' clothing. After the house has been burned to the ground, Benignus is alive, though naked, and the druid has been burnt to a crisp, though the saintly boy's robe is as good as new (see Jones 1998: 46-59 for this episode, and a general discussion of Patrick as a fiery saint). In most of these cases, the miraculous or supernatural aspect of the burning house motif is that those who emerge from the burning house still talk, and by talking tell their story, carry a message.

Patrick is credited in the Metrical Dindshenchas with eradicating human sacrifice to the idol Cromm Cruaich at Mag Sleacht: "For him ingloriously they slew their hapless firstborn with much wailing and peril, to pour their blood around Cromm Cruaich. / Milk and corn they asked of him speedily in return for a third part of all their progeny: great was the horror and outcry about him" (Gwynn 1924: 18-2). Here we have an actual

reference to Celtic human sacrifice for the sake of the fertility of the land, though hardly an eye-witness account. Likewise, in the story of the Adventure of Art mac Conn the blight that has fallen upon Ireland (due to the inappropriate marriage of the king, Art, and the archetypal Bad Fairy, Bécuma) can, according to the druids, only be reversed by the sacrifice of a (sexually) sinless man (Cross & Slover 1969: 491-502; O Hehir 1983). Both of these cases cannot escape the suspicion of having been influenced by Christian morality and Biblical and Classical paradigms. The sacrifice of firstborn children to an awful god resonates with Biblical references to child sacrifices to Moloch, and also of the plague visited on the Egyptians; the ultimate substitution of a magical cow for the sinless boy gives a peculiarly Irish twist to the stories of both Abraham and Isaac and Agamemnon and Iphigenia (see McCone 1990: 152-3 and generally for the possible interrelations of Irish and Biblical myth).

Archaeology, then, provides a little evidence of persistent human sacrifice among the Celts. What evidence exists suggests that when it occurred, it was a rare event possibly undertaken in the most drastic of circumstances. Literary evidence suggests that by the medieval era, at least, the people of Ireland, Scotland and Wales found the idea of ritual death a useful mythological tool for expressing the ambiguous relationship between the natural and supernatural worlds. They also participated in the wide-spread trope of distinguishing Us and Them, in this case constructed as pagan and Christian, by who performs human sacrifice and doesn't perform human sacrifice. This may well be the same mental process that was at work in the original ascription of human sacrifice to the Celts by Posidonios and his school. Or maybe it isn't.

While there is no evidence of the literal

sacrifice of human beings and animals by burning them alive in a wicker edifice, in fact the burning of wicker or straw man-shaped colossi, often filled with snakes or cats, was practiced in France, the Netherlands, and Britain up to the 19th century, usually as part of Midsummer celebrations. The most easily-accessible source for these customs is James George Frazer's often-derided *Golden Bough* (1913:2: 31-44; though Hutton 1996 also notes many of the same customs in the British Isles) but, whatever one may think of Frazer's explanations of these rituals (see Fraser 1990), he cannot be beat as an indefatigable collator of primary source material. Given that the geographical distribution of these folkloric wicker men corresponds pretty closely with the distribution of the Celtic tribes at the time that Caesar first wrote of the wicker man sacrifice, it is hard to flat-out deny that there can be any connection between them. It seems interesting that the word Caesar uses for the wicker man is *simulacra*. This is the same word he uses for the images of Mercury that he claims are seen everywhere among the Gauls, leading him to proclaim that they worshiped Mercury above all other gods. This Mercury is commonly assumed to be the god that the Celts called Lug, whose August 1 (or thereabouts) festival, Lughnasa, was one of the main seasonal festivals celebrated by the Irish up to the present time. Although Lughnasa is not a fire festival per se, Máire MacNeill, in her study of the Festival of Lughnasa (1982), makes a very strong case that the pagan figure of Lugh has been replaced in the Christian era by the figure of St Patrick. As with so much of Celtic mythology, this seems to be a case of endlessly sliding signifiers: can Caesar's wicker simulacra represent Mercury/Lugh, the primary hero/god who becomes assimilated to the patron saint of Ireland, a saint who just coincidentally has a penchant for

expressing the miraculous by burning up bad guys?

If there is a connection between the wicker man and the Celts it seems most likely to me that Caesar took the opportunity to sensationalize a Celtic seasonal festival custom by grafting onto it an occasional tendency to human sacrifice found elsewhere in their religion. The tabloid imagination is hardly a recent phenomenon. In fact, the appeal of *The Wicker Man* draws very much from the same modern mythology: the way in which we, as 20th century Britons and Americans, conceptualize our relationship to the primeval past that made *The Golden Bough* a best-seller in the first place. The team that created *The Wicker Man* have stated quite plainly that their starting point for the script was *The Golden Bough* (Catterall & Wells 1999). In many ways, it is this modern mythology, rather than any literal survivals from the pre-Christian past, that underlies contemporary Neopaganism.

One of the central myths of modern paganism is that of the Burning Times, the era of persecution and execution of witches commonly perceived as medieval but, in point of fact, occurring during the Early Modern, Post-Reformation era in Europe and its colonies in the New World. From a core of historical truth the story developed of a burning to out-Holocaust the Holocaust: 6 million Jews may have been murdered by Hitler, but the Inquisition, it has been claimed, accounted for more than 9 million (of a much smaller overall population),

Frazer detected dark, pagan strata underlying the most bucolic rural scene: folk lore, folk custom, especially folk festival all rested on foundations of human sacrifice, ritual combat, and a complete misunderstanding of the laws and forces of nature.

mostly women, the label 'witch' merely a coded reference to their private practice of ancient, pagan ways preserved in secret throughout a millennium of public Christianity. The accuracy of this story has been widely discussed and debated (see Adler 1986, Hutton 1991, esp. 284-341, Ginzburg 1991, Hopkins & Bond 1995, Harvey 1997), but its source is fairly easy to locate: the theories of Egyptologist

Margaret Murray as developed in her books *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921), *The God of the Witches* (1933) and *The Divine King in England* (1954).

Murray's theories of pagan survival had been academically discredited by the late 1960s, and her thesis seems to have been dropped by pagan historians by the early 1990s (see Simpson 1994, Wood 1999, Hutton 1996: 422-6). In the 1940s and 50s, however, when modern paganism was growing in the cultural womb, Murray and Frazer offered perfectly respectable theoretical frameworks for understanding Britain's pagan past and its relationship to the Christian present. Frazer detected dark, pagan strata underlying the most bucolic rural scene: folk lore, folk custom, especially folk festival all rested on foundations of human sacrifice, ritual combat, blind worship of capricious deities, and a complete misunder-

standing of the laws and forces of nature. Christianity, in his view, was no better than the various paganisms, for it remains a faith rather than a science. Frazer was one of the foremost proponents of the theory that Christianity provided merely a thin veneer of social acceptability to essentially eternal paganism. Christianity was the religion of the ruling classes; the peasants merely changed their gods' names to protect the innocent and continued as before. Interestingly, Richard Fletcher's *The Barbarian Conversion from Paganism to Christianity* (1997), the most recent

... the literal act of human sacrifice is simultaneously an example of Frazer's theory of magic as misunderstood science, ... yet also an example of the ultimate scientific pragmatism, a refusal to accept the metaphorical reality of myth and an insistence on making it all real.

survey of the process of European Christianization, seems to bolster the notion that the conversion in Northern and Western Europe really was largely a political undertaking on the part of the ruling classes, and was not very enthusiastically taken up by the folk, indirectly suggesting that the paradigm of pagan rites disguised with Christian names may in fact be accurate. Comparatively, the syncretization of Christian saints with Yoruba deities to create Haitian *voodoo* offers a case study in the way folk paganism can coexist with elite Christian culture.

Murray's thesis is in some ways the same notion inverted. She proposed that it was the elite, ruling classes who remained pagan, while the tedious bourgeoisie succumbed to Christianity. Frazer saw paganism as persisting but disintegrating under the pressures of

mainstream Christianity; Murray saw paganism, i.e. witchcraft, as retaining a coherent system in secrecy, like any good conspiracy. Murray's pagan witches are found on the periphery of society in the countryside, in small villages, in Scotland because that is where they were furthest from prying official eyes (but not, as the voluminous records of witchcraft persecution on which she bases her thesis would indicate, far enough). Frazer's paganism survives on the peripheries simply because that is furthest from the scientific center where civilizing

change occurs.

The attraction of both theories lies in the uneasiness felt by modern urban dwellers when confronted with rural life (and rather than running amok with citations again, let me simply note *Withnail and I*). This is the myth of modernity in its essence: the countryside is the Eden we are exiled from, restful, quiet, slow, and unpolluted. There we can return to our roots, harmonize with nature, recover our true and essential selves. And then when we get there, it rains all the time, there's mud everywhere and it's cold as hell, the house makes strange noises and hostile wildlife infests its every nook and cranny, everyone looks at us like we're from another planet (which we are), one with which they happen to have a war on at the moment (which they do), nothing works right, all of

our competencies are useless and all of our incompetencies are blatant. Frankly, in such a situation, if it's necessary to kill someone to make the crops grow, isn't the outsider the one that's most expendable? Don't we actually deserve to die for desecrating this Paradise with our Filthy Urban Ways? Returning to our roots: are we meant to take that literally, after all?

The rhetoric of Celticity has been ambivalent from the beginning, when the Posidonian school of commentators concentrated on the barbarity of the Celtic tribes while the Alexandrian school praised their philosophical sophistication (Piggott 1975: 91-9). The image of the wicker man has generally been associated with the savagery of the Posidonian tradition, especially since the 17th century when representations such as that of Aylett Sammes' open-work frame with the Big Babydoll head began to turn up illustrating the works of the first Celtic renaissance. For the next two centuries, an illustration of a wicker man generally meant that the author belonged to the Isn't It A Good Thing We're Christians school of Celtic commentary, whether depicting the druids as noble philosophers who sadly fell from grace or as devious priests who terrorized their congregations into submission to their (political) will.

The emergence of Neopaganism in the second half of the 20th century seems to be leading to a shift in the emotional associations of the wicker man image, inspired, I believe, in a large part by the cult popularity of *The Wicker Man*. This image has become so iconic that the July 4-5, 1992 edition of the Guardian ran a political cartoon by Martin Rowson depicting John Major as a wicker man, with the caption "A New Religion for the Heroic MAJOR Epoch: CHRISTIANITY having clearly failed the Nation, we propose to replace it as State Religion with Druidism. This is a truly Native Faith,

impeccably Green, and will serve to attract the burgeoning New Age vote while allowing extensive crossover between the Adam Smith Institute & the New Theocracy. Thus (a) in a New Approach to Recovery, the City of London is replaced by Huge Standing Stones positioned along the Ley Lines, (b) a Wicker Man is erected on the site of St. Paul's Cathedral and regularly burnt to symbolize The Light At The End Of The Tunnel ..." The Major Man is clearly stuffed full of struggling human bodies.

Today, wicker men are shifting from an icon of simple savagery to one of a more complex Dionysian tone, and furthermore, attempts are being made to recreate the experience. Many Neopagan manuals and websites recommend making and burning a wicker man as part of various seasonal celebrations, although there seem to be widely diverging differences of opinion which ones; see, for example, the websites at <www.earthspirit.com/fireheart/fhwkman.html>, <mebers.aol.com/ariadnelun/wheel/midsummer.html>, and <www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/7280/harvest.html>. Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire, which recreates an Iron Age Celtic farm, has included the burning of a wicker man (sans livestock) as part of its Beltaine celebration at various times over the last 20 years, with this year's ceremony drawing around 200 attendees. The burning, mounted as both part of the site's living history mission and as a fund-raising event, is presented as a chance to experience an ancient fertility rite, accompanied by wine and snacks and tale-telling. Despite the fanciful constructions proposed by early modern illustrators, it takes quite a bit of planning and expertise to construct a 30-foot-tall wooden figure that will burn evenly and collapse in on itself rather than on the observers (Roger Hedge, personal communication, 20 July 1999. For more infor-

mation see their website at <www.skclvdemon.co.uk/iafinintro.htm>). The most notorious current incarnation of the wicker man, however, is the Burning Man festival, held over Labor Day weekend in the Nevada desert, and renowned for its Bacchanalian character (<www.burningman.com>). While there is no Celtic context to the event, it culminates in the burning of a simulacra that exceeds the wildest Posidonian imagination. The Burning Man festival explicitly defines itself as an anti-establishment event, and this seems to be the chief subtext of the wicker man image today, an icon of the rejection of mainstream, implicitly Christian values. All of these wicker man festivities post-date the making of *The Wicker Man*.

However the closest fire festival to what we see in *The Wicker Man*, both geographically and, interestingly enough, thematically is Shetland's Up-Helly-Aa. In the movie, Lord Summerisle informs Sgt Howie that the apparently primeval paganism he sees practiced on the island was, in fact, a reconstruction instituted by his grandfather after his purchase of the place in 1868. The institutionalization of Up-Helly-Aa from a formerly disorganized tradition of pranks and parading, as Callum Brown has shown, began in the 1870s, and indeed in 1877 a satirical fly-sheet titled *An Earnest Appeal for the Restoration of the Ancient Norse faith of Shetland* proposed installing Norse gods in the numerous Protestant churches in Lerwick and constructing a Thing on the docks, and also marked the first print reference to the Lerwick Yuletide celebrations as Up-Helly-Aa (Brown 1998: 132-3). The contemporary festival's core squad of Vikings seems to develop from this proposal, and the festival prominently features the spectacular burning of a Viking longship, as iconic an image of Norse ethnic identity in its savage guise as the Wicker Man is of savage Celticity.

The visceral appeal of *The Wicker Man* resides at least in part in its presentation of a Pagan's Own Burning Times, a fantasy of retaliation for the victimization which is one of the core myths of pagan identity. The constant upping of the numbers of witches sacrificed to Christian persecution which took place from the 1960s to the 1980s often carried a somewhat distasteful undertone of Holocaust me-too-ism (the statistics offered at the pagan website <www.illusions.com/burning/burnwitc.htm> offer a welcome corrective). Ginzberg (1991) shows how the medieval persecutions that presaged the early modern witch hunts made little distinction, indeed blurred the distinctions between Jews and heretics, i.e. those who retained some aspects of pagan folk belief and practice. But what *The Wicker Man* actually depicts is the simultaneous incompatibility and interdependence of two religions taken to their logical extremes. There is no common meeting ground in Howie's and Lord Summerisle's theologies. Yet, as Lord Summerisle points out, Howie's sacrifice not only offers a solution to the islander's problems, but also offers Howie the opportunity of a martyr's crown. Each remains steadfast to his religion to the last.

At the same time, the literal act of human sacrifice is simultaneously an example of Frazer's theory of magic as misunderstood science, attempting to affect the fertility of the land by means of sympathetic magic rather than a more literal manure, yet also an example of the ultimate scientific pragmatism, a refusal to accept the metaphorical reality of myth and an insistence on making it all real. As viewers, we are presented with the same paradox in our response to the movie: logically, since Howie and the islanders demonstrably have complete faith in their mutually incompatible beliefs about the nature of postmortem existence, is

Howie's death really that bad? Doesn't the horror we feel actually reflect the weakness of our own faith? The power of *The Wicker Man* results from its refusal to resolve the paradox. Like any myth worth its Structuralist salt, it is composed of a unique combination of traditional components, offering a satisfying narrative resolution while leaving the underlying, irresolvable dilemma to haunt our dreams.

WORKS CITED:

- Adler, Margot. 1986. *Drawing Down the Moon* (2d ed.). Little, Brown.
- Brown, Callum G. 1998. *Up-Helly-Aa*. Mandolin.
- Catterall, Ali & Simon Wells, "Three great horror movies were made in 1973: The Exorcist, Don't Look Now—and The Wicker Man. The who?" *The Guardian*, 8 Jan. 1999.
- Chadwick, Nora. 1966. *The Druids*. University of Wales Press.
- Cross, Tom Peate and Charles Slover (eds.). 1969. *Ancient Irish Tales*. Barnes & Noble.
- Dalton, G. 1970. "The Ritual Killing of Irish Kings", *Folklore* 8:1-22.
- Fletcher, Richard. 1997. *The Barbarian Conversion from Paganism to Christianity*. Holt.
- Fraser, Robert. 1990. *The Making of The Golden Bough*. Macmillan.
- Frazer, J.G. 1913. *Balder the Beautiful: The Fire-Festivals of Europe and the Doctrine of the External Soul*. 2 vols. Macmillan.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. 1991. *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches Sabbath*. Pantheon.
- Gwynn, Edward. 1924. *Metrical Dindshenchas*. 4 vols. Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies.
- Harvey, Graham. 1997. *Contemporary Paganism*. New York University Press.
- Hopkins, Ellen Evert & Laurence Bond. 1995. *People of the Earth*. Destiny.
- Hutton, Ronald. 1996. *Stations of the Sun*. Oxford University Press.
- Hutton, Ronald. 1991. *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*. Blackwell.
- Jones, Leslie Ellen. 1998. *Druid Shaman Priest*. Hisarlik Press.
- Jones, Gwyn & Thomas Jones. 1974. *The Mabinogion*. Dent/Everyman.

- Kendrick, T.D. 1966. *The Druids*. Frank Cass.
- MacNeill, Máire. 1982. *The Festival of Lughnasa*. Comhairle Bhéalóideas Éireann.
- McCone, Kim. 1990. *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*. An Sagart.
- Nagy, Joseph F. 1998. *Conversing with Angels and Ancients*. University of California Press.
- O Hehir, Brendan. 1983. "The Christian Revision of Eachtra Airt Meic Cuind Ocus Tochmarc Delbchaime Ingine Morgain" in Patrick Ford, *Celtic Folklore and Christianity*, 159-179. McNally & Loftin.
- Ó Cuív, Brian. 1973. "The Motif of the Three-fold Death", *Éigse* 15:145-50.
- OGrady, S.H. 1892. *Silva Gadelica*. Williams & Norgate.
- Piggott, Stuart. 1975. *The Druids*. Thames and Hudson.
- Radner, Joan N. 1983. "The Significance of the Three-Fold Death in Celtic Tradition" in Patrick K. Ford, ed., *Celtic Folklore and Christianity*, 180-199. McNally & Loftin.
- Rees, Alwyn and Brinley Rees. 1961. *Celtic Heritage*. Thames and Hudson.
- Ross, Anne and Don Robins. 1989. *The Life and Death of a Druid Prince*. Rider.
- Simpson, Jacqueline. 1994. "Margaret Murray: Who Believed Her and Why?" *Folklore* 105:89-96.
- Tolstoy, Nikolai. 1985. *The Quest for Merlin*. Little, Brown.
- Ward, Donald J. 1970. "The Threefold death: An Indo-European Trifunctional Sacrifice?" in Jaan Puhvel, ed., *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans*.

Leslie Ellen Jones received her PhD from the Folklore & Mythology Program at UCLA, and currently works as a copy editor and writer at Salem Press in Pasadena. She has a particular interest in the representation of folkloric and mythological themes in the mass media. Dr Jones is the author of Druid Shaman Priest: Metaphors of Celtic Paganism (Hisarlik Press, 1998) and numerous articles on Celtic mythology and culture.

BOOK REVIEWS

Two Reviews of *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. By Ronald Hutton. NY: Oxford University Press, 1999. 486 pages. US\$32.50 cloth.

*Reviewed by Gina O'Connor
University of Colorado*

Ronald Hutton's groundbreaking book *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* introduces a variety of material pertinent to understanding how and why modern Witchcraft or Wicca evolved into the forms it has today. With painstaking intricacy, Hutton presents little-known details of anthropological and historical importance. Hutton's attention to detail serves at least two purposes. The first is to whet the appetite for even more in-depth investigations into the little-researched occult past. The second is to weave together a finely constructed argument that illustrates how (primarily) English views on magic and the alleged persistence of ancient Pagan practices in rural life created the climate in which Neopagan Witchcraft could flourish. Although Hutton certainly encourages the reader to accept his point of view, he commendably notes that this book is a history, but not necessarily the only history of Witchcraft.

The book's first section covers Victorian and Edwardian culture, and demonstrates that Wiccan beliefs contain many elements from the literature of those periods' scholars, novelists, and poets. Throughout the book, Hutton relentlessly seeks to deconstruct misconceptions that have lingered about the pagan past. He exposes the errors and fantasies of many seminal pagan texts such as Sir James Frazer's

continued on next page

*Reviewed by Sarah Whedon
University of Colorado*

The Triumph of the Moon is a systematic history of British Wicca written by Ronald Hutton, a historian of Britain and ancient British paganism. A distinctively historical approach to his latest subject matter makes it a book which has no parallel either in Britain or North America. As such it adds a new voice to the growing body of scholarship on contemporary Paganism, which already has voices from a variety of other fields, including religious studies, anthropology, sociology, and journalism.

Hutton's book is divided into two sections. The first, the "macrocosm," explores the various ideas, group structures, and magical practices which make up the milieu in which Wicca developed. Here he makes use of themes from literature (although the technique can be found throughout the book), to explore the development of ideas and attitudes in British culture toward things like paganism, nature, and witchcraft. At first glance one might expect this to yield skewed results, because literature cannot possibly represent the thinking of the entire population. However, Hutton asserts in the second section of the book that people who read widely figure prominently in the origins of Wicca. Furthermore, he spends no small amount of time exploring

continued on page 50

O'CONNOR REVIEWS HUTTON

continued from previous page

Golden Bough and Robert Graves' *White Goddess*. He also attacks widespread beliefs of a universal Goddess represented in archaeologically excavated Neolithic statuettes as well as the overblown demographic figures that had once estimated the executions of medieval witches to

forms of Wiccan beliefs in England, including the feminization of Wiccan practices due to the popularity of the "Gaia hypothesis" and the reconstruction of a potential Goddess worshipping culture in the prehistoric archaeological past. The last chapter deals with Hutton's personal views on how modern Wicca can be analyzed using a sociological approach to

Freemasons, Medieval magicians, Theosophists, and "cunning people" all became part of the complex web of historical movements and folk cultures that inspire important aspects of Wiccan beliefs and rituals today.

be over nine million. Through this evidence, Hutton makes clear that revived 19th and early 20th century pagan religions were substantially based on a romanticized view of the past and the natural world, as well as Victorian misconceptions about evolutionary hierarchies. (Wicca, he postulates, most readily fits into this subfield of "revived" religious traditions.) In conscious and/or unconscious efforts to revitalize and advance paganism, early Rosicrucians, Freemasons, Medieval magicians, Theosophists, and "cunning people" all became part of the complex web of historical movements and folk cultures that inspire important aspects of Wiccan beliefs and rituals today.

The second section of the book details the development of British witchcraft over the past 50 years, arguing that Gerald Gardner was the founding father of Wicca in 20th century Britain. Hutton describes the directions Gardner's followers took Wicca, with detailed attention to Janet and Stewart Farrar, Alex Sanders, Starhawk, Doreen Valiente, Robert Cochrane, and Marian Green. He devotes a chapter to the ways in which Wicca has transformed since its introduction into the United States, and subsequently how these changes have affected present

understand its religious aspects. He then concludes with a discussion on the importance of the study of paganism in academia in which he categorizes the field within "nature religions."

While Hutton is a scrupulously meticulous and entertaining scholar and author, can this history be determinative over all past attempts of understanding the pagan past? Hutton does confuse the specifics of Theosophy and Spiritualism. He also makes some questionable choices of representation, such as depicting Madame Blavatsky as a Christian at heart. Portrayals like these might be very misleading. At other times, he leaves sections of history undeveloped, leaving the reader with the sense that something important is missing. For instance, what happened to the "cunning people" in modern history? Is it possible that some of these people are still around and would in some way influence modern Wiccan practice and profile? While he notes that folk practices were recorded in England in the 20th century, he fails to explain anything about their current relevance. Although many of the proponents of folkways are Christian like the early cunning people were, so many Wiccans are also influenced by Christian beliefs. After all, as Hutton explains, many of the core

rituals and beliefs of societies such as the Rosicrucians and Golden Dawn contained Christian elements and these in turn passed on some of their practices to Wiccans. It also would have been interesting and informative to know more about the specific kinds of effects neighboring countries' folk culture and beliefs may have had on England (whether or not they self-identify as Christians). Might further investigation reveal that England was not the only source to credit for the birth of Wicca in the 20th century? Undoubtedly, specialists in areas in which he may be less familiar will find reasons to debate some of his inferences and presentations of the particulars of history.

Furthermore, Hutton's theory that Gerald Gardner was the definitive founder of Wicca is not totally convincing. It seems too simple to believe that there was a single creator of modern Wicca, whether Gardner coined the term or not. Nevertheless, Hutton spends a lot of effort persuading the reader to accept that this is the case. Yet Hutton himself shows some hesitancy. When discussing the authenticity of Gardner's grimoire, Hutton states, "My personal opinion is that the text does not provide any conclusive evidence for the question of whether Gardner composed those entries which have no known provenance or copied them from a pre-existing source; in other words, whether he was initiated into an existing religion or created one himself" (228). If Hutton is not entirely satisfied with the results of his findings, how can the reader be? On the other hand, to Hutton's credit, perhaps the fact that he leaves the door open for further questioning is part of the appeal of this book.

Whether or not the reader finds this book totally incontrovertible, it is the most comprehensive and readable of its time. There is no doubt that the study of paganism deserves to be kept alive and thriving and hopefully this book will instigate further studies of this caliber in the future interested in broadening our knowledge about the roots of paganism.

WHEDON REVIEWS HUTTON

continued from page 48

the ways in which scholarly ideas seep slowly into the popular consciousness.

This second section, the "microcosm," is where Hutton works to unravel the stories of the early development of Wicca and the involvement of such figures as Gerald Gardner, Dorothy Clutterbuck, Doreen Valiente, and Alex Sanders. He draws on letters, liturgical materials, and personal testimony to piece these stories together. Significantly, much of this material is in private collections and required him to gain the trust of many current practitioners of the Craft in order to work with it. He has made apparently difficult decisions about what to publish and what to keep secret, because much of the material is traditionally secret. Such decisions could only be evaluated by someone with access to these materials, and so leaves the reader who has no such access with a nagging feeling that he may not have chosen well. However, Hutton can hardly be faulted for this; it is a mark of his sensitivity to the material of a mystery religion.

Furthermore, these concerns are largely assuaged when confronted with Hutton's honesty in being willing to leave some questions unanswered. He does this whenever his source materials fall short of providing definitive answers, often suggesting several possible interpretations. These chapters often read like mysteries, as Hutton takes the reader through the process of exploring evidence and piecing it together. The mysteries are packed with so much detail, that it is inevitable to find areas where some is obviously missing. Therefore, while answering many questions, this book also opens up countless possible fields of inquiry.

The last chapter is really a third distinct section or subsection of the book. Here Hutton abandons his historical methods for an impressionist description of present-day British Pagans accumulated over the course of his research. This is bolstered by brief sociological interpretation that he freely admits is not his strength, making for a disappointing conclusion. I

mentalist" Wiccans, it remains clear throughout that he is sympathetic to the Wiccan community. This (only in part, of course) marks him as distinct from Philip G. Davis who has sought in *Goddess Unmasked: The Rise of Neopagan Feminist Spirituality* also to find the historical roots of ideas, magical practices and so forth (though specifically for American

While many of his revelations may be difficult for "fundamentalist" Wiccans, it remains clear throughout that he is sympathetic to the Wiccan community.

was all the more disappointed given his demonstrated ability to produce critical and well-documented arguments throughout the book. For an anthropologically rigorous study of British Witchcraft one might be better served by T.M. Luhrmann's *Persuasions of the Witches: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*. It might make more sense if he had devoted more attention to drawing connections between the history that he has pieced out and the current status. In fact, Hutton arrives at this chapter partly by way of a chapter which seeks to demonstrate the impact of American Paganism on British Paganism, but which does so in a less thorough fashion than the work of his other chapters.

These criticisms are minor in the face of an ambitious work that contributes much to the academic study of Paganism. A large part of Hutton's sensitivity to the material which he works with seems to come, in fact, from his contact with contemporary practitioners. While many of his revelations may be difficult for "funda-

Goddess religion), but with the polemical agenda of revealing the supposed threat which the Goddess poses to contemporary society.

In this book Hutton provides history which was sorely lacking, writes in a manner accessible to the educated practitioner as well as meaningful to the scholar, and opens up areas needing further research with the academic boost of having been presented by an established scholar in a publication from a well-respected press. Indeed, he voices his own interest in the growth of the field, writing that, "although pagan witchcraft has had a prominent public profile for half a century, it has been less studied than other religious movements which have appeared or arrived more recently. Perhaps the present book will do something to alter that pattern" (416). Certainly this book has the potential to do just that. *Triumph of the Moon* is a book which neither Pagan nor scholar of Pagans should go without reading.

The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory

by Cynthia Eller

Boston: Beacon Press, 2000

276 pp + illus. US\$26.00

Reviewed by Brian Hayden

Archaeology Dept, Simon Fraser University

This is a short book that will make tall waves. Coming from someone with Eller's feminist credentials, it constitutes an incisive and devastating critique of all facets of matriarchal feminism. This book is as much about factions within feminism and the best way to achieve ultimate feminist goals as it is about the myth of prehistoric matriarchies.

Eller's fundamental objection is with "difference feminism" which assumes that men and women are inherently different, and that men's dominant qualities result in bad decisions which exploit others, including women, while women's dominant characteristics result in generally beneficent decisions. She argues that this is ultimately limiting for men, but especially for women. Eller argues that individuals should be taken on their own merits, recognizing that good and bad cut across sexes, ages, classes, and most other social or biological divisions. In this respect, the matriarchal myth is shown to be ill-conceived, ill-founded, and counterproductive.

This is some of the best writing that I have read in a long time. The feminist arguments and the subsequent analysis of matriarchal claims are well researched and elegantly structured and presented. The summaries of the anthropological and ethnological literature are excellent and present the most plausible conclusions that can be advanced in the many areas covered by Eller. Treatments of the various pros and cons are nicely balanced, but the logic of her argument is inexorable, leading to

what seem like inevitable conclusions. She sets out her definitions and methodology in very clear, common sense fashion, before proceeding to any analysis. She incorporates the great variability of the ethnographic and archaeological record (essential for any realistic model of human behavior, especially in the realm of gender relations) yet indicates underlying patterns.

From my familiarity with the literature and from my own field observations, Eller's conclusions about other cultures and the past are almost always right on the money, and she is careful not to overstate those conclusions to unwarranted extremes. She sketches the broad outline of a major alternative paradigm for gender relationships in pre-Industrial societies. Each one of her chapter subheadings and supporting arguments could easily constitute topics for much greater in-depth documentation and research, or graduate theses. I would certainly have liked a more extended treatment of tribal and chiefdom ethnographic societies. I feel confident that such detailed research would overwhelmingly support Eller's basic interpretations. Her final conclusions are that: "what we do know (or can judge to be probable) about gender in prehistory is not particularly encouraging regarding the status of women. Ethnographic analogies to contemporary groups with lifeways similar to those of prehistoric times ... show little sex egalitarianism and no matriarchy ... Indeed, these societies always discriminate in some way between women and men, usually to women's detriment. ... whatever religions prehistoric peoples practiced, we can be fairly sure that goddess worship did not automatically yield cultures of peace and plenty ..."

But, as she points out, our situation has dramatically changed with industrialization. Just because brute force or sexism may have been the norm in the past, is no reason to tolerate such behavior today. In this regard, and in her

emphasis on individual differences, I am in agreement with Eller. Where we would part, I think, is on her position that there are no patterns of differences between populations of men and women. In many branches of science, people empirically observe natural clusters of traits that characterized populations, sub-pop-

ulations, or groups of individuals. Being able to identify these recurring clusters of traits and labelling them as distinct species, "types," classes, genders, sexes, or other categories assists us in conceptualizing the world around us and dealing with it. Without classifications of the world around us, we must deal with all variables varying all the time. While dividing up people and the world around us into categories may be unuseful and unwarranted, I would argue that many of the categories that we use are not just convenient ways for our minds to deal with the universe or avoid information overload, but that many of our categories really do correspond to constellations of traits that are associated with each other because they work well together in nature and are adaptive as complexes.

I am in agreement with Eller. Where we would part, I think, is on her position that there are no patterns of differences between populations of men and women.

The fundamental issue is whether gender or some aspects of behavior or attitude cluster together along a sexual dimension. I would argue that there is a constellation of attitudes, values, and behaviors that do distinguish many males from many females, as a wide range of neurophysiological and behavioral studies have now indicated. As just one example, one of our highly political and intelligent feminist graduate students has done considerable research on the unusually high incidence of high risk behavior (and consequent mortality) of young

males which contrasts markedly with much lower incidences of such behavior in females. This appears to hold true in most cultures and analogs can even be found among many non-human primates. Unfortunately, the downside of the tendency to categorize people and other aspects of our world is that conceptual categories can easily become closed cubicles in which all variation is stuffed into a few narrowly defined boxes (e.g., male or female chauvinism). In such cases, one shuts off inquiry and misses all of the dynamics that power evolution and change. Eller, in reacting to these commonplace shortcomings, has opted for the extreme solution of denying or trivializing all claims that clusters of behaviors and attitudes exist which differentiate many males from females. I think that she has thrown the baby out with the bathwater, although this is perhaps the easiest remedy for the problems that have arisen. A more realistic, but more difficult approach is to recognize that these tendencies exist, but at the same time to recognize the variability and dynamics involved and find some way to accommodate them. I would never advocate that such differences should be used as a justification for discrimination, but that each individual should be judged on their own personal qualities. I see Eller's relatively pro-active, politically correct remedies to traditional role models as being deleterious, and I would prefer a more laissez-faire approach. Even accepting Eller's basic premises, there is still a great deal to explore, negotiate, and resolve in the unending dialog between the sexes. This is a book that is long overdue in that dialog.

Nordic Religions in the Viking Age

by Thomas A DuBois

Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1999

x + 271 pp, 5 illus.

*Reviewed by Cara Hoggund
Independent Scholar*

In *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*, Thomas DuBois takes on the task of recontextualizing the sagas of Icelandic literature. DuBois argues that most previous saga scholars have Romanticized the Viking Age, describing the Vikings as “vastly more numerous, technologically superior, or somehow inherently more warlike” than their neighbors (11). DuBois intends to cut through these stereotypes using what he calls a “geographical method” (focusing on every group within a certain area) because, he argues, we cannot truly understand the religious traditions of the Nordic peoples in isolation. A folklorist by training, he draws upon textual evidence, archaeology, the anthropology of religion, and the study of Nordic oral tradition to provide a more complete picture of the Nordic peoples of that era.

He begins his analysis by reconstructing a non-Romanticized version of Nordic history, focusing on the three main groups of Nordic peoples: the Scandinavians, the Balto-Finnic peoples, and the Sámi. In his analysis, he dispels several previous beliefs about the Nordic peoples, stating, for example, that the Finno-Ugric peoples lived in Northern Europe as early as 3300BCE. DuBois also includes a brief history of the Viking colonies in the British Isles and Greenland, which play a large role in the Christianization of northern Europe.

Chapter two discusses the relationships

between the Nordic religions. DuBois emphasizes religions, due to the extremely wide variation of beliefs within the pagan communities as well as between the Nordic Christians. (He attributes some of this variation within Nordic Christians to the fact that the majority of Nordic peoples did not read Latin, so the practice of and belief in Christianity had to be translated by the priests for their congregations.) DuBois describes the influence, often ignored by previous scholarship, that eastern Christianity had on Nordic peoples; it seems that Nordic peoples were equally influenced by the symbols and art of both types of Christianity in the early stages of their interactions with Christian cultures. For their part, the Nordic pagans, though admittedly ethnocentric, were aware of the diversity of beliefs within their general geographic area, and accepted the belief in different sets of deities by other groups as normal. DuBois states that this awareness of other religions eventually led to a “convergence of religious outlook,” which he argues is one of the main findings of his research (41). In the next chapter, DuBois then goes into greater detail regarding the religious beliefs of the Nordic pagans and Nordic Christians, though as he is still covering a great deal of material, he must still be fairly general. He argues that the most unique idea the Christians brought to the Nordic worldview was the concept of one omnipotent deity, for while the various individuals and sects of Nordic paganism each had their own patron deity(ies), spirit(s), and an underlying core of beliefs, they did not believe in the overarching power of one deity or another.

In chapter four, DuBois delves deeper into the specific beliefs of the pagan and Christians communities. He specifically compares differences in the ideas of “the

good death” that each group adhered to, and how the believers adapted their everyday realities and older customs to ensure a proper burial and afterlife according to their beliefs. Chapter five continues examining Nordic beliefs during in a discussion of healing practices, including rituals and herbal remedies. The area of healing, especially, shows the influence of the continen-

uncover how the Nordic peoples adopted the main symbol of Christianity, the Cross, and what it meant to them over time. Christian influence came to Northern Europe via three main routes: the British Isles (the West), Novgorod and Byzantium (the East), and central Europe (the South.) With it came three main traditions of the Cross: Constantine’s Cross of the Vision

... pulling out the underlying Christian biases in the 13th century Nordic sagas [is] an important undertaking because the vast majority of our textual knowledge of pre-Christian culture and faith comes from these sagas.

tal and classical modes of thought, brought by Christianized cultures, upon Nordic monks, who often listed remedies including plants not native to northern Europe. Folk remedies, like the burials, DuBois argues, can be read as a barometer for the strength of influence of Christian beliefs in the pagan worldview during the time that the area was becoming Christianized. In the next chapter, DuBois analyzes one particular pagan ritual, called *seidhr*, in detail. He compares the different versions of the ritual in the three Nordic cultures mentioned above.

With his descriptions of pagan death, healing, and *seidhr* rituals and beliefs, DuBois has provided a detailed basis for the comparison of several key Christian beliefs brought later by missionaries and traders. In chapter seven, he argues that Christian symbolism came into contact with the Nordic world long before locals accepted the religious significance associated with it. DuBois shows how, through saga and archaeological evidence, scholars can

(the tradition of a ruler seeing a vision of the cross at a critical time), the Cross of the Relic (owning a piece of the cross that Jesus was crucified on), and the *Crux usualis* (making a cross in the air with one’s hand). DuBois compares each of these traditions to previous pagan traditions, and follows the adaptation of the Christian symbols into the Nordic vernacular. He points out that many Christian practices had similar pagan predecessors that were able to be adapted fairly easily, including having visions and making sacred gestures. The only key Cross tradition that did not get incorporated into Nordic Christian belief and practice or have a predecessor in Nordic religion was the personification of a symbol—the Cross of the Relic tradition was so firmly held by the British and Irish Cult that they made a Cult of the Cross, turning the Cross itself into something similar to a conscious deity.

DuBois concludes his work with a deconstruction of older saga scholarship by pulling out the underlying Christian biases

in the 13th century Nordic sagas, an important undertaking because the vast majority of our textual knowledge of pre-Christian culture and faith comes from these sagas. He chose to focus on three sagas based primarily on their use by previous scholars to reconstruct Nordic culture: the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (dealing with Christianization and public cults), the *Víga-Glúms saga* (dealing with personal and familial devotions to specific deities), and the *Eiríks saga raudha* (dealing with three episodes of ritual). Though each saga depicts pagan-Christian relations during three different moments during the Viking Age, DuBois concludes that the sagas are not merely Christianized accounts of pagan culture at those times but “a narrative with a unified Christian agenda” whose main goal was to glorify the triumph of Christianity over the inferior pagan religion (203). In other words, the sagas are highly biased versions of history, written by the (Christian) winners. This detailed analysis of these three texts may turn out to be the most valuable parts of DuBois’ work—paving the way, he hopes, for further holistic, un-Romantic saga and religion scholarship.

Nordic Religions in the Viking Age may best be used as a good example of recent scholarship in this area, taking on older, long-held concepts within Viking Age studies. It would work well as a general book for Viking-Age studies, or as a specific example of culture and ritual. DuBois provides extensive notes throughout this work, the vast majority of which are citations for the various sagas or scholarly analyses of the ideas/facts he discusses. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on any of these citations or mention that some of the many arguments he cites may or may not be under dispute themselves. However, I feel that this is mainly due to the vast amount of mate-

rial he attempts to cover in less than three hundred pages. This book rides the line between detailed analysis and general overview. It may frustrate those not familiar with Viking Age scholarship but merely reiterate a great deal of information that Viking Age scholars already know. Still, he brings up some good ideas for future research and I think his “geographical method” toward historical research provides valuable insights into the sources of information we have about the time period.

PANGAIA



Earthwise
Spirituality
for the
21st Century

80 pages to feed your soul in every issue. Free sample upon request, visit us at www.pangaia.com
P O Box 641, Pt. Arena, CA 95468
877-PANGAIA, (877-726-4242.)



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Readers' Forum

*Cynthia Eller replies to Hayden,
Raven Grimassi replies to Magliocco*

2

Peter Staudenmaier

Fascist Ecology: The 'Green Wing' of the Nazi Party
and its Historical Antecedents

4

Dave Green

Modernity, Magickal Cosmologies and Science:
A New Cauldron for a New Age?

22

David Waldron

Post-Modernism and Witchcraft Histories

36

Juliette Wood

Margaret Murray and the Rise of Wicca

45

Book Review

Jan Bremmer's *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*
Reviewed by Jerome S. Arkenberg

55



The Pomegranate

Copyright
© 2000 *The Pomegranate*. In every case,
copyright returns to the authors of articles
and letters. Permission to reprint must be
granted by these writers,
and we will be happy
to forward your requests.

The Pomegranate
is published quarterly.
ISSN 1528-0268 refers to this Journal.

Subscriptions:
4 issues: US\$20 — 8 issues: US\$37.50
by surface mail anywhere.
Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds,
or Checks drawn on US banks to
The Pomegranate
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019
Subs email: antech@teleport.com

Submissions:
Editorial email: fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca
See the inside back cover for our
Call for Papers.
Ask us for our Writers' Guidelines,
or read it on our website:
www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/
Deadline for submissions:
the Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.

The Cover:
Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

Co-Editors:

Fritz Muntean

Diana Tracy

Associate Editor:

Chas S. Clifton

Editorial Assistance:

Melissa Hope

Síân Reid

The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

The Enlightenment was a movement of ideas which characterized much of 18th century European thought. Its adherents believed that truth could be attained through reason, observation and experimentation. They sought to use their scientific method in the service of humanitarian ideals like tolerance, justice and the welfare of humanity. Some Enlightenment leaders encouraged an open-minded investigation of the nature of society. Others called for a more revolutionary program, defended the victims of religious persecution, and encouraged the development of technology. This is the movement that gave the western world separation of Church and State and set the stage for the Industrial Revolution.

In reaction to the classicism and rationalism which marked the Enlightenment, Romanticism was a movement which, although it began in 18th century, came into fruition during the 19th and characterized much of the thinking of the Victorian era. Romanticism was concerned more with feeling and emotion than with form and aesthetic qualities. The social thinkers of this era were strongly critical of the industrialization and urbanization of 19th century society, and their writing was marked by passion and imagination—visionary and idealistic at best, but sentimental or fantastic at worst.

Romanticism flourished well into the 20th century, and Modernism was only partially successful in succeeding it. The sleek geometry and aesthetic linearity of Modern art seemed fragile and insubstantial in contrast to Romantic opulence, and a return to the rigours of rationality proved difficult after a century of devotion to the primacy of emotional experi-

ence. In our feature article on the Nazi Party's 'Green Wing', Peter Staudenmaier traces the means by which an intuitive affection for the purity of the natural world, combined with a harsh criticism of modern technology and a rejection of humanism (none of which would be unfamiliar to today's deep ecologists), led to savage political consequences. A repudiation of historic methodology and a wholesale indictment of the rational process made it impossible for an entire generation to effectively critique the political and economic structures which generated the ecological and social ills of their day. Conflating biological and social categories, a single culprit was identified, and organized mass murder was the result.

Many of those Neopagan writers who promote alternative historical paradigms invoke Post-modernism as an academically credible means of reinterpreting the past and challenging empirical studies of history. David Waldron, in his article on Witchcraft Histories, suggests that these narratives, in part because of their reification of beliefs and images, owe more to Romanticism than to Post-modernism.

Dr Juliette Wood, the current president of Britain's Folklore Society presents a more generous evaluation of Margaret Murray than did her predecessor, calling Murray a "charmingly eclectic scholar", and pointing out that many of the perceived irregularities in Murray's work were the typical procedures of her day.

We *Pom* editors were considerably impressed with the article on Magical Cosmologies and Science by Dave Green, in spite of the fact that none of us are well informed on the subject of Chaos Magick. We enthusiastically encourage those readers who are familiar with the topic to give this piece a close reading and respond with such commentary as seems appropriate.

Persephone's hard-working minions

The Pomegranate

Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.

CYNTHIA ELLER WRITES:

Dear Editor,

Thanks again to *The Pomegranate* for its extensive review coverage of my recent book, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*. Thanks especially to Brian Hayden for saying that it is "a short book that will make tall waves." This was very flattering, and particularly rewarding since the book only ended up being short via much blood, sweat, and tears (the original manuscript was nine hundred pages long).

As Prof Hayden points out, we differ mainly in our assessment of the existence and relevance of significant, predictable, cross-cultural differences between women and men. I don't think we are as far apart as Hayden suggests though. I realize that I stated my case somewhat hyperbolically in chapter 4 of my book, but I think a careful reading of it (and chapter 9) makes it clear that I do not claim that sex differences do not exist. I'm more concerned with their relevance (or lack of same). The fact is, most purported sex differences have not been adequately documented yet. But I'm willing to accept that this is a failure in precise scientific measurement of such things rather than an ontological statement regarding women's and men's essential sameness. I'd even go so far as to say (for anyone who cares about my personal opinion, which is all it is) that I

think it is *probable* that there are significant, predictable, cross-cultural differences between women and men *as classes of people*. However, I think that there is questionable utility—and a lot of preexisting ideological motivation—in undertaking sex difference research.

In reaction to the racist excesses of the last couple of centuries, race difference research has recently become extremely suspect. For the most part, it is just not done these days (except in areas where there is an obvious, practical benefit to doing so; for example, in medicine, where racial predisposition to specific diseases may be an important factor in proper treatment). I see no reason to believe *prima facie* that there are no significant, predictable, cross-cultural racial differences. But I, and most Americans, think it is pernicious at this time in history to try to find out what they are. Given our very painful history of using race difference research to justify racism, we're being careful these days. We should be.

We are not so careful around questions of sex difference. From governmentally-funded sex difference research to the plethora of self-appointed authorities writing books in the ever-popular Venus/Mars genre, one can make all sorts of ridiculous, unsubstantiated generalizations about men and women (or "masculine" and "feminine," which elide effortlessly into the former) and never raise an eyebrow by doing so. Even sex difference research that is appropriately modest in its claims tends to be interpreted in the broadest, most overstated way by the popular media. We are altogether too ready to ferret out sex differences big and small, supposedly for the sake of "knowledge," when what we are really about is an excuse to treat women and men differently—and usually in familiar sexist ways—in both public and private life.

In short, exploring sex differences through ethnography, sociology, psychology, neurology, or any other branch of science is not in princi-

ple misguided. But we have no reason to trust ourselves to do it responsibly *right now*. Indeed, we have ample reason to suspect that even when we think we are enquiring into potential sex differences in a responsible, open-ended way, we are really just nailing more planks onto a deeply sexist structure.

It's time to step back and give the endless rhetoric of sex difference a rest. Maybe one day we will be able to conduct research that demonstrates that women are more nurturing than men without immediately construing this as a justification for leaving women overwhelmingly responsible for childcare. And maybe one day we will be able to conduct research that demonstrates that persons with African ethnic roots are more likely to have good rhythm than persons with European ethnic roots without thinking that blacks belong in vaudeville shows and whites in corporate boardrooms. But we're not there now. And until we are, caution should be the order of the day. I don't think we lose anything for now—and we stand to gain much—by throwing out the baby of sex difference with the bathwater of sexism: at least until we can trust ourselves to discriminate between the two. I'm thinking that's going to be awhile, in which case it is well worth our time to figure out ways to think and act during the interim that don't rely so much on generalizations about who women and men fundamentally are.

Sincerely,
Cynthia Eller

RAVEN GRIMASSI WRITES:

Dear Pomegranate,

I read the article "Spells, Saints, and *Streghe*: Witchcraft, Folk Magic, and Healing in Italy" (*Pomegranate* #13) with great interest and would like to make some comments regarding it. I feel I should preface my comments by stating I'm one of the authors whose work was examined by Professor Magliocco in her well

written article. Although my books *Ways of the Strega* and *Hereditary Witchcraft* were not written with scholarly review in mind, it was interesting to discover what a scholar drew from my material. I had the pleasure to personally meet with Professor Magliocco after the article was written, and to discuss with her my views regarding Italian witchcraft. It is unfortunate that our meeting did not take place prior to the writing of her article so as to provide Magliocco with a fuller understanding of my approach in presenting my books on Italian witchcraft.

In her article, Magliocco states I present "Italian witchcraft as consisting of three traditions: the northern Italian *Fanarra* and the central *Janarra* and *Tanarra*". While it is true that I focus on these traditions, it is a misunderstanding of my writings to conclude that I claim they are representative of "Italian witchcraft" as a whole throughout Italy. What I do claim is that these traditions (originally one system known as the Triad Tradition) divided and settled in various regions of Italy where they remained relatively intact over the centuries. Such a concept is not without precedence in the literature of Italian witchcraft. Author J.B. Andrews (*Folk-Lore; Transactions of the Folk-Lore Society*, March 1897) wrote that the witches of Naples are divided into "special departments of the art". He lists two as adepts in the art of sea magic and earth magic. Later in the article he implies that a third specialty may exist related to the stars.

Accounts such as Andrew's report are admittedly not widespread in the study of Italian witchcraft. Magliocco states that her approach is to "look for multiple documentation of the existence and meaning of a custom in order to confirm its widespread practice, rather than relying upon a single informant's report". While this seems a very safe method, I feel it may unintentionally dismiss key
continued on page 52

Fascist Ecology: The 'Green Wing' of the Nazi Party and its Historical Antecedents

by Peter Staudenmaier

This essay is an excerpt from *Ecofascism: Lessons From the German Experience*, by Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, and is reprinted with the kind permission of AK Press, PO Box 40682, San Francisco CA 94140. This book and other interesting titles are available from AK Press. Please see their website: <www.akpress.org>

"We recognize that separating humanity from nature, from the whole of life, leads to humankind's own destruction and to the death of nations. Only through a re-integration of humanity into the whole of nature can our people be made stronger. That is the fundamental point of the biological tasks of our age. Humankind alone is no longer the focus of thought, but rather life as a whole ...

*"This striving toward connectedness with the totality of life, with nature itself, a nature into which we are born, this is the deepest meaning and the true essence of National Socialist thought."*¹

In our zeal to condemn the status quo, radicals often carelessly toss about epithets like "fascist" and "ecofascist," thus contributing to a sort of conceptual inflation that in no way furthers effective social critique. In such a situation, it is easy to overlook the fact that there are still virulent strains of fascism in our political culture which, however marginal, demand our attention. One of the least rec-

ognized or understood of these strains is the phenomenon one might call "actually existing ecofascism," that is, the preoccupation of authentically fascist movements with environmentalist concerns. In order to grasp the peculiar intensity and endurance of this affiliation, we would do well to examine more closely its most notorious historical incarnation, the so-called 'green wing' of German National Socialism.

Despite an extensive documentary record, the subject remains an elusive one, underappreciated by professional historians and environmental activists alike. In English-speaking countries as well as in Germany itself, the very existence of a 'green wing' in the Nazi movement, much less its inspiration, goals, and consequences, has yet to be adequately researched and analyzed. Most of the handful of available interpretations succumb to either an alarming intellectual affinity with their subject,² or a naive refusal to examine the full extent of the "ideological overlap between nature conservation and National Socialism."³ This article presents a brief and necessarily schematic overview of the ecological components of Nazism, emphasizing both their central role in Nazi ideology and their practical implementation during the Third Reich. A preliminary survey of 19th and 20th century precursors to classical ecofascism should serve to illuminate the conceptual underpinnings common to all forms of reactionary ecology.

Two initial clarifications are in order. First, the terms "environmental" and "ecological" are here used more or less interchangeably to denote ideas, attitudes, and practices commonly associated with the contemporary environmental movement. This is not an anachronism; it simply indicates an interpretive approach which highlights connections to present-day concerns.

Second, this approach is not meant to endorse the historiographically discredited notion that pre-1933 historical data can or should be read as "leading inexorably" to the Nazi calamity. Rather, our concern here is with discerning ideological continuities and tracing political genealogies, in an attempt to understand the past in light of our current situation—to make history relevant to the present social and ecological crisis.

THE ROOTS OF THE BLOOD AND SOIL MYSTIQUE

Germany is not only the birthplace of the science of ecology and the site of Green politics' rise to prominence; it has also been home to a peculiar synthesis of naturalism and nationalism forged under the influence of the Romantic tradition's anti-Enlightenment irrationalism. Two 19th century figures exemplify this ominous conjunction: Ernst Moritz Arndt and Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl.

While best known in Germany for his fanatical nationalism, Arndt was also dedicated to the cause of the peasantry, which lead him to a concern for the welfare of the land itself. Historians of German environmentalism mention him as the earliest example of 'ecological' thinking in the modern sense.⁴ His remarkable 1815 article *On the Care and Conservation of Forests*, written at the dawn of industrialization in Central Europe, rails against shortsighted exploitation of woodlands and soil, condemning deforestation and its economic causes. At times he wrote in terms strikingly similar to those of contemporary biocentrism: "When one sees nature in a

necessary connectedness and interrelationship, then all things are equally important—shrub, worm, plant, human, stone, nothing first or last, but all one single unity."⁵

Arndt's environmentalism, however, was inextricably bound up with virulently xenophobic nationalism.

His eloquent and prescient appeals for ecological sensitivity were couched always in terms of the well-being of the German soil and the German people, and his repeated lunatic polemics against miscegenation, demands for teutonic racial purity, and epithets against the French,

Slavs, and Jews marked every aspect of his thought. At the very outset of the 19th century the deadly connection between love of land and militant racist nationalism was firmly set in place.

Riehl, a student of Arndt, further developed this sinister tradition. In some respects his 'green' streak went significantly deeper than Arndt's; presaging certain tendencies in recent environmental activism, his 1853 essay *Field and Forest* ended with a call to fight for "the rights of wilderness." But even here nationalist pathos set the tone: "We must save the forest, not only so that our ovens do not become cold in winter, but also so that the pulse of life of the people continues to beat warm and joyfully, so that Germany remains German."⁶ Riehl was an implacable opponent of the rise of industrialism and urbanization; his overtly antisemitic glorification of rural peasant values and undifferentiated condemnation of modernity established him as

The experience of the
'green wing' of
German fascism is a
sobering reminder of
the political volatility
of ecology.

the “founder of agrarian romanticism and anti-urbanism.”⁷

These latter two fixations matured in the second half of the 19th century in the context of the *völkisch* movement, a powerful cultural disposition and social tendency which united ethnocentric populism with nature mysticism. At the heart of the *völkisch* temptation was a pathological response to modernity. In the face of the very real dislocations brought on by the triumph of industrial capitalism and national unification, *völkisch* thinkers preached a return to the land, to the simplicity and wholeness of a life attuned to nature’s purity. The mystical effusiveness of this perverted utopianism was matched by its political vulgarity. While “the Volkish movement aspired to reconstruct the society that was sanctioned by history, rooted in nature, and in communion with the cosmic life spirit,”⁸ it pointedly refused to locate the sources of alienation, rootlessness and environmental destruction in social structures, laying the blame instead to rationalism, cosmopolitanism, and urban civilization. The stand-in for all of these was the age-old object of peasant hatred and middle-class resentment: the Jews. “The Germans were in search of a mysterious wholeness that would restore them to primeval happiness, destroying the hostile milieu of urban industrial civilization that the Jewish conspiracy had foisted on them.”⁹

Reformulating traditional German anti-

semitism into nature-friendly terms, the *völkisch* movement carried a volatile amalgam of 19th century cultural prejudices, Romantic obsessions with purity, and anti-Enlightenment sentiment into 20th century political discourse. The emergence of modern ecology forged the final link in the fateful chain which bound together aggressive nationalism, mystically charged racism, and environmentalist predilections.

In 1867 the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel coined the term ‘ecology’ and began to establish it as a scientific discipline dedicated to studying the interactions between organism and environment. Haeckel was also the chief pop-

ularizer of Darwin and evolutionary theory for the German-speaking world, and developed a peculiar sort of social darwinist philosophy he called ‘monism.’ The German Monist League he founded combined scientifically based ecological holism with *völkisch* social views. Haeckel believed in nordic racial superiority, strenuously opposed race mixing and enthusiastically supported racial eugenics. His fervent nationalism became fanatical with the onset of World War I, and he fulminated in antisemitic tones against the post-war Council Republic in Bavaria.

In this way “Haeckel contributed to that special variety of German thought which served as the seed bed for National Socialism. He became one of Germany’s major ideologists for racism, nationalism and imperialism.”¹⁰ Near the end of his life he

joined the Thule Society, “a secret, radically right-wing organization which played a key role in the establishment of the Nazi movement.”¹¹ But more than merely personal continuities are at stake here. The pioneer of scientific ecology, along with his disciples Willibald Hentschel, Wilhelm Bölsche and Bruno Wille, profoundly shaped the thinking of subsequent generations of environmentalists by embedding concern for the natural world in a tightly woven web of regressive social themes. From its very beginnings, then, ecology was bound up in an intensely reactionary political framework.

The specific contours of this early marriage of ecology and authoritarian social views are highly instructive. At the center of this ideological complex is the direct, unmediated application of biological categories to the social realm. Haeckel held that “civilization and the life of nations are governed by the same laws as prevail throughout nature and organic life.”¹² This notion of ‘natural laws’ or ‘natural order’ has long been a mainstay of reactionary environmental thought. Its concomitant is anti-humanism:

Thus, for the Monists, perhaps the most pernicious feature of European bourgeois civilization was the inflated importance which it attached to the idea of man in general, to his existence and to his talents, and to the belief that through his unique rational faculties man could essentially recreate the world and bring about a universally more harmonious and ethically just social order. [Humankind was] an insignificant creature when viewed as part of and measured against the vastness of the cosmos and the overwhelming forces of nature.¹³

Other Monists extended this anti-humanist emphasis and mixed it with the traditional *völkisch* motifs of indiscriminate anti-industrialism and anti-urbanism

as well as the newly emerging pseudo-scientific racism. The linchpin, once again, was the conflation of biological and social categories. The biologist Raoul Francé, founding member of the Monist League, elaborated so-called *Lebensgesetze*, ‘laws of life’ through which the natural order determines the social order. He opposed racial mixing, for example, as “unnatural.” Francé is acclaimed by contemporary ecofascists as a “pioneer of the ecology movement.”¹⁴

Francé’s colleague Ludwig Woltmann, another student of Haeckel, insisted on a biological interpretation for all societal phenomena, from cultural attitudes to economic arrangements. He stressed the supposed connection between environmental purity and ‘racial’ purity: “Woltmann took a negative attitude toward modern industrialism. He claimed that the change from an agrarian to an industrial society had hastened the decline of the race. In contrast to nature, which engendered the harmonic forms of Germanism, there were the big cities, diabolical and inorganic, destroying the virtues of the race.”¹⁵

Thus by the early years of the 20th century a certain type of ‘ecological’ argumentation, saturated with right-wing political content, had attained a measure of respectability within the political culture of Germany. During the turbulent period surrounding World War I, the mixture of ethnocentric fanaticism, regressive rejection of modernity and genuine environmental concern proved to be a very potent potion indeed.

THE YOUTH MOVEMENT AND THE WEIMAR ERA

The chief vehicle for carrying this ideological constellation to prominence was the youth movement, an amorphous phenomenon which played a decisive but highly

... radicals often carelessly
toss about epithets like
‘fascist’ and ‘ecofascist,’
thus contributing to a sort
of conceptual inflation
that in no way furthers
effective social critique.

ambivalent role in shaping German popular culture during the first three tumultuous decades of this century. Also known as the *Wandervögel* (which translates roughly as 'wandering free spirits'), the youth movement was a hodge-podge of countercultural elements, blending neo-Romanticism, Eastern philosophies, nature mysticism, hostility to reason, and a strong communal impulse in a confused but no less ardent search for authentic, non-alienated social relations. Their back-to-the-land emphasis spurred a passionate sensitivity to the natural world and the damage it suffered. They have been aptly characterized as 'right-wing hippies,' for although some sectors of the movement gravitated toward various forms of emancipatory politics (though usually shedding their environmentalist trappings in the process), most of the *Wandervögel* were eventually absorbed by the Nazis. This shift from nature worship to Führer worship is worth examining.

The various strands of the youth movement shared a common self-conception: they were a purportedly 'non-political' response to a deep cultural crisis, stressing the primacy of direct emotional experience over social critique and action. They pushed the contradictions of their time to the breaking point, but were unable or unwilling to take the final step toward organized, focused social rebellion, "convinced that the changes they wanted to effect in society could not be brought about by political means, but only by the improvement of the individual."¹⁶ This proved to be a fatal error. "Broadly speaking, two ways of revolt were open to them: they could have pursued their radical critique of society, which in due course would have brought them into the camp of social revolution. [But] the *Wandervögel* chose the other form of protest against society—

romanticism."¹⁷

This posture lent itself all too readily to a very different kind of political mobilization: the 'unpolitical' zealotry of fascism. The youth movement did not simply fail in its chosen form of protest, it was actively realigned when its members went over to the Nazis by the thousands. Its countercultural energies and its dreams of harmony with nature bore the bitterest fruit. This is, perhaps, the unavoidable trajectory of any movement which acknowledges and opposes social and ecological problems but does not recognize their systemic roots or actively resist the political and economic structures which generate them. Eschewing societal transformation in favor of personal change, an ostensibly apolitical disaffection can, in times of crisis, yield barbaric results.

The attraction such perspectives exercised on idealistic youth is clear: the enormity of the crisis seemed to enjoin a total rejection of its apparent causes. It is in the specific form of this rejection that the danger lies. Here the work of several more theoretical minds from the period is instructive. The philosopher Ludwig Klages profoundly influenced the youth movement and particularly shaped their ecological consciousness. He authored a tremendously important essay titled "Man and Earth" for the legendary Meissner gathering of the *Wandervögel* in 1913.¹⁸ An extraordinarily poignant text and the best known of all Klages' work, it is not only "one of the very greatest manifestoes of the radical ecopacifist movement in Germany,"¹⁹ but also a classic example of the seductive terminology of reactionary ecology.

"Man and Earth" anticipated just about all of the themes of the contemporary ecology movement. It decried the accelerating extinction of species, disturbance of global ecosystemic balance, deforestation, destruc-

tion of aboriginal peoples and of wild habitats, urban sprawl, and the increasing alienation of people from nature. In emphatic terms it disparaged Christianity, capitalism, economic utilitarianism, hyperconsumption and the ideology of 'progress.' It even condemned the environmental destructiveness of rampant tourism and the slaughter of whales, and displayed a clear recognition of the planet as an ecological totality. All of this in 1913!

It may come as a surprise, then, to learn that Klages was throughout his life politically arch-conservative and a venomous antisemite. One historian labels him a "Volkish fanatic" and another considers him simply "an intellectual pacemaker for the Third Reich" who "paved the way for fascist philosophy in many important respects."²⁰ In "Man and Earth" a genuine outrage at the devastation of the natural environment is coupled with a political subtext of cultural despair.²¹ Klages' diagnosis of the ills of modern society, for all its declamations about capitalism, returns always to a single culprit: "Geist." His idiosyncratic use of this term, which means mind or intellect, was meant to denounce not only hyperrationalism or instrumental reason, but rational thought itself. Such a wholesale indictment of reason cannot help but have savage political implications. It forecloses any chance of rationally reconstructing society's relationship with nature and justifies the most brutal authoritarian-

ism. But the lessons of Klages' life and work have been hard for ecologists to learn. In 1980, "Man and Earth" was republished as an esteemed and seminal treatise to accompany the birth of the German Greens.

Another philosopher and stern critic of

Enlightenment who helped bridge fascism and environmentalism was Martin Heidegger. A much more renowned thinker than Klages, Heidegger preached "authentic Being" and harshly criticized modern technology, and is therefore often celebrated as a precursor of ecological thinking. On the basis of his critique of technology and rejection of humanism, contemporary deep

ecologists have elevated Heidegger to their pantheon of eco-heroes:

Heidegger's critique of anthropocentric humanism, his call for humanity to learn to "let things be," his notion that humanity is involved in a "play" or "dance" with earth, sky, and gods, his meditation on the possibility of an authentic mode of "dwelling" on the earth, his complaint that industrial technology is laying waste to the earth, his emphasis on the importance of local place and "homeland," his claim that humanity should guard and preserve things, instead of dominating them—all these aspects of Heidegger's thought help to support the claim that he is a major deep ecological theorist.²²

Such effusions are, at best, dangerously

The specific contours of this early marriage of ecology and authoritarian social views are highly instructive. At the center of this ideological complex is the direct, unmediated application of biological categories to the social realm.

naive. They suggest a style of thought utterly oblivious to the history of fascist appropriations of all the elements the quoted passage praises in Heidegger. (To his credit, the author of the above lines, a major deep ecological theorist in his own right, has since changed his position and eloquently urged his colleagues to do the same.)²³ As for the philosopher of Being himself, he was—unlike Klages, who lived in Switzerland after 1915—an active member of the Nazi party and for a time enthusiastically, even adoringly supported the Führer. His mystical panegyrics to *Heimat* (homeland) were complemented by a deep anti-semitism, and his metaphysically phrased broadsides against technology and modernity converged neatly with populist demagoguery. Although he lived and taught for thirty years after the fall of the Third Reich, Heidegger never once publicly regretted, much less renounced, his involvement with National Socialism, nor even perfunctorily condemned its crimes. His work, whatever its philosophical merits, stands today as a signal admonition about the political uses of anti-humanism in ecological garb.

In addition to the youth movement and protofascist philosophies, there were, of course, practical efforts at protecting natural habitats during the Weimar period.

... although some sectors
of the [*Wandervögel*]
movement gravitated
toward various forms of
emancipatory politics
(though usually shedding
their environmentalist
trappings in the process),
most of the *Wandervögel*
were eventually
absorbed by the Nazis.

Many of these projects were profoundly implicated in the ideology which culminated in the victory of 'Blood and Soil.' A 1923 recruitment pitch for a woodlands preservation outfit gives a sense of the environmental rhetoric of the time:

"In every German breast the German forest quivers with its caverns and ravines, crags and boulders, waters and winds, legends and fairy tales, with its songs and its melodies, and awakens a powerful yearning and a longing for home; in all German souls the German forest lives and weaves with its depth and breadth, its stillness and strength, its might and dignity, its riches and its beauty—it is the source of German inwardness, of the German soul, of German freedom.

Therefore protect and care for the German forest for the sake of the elders and the youth, and join the new German "League for the Protection and Consecration of the German Forest."²⁴

The mantra-like repetition of the word "German" and the mystical depiction of the sacred forest fuse together, once again, nationalism and naturalism. This intertwinement took on a grisly significance with the collapse of the Weimar republic. For alongside such relatively innocuous conservation groups, another organization was growing which offered these ideas a

hospitable home: the National Socialist German Workers Party, known by its acronym NSDAP. Drawing on the heritage of Arndt, Riehl, Haeckel, and others (all of whom were honored between 1933 and 1945 as forebears of triumphant National Socialism), the Nazi movement's incorporation of environmentalist themes was a crucial factor in its rise to popularity and state power.

NATURE IN NAZI IDEOLOGY

The reactionary ecological ideas whose outlines are sketched above exerted a powerful and lasting influence on many of the central figures in the NSDAP. Weimar culture, after all, was fairly awash in such theories, but the Nazis gave them a peculiar inflection. The National Socialist "religion of nature," as one historian has described it, was a volatile admixture of primeval teutonic nature mysticism, pseudo-scientific ecology, irrationalist anti-humanism, and a mythology of racial salvation through a return to the land. Its predominant themes were 'natural order,' organicist holism and denigration of humanity: "Throughout the writings, not only of Hitler, but of most Nazi ideologues, one can discern a fundamental deprecation of humans vis-à-vis nature, and, as a logical corollary to this, an attack upon human efforts to master nature."²⁵ Quoting a Nazi educator, the same source continues: "anthropocentric views in general had to be rejected. They would be valid only 'if it is assumed that nature has been created only for man. We decisively reject this attitude. According to our conception of nature, man is a link in the living chain of nature just as any other organism'."²⁶

Such arguments have a chilling currency within contemporary ecological discourse: the key to social-ecological harmony is

ascertaining "the eternal laws of nature's processes" (Hitler) and organizing society to correspond to them. The Führer was particularly fond of stressing the "helplessness of humankind in the face of nature's everlasting law."²⁷ Echoing Haeckel and the Monists, *Mein Kampf* announces: "When people attempt to rebel against the iron logic of nature, they come into conflict with the very same principles to which they owe their existence as human beings. Their actions against nature must lead to their own downfall."²⁸

The authoritarian implications of this view of humanity and nature become even clearer in the context of the Nazis' emphasis on holism and organicism. In 1934 the director of the Reich Agency for Nature Protection, Walter Schoenichen, established the following objectives for biology curricula: "Very early, the youth must develop an understanding of the civic importance of the 'organism', i.e. the co-ordination of all parts and organs for the benefit of the one and superior task of life."²⁹ This (by now familiar) unmediated adaptation of biological concepts to social phenomena served to justify not only the totalitarian social order of the Third Reich but also the expansionist politics of *Lebensraum* (the plan of conquering 'living space' in Eastern Europe for the German people). It also provided the link between environmental purity and racial purity:

Two central themes of biology education follow [according to the Nazis] from the holistic perspective: nature protection and eugenics. If one views nature as a unified whole, students will automatically develop a sense for ecology and environmental conservation. At the same time, the nature protection concept will direct attention to the urbanized and 'overcivilized' modern human race.³⁰

In many varieties of the National Social-

ist world view ecological themes were linked with traditional agrarian romanticism and hostility to urban civilization, all revolving around the idea of rootedness in nature. This conceptual constellation, especially the search for a lost connection to nature, was most pronounced among the neo-pagan elements in the Nazi leadership, above all Heinrich Himmler, Alfred Rosenberg, and Walther Darré. Rosenberg wrote in his colossal *The Myth of the 20th Century*: "Today we see the steady stream from the countryside to the city, deadly for the Volk. The cities swell ever larger, unnerving the Volk and destroying the threads which bind humanity to nature; they attract adventurers and profiteers of all colors, thereby fostering racial chaos."³¹

Such musings, it must be stressed, were not mere rhetoric; they reflected firmly held beliefs and, indeed, practices at the very top of the Nazi hierarchy which are today conventionally associated with ecological attitudes. Hitler and Himmler were both strict vegetarians and animal lovers, attracted to nature mysticism and homeopathic cures, and staunchly opposed to vivisection and cruelty to animals. Himmler even established experimental organic farms to grow herbs for SS medicinal purposes. And Hitler, at times, could sound like a veritable Green utopian, discussing authoritatively and in detail various renewable energy

sources (including environmentally appropriate hydropower and producing natural gas from sludge) as alternatives to coal, and declaring "water, winds and tides" as the energy path of the future.³²

Even in the midst of war, Nazi leaders maintained their commitment to ecological ideals which were, for them, an essential element of racial rejuvenation. In December 1942, Himmler released a decree "On the Treatment of the Land in the Eastern Territories," referring to the newly annexed portions of Poland. It read in part:

The peasant of our racial stock has always carefully endeavored to increase the natural powers of the soil, plants, and animals, and to preserve the balance of the whole of nature. For him, respect for divine creation is the measure of all culture. If, therefore, the new *Lebensräume* (living spaces) are to become a homeland for our settlers, the planned arrangement of the landscape to keep it close to nature is a decisive prerequisite. It is one of the bases for fortifying the German Volk.³³

This passage recapitulates almost all of the tropes comprised by classical ecofascist ideology: *Lebensraum*, *Heimat*, the agrarian mystique, the health of the Volk, closeness to and respect for nature (explicitly constructed as the standard against which society is to be judged), maintaining nature's precarious balance, and the earthy powers of the soil and its creatures. Such motifs were anything but personal idiosyn-

cracies on the part of Hitler, Himmler, or Rosenberg; even Göring—who was, along with Goebbels, the member of the Nazi inner circle least hospitable to ecological ideas—appeared at times to be a committed conservationist.³⁴ These sympathies were also hardly restricted to the upper echelons of the party. A study of the membership rolls of several mainstream Weimar era *Naturschutz* (nature protection) organizations revealed that by 1939, fully 60 percent of these conservationists had joined the NSDAP (compared to about 10 percent of adult men and 25 percent of teachers and lawyers).³⁵ Clearly the affinities between environmentalism and National Socialism ran deep.

At the level of ideology, then, ecological themes played a vital role in German fascism. It would be a grave mistake, however, to treat these elements as mere propaganda, cleverly deployed to mask Nazism's true character as a technocratic-industrialist juggernaut. The definitive history of German anti-urbanism and agrarian romanticism argues incisively against this view:

Nothing could be more wrong than to suppose that most of the leading National Socialist ideologues had cynically feigned an agrarian romanticism and hostility to urban culture, without any inner conviction and for merely electoral and propaganda purposes, in order to hoodwink the public ... In reality, the majority of the leading National Socialist ideologists were without any doubt more or less inclined to agrarian romanticism and anti-urbanism and convinced of the need for a relative re-agrarianization.³⁶

The question remains, however: To what extent did the Nazis actually implement environmental policies during the twelve-year Reich? There is strong evidence that the 'ecological' tendency in the party, though largely ignored today, had considerable success for most of the party's reign.

This 'green wing' of the NSDAP was represented above all by Walther Darré, Fritz Todt, Alwin Seifert and Rudolf Hess, the four figures who primarily shaped fascist ecology in practice.

BLOOD AND SOIL AS OFFICIAL DOCTRINE

"The unity of blood and soil must be restored," proclaimed Richard Walther Darré in 1930.³⁷ This infamous phrase denoted a quasi-mystical connection between 'blood' (the race or Volk) and 'soil' (the land and the natural environment) specific to Germanic peoples and absent, for example, among Celts and Slavs. For the enthusiasts of *Blut und Boden*, the Jews especially were a rootless, wandering people, incapable of any true relationship with the land. German blood, in other words, engendered an exclusive claim to the sacred German soil. While the term "blood and soil" had been circulating in völkisch circles since at least the Wilhelmine era, it was Darré who first popularized it as a slogan and then enshrined it as a guiding principle of Nazi thought. Harking back to Arndt and Riehl, he envisioned a thoroughgoing ruralization of Germany and Europe, predicated on a revitalized yeoman peasantry, in order to ensure racial health and ecological sustainability.

Darré was one of the party's chief "race theorists" and was also instrumental in galvanizing peasant support for the Nazis during the critical period of the early 1930s. From 1933 until 1942 he held the posts of Reich Peasant Leader and Minister of Agriculture. This was no minor fiefdom; the agriculture ministry had the fourth largest budget of all the myriad Nazi ministries even well into the war.³⁸ From this position Darré was able to lend vital support to various ecologically oriented initia-

tives. He played an essential part in unifying the nebulous proto-environmentalist tendencies in National Socialism:

It was Darré who gave the ill-defined anti-civilization, anti-liberal, anti-modern and latent anti-urban sentiments of the Nazi elite a foundation in the agrarian mystique. And it seems as if Darré had an immense influence on the ideology of National Socialism, as if he was able to articulate significantly more clearly than before the values system of an agrarian society contained in Nazi ideology and—above all—to legitimate this agrarian model and give Nazi policy a goal that was clearly oriented toward a far-reaching re-agrarianization.³⁹

This goal was not only quite consonant with imperialist expansion in the name of Lebensraum, it was in fact one of its primary justifications, even motivations. In language replete with the biologicistic metaphors of organicism, Darré declared: “The concept of Blood and Soil gives us the moral right to take back as much land in the East as is necessary to establish a harmony between the body of our Volk and the geopolitical space.”⁴⁰

Aside from providing green camouflage for the colonization of Eastern Europe, Darré worked to install environmentally sensitive principles as the very basis of the Third Reich’s agricultural policy. Even in its most productivist phases, these precepts remained emblematic of Nazi doctrine. When the “Battle for Production” (a

scheme to boost the productivity of the agricultural sector) was proclaimed at the second Reich Farmers Congress in 1934, the very first point in the program read “Keep the soil healthy!” But Darré’s most important innovation was the introduction on a large scale of organic farming methods, significantly labeled “*lebensgesetzliche Landbauweise*,” or farming according to the laws of life. The term points up yet again the natural order ideology which underlies so much reactionary ecological thought. The impetus for these unprecedented measures came from Rudolf

Steiner’s anthroposophy and its techniques of biodynamic cultivation.⁴¹

The campaign to institutionalize organic farming encompassed tens of thousands of smallholdings and estates across Germany. It met with considerable resistance from other members of the Nazi hierarchy, above all Backe and Göring. But Darré, with the help of Hess and others, was able to sustain the policy until his forced resignation in 1942 (an event which had little to do with his

environmentalist leanings). And these efforts in no sense represented merely Darré’s personal predilections; as the standard history of German agricultural policy points out, Hitler and Himmler “were in complete sympathy with these ideas.”⁴² Still, it was largely Darré’s influence in the Nazi apparatus which yielded, in practice,

a level of government support for ecologically sound farming methods and land use planning unmatched by any state before or since.

For these reasons Darré has sometimes been regarded as a forerunner of the contemporary Green movement. His biographer, in fact, once referred to him as the “father of the Greens.”⁴³ Her book *Blood and Soil*, undoubtedly the best single source on Darré in either German or English, consistently downplays the virulently fascist elements in his thinking, portraying him instead as a misguided agrarian radical. This grave error in judgement indicates the powerfully disorienting pull of an ‘ecological’ aura. Darré’s published writings alone, dating back to the early 20s, are enough to indict him as a rabidly racist and jingoist ideologue particularly prone to a vulgar and hateful antisemitism (he spoke of Jews, revealingly, as “weeds”). His decade-long tenure as a loyal servant and, moreover, architect of the Nazi state demonstrates his dedication to Hitler’s deranged cause. One account even claims that it was Darré who convinced Hitler and Himmler of the necessity of exterminating the Jews and Slavs.⁴⁴ The ecological aspects of his thought cannot, in sum, be separated from their thoroughly Nazi framework. Far from embodying the ‘redeeming’ facets of National Socialism, Darré represents the baleful specter of ecofascism in power.

IMPLEMENTING THE ECOFASCIST PROGRAM

It is frequently pointed out that the agrarian and romantic moments in Nazi ideology and policy were in constant tension with, if not in flat contradiction to, the technocratic-industrialist thrust of the Third Reich’s rapid modernization. What is not often remarked is that even these mod-

ernizing tendencies had a significant ecological component. The two men principally responsible for sustaining this environmentalist commitment in the midst of intensive industrialization were Reichsminister Fritz Todt and his aide, the high-level planner and engineer Alwin Seifert.

Todt was “one of the most influential National Socialists,”⁴⁵ directly responsible for questions of technological and industrial policy. At his death in 1942 he headed three different cabinet-level ministries in addition to the enormous quasi-official *Organisation Todt*, and had “gathered the major technical tasks of the Reich into his own hands.”⁴⁶ According to his successor, Albert Speer, Todt “loved nature” and “repeatedly had serious run-ins with Bornmann, protesting against his despoiling the landscape around Obersalzberg.”⁴⁷ Another source calls him simply “an ecologist.”⁴⁸ This reputation is based chiefly on Todt’s efforts to make Autobahn construction—one of the largest building enterprises undertaken in this century—as environmentally sensitive as possible.

The pre-eminent historian of German engineering describes this commitment thus: “Todt demanded of the completed work of technology a harmony with nature and with the landscape, thereby fulfilling modern ecological principles of engineering as well as the ‘organological’ principles of his own era along with their roots in völkisch ideology.”⁴⁹ The ecological aspects of this approach to construction went well beyond an emphasis on harmonious adaptation to the natural surroundings for aesthetic reasons; Todt also established strict criteria for respecting wetlands, forests and ecologically sensitive areas. But just as with Arndt, Riehl and Darré, these environmentalist concerns

Not only did the ‘green wing’ refurbish the sanguine antisemitism of traditional reactionary ecology; it catalyzed a whole new outburst of lurid racist fantasies of organic inviolability and political revenge.

were inseparably bound to a völkisch-nationalist outlook. Todt himself expressed this connection succinctly: "The fulfilment of mere transportation purposes is not the final aim of German highway construction. The German highway must be an expression of its surrounding landscape and an expression of the German essence."⁵⁰

Todt's chief advisor and collaborator on environmental issues was his lieutenant Alwin Seifert, whom Todt reportedly once called a "fanatical ecologist."⁵¹ Seifert bore the official title of Reich Advocate for the Landscape, but his nickname within the party was "Mr Mother Earth." The appellation was deserved; Seifert dreamed of a "total conversion from technology to nature,"⁵² and would often wax lyrical about the wonders of German nature and the tragedy of "humankind's" carelessness. As early as 1934 he wrote to Hess demanding attention to water issues and invoking "work methods that are more attuned to nature."⁵³ In discharging his official duties Seifert stressed the importance of wilderness and energetically opposed monoculture, wetlands drainage and chemicalized agriculture. He criticized Darré as too moderate, and "called for an agricultural revolution towards 'a more peasant-like, natural, simple' method of farming, 'independent of capital'"⁵⁴

With the Third Reich's technological policy entrusted to figures such as these, even the Nazis' massive industrial build-up took on a distinctively green hue. The prominence of nature in the party's philosophical background helped ensure that more radical initiatives often received a sympathetic hearing in the highest offices of the Nazi state. In the mid-thirties Todt and Seifert vigorously pushed for an all-encompassing Reich Law for the Protection of Mother Earth "in order to stem the

steady loss of this irreplaceable basis of all life."⁵⁵ Seifert reports that all of the ministries were prepared to co-operate save one; only the minister of the economy opposed the bill because of its impact on mining.

But even near-misses such as these would have been unthinkable without the support of Reich Chancellor Rudolf Hess, who provided the 'green wing' of the NSDAP a secure anchor at the very top of the party hierarchy. It would be difficult to overestimate Hess's power and centrality in the complex governmental machinery of the National Socialist regime. He joined the party in 1920 as member #16, and for two decades was Hitler's devoted personal deputy. He has been described as "Hitler's closest confidant,"⁵⁶ and the Führer himself referred to Hess as his "closest advisor."⁵⁷ Hess was not only the highest party leader and second in line (after Göring) to succeed Hitler; in addition, all legislation and every decree had to pass through his office before becoming law.

An inveterate nature lover as well as a devout Steinerite, Hess insisted on a strictly biodynamic diet—not even Hitler's rigorous vegetarian standards were good enough for him—and accepted only homeopathic medicines. It was Hess who introduced Darré to Hitler, thus securing the 'green wing' its first power base. He was an even more tenacious proponent of organic farming than Darré, and pushed the latter to take more demonstrative steps in support of the *lebensgesetzliche Landbauweise*.⁵⁸ His office was also directly responsible for land use planning across the Reich, employing a number of specialists who shared Seifert's ecological approach.⁵⁹

With Hess's enthusiastic backing, the 'green wing' was able to achieve its most notable successes. As early as March 1933,

a wide array of environmentalist legislation was approved and implemented at national, regional and local levels. These measures, which included reforestation programs, bills protecting animal and plant species, and preservationist decrees blocking industrial development, undoubtedly "ranked among the most progressive in the world at that time."⁶⁰ Planning ordinances were designed for the protection of wildlife habitat and at the same time demanded respect for the sacred German forest. The Nazi state also created the first nature preserves in Europe.

Along with Darré's efforts toward re-agrarianization and support for organic agriculture, as well as Todt and Seifert's attempts to institutionalize an environmentally sensitive land use planning and industrial policy, the major accomplishment of the Nazi ecologists was the *Reichsnaturschutzgesetz* of 1935. This completely unprecedented "nature protection law" not only established guidelines for safeguarding flora, fauna, and "natural monuments" across the Reich; it also restricted commercial access to remaining tracts of wilderness. In addition, the comprehensive ordinance "required all national, state and local officials to consult with Naturschutz authorities in a timely manner before undertaking any measures that would produce fundamental alterations in the coun-

tryside."⁶¹

Although the legislation's effectiveness was questionable, traditional German environmentalists were overjoyed at its passage. Walter Schoenichen declared it the "definitive fulfilment of the völkisch-romantic longings,"⁶² and Hans Klose, Schoenichen's successor as head of the Reich Agency for Nature Protection, described Nazi environmental policy as the "high point of nature protection" in Germany. Perhaps the greatest success of these measures was in facilitating the "intellectual realignment of German Naturschutz" and the integration of mainstream environmentalism into the Nazi enterprise.⁶³

While the achievements of the 'green wing' were daunting, they should not be exaggerated. Ecological initiatives were, of course, hardly universally popular within the party. Goebbels, Bormann, and Heydrich, for example, were implacably opposed to them, and considered Darré, Hess and their fellows undependable dreamers, eccentrics, or simply security risks. This latter suspicion seemed to be confirmed by Hess's famed flight to Britain in 1941; after that point, the environmentalist tendency was for the most part suppressed. Todt was killed in a plane crash in February 1942, and shortly thereafter Darré was stripped of all his posts. For the final three years of the Nazi conflagration

To explain the destruction of the countryside and environmental damage, without questioning the German people's bond to nature, could only be done by ... refusing to understand them as an expression of conflicting social interests.

the 'green wing' played no active role. Their work, however, had long since left an indelible stain.

FASCIST ECOLOGY IN CONTEXT

To make this dismaying and discomforting analysis more palatable, it is tempting to draw precisely the wrong conclusion—namely, that even the most reprehensible political undertakings sometimes produce laudable results. But the real lesson here is just the opposite: Even the most laudable of causes can be perverted and instrumentalized in the service of criminal savagery. The 'green wing' of the NSDAP was not a group of innocents, confused and manipulated idealists, or reformers from within; they were conscious promoters and executors of a program explicitly dedicated to inhuman racist violence, massive political repression and worldwide military domination. Their 'ecological' involvements, far from offsetting these fundamental commitments, deepened and radicalized them. In the end, their configuration of environmental politics was directly and substantially responsible for organized mass murder.

No aspect of the Nazi project can be properly understood without examining its implication in the holocaust. Here, too, ecological arguments played a crucially malevolent role. Not only did the 'green wing' refurbish the sanguine antisemitism of traditional reactionary ecology; it catalyzed a whole new outburst of lurid racist fantasies of organic inviolability and political revenge. The confluence of anti-humanist dogma with a fetishization of natural 'purity' provided not merely a rationale but an incentive for the Third Reich's most heinous crimes. Its insidious appeal unleashed murderous energies previously untapped. Finally, the displacement

of any social analysis of environmental destruction in favor of mystical ecology served as an integral component in the preparation of the final solution.

To explain the destruction of the countryside and environmental damage, without questioning the German people's bond to nature, could only be done by not analysing environmental damage in a societal context and by refusing to understand them as an expression of conflicting social interests. Had this been done, it would have led to criticism of National Socialism itself since that was not immune to such forces. One solution was to associate such environmental problems with the destructive influence of other races. National Socialism could then be seen to strive for the elimination of other races in order to allow the German people's innate understanding and feeling of nature to assert itself, hence securing a harmonic life close to nature for the future.⁶⁴

This is the true legacy of ecofascism in power: "genocide developed into a necessity under the cloak of environment protection."⁶⁵

The experience of the 'green wing' of German fascism is a sobering reminder of the political volatility of ecology. It certainly does not indicate any inherent or inevitable connection between ecological issues and right-wing politics; alongside the reactionary tradition surveyed here, there has always been an equally vital heritage of left-libertarian ecology, in Germany as elsewhere.⁶⁶ But certain patterns can be discerned: "While concerns about problems posed by humankind's increasing mastery over nature have increasingly been shared by ever larger groups of people embracing a plethora of ideologies, the most consistent 'pro-natural order' response found political embodiment on the radical right."⁶⁷ This is the common thread which unites merely conservative or

even supposedly apolitical manifestations of environmentalism with the straightforwardly fascist variety.

The historical record does, to be sure, belie the vacuous claim that "those who want to reform society according to nature are neither left nor right but ecologically minded."⁶⁸ Environmental themes can be mobilized from the left or from the right, indeed they require an explicit social context if they are to have any political valence whatsoever. "Ecology" alone does not prescribe a politics; it must be interpreted, mediated through some theory of society in order to acquire political meaning. Failure to heed this mediated interrelationship between the social and the ecological is the hallmark of reactionary ecology.

As noted above, this failure most commonly takes the form of a call to "reform society according to nature," that is, to formulate some version of 'natural order' or 'natural law' and submit human needs and actions to it. As a consequence, the underlying social processes and societal structures which constitute and shape people's relations with their environment are left unexamined. Such willful ignorance, in turn, obscures the ways in which all conceptions of nature are themselves socially produced, and leaves power structures unquestioned while simultaneously providing them with apparently 'naturally ordained' status. Thus the substitution of ecomysticism for clear-sighted social-ecological inquiry has catastrophic political repercussions, as the complexity of the society-nature dialectic is collapsed into a purified Oneness. An ideologically charged 'natural order' does not leave room for compromise; its claims are absolute.

For all of these reasons, the slogan advanced by many contemporary Greens, "We are neither right nor left but up

front," is historically naive and politically fatal. The necessary project of creating an emancipatory ecological politics demands an acute awareness and understanding of the legacy of classical ecofascism and its conceptual continuities with present-day environmental discourse. An 'ecological' orientation alone, outside of a critical social framework, is dangerously unstable. The record of fascist ecology shows that under the right conditions such an orientation can quickly lead to barbarism.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ernst Lehmann, *Biologischer Wille. Wege und Ziele biologischer Arbeit im neuen Reich*, München, 1934, pp. 10-11. Lehmann was a professor of botany who characterized National Socialism as "politically applied biology."
2. Anna Bramwell, author of the only book-length study on the subject, is exemplary in this respect. See her *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré and Hitler's 'Green Party'*, Bourne End, 1985, and *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History*, New Haven, 1989.
3. See Raymond H. Dominick, *The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1871-1971*, Bloomington, 1992, especially part three, "The Völkisch Temptation."
4. For example, Dominick, *The Environmental Movement in Germany*, p. 22; and Jost Hermand, *Grüne Utopien in Deutschland: Zur Geschichte des ökologischen Bewusstseins*, Frankfurt, 1991, pp. 44-45.
5. Quoted in Rudolf Krügel, *Der Begriff des Volksgeistes in Ernst Moritz Arndts Geschichtsanschauung*, Langensalza, 1914, p. 18.
6. Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Feld und Wald*, Stuttgart, 1857, p. 52.
7. Klaus Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft*, Meisenheim, 1970, p. 38. There is no satisfactory English counterpart to "Großstadtfeindschaft," a term which signifies hostility to the cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and cultural tolerance of

- cities as such. This 'anti-urbanism' is the precise opposite of the careful critique of urbanization worked out by Murray Bookchin in *Urbanization Without Cities*, Montréal, 1992, and *The Limits of the City*, Montréal, 1986.
8. George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, New York, 1964, p. 29.
 9. Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945*, New York, 1975, pp. 61-62.
 10. Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism: Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League*, New York, 1971, p. xvii.
 11. *ibid.*, p. 30. Gasman's thesis about the politics of Monism is hardly uncontroversial; the book's central argument, however, is sound.
 12. Quoted in Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism*, p. 34.
 13. *ibid.*, p. 33.
 14. See the foreword to the 1982 reprint of his 1923 book *Die Entdeckung der Heimat*, published by the far-right MUT Verlag.
 15. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, p. 101.
 16. Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement*, New York, 1962, p. 41.
 17. *ibid.*, p. 6. For a concise portrait of the youth movement which draws similar conclusions, see John De Graaf, "The Wandervogel," *CoEvolution Quarterly*, Fall 1977, pp. 14-21.
 18. Reprinted in Ludwig Klages, *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 3, Bonn, 1974, pp. 614-630. No English translation is available.
 19. Ulrich Linse, *Ökopax und Anarchie. Eine Geschichte der ökologischen Bewegungen in Deutschland*, München, 1986, p. 60.
 20. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, p. 211, and Laqueur, *Young Germany*, p. 34.
 21. See Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, Berkeley, 1963.
 22. Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics and Art*, Indianapolis, 1990, pp. 242-243.
 23. See Michael Zimmerman, "Rethinking the Heidegger—Deep Ecology Relationship", *Environmental Ethics* vol. 15, no. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 195-224.
 24. Reproduced in Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, *Auf der Suche nach Arkadien*, München, 1990, p. 147.
 25. Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature*, London, 1985, p. 40.
 26. *ibid.*, pp. 42-43. The internal quote is taken from George Mosse, *Nazi Culture*, New York, 1965, p. 87.
 27. Hitler, in Henry Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941-1942*, Stuttgart, 1963, p. 151.
 28. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, München, 1935, p. 314.
 29. Quoted in Gert Gröning and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, "Politics, planning and the protection of nature: political abuse of early ecological ideas in Germany, 1933-1945", *Planning Perspectives* 2 (1987), p. 129.
 30. Änne Bäumer, *NS-Biologie*, Stuttgart, 1990, p. 198.
 31. Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, München, 1938, p. 550. Rosenberg was, in the early years at least, the chief ideologist of the Nazi movement.
 32. Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, pp. 139-140.
 33. Quoted in Heinz Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft und Agrarpolitik im deutschen Sprachgebiet*, Band II, München, 1958, p. 266.
 34. See Dominick, *The Environmental Movement in Germany*, p. 107.
 35. *ibid.*, p. 113.
 36. Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfreundschaft*, p. 334. Ernst Nolte makes a similar argument in *Three Faces of Fascism*, New York, 1966, pp. 407-408, though the point gets lost somewhat in the translation. See also Norbert Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany*, Oxford, 1993, p. 56: "The change in direction towards the 'soil' had not been an electoral tactic. It was one of the basic ideological elements of National Socialism ..."
 37. R. Walther Darré, *Um Blut und Boden: Reden und Aufsätze*, München, 1939, p. 28. The quote is from a 1930 speech entitled "Blood and Soil as the Foundations of Life of the Nordic Race."
 38. Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, p. 203. See also Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany*, p. 57, which stresses that Darré's total control over agricultural policy constituted a uniquely powerful position within the Nazi system.
 39. Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfreundschaft*, p. 312.
 40. *ibid.*, p. 308.
 41. See Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft*, pp. 269-271, and Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, pp. 200-206, for the formative influence of Steinerite ideas on Darré.
 42. Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft*, p. 271.
 43. Anna Bramwell, "Darré. Was This Man 'Father of the Greens'?" *History Today*, September 1984, vol. 34, pp. 7-13. This repugnant article is one long series of distortions designed to paint Darré as an anti-Hitler hero—an effort as preposterous as it is loathsome.
 44. Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *Hess: A Biography*, London, 1971, p. 34.
 45. Franz Neumann, *Behemoth. The Structure and Practice of National Socialism 1933-1944*, New York, 1944, p. 378.
 46. Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, New York, 1970, p. 263.
 47. *ibid.*, p. 261.
 48. Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, p. 197.
 49. Karl-Heinz Ludwig, *Technik und Ingenieure im Dritten Reich*, Düsseldorf, 1974, p. 337.
 50. Quoted in Rolf Peter Sieferle, *Fortschrittsfeinde? Opposition gegen Technik und Industrie von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart*, München, 1984, p. 220. Todt was just as convinced a Nazi as Darré or Hess; on the extent (and pettiness) of his allegiance to antisemitic policies, see Alan Beyerchen, *Scientists Under Hitler*, New Haven, 1977, pages 66-68 and 289.
 51. Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, p. 173.
 52. Alwin Seifert, *Im Zeitalter des Lebendigen*, Dresden, 1941, p. 13. The book's title is grotesquely inept considering the date of publication; it means "in the age of the living."
 53. Alwin Seifert, *Ein Leben für die Landschaft*, Düsseldorf, 1962, p. 100.
 54. Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, p. 198. Bramwell cites Darré's papers as the source of the internal quote.
 55. Seifert, *Ein Leben für die Landschaft*, p. 90.
 56. William Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, New York, 1941, p. 19. Shirer also calls Hess Hitler's "protégé" (588) and "the only man in the world he fully trusts" (587), and substantiates Darré's and Todt's standing as well (590).
 57. Quoted in Manvell and Fraenkel, *Hess*, p. 80. In a further remarkable confirmation of the 'green' faction's stature, Hitler once declared that Todt and Hess were "the only two human beings among all those around me to whom I have been truly and inwardly attached" (Hess, p. 132).
 58. See Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft*, p. 270, and Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, p. 201.
 59. *ibid.*, pp. 197-200. Most of Todt's work also ran through Hess's office.
 60. Raymond Dominick, "The Nazis and the Nature Conservationists", *The Historian* vol. XLIX no. 4 (August 1987), p. 534.
 61. *ibid.*, p. 536.
 62. Hermand, *Grüne Utopien in Deutschland*, p. 114.
 63. Dominick, "The Nazis and the Nature Conservationists", p. 529.
 64. Gröning and Wolschke-Bulmahn, "Politics, planning and the protection of nature", p. 137.
 65. *ibid.*, p. 138.
 66. Linse's *Ökopax und Anarchie*, among others, offers a detailed consideration of the history of eco-anarchism in Germany.
 67. Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature*, p. 27.
 68. Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, p. 48.

Modernity, Magickal Cosmologies and Science: A New Cauldron for a New Age?

by Dave Green
University of the West of England

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the many overlaps between Pagan magick—particularly Pagan cosmologies—and science. Using the example of chaos magic it explores the ways in which science is used to legitimate and liberate contemporary magickal practices. I then argue that science is increasingly coming to resemble a religion. In particular, scientific ontological explanations increasingly use spiritual metaphors.

Appropriating Foucault's concept of heterotopia, I examine the ways in which Pagan fusions of science and magick furnish magickians with transformative possibilities. Using heterotopia as a heuristic, I demonstrate how postmodern magickal practices help to critique purely rational notions of modernity and modern man. Postmodernism and irrationality, for me, being fundamental, symbiotic parts of the modern condition.

Similarly Magickal selves are multiplicities with both rational and irrational aspects. Magickians are in constant motion, synthesising different domains of knowledge and experience. In this respect they resemble Deleuze and Guattari's nomad and Serres' Hermes and harlequin, providing modern individuals with postmodern possibilities for change.

My ongoing research into contemporary Paganism has continually forced me to rethink my precon-

ceptions about the relationship between science, magick and religion. Once virtually indistinguishable under the *aegis* of cosmology, science and religion, like C.P. Snow's *Two Cultures*, have become symbolically opposed (see Sorrel, 1991: 98-126; Needleman, 1988). This polarisation has produced caricatures of religious narrative and magickal practice as irrational, magick famously being in Frazer's terms "the bastard sister of science", or, for Tylor, "one of the most pernicious delusions that ever vexed mankind". Meanwhile, scientific rationality is seen as liberational (Midgley, 1992). The relationship between science, magick and religion became a staple of anthropological study. Those debates are well-known and need not be elaborated here other than to say that many early theories of magic, particularly intellectualist approaches, tended to view magickal ritual as a pre-enlightenment, pre-scientific mentality which eventually through a process of cultural and intellectual evolution would be abandoned by primitive societies. Such a mind-set is astutely depicted throughout Jim Crace's fictive *Continent*, particularly in the first story of the collection 'Talking Skull' in which science is viewed by the main protagonist as a panacea and magickal superstition is seen very much as *other*.

My research, however, tends to dismiss these types of stereotyping and evolutionism. Instead it depicts an emergent picture of Pagan cosmologies where magick, religion and science are fused into holistic ontological explanations. This is particularly the case when we look at Pagan appropriations of anti-reductionist science—such as systems biology, complexity and chaos theories, and quantum mechanics—as a critique of Cartesian, mechanistic models (see Capra, 1992). In other words, my research provides a window on the world where mag-

Chaos magic, alternatively known as chaoism, is a radical, libertarian form of magick which appears to have the most overt scientific content both in terms of cosmological understanding and magickal practice.

ickal cosmology increasingly comes to resemble scientific ontology and vice-versa.

PAGAN COSMOLOGIES, MAGICK AND SCIENCE

Over the last twenty years or so, now familiar parallels have been drawn between ontological models drawn from contingent, anti-reductionist science and cosmological explanations derived from Oriental spirituality (for example, Capra, 1992). As one shall see, the holism of the Tao is likened to the holism of the quantum field. The resonating interaction of particles is likened to the Dance of Shiva. The paradoxical nature of matter is said to be analogous to the Zen koan. All forms of dualism are, in theory, rejected. Thus Cartesian dualism is rejected along with Christian dualism as reductionist ontologies. While scientific attention has been drawn ever eastward, the Occident has quietly been cultivating its own fusion of indigenous spiritual tradition and cutting-edge scientific explanation.

When talking to Pagans about their cosmological models it soon becomes obvious that many are well versed in the latest scientific ideas and freely use them to support their cosmological understandings. Effectively, Pagan cosmological *language games* exist where scientific theory and magickal narrative meet. Examples of the overlap of Pagan and occult cosmology and anti-reductionist science are numerous. Perhaps the best known examples are the Gaia hypothesis and the Pagan view of the Earth as a sen-

tient organism capable of action and reaction; and, the manner in which the ten sephiroth of the Kabballistic Tree of Life have been likened to the ten dimensions and *super-strings* of space-time.

In an interview as part of my own research, a prominent Odinist re-interpreted Heathen cosmogony in terms of contemporary physics. He explained how the Odinist cosmos with its concept of multiple worlds came into being in tradition through the meeting of fire and ice in the void. He argued that this was symbolic of the fusion of energy—possibly of matter and anti-matter—in the Big Bang of astrophysics. Serena Roney-Dougal (1993)—a Pagan and trained parapsychologist—outlines many parallels between science, esotericism and magick; for example, she makes connections between physical indeterminacy to consciousness and psi-phenomena; biochemistry to the chakra system; and, geo-magnetism to earth mystery and UFO activity. In all of these cases science appears to legitimate ancient wisdoms.

CHAOS MAGIC AND SCIENCE

For the purposes of this article, however, I'd like to concentrate on the numerous overlaps between cosmological understandings drawn from chaos magick and anti-reductionist scientific theory. Chaos magic, alternatively known as chaoism, is a radical, libertarian form of magick which appears to have the most overt scientific content both in terms of cosmological understanding and

... material rootedness ... provides chaoists with a theory of how magick works, given that consciousness, mediated through gnosis, can affect the physical universe.

magickal practice (see Wilson, 1992). Chaos magic is “truly postmodern in that it is completely eclectic, positively not adopting one system, but using whatever elements may be suitable at a particular place at a particular time, even to the extent of using science fiction characters as modern mythological figures” (Greenwood, 1996: 281). A popular example is the use of Star Trek characters as archetypal representations of Jung’s personality types of thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation; for example, Mr Spock as logical thinking. Chaos magic draws its inspiration from, among others, Aleister Crowley’s Thelema, Tantra, the Tao, H.P. Lovecraft’s Cthulu mythos, American Discordian philosophy, Situationalism, and Nietzscheanism, particularly the idea of the magickal ‘will to power’ (see Sutcliffe, 1996: 127-30). This explosive mixture means that it has come to possess a ‘guerrilla ontology’ (Wilson, 1992: 59).

Its emphasis on altered states of consciousness, or *gnosis*, has meant that chaoism has been likened to a postmodern form of shamanism (Houston, 1995; also Woodman, 1998: 2-3). And, although it is a largely materialist magickal practice, Chaoism does have a spiritual core, often under-emphasised by other occultists and scholars, which for me locates it as part of the Left-hand magickal path within the wider Pagan community (see Sutcliffe, 1996: 127-130; Woodman, 1998: 19-22).

For the purposes of this article I would like to concentrate on two ways in which

chaoism overlaps with science. Firstly the relationship between chaoist cosmology, quantum physics and neuroscience; secondly, the chaoist idea of the Pandemonaeon and forms of existential experimentation.

CHAOIST COSMOLOGY AND THE PHYSICS OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

For chaoists the cosmos is both contingent and chaotic. Paradoxically, however, this chaos has order, and can also be ordered magickally, principally through the transformation of the magickian’s consciousness (see Woodman, 1998). As Adrian Savage (n.d.: 4) states:

To the Chaos practitioner, Chaos is not the absence of order, but—to paraphrase Henry Miller—an order beyond understanding. It is analogous to the Hindu’s Brahman, the Buddhist’s Void, the Taoist’s Tao, and the Ancient Anglo-Saxon’s Wyrð.

This chaoist cosmological model comes to resemble the types of physical indeterminacy posited by quantum theorists such as Werner Heisenberg who argue that the physical realm is simultaneously structured by matter but suffused with uncertainty and possibility. Chaos magic brings with it:

... the realization that everything is possible, and every conceivable reality is in *potentia*, lying dormant within the sub-spaces of the very air we breathe. All things are in *potentia*, with no intimation of restriction. This is the Chaos of orthodoxy, the omnipresent primal soup (Templum Nigri Solis, 1996: 207)

Ontological concepts derived from quantum mechanics are therefore popular among chaos magickians. Pete Carroll, a founding father of chaos magick, for example, has developed a materialistic theory of magick founded on quantum-based predictions of magickal reality. Indeed he characterises chaos magicians as ‘rebel physicists’.

Quantum theory states that matter is simultaneously both particle and wave (Capra, 1992: 164-5). In this respect matter resembles a Zen koan in that it has a dual nature but is also non-dual (see Capra, 1992). Accordingly, the physicist David Bohm has characterised the cosmos as non-dual but simultaneously consisting of the manifest, material *explicate order* and the *implicate order*—the supra-material realm of magick and synchronicity. Similarly, the dual nature of matter has also been used in occult cosmologies in order to explain paranormal events; for example, Lawrence LeShan (1987) has proposed that two kinds of reality exist simultaneously, the sensory and the clairvoyant. These theories reminiscent of Paracelsus’ cosmology wherein the universe consisted of concomitant *gross* and *subtle* forces. The quantum world-view has prompted Roney-Dougal (1993: 75) to remark that we “have to change from an ‘either-or’ world view to a ‘both-and’ one.”

Similarly Dave Lee (1997: 85-100), a leading chaos magickian, uses this property of matter to reject cosmological models which rest upon dualism. Christianity and the cosmic duality of good and evil, and the Cartesian separation of mind and matter, are prime examples (also Woodman, 1998: 1). This rejection of Descartes provides the chaoist with a vital connection between consciousness and matter, particularly when linked to the idea of the Bose-Einstein Condensate (BEC) (Lee, 1997: 90-93). This predicts “a similarity between the behaviour of

fundamental wave/particles and that of brains—because one is rooted in the other” (Lee, 1997: 92). It is this material rootedness which provides chaoists with a theory of how magick works, given that consciousness, mediated through *gnosis*, can affect the physical universe (Hawkins, 1996: 81). Thus brain and cosmos are intimately, perhaps holographically, connected (see Needleman, 1988). The fact that chaoists see “no gap between in-here and out-there” (Watson, 1998: 41) suggests significant overlaps between chaoist cosmology and theories of the brain and consciousness arising from contemporary neuroscience (see below; also Watson, 1998).

THE PANDEMONAEON AND EXISTENTIAL EXPERIMENTATION

Thus a major feature of chaoism is the creation of order and positive magickal results from cosmic chaos. This is particularly true of the chaoist notion of the Pandemonaeon (see Hine, n.d., 1993). This is an imaginal terrain and time-scape, alternatively known as the Fifth Aeon, which the chaoist can use to envision alternate realities and futures, giving them some form of imaginal reality—a hyperreality. Thus the Pandemonaeon is an arena for the creation of personal, postmodern cosmologies for, like other neo-shamanic cosmoses, the Pandemonaeon is both within and without (Hine, 1993: 26; also see Needleman, 1988). As Phil Hine argues, the Pandemonaeon typifies “the trend towards individualism becoming separate from any totalizing belief or narrative, be it metaphysical or scientific” (Hine, n.d.: 1).

In these respects the Pandemonaeon resembles a new technology which each of us can use individually to re-enchant reality:

Despite the restrictions control culture tries to impose, we now inhabit a cyber age, where information and technology are easily

accessed. This is the mirror of the Shamanic Age, when knowledge was free to those who wished to reach out and interface with it directly, and all realities were immanent. Human biology and the environment were not discrete, and this is an understanding we are discovering today. We still have the neurological hardware that caused bushes to burn and dragons to walk the earth, and there is a new magical technology that allows us to reboot it. (Templum Nigri Solis, 1996: 206-7)

This heuristic of virtual technology and space and can be extended when we come to consider how the Pandemonaeon operates, because linked to the Pandemonaeon is the Ideosphere, a “non-local space entered by the magician in order to explore possible models & paradigms which may be of use in configuring the Pandemonaeon” (Hine, n.d.: 2). The Ideosphere operates as a cosmological laboratory in which the magician has *carte blanche* to create his own cosmology. The Ideosphere is, therefore, a smooth, *horizontal* space (see below). Hine (n.d.: 2) outlines his experimental way of working with the Ideosphere thus:

The Ideosphere is more of an attitude; a stance from which the magician can seek inspiration from any incoming information, be it newspaper articles, cartoons, flickering media images, scientific jargon, random acronyms, or half-heard phrases from another's conversation. An idea flashes into the Ideosphere; the magician may grasp it immediately or store it for later work. The main attitude to foster is that nothing, no matter how ridiculous, bizarre or unworkable should be rejected. Working from the Ideosphere, the magician allows himself to bathe in the emanations of the mass media until, sated and bloated, he withdraws into silence to digest, regurgitate, and create new forms.

Here, therefore, we have another overlap with science—the use of the experimental method by chaos magicians. Chaoists are, for me, occult experimenters *par excellence*. The results of these experiments are noted

with further experimentation undertaken on their basis: Chaoists experiment with traditional magickal forms, deconstructing and reassembling traditional forms of ritual in novel and transformative ways. Experimentation with identity through the manipulation of various *word viruses*—a linguistic concept invented by William S. Burroughs and, incidentally, analogous to biologist Richard Dawkins' idea of the *meme*—is a way of experimenting with and reconditioning the self (see Lee, 1997: 125-6; also Hine, n.d.). Experimentation with different sexual techniques and drugs, particularly psychedelics, are common ways of achieving the desired *gnosis* or altered states of consciousness required for magickal workings (Lee, 1997: 68-81). Experimenting with therapeutic regimes, most notably neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) is another ubiquitous form of self-experimentation and method of transforming consciousness (for example, Lee, 1997). For chaoists, “It is the very nature of magic to be progressive, anarchic and experimental” (Templum Nigri Solis, 1996: 206).

Just as matter has a multiple nature as particle and wave, both NLP and chaos practitioners see the self as having a multiple, even schizophrenic, character (Lee, 1997: 131-2). Here the chaoist self lives up to the ‘postmodern shaman’ tag. The *multiple self* and experimentation within the Pandemonaeon and Ideosphere, again, relate to findings arising out of contemporary neuroscience and philosophy in which consciousness is said to rise out of “a plurality of voices within us which are themselves contradictory, inconsistent and often just nonsense” (Watson, 1998: 41; also Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 239-52). Interestingly, the prominent neuroscientist Daniel Dennett terms this booming, buzzing confusion ‘pandemonium’, a term cognate with the chaoist

The Pandemonaeon ... is an imaginal terrain and time-scape, alternatively known as the Fifth Aeon, which the chaoist can use to envision alternate realities and futures, giving them some form of imaginal reality—a hyperreality.

Pandemonaeon. In this respect the chaos of the body resembles the chaos of the cosmos.

Having outlined some of the uses of scientific concepts in Pagan cosmologies I'd now like to turn my attention to the way in which science has increasingly come to resemble a religion.

SCIENCE AS RELIGION

One has now seen that various Pagan cosmologies have appropriated concepts and models derived from scientific enquiry. Appropriation, however, is not a one-way process and science has borrowed metaphors from religion in order to demonstrate how the physical world operates and is structured. A prime example is Jim Lovelock's use of ‘Gaia’, the Greco-Roman Earth goddess, as an anthropomorphisation of global organic chemical processes (see Lovelock, 1979). Furthermore although science has always viewed itself as rational it has taken on some of the totalizing characteristics of a religion, espousing its own forms of dogma, doctrine and salvation (see Midgley, 1992; Fuller, 1997: 40-62). As the Enlightenment project has unfolded we, as a culture, have increasingly put our ‘faith’ in science and reason—faith being the operative word. In particular we have turned to science as the dominant source of cosmological truth. Epistemological (for example, Needleman, 1988), postmodern and late modern critiques have dented the intellectual credibility of science. However these criticisms do not

seem to have affected science's ideological and social centrality, particularly in its most dogmatic form—*scientism*. As Roney-Dougal (1993: 247) remarks:

... when I see advertisements on television no longer using sex or affluence to sell their products but rather a ‘scientist’ in a white coat, then I know that scientists are verily the most influential symbol of the day—the high priests of the latest religion.

‘Popular’ scientists have begun to appropriate the language of theologians and metaphysicians in their arguments. For example, Stephen Hawking writes in his *A Brief History of Time* that it is the quest of science to understand “the mind of God”. Richard Dawkins sees scientific enquiry as the key to metaphysical questions such as, “Is there a meaning to life? What are we for? What is man?”. In this respect science has taken on a mantle of mysticism and mystery (Fuller, 1997: 48-50). Indeed on a metaphysical level, the rise of theories of complexity and quantum mechanics has meant that, far from providing simple answers to these questions, the cosmos has become more complex and unpredictable—more mysterious (also Fuller, 1997: 48-50). For example, Bas von Frassen (1985: 258) writes:

Once atoms had no colour, now they have no shape, place or volume ... There is a reason why metaphysics sounds so passé, so *vieux-jeu* today; for intellectually challenging complexities and paradoxes it has been far surpassed by theoretical science. Do the concepts of the

*Chaoists are ... occult experimenters par excellence.
...Chaoists experiment with traditional magickal
forms, deconstructing and reassembling traditional
forms of ritual in novel and transformative ways.*

Trinity and the soul, haecceity, universals, prime matter, and potentiality baffle you? They pale beside the unimaginable otherness of closed space-time, event horizons, EPR correlations and bootstrap models.

Furthermore Steve Fuller (1997: 50-60) argues that science has taken on the characteristics of religion in a number of other ways:

Science has developed its own *soteriology*, where it sees itself as the sole source of salvation from society's ills, and, increasingly, liberation from the constraints of mortality when we think of the latest breakthroughs in genetics and technologies like cryogenics (also Midgley, 1992).

It possesses its own brand of *saintliness*, for example, in the canonisation and hagiolatry of prominent scientific figures such as Einstein and Hawking. Effectively, it has developed its own cult of genius. It has its own form of *magical causation*, where science appears to work magickally 'at a distance' over time and space, rather like Frazer's conception of 'contagious magic'. How often do new breakthroughs in technology seem to work *as if by magick*? (see Needleman, 1988: 139-40). Finally it has developed its own form of *theodicy*, in which science appears to conform to some sort of divine justice which, firstly, justifies even its most loathsome features, such as the technological features of warfare; and, secondly, can be used to discredit those creeds, like religion, which dare to compete with it as a source of cosmological or ontological understanding. Sci-

ence has created its own cosmologies which could not exist outside scientific method. That, seemingly, appears justification enough within the scientific community for its cultural dominance.

A further overlap is provided by that *Eureka* moment, the flash of insight when scientific discovery overlaps with the so-called irrational and the *numinous* (see Needleman, 1988: 105). Rudolf Otto argues that the numinous cannot be rationally defined or explained; it can only be experienced, "only be suggested by means of the special way in which it is reflected in the mind in terms of feeling". Perhaps the most famous example, Archimedes aside, is Kekulé's discovery of the form of the benzene molecule in 1865. Needleman (1988: 105) relates the story thus:

After struggling with this problem until he saw no way out, Kekulé one night dreamed of a snake eating its tail and awoke realizing the problem had been solved beneath the level of his ordinary thought. The discovery that organic chemical compounds take the form of rings was the basis of an entire branch of organic chemistry.

Similarly many prominent scientists have incorporated concepts and metaphors culled from religion and magick in their cosmologies: Stephen J. Gould uses magickal metaphors to illustrate his thoughts on the contingency of evolution. In particular he uses angelic intervention as an example of social bifurcation. Einstein rejected the uncertainties associated with quantum

theory by notoriously invoking the divine—"I cannot believe that God plays dice with the cosmos". Stephen Hawking, on the other hand, accepting of quantum indeterminacy retorted some years later, "On the contrary, it appears that not only does God play dice, but also that he sometimes throws the dice where they cannot be seen". Perhaps most famously, Fritjof Capra vividly describes his epiphany in realising that physical ontology and sacred cosmology were one in terms of seeing phenomena which he'd only previously experienced through "graphs, diagrams and mathematical theories" (Capra, 1992: 11):

I 'saw' cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I 'saw' the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy; I felt its rhythm and I 'heard' its sound, and at that moment I *knew* that this was the Dance of Shiva, the Lord of Dancers worshiped by the Hindus.

HETEROTOPIA—TOWARDS POSTMODERN COSMOLOGIES?

One has seen that there are numerous overlaps between science and esotericism in Pagan cosmology, but what are the consequences of these relationships? For me, one important corollary is that Pagan cosmological arguments act as heterotopic textual sites. I have recently been working on the role that heterotopia play in Pagan sacred spaces and Pagan identities (for example, Green, 1999).

Heterotopia is a concept coined by Michel Foucault to refer to sites of 'otherness' wherein diverse elements, often polar opposites, are juxtaposed to create new meanings and transformative ways of seeing the world. For Foucault (1986: 25) the heterotopia "is capable of juxtaposing in a single place several spaces, several sites that are in

themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another; thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space". Foucault (1986: 25-6) gives the example of how sacred Oriental gardens act as heterotopic sites, sacred microcosms echoing wider religious cosmology:

We must not forget that in the Orient the garden, an astonishing creation that is now a thousand years old, had very deep and seemingly superimposed meanings. The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space still more sacred than the others that were like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its centre (the basin and water fountain were there); and all the vegetation of the garden was supposed to come together in this space, in this sort of microcosm. As for carpets, they were originally reproductions of gardens (the garden is a rug onto which the whole world comes to enact its symbolic perfection, and the rug is a sort of garden that can move across space). The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world. The garden has been a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity (our modern zoological gardens spring from that source).

In this example the garden provides new cosmological understanding whilst transforming the notion of the garden itself.

The hermetic and alchemic heritage common to both contemporary science and magick, for example, also emphasises heterotopia. The exoteric alchemic quest involved the mixing of the opposing elements of sulphur and mercury eventually to produce the Philosopher's Stone or Elixir of Life. On an esoteric level these chemical reactions are

said to symbolise the concomitant processes of spiritual self-transformation in which one confronts one's symbolic opposites in the forms of the Jungian *shadow* and *animus* or *anima*. In this case the alchemic self, magically linked to the crucible, acts as a heterotopia. Interestingly Lee (1997: 106-111) refers to his eclectic chaoist repertoire of healing techniques—for example, the consumption of magickal elixirs, dance and movement *gnosis*, and the use of *pranayama*—as body alchemy. In this case the chaoist body is positively transformed by the heterotopic “overlaps of the physical and mental/emotional levels” (p.106). The self is a *multiplicity*.

Thus heterotopic sites appear to work on the fundamental magickal principle of the *hieros gamos*, or sacred marriage, where opposing elements or symbols are magically synthesised (for example, Green, 1999). This idea is ubiquitous within Paganism whether one is talking about symbolic synthesis—for example, the ritualistic marriage of the Goddess and Horned God in Wiccan celebration—or actual physical synthesis—such as Tantric sex magick. This idea of sacred union is particularly marked in the writings of George Bataille, especially in his notion of transgression wherein, for example, sacrifice, the potlatch, or eroticism ruptures the profane order to provide sacred moments of continuity and community. As Bataille (1986: 242) argues “the sacred is only a privileged moment of communal unity, a convulsive form of what is ordinarily stifled.” Magickal heterotopia allows the sacred to interrupt the established order (see Green, 1999).

Heterotopia can be spatial or textual sites. I view Pagan ritual spaces, for example, as being heterotopic spaces which juxtapose symbols, particularly those pertaining to life and death, in order to transform the ritual's

participants, producing new existential symbols, insight and new, transformative, ways of being (Green, 1999). The chaoist Ideosphere is heterotopic. Likewise in Pagan cosmological texts or discourses the symbolic opposites of science and mysticism, I argue, are juxtaposed in such a way that produces new ways of experiencing and viewing the cosmos (*ibid.*). For me this has differential effects on the individual and societal levels:

For the individual, the overlap between Pagan cosmology and anti-reductionist science helps to galvanise magickal identity and legitimate magickal cosmologies whilst providing individual opportunities for spiritual insight and transformation. We have seen this in the case of the chaos magickian whose eclectic synthesis of magick, physics, consciousness studies and therapeutic techniques provides him with *gnosis* and transformation, whilst giving him the opportunity to create his own subjective universe.

On the societal level, there appears to be an emergent *zeitgeist* in which, far from being incompatible ways of understanding the universe, science and Paganism appear to legitimate and reproduce each other. Yob, for example, has suggested that religious metaphors and scientific models are compatible in the sense that they serve virtually identical functions in differing attempts at cosmological understanding. She states that scientific and religious cosmologies should not be judged on criteria of truth or verifiability, but rather:

... judged according to their ability to illuminate, stimulate insight, and suggest relationships and the existence of other structures otherwise unimagined. They persist as long as they continue to power investigation and assist communication and are rejected when they no longer do this adequately. (Yob, 1992: 484)

The Ideosphere operates as a cosmological laboratory in which the magician has carte blanche to create his own cosmology.

You could call this a postmodern view of cosmological models and metaphors. This relativization of cosmology allows for a plurality of individual cosmological beliefs to exist alongside each other unproblematically, something which patently happens when considering the diversity of cosmological belief within the Pagan community.

This postmodern fusion of scientific and religious understandings of the cosmos also says something about rationality and the cultural dominance of science. In postmodern terms we cannot really talk about the superiority of scientific rationality as opposed to religious or magickal irrationality, but rather a plurality of rationalities as posited by certain *neo-intellectualist* scholars of magick. Similarly, Paula Eleta in her study of magick in modern day Argentina characterises contemporary magick not as “a return to primitivism”, but rather, like science, “a form of knowledge-control of reality” (1997: 51), which pervades both sacred and secular milieux. Marian Green (1988: 12) notes the parallels between scientific and magickal technologies:

In every instance the magical equipment has exact parallels in other technologies. The Tarot symbols are like the electronic engineer's technical drawings: each symbol represents a different component which, in circuit, will act in a specific way. The magician's robe and magical circle of protection are like the laboratory overalls and sterile atmosphere found in medical research—used for exactly the same reasons keeping the psychic rather than the physical atmosphere pure and untainted.

MODERN MAN MEETS THE *NOMAD*,

HERMES AND THE HARLEQUIN

What this example illustrates is that both science and Paganism are traditions which are subject to *reflexivity*. Critiques of complexity theory have overwhelmingly argued that it does not constitute a postmodern science despite notable dissenters. Rather than dispute this—much science is still clearly a largely deterministic and monolithic enterprise committed to progress and liberation through the rational application of technology—I argue that science is a microcosm of Mellor and Shilling's (1997) ‘Janus-Faced’ modernity. Whilst Paganism can be seen in one respect as an attempt to valorize and reapply ancient wisdom in an ‘inauthentic’ modern context, one has also seen the appropriation of rational science by Pagans as a means of its legitimization. One example is the growth of *cyber-* or *techno-Paganism* and the proliferation of Pagan internet sites in recent years. Similarly one has seen how science has, counter-intuitively, adopted the character of an organised religion. In ‘Janus-Faced’ modernity a plurality of rationalities co-exists:

One the one hand, there is the modernity with which we are most familiar: that of Cartesian dualism, Kantian reason, Corbusier's *machine à habiter* and Habermas' ‘ideal speech’ situation. On the other hand, however, is another modernity: that of Schopenhauer's ‘senseless will’, Nietzsche's ‘will to power’, Baudelaire's *flâneur*, and the reassertion of sensuality in baroque culture (Mellor and Shilling, 1997: 131).

Postmodernism in this context does not appear to be an evolution of, or break, with

Epistemological, postmodern and late modern critiques have dented the intellectual credibility of science. However these criticisms do not seem to have affected science's ideological and social centrality.

modernity as many commentators argue. Rather evidence culled from Pagan magick suggests that the postmodern is an integral part of modern life (see Green, 1999). For many magickians, magick as a postmodern social practice is a 'component' which has the ability to transform modern thought and trajectories, rather like the transformative hybridized effects of globalization.

An example of the way in which rationalities exist alongside each other is provided by urban milieux. The metropolis is often said to epitomise modernity. Urban landscapes are often used as metaphors for modern life and psychology, particularly when one considers the functionalism of modernist architecture as machines for living. Despite this—like Eleta (1997)—Donald (1992) in his semiotic reading of the changing face of the city sees rationality and magick, in its broadest sense, as co-existing in the metropolis. He illustrates this with the example of Doris Lessing's novel *The Four-Gated City* to illustrate how the same environment can be described in rationalistic terms by an incomer, contrasting this with the romantic, almost 'magickal', narrative given by a native whose memories are inextricably linked to the fabric of the buildings (Donald, 1992: 434-5). Certainly a surprise for me during the course of my research has been the extent to which magick is not only surviving but flourishing in modern urban contexts, particularly in London. Chaoism in particular has developed as a very urban, almost alien-

ated, form of magickal practice.

Importantly one has seen how the magickal self is a *multiplicity*. Mellor and Shilling's (1997) non-dualistic reworking of Durkheim's notion of *homo duplex* demonstrates the co-existence of 'rationality' and 'irrationality' within modern individuals. Such a reworking allows them to question:

... the widespread assumption which has been expressed from Descartes, Kant and Hume, to Parsons, Giddens and Habermas, that the rationalist Enlightenment project has achieved control over the extra-rational senses and sensualities of humans (Mellor and Shilling, 1997: 2).

This control is largely absent, and certainly resisted, when one considers an individual's participation in ludic Pagan celebration, or the postmodern existential experimentation of the Ideosphere (Hine, n.d.). The 'smooth space' of resistance of the Ideosphere, in particular, mirrors notions explicit within the experimental horizontal philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

Richard Sutcliffe (1996: 129) notes the Neo-Nietzschean influence of Deleuze and Guattari on chaoism. Their 'eroticised' 'will to power'—*délire*, or desire—neatly appears to encompass the motivation behind many chaoist magickal workings (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1986). Similarly their idea of *multiplicities* and the human as a heterogeneous *desiring machine* able to transform chaos parallels chaoist notions of the creative,

schizoid, magickal self (Watson, 1998). Particularly important here is their idea of the nomad (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 351-423). Deleuze and Guattari set out to make their philosophy a transformative experience in itself. For example *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) acts as a textual heterotopia, juxtaposing differing literary styles, chronologies and knowledge culled from natural and social science, mathematics, literature, philosophy, history and art to create a *bricolage* which seeks to affect the reader on many levels. Their philosophy possesses its own transformative aesthetic. It is a treatise of horizontal, *rhizomatic* thought over vertical, arborescent hierarchies of knowledge (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 3-25). It belongs to 'the smooth' rather than to the gridded and hierarchised—the *striated*—spaces of modernity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 351-423). By this I mean that Deleuze and Guattari, like chaoists, have levelled out—made horizontal—modern hierarchies of signs and knowledge so that no single signifier or discourse, such as science, is privileged. This allows the nomadic *bricoleur* to make connections between different signs and domains of knowledge, for example, (re)connecting religious metaphors with scientific models. In this respect the chaoist resembles the nomad who is able to roam over a smooth space, be it the Asian steppes, the horizontal plane of signs, or, the smooth space of the *social unconscious*, leaving their old domains—*detritorialization*—and creating new (symbolic) homes—*reterritorialization* (*ibid.*). Like the Deleuzian nomad, the magickian is able to resist, to smooth over, the striated spaces of modernity and make transformative connections between science and magick.

For me, the idea of the nomadic magickian strikes a chord with the work of the prominent French philosopher of science

Michel Serres and his 'twin' figures of *Hermes* and the *harlequin* (see Serres, 1983). Serres' philosophy is a voyage between the arts and the sciences (see Lechte, 1994: 82) which, for me, parallels the types of syntheses that magickians are seeking between science and magick. Serres' 'magickian figure' is *Hermes*, appropriately the Greco-Roman God of Magick, the traveller—again a nomadic figure—who mediates and translates between apparently heterogeneous domains of knowledge and diverse regions of social life in order to forge passages between them (see Lechte, 1994: 83-5). For purposes of my argument, *Hermes* is the magickian who heals the splits between various fields of enquiry creating new ways of experiencing the universe. The other figure is the *harlequin*, itself a ludic, magickal chameleon, but also a metaphor for the multi-dimensional nature of knowledge. The *harlequin* is "a composite figure that always has another costume underneath the one removed. The *harlequin* is a hybrid, hermaphrodite, mongrel figure, a mixture of diverse elements, a challenge to homogeneity" (Lechte, 1994: 82). The *harlequin* resembles the magickal self as a site for heterotopic transformation. Serres believes that:

... the very viability and vitality of science depends on the degree to which it is open to its poetical other. Science only moves on if it receives an infusion of something out of the blue, something unpredictable and miraculous. The poetic impulse is the life-blood of natural science, not its nemesis. Poetry is the way of the voyager open to the unexpected and always prepared to make unexpected links between places and things (Lechte, 1994: 85).

Pagan magickians are simultaneously nomad, *Hermes*, and *harlequin*. *Multiplicities*.

CONCLUSIONS: A NEW CAULDRON FOR A NEW AGE?

For me, the perceived incompatibility of science and religion in the modern world is divisive and one of our greatest contemporary challenges is the creation of these nomadic types of dialogue between the two (Needleman, 1988, Capra, 1992). Once it was Eastern mysticism (*ibid.*), but now Pagan paths also appear to be at the vanguard of bringing such a dialogue into being, ushering in a 'new age' where science and religion could exist harmoniously. Perhaps producing what Roney-Dougal (1993; 246) terms "Science with a Conscience". Whether this is the arrival of the much-heralded Aquarian Age is, however, debatable. It certainly is a new age which has some of the postmodern features which certain forms of Paganism are seeking to cultivate within modernity. To do this one has to abandon dualistic notions of (ir)rationality within both the self and society. Certainly chaoists recognise the multiplicity of the self, and cyber-Paganism appears to suggest that modernity is 'Janus-Faced'.

For chaoists, the idea of science as a dominant religion belongs to the Fourth Aeon (see Lee, 1997: 97). Conversely, the post-modern Fifth Aeon of the Pandemonaeon acts in several magickal ways synthesising the individual with the collectivity and, importantly, new forms of non-monotheistic spirituality with science (see Hine, n.d.: 1; also Hine, 1993). We see this clearly in an article from an Australian chaoist group the Templum Nigri Solis who link the bombing of Hiroshima with the birth of the 'quantum universe'—a new 'spiritual landscape' which heralds the Nietzschean death of God and the age of contingency:

The first public demonstration of nuclear power heralded the transition from a relativistic universe to a quantum universe. This view

is only beginning to become established in popular culture, as at the time of writing,

most schools have difficulty incorporating post-Newtonian physics into their curricula. To do so would challenge the orthodox view of the universe, which is an integral construct of the old Western paradigm. In the centuries before Hiroshima, science and religion were enmeshed. Although practitioners of either would have denied it, there was a tacit alliance. Most of pre-war science still accommodated the concept of a creator/god, adherence to which caused Einstein to balk at the last theoretical hurdle (Templum Nigri Solis, 1996: 206)

To conclude, like the alchemic crucible where polar opposites were reconciled, Pagan magickal cosmologies appear to provide a new cauldron for a new age. Science needs its *other*. To extend the magickal metaphor, this new cauldron is a postmodern melting pot, or heterotopia, where the divisions between magick, ancient truth and modern science are being healed bringing with it the potential of seeing the cosmos in new, transformative ways.

REFERENCES:

- Bataille, G. (1986) *Visions of Excess*. Selected Writings, 1927-39. Allan Stoekl (ed.). Second Printing. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press.
- Capra, F. (1992) *The Tao of Physics*. (3rd ed.). London: Flamingo.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1988) [1980] *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Athlone.
- Donald, J. (1992) "Metropolis: The City as Text" in R. Bock and K. Thompson (eds.) *Social and Cultural Forms of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press and The Open University, 417-470.
- Eleta, P. (1997) "The Conquest of Magic over Public Space: Discovering the Face of Popular Magic in Contemporary Society", *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 12 (1): 51-67.
- Foucault, M. (1986) "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics*, 16(1): 22-27.

von Frassen, B. (1985) "Empiricism in the Phi-

losophy of Science" in P. Churchland and C.A. Hooker (eds.) *Images in Science*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Fuller, S. (1997) *Science*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Green, D.A. (1999) "Opposites Attract: The Transformation of Uncertainty in Pagan Identity", paper delivered to the British Sociology Association, Sociology of Religion Study Group Conference, University of Durham, 9th April, 1999.

Green, M. (1988) *The Path Through The Labyrinth*. Loughborough: Thoth.

Greenwood, S. (1996) "The British Occult Subculture: Beyond Good and Evil?" in J.R. Lewis (ed.) (1996) *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 277-296.

Hawkins, J. (1996) *Understanding Chaos Magic*. Chieveley: Capall Bann.

Hine, P. (1993) *Prime Chaos*. London: Chaos International.

_____. (n.d.) "Pandemonaeon Magicks" at Hine's website: <http://sonic.net/fenwick/chaos/pandmag.html#intro>

Houston, S. (1995) "Chaos Magic", *Gnosis* 36: 54-9.

Lechte, J. (1994) *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism to Postmodernity*. London: Routledge.

Lee, D. (1997) *Chaotopia! Magick & Ecstasy in the Pandemonaeon*. Leeds: Attractor.

LeShan, L. (1987) *The Science of the Paranormal*. Wellingborough: Aquarian Press.

Lovelock, J. (1979) *Gaia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mellor, P.A. and Shilling, C. (1997) *Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity*. London: Sage.

Midgley, M. (1992) *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and its Meaning*. London: Routledge.

Needleman, J. (1988) *A Sense of the Cosmos*. London: Arkana.

Roney-Dougal, S. (1993) *Where Science & Magic Meet*. Shaftesbury: Element.

Savage, A. (n.d.) "An Introduction to Chaos Magick" at

<http://www.sonic.net/fenwick/chaos/intchaos.html>

html

Serres, M. (1983) [1969] *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Sutcliffe, R. (1996) "Left-Hand Path Ritual Magick" in G. Harvey and C. Hardman (eds.) *Paganism Today*. London: Thorsons: 109-137.

Templum Nigri Solis (1996) "Anno Chaos—The Pandemonaeon" in C. Hyatt (ed.) *Rebels & Devils: The Psychology of Liberation*. Arizona: New Falcon: 205-7.

Watson, S. (1998) "The Neurobiology of Sorcery: Deleuze and Guattari's Brain", *Body and Society*, 4(4): 23-45.

Wilson, R.A. (1992) *Cosmic Trigger I: Final Secrets of the Illuminati*. Scottsdale, Arizona: New Falcon Publications.

Woodman, J. (1998) "A Means to an End? The Role of Altered States of Consciousness in Chaos Magic", paper delivered to Shamanism in Contemporary Society conference at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 24th June, 1998.

Yob, I.M. (1992) "Religious Metaphor and Scientific Models: Grounds for Comparison", *Religious Studies*, 28(4): 475-85.

Dave Green is a lecturer in sociology at the University of the West of England, Bristol, UK. He was formerly a research associate in social work at Brunel University, London writing on comparative community care and poverty. He is currently completing his doctorate, an ethnography of contemporary Pagan magic and its relationship to psycho-social theory, particularly the work of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Baudrillard and Haraway. His research interests include magic, the relationship between neo-shamanic cosmologies, consciousness and neuroscience, sacred space, vampirism and exorcism. He would particularly like to thank Justin Woodman of Goldsmith's College, University of London for his many insights into the contemporary chaoist scene.

Post-Modernism and Witchcraft Histories

by David Waldron
University of Ballarat

ABSTRACT

The Neopagan movement relies extensively on representations of the past for historical, cultural and ideological legitimacy. Of particular importance in these histories is the reclaiming or re-creation of pre-Christian pagan societies, the witchhunting crazes of the early modern period, and the reinterpretation of the rise of modernity and industrialism. The means by which these histories are constructed and the changes in the processes by which historical representations are formed are indicative of broader changes in the configuration of historical legitimacy in western culture.

This paper will examine how these histories are constructed and the nature of their relationship with contemporary ideological and cultural configurations. Of particular importance is the perceived shift in Neopagan witchcraft histories from traditional historiography to post-modern historiography in the early 80s. This paper will investigate the location of these historical discourses within the framework of western modernity and in debates over the legitimacy of historical claims between different elements within the Neopagan movement.

Neopaganism is a contemporary eclectic religion, with strong counter-cultural elements. In defining a sense of cultural and social identity the Neopagan movement draws upon a wide variety of historical representations. Of these the most significant are representations of

ancient pagan societies and the early modern European witchhunting crazes. Many, if not most, of these historical representations are based on eclectic, invented and created histories. It is this eclecticism in defining Neopagan histories and a sense of historico-cultural identity that makes Neopaganism a particularly interesting area of study. It is a religion that defines and creates history through a wide range of symbolic appropriations and reinventions originating in areas as diverse as traditional historiography, popular culture, conservative Christian stereotypes, positivist caricatures of pre-industrialist society, romantic literature and art, and the colonial experience.

The sign of the witch is itself derived from a particular conceptualization of western history and is appropriated specifically because of its socio-cultural impact in western society. The sign of the witch is everywhere in our culture. It is represented in mass media stereotypes of satanic cults. It is apparent in cinematic presentation through popular films like "The Wizard of Oz", "The Craft" and Disney's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs". In the writings of historian Norman Cohn and playwright Arthur Miller the witch is taken as a symbolic representation of the pointless and irrational persecution of minorities and social dissidents. Other writers have utilized the persecution of the witch and the figure of the witch itself as an example of the perils of ignorance and superstition set in stark relief against the freedom granted by enlightenment humanism.

The Neopagan movement takes these images of mainstream culture and recreates them as symbolic constructions which illustrate the weaknesses of the industrial, the patriarchal and the positivist and sets them against the authenticity and capacity for human expression revealed in the primitive, the feminine, the rustic and the rural. The

... the conclusions reached by historians examining the witchcraft beliefs of the early modern period, increasingly placed the empirical veracity of the historical claims of the Neopagan movement under threat.

Neopagan recreation of history posits continuity, authenticity and cultural autonomy against the repressive and destructive aspects of western modernity, caricatured as universalist reason. Neopagan histories invert the stereo-types, caricatures and symbolic representations of the witch, the feminine and nature in enlightenment narratives and presents them as an alternative vision of a possible social, cultural and spiritual order in western society.

In this paper I would like to examine the methods by which history is understood and interpreted within the Neopagan movement. In particular I would like to focus on the different kinds of historiographical positions utilized by different aspects of the Neopagan movement and how these constructions of Neopagan identity have evolved to deal with changes in western culture and society. I would also like to examine how the differing attitudes towards historical representation are indicative of broader trends in western culture.

Firstly, I have divided up the myriad different forms of Neopaganism into four general areas illustrating different kinds of cultural and ideological construction and the general trends towards representations of history. In a movement as diverse and frag-

mented as Neopaganism there is, by necessity, a certain degree of overlap between these four areas. However the categories I have selected are representative of four general trends towards historical representation in the Neopagan movement. These are: ANTIQUARIAN: Those groups who rely on traditional historiography and empirical veracity in defining their historical legitimacy and socio-cultural identity. Also included in this grouping are the various national and ethnic groups such as

Odinist, Celtic or Creole based practitioners who utilize the re-creation of magical ritual as a means of defining a national cultural identity in the confines of traditional historiography.

TRADITIONALIST: The groups derived from the ritual magic intensive witchcraft such as Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca. These groups tend to be more concerned with the precision of ritual activity and magical practice than the veracity of their historical claims. Some people have used the term "Traditionalist" to describe those claiming to have a hereditary or pre-industrial background to their witchcraft beliefs. I am using the term here to specifically refer to those hierarchical groups that are descended from ritual magic practices in 19th century Europe.

NEW AGE/ELECTIC: These groups are heavily reliant on the work of Carl Jung and his theory of the collective unconscious. New Age/Eclectic Neopagans are particularly concerned with the psychological impact and universality of symbols. They posit the psychic truth of symbolic representations manifested in history and other cultures as the ultimate source of authenticity in ritual opposed to the empirical veracity of truth claims.

ECO-FEMINIST: Those groups that are par-

particularly concerned with the plight of women and utilize the symbol of the witch as an ultimate expression of the persecution of women within patriarchal culture and society. The fundamental historical concern here is the ability of historical representations to empower women as opposed to arguments over historical validity.

While these four areas of witchcraft history have different structures of legitimating historical interpretation and ideological/cultural perspectives, there are several elements which link them together. The first is a belief that the application of the enlightenment and industrialization represent a distancing of humanity from its more authentic and natural existence uncorrupted by the influence of western civilization. Secondly, the Neopagan movement is generally unanimous in the belief that western Christianity is guilty of suppressing much of what is free, creative and autonomous in human nature in support of a static oppressive patriarchal system of morality and social control. Thirdly, the witchhunting crazes of the early modern period are taken as representative of a conscious attempt to oppress and destroy the vestiges of pre-Christian nature religions. And finally, the reclaiming and re-creating of the pre-Christian agrarian past is perceived as the best way for contemporary society to evolve in such a way as to transcend the ills caused by the oppressive aspects of Christianity, the enlightenment and western modernity.

Until recently, Neopagan histories were solidly based on an appropriation of the romanticist histories of Margaret Murray and 19th century historians and folklorists such as Jules Michelet and Jakob Grimm. These writers perceived the witch persecutions of the early modern period to be representative of a

The rise of post-modernism also influenced the interpretation of history in the Neopagan movement. ...Instead of arguing the veracity of historical interpretations empirically, Neopagans could deconstruct and re-read historical narratives on the basis of their underlying assumptions.

wide spread and endemic oppression of the peasantry and a pan-European pagan witch cult by the aristocracy and early modern church.¹ The underlying ideology surrounding this interpretation of witchhunting crazes of the early modern period has been considerably developed in popular culture and has enjoyed broad popularity in the general public, despite the recent contradictory findings in academic histories. However, the method of defining the historical legitimacy of these histories has undergone radical change.

The 1980s saw a major transformation in the historical study of witchcraft that in turn led to major shifts in the construction of historical legitimacy within the Neopagan movement. Prior to the mid 1980s, Anglophone witchcraft histories were predominantly concerned with universalist arguments about magic and the primitive, the nature of mass persecution, the dangers of superstition compared to scientific rationality among other universalist perspectives. In addition, Anglophone histories of witchcraft were heavily influenced by a fixation upon the British and American experience of witchhunts with only

a peripheral interest in the witchhunting crazes and witchcraft beliefs of continental Europe. During the 1980s a series of conferences were held in Paris and Schwelzig by a collection of continental witchcraft historians. These historians were examining the history of witchcraft from a local history rather than a universalist anthropological or psychological perspective. What was perhaps the most significant outcome of their research was the finding that popular beliefs of witchcraft and the nature of the early modern witchhunting crazes arose out of an immensely varied and diverse period of history. The social class, gender and cultural background of those persecuted varied immensely in location and time. Furthermore, it was found that the nature of the charges laid against those accused of witchcraft and the socio-cultural identity of those charged varied immensely from place to place and over time. Similarly, there was an apparent difference between learned doctrine of witchcraft practices, as represented by the *Malleus Maleficarum* and the *Pax Formica* to what was believed and manifested in witchcraft accusations at the local level in European society.²

Aside from revolutionizing and granting renewed credibility to the study of witchcraft as a historical discipline the conclusions reached by historians examining the witchcraft beliefs of the early modern period, increasingly placed the empirical veracity of the historical claims of the Neopagan movement under threat. Furthermore, the claims of several of the primary leaders of the Neopagan movement, most notably Gerald Gardner, also came under question. It was found that much of the material he claimed originated with a secret coven of witches in rural England was in fact derived from his interpretations of Hindu manuscripts, the ritual magic of Aleister Crowley and other 19th

century occultists.³ It became increasingly doubtful whether he had actually met with any surviving witches at all. Even Gardner's closest associates, such as Doreen Valiente and Ray Buckland, began to claim that whilst they believed the core of his ideas came from an actual experience with a surviving cult of witches, much of his writings were an attempt to fill the gaps in his experience with his own knowledge of ritual magic obtained through anthropological and ritual magic background.⁴ These critiques were also supported by the fact that once local empirical studies of witchcraft beliefs and practices came to be generally recognized in the Anglophone world, the representation of witchcraft described by the Neopagan movement and romanticist historians like Margaret Murray and Jules Michelet bore very little resemblance to that suggested by the empirical data available.⁵

There were a wide variety of responses to the increased pressure placed on Neopagan representations of history. Some simply changed their representations of witchcraft history to suit new historical findings or looked to the historical data available on their own indigenous folklore and ritual. Others took a more confrontational approach typified by Mary Daly's description of critiques against eco-feminist interpretations of witchcraft being equivalent to Nazi book burnings.⁶ However, many Neopagan writers, notably Starhawk and Margot Adler, took an alternative approach, relying on Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, and described witchcraft history as representative of universal psychic truths independent of empirical history. In this light what was important in witchcraft histories was not the empirical veracity of historical claims but the psychological impact of images like the witch, the crone, and the witch persecutions of the early modern era.⁷

This particular aspect of eco-feminist Neopaganism is illustrated by Margot Adler's claim that "Goddess worship has an ancient universality about it but it appeared in different places in different times." As she states, "The Old religion may not have existed geographically or historically but existed in the Jungian sense that people are tapping into a common source." According to Adler this perspective of history is very common throughout the Neopagan movement. In a series of interviews she found that many Neopagans focused on the symbolic experience as an indicator of past legitimacy illustrated by statements like "When you are doing a ritual and you suddenly get the feeling that you are experiencing something generations of your forebears experienced it is probably true." Other Neopagans she interviewed claimed, "It doesn't matter whether the grandmother was a physical reality or a figment of our imagination. One is subjective the other objective but we experience both." What these statements indicate is that the fundamental issue of truth and legitimacy in many Neopagan truth claims is based upon symbolic impact, popular appeal and experiential reality in ritual. These psychological truths were perceived as existing in their own right independently of issues relating to empirical veracity.⁸

The rise of post-modernism also influenced the interpretation of history in the Neopagan movement. For the first time an academically credible means of interpreting history and challenging empirical studies of witchcraft history became possible. Instead of arguing the veracity of historical interpretations empirically, Neopagans could deconstruct and re-read historical narratives on the basis of their underlying assumptions. Jim Wafer describes this shift in Neopaganism as a movement from foundationalism to post-modernism, borrowing from Lyotard's

description of post-modernism as "A recognition of the futility of seeking an absolute foundation for knowledge."⁹ This perspective is shared by Dianne Purkiss who postulates that "The entirety of modern witchcraft offers a unique opportunity to see a religion being made from readings and rereadings of texts and histories. No one person is in charge of the process, so modern witchcraft is not a unified set of beliefs. Every interpretation is subject to reinvention by others."¹⁰

The adoption of post-modernism by many sectors of the Neopagan movement became not only a means of rationalizing a particular conception of history, it also became a statement of ideological identity. The very fact that history was defined in accordance with alternative perspectives of historical legitimacy became a means of illustrating fundamental differences in the nature of Neopagan epistemology and cultural structure. This was placed in comparison to the linear empirical perspectives of enlightenment and traditional historiographical discourses of witchcraft history. This perspective is illustrated by Dianne Purkiss' comment that "Modern witches' histories of witchcraft present a much cleaner break with academic values than anything feminist historians have ever produced or wished to produce. Far more than Derrida or Foucault, popular history disregards the assumptions that make enlightenment history possible."¹¹

However, despite this reliance on rather post-modern styled interpretations of historical veracity and a belief in the virtues of psychic and experiential truth over empirical and factual truth, the question of historical legitimacy and veracity is still an area of unresolved tension for many Neopagans. According to Dr Sian Reid of Charleton University, conflicts over legitimacy and authenticity of representations are rife within most sectors of the pagan community leading to broad areas of

**The witch is a particularly
unique figure in western
symbolic construction ...
a prominent symbol that
stands astride the
romantic/enlightenment divide
of western modernity.**

personal and politico-cultural conflict within the sub-culture. Of particular importance in these conflicts are ideals of what *is* an authentic witchcraft tradition and practice, and a fear that one particular pagan community within the subculture is attempting to hegemonically dominate another in creating witchcraft representations.¹²

This tension tends to belie claims that Neopaganism has shifted from its dependence on a sense of historical authenticity to that of a post-modern re-reading of historical narrative as a basis of legitimating its truth claims. In addition, despite claims to the contrary, the popular histories developed within the Neopagan movement do not bypass the tendency to create meta-narratives. To the contrary, the development of post-modern histories within the Neopagan movement are *intrinsically* based in underlying meta-narratives and universalistic and symbolic interpretations of nature, the feminine, pre-industrial society and the significance of symbols in forming human identity and creative human expression. In this light, it is perhaps better to describe Neopaganism as a romantic rather than a post-modern movement.

The primary ideological correlation, as I see it, between contemporary Neopaganism and romanticism, is the belief that it is necessary to gaze inwards and to appropriate

images from the past to find forms of identity and symbols of meaning perceived as natural, culturally authentic and in opposition to the forces of the enlightenment and industrialism. Conversely, this also involves a belief in the veracity of symbols, images and feelings over empirical experience and logic. Like much of western romantic literature, Neopaganism is fundamentally dominated by a reification of beliefs and images. Quintessentially modern ideological and symbolic

socio-cultural formations are reinforced by interpretations of a past that is dogmatically protected as a particular symbolic construction that is defined as authentic. Similarly, Neopaganism and romanticism both share a focus on the new and the modern. Whilst Neopaganism and romanticism gaze into representations of the past for symbols of authenticity and meaning, they are far more than simply a reaction of traditionalism against industrialization and the objectification of society. What they represent is a search for cultural authenticity and creative autonomy and a redefinition of the modern as a search for that which is creative, authentic and autonomous.¹³

Romanticism is very much a modernist movement. It is fundamentally concerned with the transformation, development and progress of the human subject. Western modernity is marked by concepts of "the new", progress, science, industrialism and the transformation of the human subject in the social and physical environment. However, this force for social, economic and political development and transformation is also marked by an integrated episteme of cultural and aesthetic transformation. It is through this integrated episteme that the new social formations, technological developments and the changing human relationship with nature

is understood and interpreted. This perspective is illustrated by Thomas Hansen's statement that:

The romanticist episteme marks in a certain way the final breakthrough of modernity as a cultural system, as it for the first time posits *originality* and notions of *autonomy* and *self grounding* of human beings, cultures and social forms as marks of the highest cultural and political value. If modernity as a cultural system of secularized thought is fundamentally characterized by its anthropocentrism and a celebration of a break with the past, the romanticist celebration of human will, autonomy, of an emerging human spirit, the mystique of the artistic self creation and individual genius marks the consummation of that cultural system.¹⁴

The significance of Neopagan histories becomes increasingly important when perceived as a romanticist reinterpretation of a prominent symbol in western culture. The witch is a particularly unique figure in western symbolic construction as it is a prominent symbol that stands astride the romantic/enlightenment divide of western modernity. For some sectors of society the witch represents superstition, evil, irrationality and the primitive, *ie*, that which limits the potential for human progress and autonomy from nature. To others, the witch represents beauty, nature, freedom and cultural autonomy from the corrupting and limiting influences of scientific rationalism, commodification and industrialization. In this context, the Neopagan movement's construction of the witch and of witchcraft is indicative of a broader trend of romantic thought in western society and the means by which it appropriates images and symbols. If we examine Neopaganism as a romantic movement located within the sphere of western modernity it ceases to be simply a reactionary counter-cultural movement and

If we examine Neopaganism as a romantic movement located within the sphere of western modernity it ceases to be simply a reactionary counter-cultural movement and becomes indicative of changes in the nature of western modernity.

becomes indicative of changes in the nature of western modernity. This is particularly the case when examining the means by which Neopaganism as a romantic movement appropriates symbols and defines cultural and historical identity.

Romanticism is inherently shaped and defined by its location in relation to the enlightenment and capitalist industrialism in western modernity. Similarly, the transcendent imagination, the central component of romantic thought as defined by Richard Kearney, does not occur in isolation from the economic, epistemological and social formations in which it develops.¹⁵ The meaning, significance and identity of the social and cultural structures from which the romantic episteme defines social and cultural significance are fundamentally characterized by the dominant economic and socio-political structures from which these symbols are appropriated. Signs and symbols do not have any essential value but are always referent, even if only in relation to other abstracted signs. Furthermore, these structures of signs are given meaning by their place in relation to a complex infrastructure of other signs and cultural formations. The interpretive meaning of these structures are also historically contingent.

This is to say that these meanings are based on the social and cultural processes by which they are interpreted and they are defined within the context of historical process and cultural formations in which they have significance.

Given that romantic epistemes, and the cultural forms they appropriate, are the products of particular national, economic and political configurations it is not surprising that, as the structure of western modernity and its inter-relationship with capitalism has changed, so too has the romantic counter episteme. Romanticism is a quintessentially modern movement based in the continual process of reshaping cultural meaning in a social order dominated by capitalist industrialism and the commodification of social value in terms of both symbolic significance and in terms of labor and production. From this perspective, the shift from "Foundationalist" to "Post-modernist" in the Neopagan movement, as described by Jim Wafer and Dianne Purkiss, is not brought about by the realization of the "Futility of seeking an absolute foundation for knowledge".¹⁶ Rather the shift from foundationalism to post-modernism in the Neopagan movement is perhaps more appropriately defined in terms of a shift in the nature of western modernity in the era of late capitalism and its corresponding structures of symbolic appropriation and discourses of cultural meaning within the romantic counter episteme.

In this context, Neopaganism and its relationship with historical representations are best described as an expression of the romantic episteme located within the sphere of western modernity. The cultural symbols it appropriates and the ideological basis of social and cultural identity are fundamentally defined by the overarching structure of western modernity in which it exists and is given meaning. What we are seeing in the shift from

foundationalism to post-modernism in Neopagan histories is representative of several issues. Firstly, it is representative of the inter-relationship between popular history and academic history. The two areas are often in conflict, particularly with regards to cultural signs of strong symbolic impact in western culture. The means by which this tension has been transformed over the course of recent history is indicative of broader trends of popular and academic historiography in western society. Secondly, the development of Neopagan histories is illustrative of how academic debates about the nature of historiographical validity and the interpretation of empirical evidence impact in popular representations of history. It is also representative of the means by which these ideological constructions of legitimacy in historical construction are utilized in defining symbolic cultural and social identity. Finally, the shifts in Neopagan historiographical method are also indicative of the inter-relationship between romantic and enlightenment epistemes in western culture. This is particularly significant in the era of late capitalism where the increasing commodification of cultural symbols has become a strong influence in the construction of popular history and the reabsorption of counter-cultural identities into mainstream society as consumable and purchasable symbols of identity.

NOTES:

1. Rose, Elliot. *A Razor for a Goat*. University of Toronto Press. 1962. pp 7-10; Kephart, M.J. 'Rationalist vs Romantics among the Scholars of Witchcraft'. In *Witchcraft and Sorcery*. Ed Marwick, Max. Penguin: London. pp 327-328; Murray, Margaret. *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*. Oxford UP: London. 1921. pp 12, 140, 233, 236; Michelet, Jules. *La Sorciere*. English Translation. Oxford UP: London. 1966(1982). pp 127-128, 138; Purkiss,

- Dianne. *The Witch in History: Early Modern and 20th Century Interpretations*. Routledge: London. 1996. pp 19-20, 34-36.
2. Weisner, Mary. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge UP. 1993. See also Evans, Richard. *The German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History*. Routledge: London. 1988. pp 57-74.; Monter, William. 'The Witches of Normandy'. *Journal of French History*. Vol 20. No 4. Fall 1997. pp 563-595; Ankarloo & Henningsen. *Early Modern Witchcraft*. Oxford UP: London. 1990; Cohn, Norman. *Europe's Inner Demons*. pp 1-4, 16-17, 22, 55-58 & 229-230. Also see Harley, David. 'Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife Witch'. *Journal for the Society of the Social History of Medicine*. vol 3. 1990. pp 1-26; Briggs, Robin. *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural context of European Witchcraft*. Harper Collins: London. 1996. pp 77-78, 217-218, 279-281; Marland, Hillary (Ed.) *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe*. Routledge: London. 1993. pp 45, 50, 88, 119. 159; Anglo, Sydney. 'Evident Authority and Authoritative Evidence: The Malleus Maleficarum'. *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*. Routledge: London. 1977. Also see Kevin, Robin. 'Magical Emasculation and the Limits of Popular Anti-Clericism in Early Modern Europe'. *Journal of Social History*. Vol 31. No 1. Fall 1997. pp 61-83.
 3. Guiley, Elizabeth. 'Witchcraft as Goddess Worship'. In *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*. Ed. Larrington, Carolyne. Pandora: London. 1992. pp 411-424; Hutton, Ronald. *The Triumph of the Moon*. Oxford UP: London. 1999. pp 217-220; Chapin-Bishop, Cat & Bishop, Peter. 'Embarrassed by our Origins'. *The Pomegranate: New Journal of Neopagan Thought*. 12. May 2000. pp 48-55.
 4. Purkiss, Diane. *The Witch in History*. p 40; Hutton, Ronald. 'Modern Pagan Witchcraft'. in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The 20th Century*. Ed. Ankarloo and Clark. Athlone: London. 1999. pp 44-47
 5. Ankarloo and Henningsen. *Early Modern European Witchcraft*. pp 1-7; Ginzberg, Carlo. *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches Sabbat*. Penguin: London. 1992. pp 9-15.
 6. Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology*. Women's Press: London. 1979. pp 196, 208, 217, 298 & 306.
 7. Adler, Margot. *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshipers and Other Pagans in America Today*. Penguin: New York. 1986(1979). pp 28, 30, 31, 44 & 88; Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance*. Harper Collins: San Francisco. 1989(1979) pp. 22-24.
 8. Adler, Margot. *Drawing Down the Moon*. pp 56-58, 59 & 90.
 9. Wafer, Jim. *Gay and Lesbian Alternative Religious Movements: Do you have to have foundations before you can rock them*. Australian Anthropological Society Annual Conference: Alternative Culture Panel. 10 July 1999. University of New South Wales. p 3.
 10. Purkiss, Dianne. *The Witch in History*. p 31.
 11. Purkiss, Dianne. *The Witch in History*. p 52.
 12. Reid, Sian. 'Witch Wars: Factors Contributing to Conflict in Canadian Neopagan Communities'. *The Pomegranate: New Journal of Neopagan Thought* 11. February 2000. pp 10-20.
 13. Gouldner, Alvin. *For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today*. Allen Lane: London. 1973. p 327.
 14. Hansen. 'Inside the Romanticist Episteme.' *Thesis* 11. SAGE: London. February 1997. p 23.
 15. Kearney, Richard. *The Wake of Imagination: Towards a Postmodern Culture*. University of Minneapolis Press. 1988.
 16. Wafer, Jim. *Gay and Lesbian Alternative Religious Movements*. Australian Anthropological Society Annual Conference: Alternative Culture Panel. 10 July 1999. University of New South Wales. p 3.

David Waldron is currently doing a PhD at Ballarat University in Australia on 20th century representations of Witchcraft

Margaret Murray and the Rise of Wicca

*by Juliette Wood
Reading University*

This article is reprinted from 3rd Stone 34 (April-June 1999). 3rd Stone magazine is enthusiastically recommended to our readers, who are encouraged to visit its website at <www.thirdstone.demon.co.uk>.

Dr Juliette Wood is the current president of Britain's Folklore Society.

One does not ordinarily associate a learned society with the emergence of a new system of belief. Thus it is all the more astonishing that a book published by an Egyptologist with an interest in folklore at the beginning of the 1920s should be the ultimate source for Wicca, the most influential movement in the revival of modern witchcraft.

Margaret Murray, the Egyptologist in question, is undoubtedly best known for her work on the history of witchcraft. Born in India, she trained as an Egyptologist after her return to Britain and worked at University College London where she was one of Flinders Petrie's most loyal students and supporters. Her work on witchcraft dates from the latter part of her long life. Although she had published a number of articles on the subject in various learned journals, her first book, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, only appeared in 1921. It did not really have an impact until it was reprinted in 1952 and later appeared in paperback in 1962. Murray claimed that witchcraft was actually 'an old religion'

based on the natural cycle of vegetation. The rituals of this religion were dominated by a horned hunting god and his consort, and the religion had been practised in Europe since the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods. According to Murray's book, the Christian Church persecuted the practitioners of the cult as witches. Nevertheless the cult survived and could still be found in certain folk practices associated with the changing seasons. She expanded this idea in subsequent articles and in two further books, namely *The God of the Witches* (1933) and *The Divine King* (1955). Her work was an important, perhaps the most important, influence on the rise of the modern Wicca movement in the 1950s, although many of its practitioners today are at pains to point out that their doctrines are not dependent on Murray.

Murray was president of the Folklore Society just before her death in the 1960s and had been an active member for some years previously. Many current members of the Society remember her fondly, and she was especially keen to encourage younger researchers, even those who disagreed with her ideas. Her ideas, however, have become something of an embarrassment to professional Folklorists, embodying as they do the somewhat reductionist assumptions associated with 19th century evolutionary theories which were even by Murray's time outdated in relation to academic folklore studies. Yet even today, this quaint, 19th century approach which sees 'survivals' in every custom and uses 'folk memory' to justify tenuous links between past and current practices, characterises the popular image of what folklore is.

The topic of Murray and her relation to folklore studies was reopened recently by another president of the Society who emphasised Murray's very selective use of

material in creating her appealingly romantic, although historically untenable, 'old religion'. Yet even at its first appearance, there was some scholarly dismay at Murray's now famous thesis that witchcraft originated as an ancient fertility cult. Several historians and anthropologists noted that she gave undue weight to this hypothesis and failed to consider that witchcraft might be described within the wider context of sympathetic magic with the fertility elements as a secondary feature.

While the somewhat racy and anti-religious content of *The Witch Cult* caused controversy at the time, it was greeted enthusiastically by the editors of *The Occult Review*. The aspect of Murray's work which appealed particularly to the occult movement was her conviction that the witch cult was a 'secret tradition' which survived despite attempts to suppress it. This kind of thinking was very popular among occultists at the period, and *The Occult Review* carried a number of articles throughout the 20s and 30s on so-called 'secret traditions'. The journal undoubtedly provided a degree of popularisation for Murray's work, since the original publication sold rather slowly. However the republication of her book in 1952 occurred in an entirely different climate. By that time the witchcraft laws had been repealed and Murray's work had already had an

[Murray's] quaint, 19th century approach which sees 'survivals' in every custom and uses 'folk memory' to justify tenuous links between past and current practices, characterises the popular image of what folklore is.

too easy to let this kind of controversy get out of proportion. Modern scholars have objected to Murray's ideas on academic, not religious or sexual grounds. A fundamental problem with Murray's work is her exclusive focus on witchcraft as an ancient fertility cult and her tendency to generalise wildly on the basis of very slender evidence. The consensus today, with the notable exception of some Neopagan writers, is that this picture of a benign nature/fertility cult is a construct rather than a record of history. This suggestion that the study of witchcraft might be more fruitfully linked to sympathetic magic rather than to fertility cults has been echoed in recent reassessments of her work. Attitudes range from Norman Cohn's critique which rejected Murray's evidence totally, to the more sympathetic stance of Carlo Ginsberg whose

influence on what was to become the modern Neopagan movement led by another member of the Folklore Society, Dr Gerald Gardner. In 1954 Murray wrote a preface to his book, and there is even a suggestion that she herself was a witch, a claim she vigorously denied in a letter to a colleague.

However Murray never made any secret of her antagonism to organised religion. In this and all subsequent books on witchcraft she sympathised with the practitioners of this ancient fertility cult whom she felt were victims of bigotry. It is all

analysis of a local group of 'witch hunters' led him to see some continuity of early religious forms. However Ginsberg does not propose anything approaching the pan-European cult which Murray advocated.

Murray's autobiography, written as she approached her hundredth birthday, reveals a mind clear and sharp. She rejected utterly the suggestion that she was a witch herself. What then were the elements which constitute her theories about the nature and origins of witchcraft?

Murray's own ideas about the origin of witchcraft were formed in the decades before 1921 when her first book was published. She had lectured on, or published, substantial portions of her first book in *Folklore* and the anthropological journal, *Man*, before then and had covered key themes, such as the number thirteen, child sacrifice, animal transformation, the devil's mark, the witch coven and the familiar, which figure prominently in her subsequent books. The most obvious source for her approach lies in the theories of cultural evolution so important to 19th and early 20th century thinking, especially in the newly developing social sciences. Cultural evolution is much talked about among scholars who study the history of ideas, and the Folklore Society was an important arena for discussion among leading cultural scholars such as Edward Tylor and Andrew Lang. However 'cultural evolution' was never a monolithic theory, and there were several strands, each with their supporters and detractors. The early issues of the new journal, *Folklore*, and the venerable journal, *The Atheneum*, played host to several lively debates on whether characteristics of 'primitive culture' were universal, and stemmed from a psychic unity among mankind, or whether diffusion played some role in this model.

Murray's theory incorporated elements from both sides of this argument, and a great deal else besides. Basic to Murray's thinking was the idea of the 'divine king'. Her early studies in Egyptian archaeology indicate that Murray was much influenced by Frazer's concept of the dying god. The theory is centred on Frazer's reading of classical texts in which he identified a number of metaphors having to do with the death and resurrection of divine and semi-divine figures which seemed linked to the cycle of the seasons. These he interpreted in terms of an all-embracing primitive ritual aimed at ensuring the continuance of fertility which, through the actions of significant individuals such as priests, kings and eventually their substitutes, propitiated certain natural forces. Frazer's rationalist stance saw primitive man as a kind of proto-rationalist who, lacking an understanding of science, attempted to control the forces of nature by means of rituals in which sympathetic magic functioned as a kind of substitute for scientific principles of cause and effect. Murray believed Frazer to be antagonistic to her ideas and thought he was behind a negative review in *The Scotsman* when her book first appeared, but their methods had much in common. Both proceeded from the study of documents, in Frazer's case classical texts, in Murray's the records of medieval and early modern witchcraft. Significant elements from these documents were selected out and projected backward in time onto the 'mind' of primitive man. Both shared a mistrust of organised religion. However, Frazer eventually included the Christian resurrection story among his examples of the dying god myth, while Murray maintained a distinction between her witch-cult and Christianity.

Another important influence on Murray's thinking was her great friend and

colleague in the Folklore Society, the religious historian E.O. James, editor of *Folklore* from 1932-58. His theories about the mother goddess use the same kinds of arguments as Murray, and his book on *The Cult of the Mother Goddess* is in many ways a companion piece to hers in its use of a Frazerian model moderated by myth-ritual assumptions. James' attitude to the relation between myth and ritual was closer to a group of Cambridge-based classicists usually referred to as the 'Myth-ritual School'. For James, as for Frazer, ritual was concerned with the promotion of social fertility which, in the mind of primitive man, could directly affect the operation of nature. Like Frazer, James' theories developed from reading texts. However, for scholars associated with the myth-ritual school, these texts included not just classical ones, but those from the ancient Near East. In effect, although divine kingship and renewing rituals based on the agricultural cycles still remained central, the myth-ritual approach was essentially a diffusionist position centring on the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean. This was a significant refinement of other cultural evolution theories, notably those of Frazer and Tylor who assumed a psychic unity in mankind and a universal process of culture evolution. Scholars who adopted the myth-ritual approach used terms such as 'adaptation', 'disintegration' and 'degradation'. As a result, the idea of cultural evolution became less one directional and less progressive, while the idea of a primary pattern became stronger. Myth and ritual however remained the product of the needs of an agricultural world, and the 'pattern' involved elements of dying god, divine marriage and the rebirth of vegetation re-enacted in a great annual festival. Murray's theories apparently presented substantive evidence for this. Here was an

actual (pre)historical context—Neolithic religion in Europe—whose rituals were dependent on the agricultural seasons and centred around dying and resurrection linked to the vegetative cycle.

The survival of these rituals, misunderstood and persecuted as witchcraft, presented a dramatic and profound change to the concept of cultural evolution. The Frazerian myth of the dying god and the myth/ritualist Near Eastern religion were always academic constructs. Murray's witch cult seemed to make them real and living.

While the idea of cultural evolution provided a theoretical context for Murray's work, there are a number of specific influences as well. The historian Ronald Hutton has recently pointed out similarities between Murray's characterisation of the witch cult and the concept of *la Vecchia religione* in Charles Leland's *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches*. Leland's somewhat dubious identification of a supposed witch cult in medieval Italy appeared in the 1890s. Theories about the survival of ancient civilisations were becoming increasing popular during the 19th century and the idea that earlier races survived in later culture under the guise of fairies or witches had been suggested by anthropologists and folklorists (such as Lawrence Gomme, A.R. Wright and David MacRitchie) working at the end of the last century. It is not always possible to say with certainty how much of this was 'in the air' at the time and how much was the direct result of Murray's reading.

Murray gave few hints in her autobiography about the sources of her work. She spent some time in Glastonbury in 1915 recuperating from an illness. Here she became interested in the Holy Grail and probably came across an article on the Dorset Ooser (a mask used in a seasonal celebration, see photograph). She stated

that a chance remark from someone whom she claimed not to recall that witches had their own religion sparked her interest in witchcraft. She began to work 'only from contemporary records' and 'had the sort of experience that sometimes comes to a researcher', namely that the Devil was a disguised man, not a demon. This 'startled, almost alarmed her' and indicated that witches were members of an old

and primitive form of religion. Murray believed her witchcraft research, which she characterised as 'the interpretation of beliefs and ceremonies of certain ancient forms of religion', to be her most important work. Her assertion that she forgot who started her on this important endeavour is a little suspect for a woman who paid great attention to detail and had an excellent memory. The whole passage betrays the heightened dramatic tension of autobiographical discourse, and there are in fact a number of studies which anticipate Murray's ideas very closely indeed.

For example the great statistician and polymath, Professor Karl Pearson, was Professor of applied mathematics at University College and a colleague of Murray's. Pearson was interested in eugenics and social reform and this led him to speculate, as did so many fine minds of the day on the nature of society. His essay 'Woman as

The fact that Murray
was not the first to
mention witchcraft as a
survival of an
earlier cultural
practice does not
really strengthen the
argument that it is in
reality an ancient
religion.

Witch: Evidence of Mother-right in the Customs of Mediaeval Witchcraft' appeared in 1897 and drew heavily on Erich Neumann's concept of 'mother-right' (i.e. matriarchy) and on the work of the French historian, Jules Michelet. Pearson's essay anticipates substantial themes which appear later in Murray. It treated the customs of medieval witchcraft as fossils of the 'old mother age' of prehistoric civilisation. Besides witchcraft, such fossils were to be found in the folklore of agri-

culture, spring and harvest festivals and peasant dances (all of which were of particular interest to Murray). Both witch gatherings and peasant ceremonies were relics of ancient rites. What Christianity repressed became witchcraft; what it tolerated became associated with seasonal folk festivals. The characteristic features of witch gatherings included a communal feast, a choral dance and a sacrifice under a sacred tree. Since inheritance during the period of 'mother-right' was through the female, it followed that the deities and the presiding spirit of witchcraft were undoubtedly female. Pearson suggested (following Michelet) that originally the male deity had been subservient to the female one. Later however, the male deity became prominent and eventually became the 'devil' of the witch trials. Pearson's attitude to Joan of Arc was also close to Michelet. Both suggested that she was a white witch or folk

healer. The figure of Joan is important in Murray's most extreme book on the witch cult, *The Divine King*.

At the centre of Murray's witch cult was a male deity. The Diana of the historical documents (and of Leland's *Aradia*) becomes a male deity called Dianus, (Janus Dionysius) by a philological slight of hand and, no doubt, also influenced by the literary cult of Pan popular in the Edwardian period. In literature Pan became a symbol of duality, of savage sexual release, of a life of wildness opposed to the strictures of civilisation. Nietzsche defined Pan

as primary emotion to challenge Apollonian authority. Here too Murray apparently provided anthropological validation for such a cult and created the possibility for joyous sensual worship sanctioned by ancient religion.

Other scholars also examined this idea of surviving religious cults. Jessie Weston, a noted Arthurian specialist, suggested that coded in the Grail narratives were records of secret societies and rites which had to be kept hidden from prevailing Christian orthodoxy and that these secret rituals were related to mystery religions that involved sacred kingship and sexual initiations of the type described in Frazer's *Golden Bough*. Although Murray never took up the occult angle, she was interested in the same

No matter how
sympathetically one
wishes to look at this
charmingly eclectic
scholar, folklorists
and historians will
(quite rightly)
continue to point out
the mismatch between
Murray's construct
and what can be read
into her sources.

1952 the re-published *Witchcult* sold much better. Gerald Gardner, another figure involved in the witchcraft revival who also had contacts with the Folklore Society and direct contact with Murray, also benefited from the repeal of the witchcraft act. Murray's work certainly appealed to the modern Wicca movement. The relationship between the two is somewhat contentious, with academic opinion suggesting Wicca's dependence on Murray as a basis for constructing both their rituals and their history. Wiccan writers, in particular Gardner, claimed their sources antedated Murray.

Vivianne Crowley, an important exponent of modern Wicca, acknowledges Murray's importance, but defends the prior existence of the ancient witch cult. Her

themes and images. In effect she turned the vegetation myth into a mystery religion which was not merely a fragmentary survival but a living entity. The implications of this were worked out by the modern Neopagan movement whose newly revived rituals were given authenticating force via Murray's theories.

The repeal of the witchcraft laws in the 1950s was a significant factor in Murray's popularity. She herself admitted that her second book *The God of the Witches* published in 1933 was a failure. However, in

chapter on the Witch God follows Murray's argument and use of material, starting with the Palaeolithic cave drawing known as 'the shaman' in the cave of *Trois Freres*. Murray wrote an enthusiastic note about this figure and used the illustration in her books. In the first edition of Crowley's account, Murray is mentioned four times; twice in connection with the sacrifice of kings, once in connection with initiation rituals, and once in a discussion of the predecessors of the Wicca movement in which she is given pride of place.

In the revised and updated edition, Murray is less prominent. Crowley still acknowledges her contribution, but treats her as one among several early writers on the ancient cult. The revised edition stresses Murray's testimony to Gardner, omits reference to the self-sacrifice of English kings (presumably since this later phase of Murray's ideas on the subject were getting increasingly far-fetched), mentions Frazer only (i.e. omits the earlier reference to Murray) in connection with ritual king murders. Indeed Crowley has a point. Murray was not the first to suggest the existence of a vegetation cult and the links to witches, but she did take the elements and forge a new and exciting synthesis on which she wrote several readable books and published in her many talks. The fact that Murray was not the first to mention witchcraft as a survival of an earlier cultural practice does not really strengthen the argument that it is in reality an ancient religion.

Many historians of witchcraft suggest that it was Murray's failure to use the newly available records of witchcraft which account for some at least of the problems with her theories. Indeed, although she was insistent that she consulted the original documents, these were mostly already in print, and always mined for the informa-

tion which she expected to find there. Much the same can be said of the 'field-work' which supported her findings. Murray's correspondents were primarily other educated individuals, often connected with local parishes or councils. She asked specific questions to which she received specific answers which she took as further substantiation of her assumptions. This is painfully clear in the papers relating to Pook Fair. Some of the information actually contradicted her assumptions but she simply rearranged it to suit her ideas. One must add in her defence that this was typical procedure at the time. Collecting meant finding a 'good' informant who would have access to more popular sources. Murray was one of many educated men and women collecting material from servants, employees and rural workers within a parish context or encountered on a holiday to some 'exotic' locale within Great Britain.

In theoretical terms Murray's stance was a particular variant of the myth-ritual approach. She historicized the 'dying god' myth as a vegetation cult practised during a particular period of primitive European time. No matter how sympathetically one wishes to look at this charmingly eclectic scholar, folklorists and historians will (quite rightly) continue to point out the mismatch between Murray's construct and what can be read into her sources. However indebted it is to Murray's ideas, modern Wicca has certainly gone its own way. Broader based, more popular, more influenced by feminine principles and increasingly confident as a cult, it is less dependent on arguments about continuity from an ancient period and on the reality or lack thereof of Murray's thinking. Certainly the movement differs in many respects from the witchcraft cults of the 1960s and its current concerns are linked to ecological thinking and femi-

nism. The latter would certainly have pleased Murray as she was herself involved in the suffragette movement and her belief in the freedom of expression, especially for women, was a positive force in her own life.

SOURCES:

- Boardman, John, 1997, *The Great God Pan: The Survival of an Image*, London.
- Burnett, David, 1991, *Dawning of the Pagan Moon, An investigation into the rise of Western Paganism*, Eastbourne.
- Cohn, Norman, 1976, *Europe's Inner Demons*, St Albans.
- Crowley, Vivianne, 1989 Revised and updated Thorsens 1996, *Wicca the Old Religion in the New Age*, Wellingborough.
- Frazer, James, Abridged version 1922, new ed. 1993, *The Golden Bough*, Wordsworth.
- Gardner, G.B., 1954, *Witchcraft Today*, London.
- Ginsberg, Carlo, 1983, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and the Agrarian cults in the 16th and 17th centuries*, London.
- Hutton, Ronald, 1991, *Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, Blackwell.
- Hutton, Ronald, 1996, *The Stations of the Sun*, Oxford.
- Leland, C.G., 1899, *Aradia or Gospel of the Witches*, London.
- Luhrmann, Tanya, 1989, *Persuasion of the Witches Craft*, Oxford.
- Murray, Margaret, 1963, *My First Hundred Years*.
- Michelet, Jules, 1958, *Satanism and Witchcraft*, New York.
- Pearson, Karl, 1897, *The Chances of Death and Other Studies in Evolution*, 2 vols., Edward Arnold.
- Simpson, Jacqueline, 1994, 'Margaret Murray, Who Believed Her and Why' Presidential Address of 1992 *Folklore* 105:89-96.

This article is based on A Coven of Scholars: Margaret Murray and her Working Methods by Caroline Oates and Juliette Wood, the first offering in a new Archive Series published by the Folklore Society.

READERS' FORUM

continued from page 3

fragments that may indicate the survival of archaic elements reflective of older traditions. Some of these older traditions may be key source material from which common folklore or folk magic may have evolved. They may also represent traditions retained within secret societies that were never fully assimilated by the culture in which they resided. One example can be found in the witchcraft trial of Elena Draga (Elena Crucichi) circa 1582. The records of this trial indicate that Elena employed a form of sympathetic healing magic that involved pouring the bath water of the afflicted into the ocean as the tide was going out. Elena stated that along with the tide the spell had to be timed with the phase of the moon, typically waiting until the third or fourth week. Historian Ruth Martin states that "it is one of the few entirely non-Christian aspects of healing still in existence by this period" (*Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice 1550-1650*, page 143). To dismiss it as an anomaly or to reject its relevance because it may not be reflective of popular Italian folk magic is to lose sight of a possible surviving element of a secret tradition residing in a subculture of Italian society. I often wonder if anyone is keeping track of the many discarded "anomalies," comparing them in their collective state to see what they might impart.

Magliocco states in her article that "The trouble with seeing Italian folk practices as 'survivals' of Neolithic or ancient Etruscan practices ... is that it ignores the many cultural changes which have swept Italy since the early Bronze Age, as well as folklore's extraordinary ability to adapt to cultural changes". While I certainly do not feel that all Italian folklore and folk magic customs and practices are rooted in pre-Christian religion or Neolithic culture, I do believe that many are. Yves Bonnefoy (*Roman and European Mythologies*) makes a compelling argument for the persistence of prehistoric and primitive con-

cepts surviving well into the Roman period in Italy. He addresses that particularly in Etruria "essential aspects of the way of life and organization characteristics of Iron Age cultures, as well as survivals of prehistoric ritual customs such as the celebration of cults in grottoes or rock sanctuaries" existed at the time of the Roman conquest. Bonnefoy states that "traces survived of primitive conceptions and practices so distant from the rationality of the classical world that they sometimes provoked the astonishment and incomprehension of writers in the Hellenistic and Roman periods". The most striking examples were the animistic conception of the supernatural, the omnipresence importance of divine signs and divination, and the belief in the material survival of the dead in their place of burial. According to Bonnefoy, so tenacious were these and other archaic elements that they persisted even into the Middle Ages where they plagued Church leaders. Bonnefoy writes: "Regarding this tenacity we have the testimony of the capitularies and the councils who up to the Carolingian period denounced superstitious practices and condemned as sacrilegious those who continued to light flares and fires near trees, rocks and fountains. Gregory the Great had already recognized the impossibility of extirpating the layers of beliefs rooted 'in such stubborn minds'; the only way to fight superstition was to assign the pagan vestiges to the new cult, to put pious images on trees, to carve crosses on menhirs, to place fountains under the invocation of the Virgin—in a word, to cover the ancient veneration with a cloak of orthodoxy" (*Roman and European Mythologies*. University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp 26, 202-203). So, in effect, Christianity helped to further preserve the archaic elements of Italic paganism and to pass them on with a Christian veneer.

The essential basic beliefs held by the Etruscans and Romans can still be found in popular Italian folk practices. Some examples are the belief in some type of indwelling spirit residing

in a natural object such as a stone, the divinatory nature of fava beans, and the power of red ribbons or strips of cloth. Granted, many now popular customs and practices were modified by cultural changes and would therefore not reflect the identical ancient Roman or Etruscan belief or practice. However I believe that there is a difference between how folk lore and folk magic evolves among common people compared to witch families. The average person does not consciously set out to maintain folk traditions. He or she simply participates in them, enjoys them, and may even pass them on to others by example or oral instruction. But the average individual is not typically concerned with any modifications that might be made. Therefore the custom or practice can easily change over time. The witch, by contrast, is typically devoted to retaining traditions intact. The hereditary witch is well aware that he or she is an outcast of society and is never assimilated into the culture in which he or she resides, not by personal desire nor by the desires of his or her neighbors. Instead the witch finds his or her identity in the things that separate him or her from the people and the culture that rejects the witch. Therefore the preservation of customs and practices (even those incongruent with popular culture) is essential to the hereditary witch because it the only safe and reliable world he or she knows. In the meantime the culture and the society in which he or she lives proceeds on without the witch in tow. Leland noted in *Etruscan Roman Remains* that the witches of Italy keep "an immense number of legends of their own, which have nothing in common with the nursery or popular tales such as are collected and published". It is only natural that esoteric traditions should differ from exoteric ones. Therefore it is not surprising that certain aspects of Italian witchcraft customs and practices may not appear in popular folklore and folk magic. However, enough folklore resides in modern Italian witchcraft to indicate its origin in Italy, and sufficient historical evi-

dence is available to support its endurance over the centuries.

With all due respect to Prof Magliocco's focus on popular Italian customs and practices, I believe that historical documents will serve us more effectively than will a comparison of folklore and folk magic practices. Is there any evidence that witchcraft was ever viewed as a religion in the past or that hereditary witches existed and were connected with an organized cult? Such appears to have been the opinion of Francesco Guazzo, an Italian Ambrosian monk who grew up in the region of Tuscany and came to be regarded as an authority on witchcraft. In his book *Compendium Maleficarum*, written at the request of the Archbishop of Milan (Frederico Borromeo) and published in 1608, Guazzo writes in great detail concerning the structure of the Italian witch cult (as well as other European systems). In chapters 12 and 18, Guazzo indicates that witches gather in circles drawn upon the ground with beech twigs, and work with spirits of earth, air, fire, and water among others. Guazzo notes in chapter ten that witches adhere to certain laws, one of which relates to countering the magic of other witches: "... for no one might thrust his sickle into another's harvest, according to the law which provides that he who binds must also unbind." In chapter 6, Guazzo states: "The infection of witchcraft is often spread through a sort of contagion to children by their fallen parents ... and it is one among many sure and certain proofs against those who are charged and accused of witchcraft, if it be found that their parents before them were guilty of this crime. There are daily examples of this inherited taint in children ...". Guazzo states that Italian witches "read from a black book during their religious rites" and he notes a religious demeanor among witches in chapter eleven, where he writes: "For witches observe various silences, measuring, vigils, mutterings, figures and fires, as if they were some expiatory religious rite". Guazzo's depiction of witchcraft seems to indi-

cate a rather structured and organized cult, and is consistent with accounts from Italian witch trial transcripts dating from 1310-1647. Folklorist Lady Vere de Vere also describes a structured witch cult in an article she wrote in 1894: "... the community of Italian witches is regulated by laws, traditions, and customs of the most secret kind, possessing special recipes for sorcery" (*La Rivista of Rome* June 1894). Folklorist J.B. Andrews later added: "The Neapolitans have an occult religion and government in witchcraft, and the camorra; some apply to them to obtain what official organizations cannot or will not do. As occasionally happens in similar cases, the Camorra fears and yields to the witches, the temporal to the spiritual" (*Folk-Lore*; Transactions of the Folk-Lore Society, March 1897).

Prof Magliocco expressed extreme doubt in her article that secret societies can remain secret. She cites the Mafia as an example of one that failed to remain secret. However, the Mafia drew a great of attention to itself through its criminal activity and the use of violence and murder. The dealings of the Mafia clearly could not go unnoticed. That some secret societies have been exposed does not mean that all must meet the same fate in due course of time. Magliocco stated in her article that "the existence of an Italian witch cult among Italian-Americans" is "extremely unlikely". Leland noted that Maddalena (his witch informant) was immigrating to America in 1899. It seems extremely unlikely that she would be the only travelling witch in the entire history of the Italian immigration to America. I see no reason for any children or grandchildren she may have had, to not preserve family traditions passed to them simply because of Italian-American culture. Perhaps in the final analysis we may have to consider that the Italian witch cult may simply be as those who actually practice it claim it to be.

Raven Grimassi
San Diego CA

Book Review: THE EARLY GREEK CONCEPT OF THE SOUL

by Jan Bremmer
Princeton UP, 1983. xii + 154. pp.
Two Appendices. Index. Selected Bibliography.
ISBN 0-691-03131-2.

Reviewed by Jerome S. Arkenberg
Department of History
California State University—Fullerton

While at first glance this study may not seem germane to modern Hellenic polytheists, those particularly interested in reconstructing this ancient religion should find it of particular interest, as Bremmer notes that the ancient Hellenes viewed both the soul (*psyche*) and human psychological makeup entirely differently than we, here in the West, do today. The study is divided into two parts. The first examines the souls of the living—the free soul, the ego souls, and soul animals. The second part examines the conceptions of the souls of the dead. Bremmer includes two appendices, one on the soul of plants and animals, the other on the wandering soul in Western folk tradition.

In sum, the Hellenes, as first enunciated in Homer, conceived of four separate "souls"—a free soul, corresponding with *psyche*, and body souls, corresponding with *thymos*, *nous*, and *menos* (p. 13), a distinction which is common to many pre-modern peoples, including the Anglo-Saxons. The free soul, or *psyche*, is so integral to the human being that without it one cannot survive. For the most part,

the Hellenes believed that the *psyche* rarely manifested itself, but would usually flee the body at a time of crisis, causing immediate collapse—a swoon or faint, if it returned; or death, if it did not. However, the *psyche* is not the *aion*, or "life-stuff" (which Bremmer does not adequately or clearly define); nonetheless, when the *psyche* leaves the body and does not return, the body dies. Despite several assertions that the free soul has a non-physical mode of existence in dreams, faints, and various forms of unconsciousness including the trance, Bremmer notes that, as in death, the use of *psyche* in Homer does not support this conception. The Homeric *psyche*, Bremmer contends, is a transitional concept, between the archaic "breath-soul", which wanders away when the body is passive, to a post-Homeric "unitary-soul"—*ie*, both the free soul as the soul of the dead, and the breath soul which wanders away during various forms of unconsciousness. This concept of the wandering free soul persisted for much of the Hellenic Archaic age, as seen in a number of legends related by Pindar, Hippocrates, and Xenophon, including bilocation, not unlike the New Testament stories of the raising of Lazarus or Jesus' appearance to the two disciples travelling on the road to Emmaus.

The ego soul (usually held to represent living consciousness), Bremmer states, most

Bremmer contends that the ancient Hellenes conceived of their personalities, and their motivational forces, as structured entirely different than the way we, in the post-Freudian West, do today.



frequently occurs in Homer as the *thymos*. The latter is the opposite of the *psyche*; *ie*, it is only active when the body is awake. It is also the source of all emotions, and the force that urges people to act. Thought to reside primarily in the chest (and in the *phrenes*—the lungs or diaphragm), it normally stays in its place and does not wander about—when the body is passive, it does not leave the body, but just shuts down. Another aspect of the ego soul was known to the Hellenes as the *nous*—the mind, or “an act of mind, a thought or a purpose.” Though always found in the chest, it is not a material thing—*ie*, it cannot be struck, pierced, or blown out like the *psyche* or *thymos*. Finally, there is the *menos*—the momentary impulse to act, only rarely controllable by the individual, such as the “battle fury” of warriors.

Regarding the dead, Bremmer notes the belief that they “moved and spoke like the living and that the soul of the dead could not move but instead flitted and squeaked” (p. 73). Death occurred when the *psyche* left the body and failed to return. The *nous*, though, is never mentioned in connection with death, though the *thymos* and *menos*, as the *psyche*, flit away. This meant, for the Hellenes, that funeral rites were not simply a means for disposal of the body, but of performing various rites intended to aid the soul in its passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Without these rites, the soul could not pass on—thus the emphasis on recovery of bodies for burial, or, as an added punishment, a refusal of burial for those condemned and executed.

Bremmer contends that the ancient Hellenes conceived of their personalities, and their motivational forces, as structured entirely different than the way we, in the post-Freudian West, do today. Only in Classical Athens, in the 5th century BCE does the concept arise that humans can determine

their own courses of action—this perhaps may be a consequence of the growth of literacy and political consciousness, as once notably stated by Jack Goody and Ian Watt in their pioneering study “The Consequences of Literacy” (*Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5 (1962-63): 304-345). For all those interested in this subject, in the funerary rites of the ancient Hellenes, or with shamanistic practices, this study should prove richly rewarding.

PANGAIA



Earthwise
Spirituality
for the
21st Century

80 pages to feed your soul in every issue. Free sample upon request, visit us at www.pangaia.com
P O Box 641, Pt. Arena, CA 95468
877-PANGAIA, (877-726-4242.)



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT

Readers' Forum

Starhawk and Michael York on that Atlantic Monthly article
Sabina Magliocco and Raven Grimassi on Stregheria
Gus diZerega and Ann-Marie Gallagher on the 'Green' Nazis
Angeline Kantola on Science and Chaos Magick
Jo Pearson on Margaret Murray

2

A Symposium

The Nature of the Divine: Transcendence and Immanence
in Contemporary Pagan Theology

4

Chas S. Clifton

If Witches No Longer Fly:
Today's Pagans and Solanaceous Plants

17

Ann Gróa Sheffield

Frey, God of the World

24

Book Reviews

Ankarloo & Clark's *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*

Review by Dana Kramer-Rolls

36

Susan Greenwood's *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld*

Reviews by Daniel Cohen
and Douglas Ezzy

Leonard Shlain's *The Goddess and the Alphabet*

Review by Ken McCormick



The Pomegranate

Copyright

© 2001 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

ISSN 1528-0268 refers to this Journal.

Subscriptions:

4 issues: US\$20 — 8 issues: US\$37.50
by surface mail anywhere.

Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds,
or Checks drawn on US banks to

The Pomegranate

501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019

Subs email: thepom@cascadeaccess.com

Submissions:

Our readers are both scholars and nonscholars. We seek submissions written in language that is engaging, clear, and jargon-free.

See the inside back cover for further details

Deadline for submissions:
the Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.

The Cover:

Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

General Editor:

Fritz Muntean

Business Manager:

Diana Tracy

Managing Editor:

Chas S. Clifton,
University of Southern Colorado, Pueblo

Editorial Assistance:

Melissa Hope
Síân Reid

Board of Editorial Consultants:

Vivianne Crowley,
Heythrop College, University of London

Douglas Ezzy,
University of Tasmania

Adrian Ivakhiv,
University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh

Jo Pearson,
The Open University

Sarah Pike,
California State University, Chico

The Pomegranate: The Journal of Pagan Studies is published for the interdisciplinary study of contemporary and classical Pagan religions, including Wicca, Witchcraft, Druidism, Ásatrú, Odinism, as well as other forms of revived and diaspora Paganism. We welcome articles and essays from historians of religion, environmental historians, social scientists, and independent writers and scholars whose work engages or is informed by current academic research.

Notes from the Underground

The growth of contemporary Pagan religions has been matched with a surge of serious writing about Paganism (if you prefer, "Paganisms"). Increasing numbers of articles and books are coming out from self-identified Pagan scholars and from a greater variety of others who have moved past the original simplistic characterizations of Paganism as a bizarre and deviant subculture.

Through its history, *The Pomegranate* has sought to offer readers a selection of some of the best new research on Pagan religion, including book excerpts, reprints from other specialized journals, and recent conference papers. In some instances, however, scholars in this field have been hampered by the fact that there was no "peer-reviewed" journal, one in which major articles were reviewed anonymously by qualified outside scholars. This deficiency has also made it harder to present *The Pomegranate* to university librarians and to database compilers, another essential part of making its contents available to future researchers.

Changes beginning in this issue are signaled by a change in *The Pomegranate's* subtitle, from "A Journal of Neopagan Thought" to "The Journal of Pagan Studies." Dropping the "Neo-" prefix signifies two ideas. One is that contemporary Paganism is not as "neo-" as it was; it has gained its third and even fourth generation of adherents. A second reason for dropping "Neo-" is that *The Pomegranate* retains an interest in new interpretations of historic Pagan religions and of their interaction with other world views.

By adding "Pagan Studies" we hope to signal the birth of a scholarly discipline. In an

earlier issue of *The Pomegranate*, Michael York of Bath Spa University College defined "Paganism" as "an affirmation of interactive and polymorphic sacred relationships by individual or community with the tangible, sentient, and nonempirical" (#11, Feb 2000, p. 9), a definition constructed to eschew "any true hierarchy between the temporal and permanent, between the physical and spiritual, or between this world and the otherworld." While other definitions continue to be offered, this one offers editorial room for both historic and contemporary Pagan religions. Furthermore, we regard them primarily as religions rather than as folklore, urban subcultures, or literary creation, concentrating on their links and common elements rather than regarding them merely as precursors to or reactions against the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition. We plan to publish a gradually growing body of work to support that idea that "Pagan Studies" should be approached as a distinct entity and not always parceled out under other headings such as "new religious movements" or "feminist religion."

During the past year, *The Pomegranate* gained the assistance of a new board of editorial consultants from different universities and different nations to help in our transition to being a true "refereed" journal. Their contributions are invaluable, and their presence signals our warm working relationship with the Nature Religions Scholars Network (NRSN), an informal network of researchers in the areas of Pagan studies and other nature-based spirituality. The NRSN meets each year during the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and maintains a Web presence at www.uscolo.edu/natrele. Their assistance is invaluable, and we look forward to making the board of editorial consultants an important component in *The Pomegranate's* growth.

Chas S. Clifton

The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.

As many readers of The Pomegranate are aware, an article appeared in the January 2001 issue of Atlantic Monthly magazine in which many of the popular myths of feminist Witchcraft were called into question. This article may be read on the web at <www.theatlantic.com/issues/2001/01/allen.htm>. Starhawk has written a response to this article which we are pleased to reprint with her permission.

STARHAWK WRITES:

I write in regards to Charlotte Allen's article "The Scholars and the Goddess". Although Ms Allen interviewed me and others at great length for this article, she still seems to have missed the core insights and perspective of Goddess spirituality.

Goddess religion is not based on belief, in history, in archaeology, in any Great Goddess past or present. Our spirituality is based on experience, on a direct relationship with the cycles of birth, growth, death and regeneration in nature and in human lives. We see the complex interwoven web of life as sacred, which is to say, real and important, worth protecting, worth taking a stand for. At a time when every major ecosystem on the planet is under assault, calling nature sacred is a radical act because it threatens the overriding value of profit that allows us to despoil the basic life support sys-

tems of the earth. And at a time when women still live with the daily threat of violence and the realities of inequality and abuse, it is an equally radical act to envision deity as female and assert the sacred nature of female (and male) sexuality and bodies.

Any discussion of "the Wiccan narrative" must begin from that framework if it is to make any sense at all. And to truly understand our thealogy (with an 'a'—from 'thea': 'Goddess'), you have to be willing to move outside of Jewish or Christian concepts of deity. Ms Allen, producer of the Catholic page on Beliefnet and author of a book on Christ, seems unable to stretch beyond her own belief system, and her conclusions should be read with that in mind.

To us, Goddesses, Gods, and for that matter, archaeological theories are not something to believe in, nor are they merely metaphors. An image of deity, a symbol on a pot, a cave painting, a liturgy are more like portals to particular states of consciousness and constellations of energies. Meditate on them, contemplate them, and they take you somewhere, generally into some aspect of those cycles of death and regeneration. The heart of my connection to the Goddess has less to do with what I believe happened five thousand years ago or five hundred years ago, and much more to do with what I notice when I step outside my door: that oak leaves fall to the ground, decay and make fertile soil. Calling that process sacred means that I approach this everyday miracle with a sense of awe and wonder and gratitude, and that in very practical terms, I compost my own garbage.

The current discussion within the Goddess tradition about our history and scholarship is part of the healthy development of a vibrant tradition that tends not to attract true believers of any sort. We enjoy the debate, but we are sophisticated enough to know that scholars, too, have their biases and fashions. What is

**WE ARE SOPHISTICATED ENOUGH TO
KNOW THAT SCHOLARS, TOO, HAVE THEIR
BIASES AND FASHIONS. WHAT IS DECLARED
UNTRUE THIS YEAR MAY BE TRUE FIVE
YEARS FROM NOW, AND VICE VERSA.**

declared untrue this year may be true five years from now, and vice versa. Archaeologists may never be able to prove or disprove Marija Gimbutas' theories—but the wealth of ancient images she presents to us are valuable because they work: they function elegantly, right now, as gateways to that deep connected state. We may never truly know whether Neolithic Minoans saw the spiral as a symbol of regeneration—but I know the amazing, orgasmic power that is raised when we dance a spiral with two thousand people at our Halloween ritual every year. I may never know for certain what was in the mind of the maker of the paleolithic, big bellied, heavy breasted female figure that sits atop my computer, but she works as a Goddess for me because my own creativity is awakened by looking at her every day.

Allen makes a big point of asserting that ancient peoples were polytheists, and that this somehow disproves the myth that they worshiped a Great Goddess. She utterly misses the point that we are polytheists, now, today. No one, certainly not Gimbutas, ever postulated a monolithic, monotheistic Goddess religion of the past. But even the terms 'polytheistic' and 'monotheistic' come out of a framework that actually makes no sense to us. It's like asking "Is water one or many?" The only possible answer is "Huh? Hey, it's wonderful, miraculous, life giving, vital stuff that we need to honor and respect and conserve and not pollute, that's the point."

Goddess traditions of today, in all their

forms and nuances: Paganism, women's spirituality, Wicca, Witchcraft, indigenous Goddess worship, are vast, diverse, and constantly evolving. Allen's bias is shown in the extremely narrow selection of Goddess thinkers and writers she chooses to interview or quote from. She quotes at length from the book I wrote over twenty years ago, but doesn't bother to mention the seven other books I've written or co-authored since, which include an economic and sociological analysis of the Witch burnings in *Dreaming the Dark* (Beacon, 1982), and a long discussion of the textual evidence for Goddess worship and the transition to patriarchy in ancient Sumer in *Truth or Dare* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1988). She cites Cynthia Eller, whose own bias is revealed in the very title of her book, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*. 'Matriarchy' is a term that most Goddess scholars set gently aside sometime back in the early eighties, if not before, because none of us envision an ancient society that is the mirror image of patriarchy. Using the term implies that Eller is either not up to date on the very movement she's critiquing, or that she is unwilling to engage with the full range of thought within that movement.

Allen doesn't bother to cite the dozens of other Goddess scholars, philosophers, and journalists from Carol Christ to Margot Adler who might have provided a counterbalance to what she puts forth as the new received historic truth. But her own bias is most clearly revealed in her use of pejorative terms such as 'bunk'

continued on page 45

The Nature of the Divine: Transcendence and Immanence in Contemporary Pagan Theology

A Symposium

This article is an edited version of a discussion which took place in mid-2000 on NATREL, the Nature Religions Scholars' email list.

ANNE-LAURE FERLAT D'APREMONT is a PhD student at Bath Spa University studying the Russian Pagan movements and paganism.

JENNY BLAIN is an anthropologist and writer who teaches in the School of Social Science and Law, Sheffield Hallam University.

CAT CHAPIN-BISHOP is a psychotherapist who teaches pastoral counselling at Cherry Hill Seminary.

CHRISTOPHER CHASE pursues graduate work at Arizona State University.

CHAS CLIFTON teaches nature writing and creative non-fiction at the University of Southern Colorado.

VIVIANNE CROWLEY lectures in Psychology of Religion at Heythrop College, University of London.

BARBARA JANE DAVY studies religion, nature, and ethics at Concordia University, Montreal, and lives in the Ottawa River bioregion.

GUS DIZEREGA teaches in the Department of Politics, Whitman College, Walla Walla WA.

ADRIAN IVAKHIV is an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies and Anthropology, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh.

JANE KING is a Researcher of Occult Literature at Miskatonic University in Arkham MA

FRANCINE NICHOLSON is a writer specializing in Religion and Irish Studies, currently editing an anthology on Pre-Christian Celtic religion.

SYLVIE SHAW is a PhD student at Monash University studying people's connection with nature.

SHERI STANLEY is a Wiccan High Priestess and student of religious studies at Ohio University.

RACHEL WATCHER is a NROOGD Elder living in San Francisco.

MICHAEL YORK is a Research Fellow at the Study of Religions Department, Bath Spa University College.

RACHEL WATCHER: I spent twenty years functioning as a priestess and active clergywoman outside of normal Craft parameters and the last ten years as a Wiccan priestess and elder and clergywoman serving the community. When I draw down the Lord and Lady, I feel Deity is immanent within the circle, however, when I release that energy to return to the mundane world, Deity is then transcendent. In looking at the definition of immanence, this would seem to present a conundrum. Does the Pagan community have a different connotation for the word than what is generally accepted?

It would seem that my practice supports the idea of both transcendence and immanence if the definition of immanence is rather strictly restricted or limited. Have I pushed this envelope to the point where it is no longer the same envelope? Another consideration is that the space between the worlds is all there is at that time and place, under which circumstance I would be exactly accurate to use the standard definition of immanence.

My discussions with other Pagans in my area would indicate the general belief (yes, I had two people that agreed unequivocally) is that Deity is generally transcendent and unless 'bothered' will not take an active part in the lives of mortals. As an aside, it was also generally agreed that this is where magic comes in. The idea is that as long as we can

I PREFER PANENTHEISM BECAUSE I, AND MANY OTHERS, HAVE HAD ... SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES WHICH DRAW UPON QUALITIES THAT DO NOT SEEM IMPLIED IN THE CONCEPT OF MATTER ...

control our own environment, we should get on with it and not bother them. An interesting twist on the "Deity helps those who help themselves" idea.

SYLVIE SHAW: I remember reading an article by W.E.H. Stanner in a book of readings on Durkheim where he talks about the idea that transcendence and immanence are useful as far as they go, but we need a new term for the overlap between them. I think that perhaps Gerard Manley Hopkins coined the term "inscendence" to imply both transcendence and immanence. Forgive me if this is not quite correct. The terms used separately seem to me to set up a dualism between spirit and nature—or they are used that way—so maybe a third expression is a way to incorporate the two.

GUS DIZEREGA: You have left out panentheism, which is my own perspective and that of many other Pagans I know. Check out the concept as developed in the work of Whitehead and Hartshorne.

MICHAEL YORK: I'm dubious about the notion of panentheism. I remember theists at King's College London also not liking the term—arguing that they suspect it collapses into pantheism. From my more pantheistic prospective, on the other hand, I have always been suspicious of panentheism as simply a re-dressing of theism/transcendentalism.

GUS: That theists think panentheism collapses into pantheism, and Michael suspects it collapses into theism suggests the term's validity. Both pantheists and theists think it points

to the other because it includes qualities *absent* from their own position, qualities that they believe to be contradictory to their concept. Since the position I've described is not purely theistic, nor is it purely pantheistic, by testimony of both sides, it must be a third possibility, or it must be incoherent. I certainly see nothing incoherent about the concept that the world is alive, aware, valuable, sacred, beautiful, and yet in itself an incomplete expression of the whole.

VIVIANNE CROWLEY: Panentheism to me implies that something may pre-exist matter as we know it. Does this have to imply theism? Or merely that there may be other states of being/consciousness/existence beyond those that we currently understand—or that there may not be.

Panentheism seems to leave more room for a "jury's out" unknowable.

GUS: The debate is whether there is something in any sense transcendent to what exists (in some sense) in the material/energy world. The distinction at issue (the "en" part of panentheism) is sometimes described as the "soul" of matter. I prefer panentheism because I, and many others, have had what would be termed spiritual experiences that draw upon qualities that do not seem implied in the concept of matter, no matter how it is defined. An example is the quality of unconditional love.

These experiences are extremely widespread in many cultures, Pagan and otherwise. While there is a lot of debate on how to

WHAT ATTRACTS ME ABOUT POLYTHEISM IS PRECISELY ITS ASSERTION OF AN IRREDUCIBLE PLURALITY—I.E. THAT DEITY/SPIRIT CANNOT BE ADEQUATELY CAPTURED WITHIN ANY SINGLE REPRESENTATION OR ESSENCE.

define these experiences and fine tune the concepts used to describe them, there is pretty strong agreement among those who report this range of experiences that they exceed the power of language to describe. If words cannot describe them, we can be skeptical of too much philosophical analysis as to their character—unless the philosopher has had the experience. Even then, s/he remains connected to the religious and cultural concepts available in his/her time when seeking to describe the experience. Further, this context of perfect love/compassion/care/understanding and valuing embraces and gives meaning to the more obviously material/energetic elements of the world and our experience. It thus “transcends” material experience even as it confirms the world’s value and sacredness.

I have never read those who describe themselves as pantheists describing love/compassion or similar qualities as fundamental to the nature of existence. Certainly most do not. At most, pantheists might term it an “emergent” quality rather than a fundamental one.

So, it appears there are at least three possible basic spiritual positions: a purely transcendental spirituality judging the material world as fallen, unimportant or otherwise inferior compared to a greater good that is fundamentally distinct from it; a purely immanent spirituality saying that the world (whatever it is) is all there is, and is worthy of respect, etc.; and a spirituality affirming both the goodness and sacredness of the world and

its existence within an even more inclusive context. (My provisional way of making sense of it is to argue that material existence is subject to the influence of need, whereas the ultimate context appears to be free from any sense of need.) Since this third is neither traditional Western theism nor pantheism as usually described, panentheism seems as good or better a term than anything else I’ve heard to describe it.

FRANCINE NICHOLSON: Gus ... at the risk of sounding naïve, I wonder: where do you put polytheists?

GUS: Historically most are panentheists. Certainly the Lakota, Crow, and Navajo today are polytheists. Gardnerian Wicca and other English Traditional Craft lines are most definitely polytheistic. The only pantheistic position that would reject panentheism would argue that in some sense the Gods have always existed as a radical multiplicity. I know of no such tradition, though I have heard that some Norse types make such a claim.

FRANCINE: Thanks for explaining. I think this is where most polytheists I know would fall—except those who prefer archetypes in the Neopagan sense.

JANE KING: Maybe, but this conversation seems pretty far removed from polytheism. Where is the multiplicity that we all celebrate?

ADRIAN IVAKHIV: What attracts me about polytheism (as an idea) is precisely its assertion of an irreducible plurality—i.e. that

deity/spirit cannot be adequately captured within any single representation or essence. That doesn’t necessarily mean that things aren’t ultimately connected at some level, it just means that they are also plural, and that it is a bad practice, dangerous even, to assume that plurality within a single humanly-perceivable personal entity (God). I’m persuaded by those, like James Hillman and the archetypal wing of post-Jungian psychologists, who claim that monotheism tends towards exclusivist and authoritarian beliefs (and social practices) whereas radical polytheism is open-ended, pluralistic, polymorphous and therefore more appropriate for a “post-modern” world in which we need to make sense of difference. At this historical juncture, in other words, it’s more important for us humans to develop ways of living with and conceiving difference—and therefore to experience divinity as plural—than to try to articulate a single capital-B Being who created or is responsible for all existence.

Yikes ... I’ve strayed far too deeply into theology/advocacy and away from scholarly neutrality.

CHAS CLIFTON: While I too tend to identify “psychological polytheism” with people like Hillman or Ginette Paris, it is finding an echo in the thought of some more experimentally oriented psychologists who suggest that the mind is a sort of committee or board of directors with a chairman. So a number of things start to converge: the Buddhist idea of no-Self, a polytheistic view of divinity, a “polytheistic” view of the self (small s). Consequently, the idea that seeking one’s True Self or the One God are both illusionary, at least at the rational level.

Some of the people endorsing psychological polytheism also struggle with the dualism that seems inherent in the typical descriptions of shamanism: the spirit (better?) leaves the body (lesser?) and goes on journeys. One crit-

icism made of neoshamanism that I’ve heard is that its practitioners unthinkingly buy into this implied hierarchy, the old “soma sema” things, and hence are *not* moving towards Adrian’s “appropriately radical polytheism.”

ADRIAN: For what it is worth, this line of thinking also converges (or intertwines) with some of the more interesting work going on in cognitive science (especially the well respected, if not quite mainstream, work of the Buddhist Francesco Varela and his colleagues in the autopoietic school of cognitive biology), and even in poststructuralist theory (e.g. the psychological/political theorizing of Deleuze and Guattari whose work, despite the strangeness of their language, I find quite useful for a non-dualist and eco-friendly conception of mind/spirit/the whole works).

SYLVIE: Chas, I was interested in your comments linking dualism and shamanism. For the English natrels, this might be old news, but yesterday I found Gordon MacLellan’s primer on shamanism (Piatrus Press, 1999)—no “neo-” here, you are either a shaman or you are not, he says.

I had read his marvellous article in Graham Harvey and Charlotte Hardman’s book and wished I could do “work” with him. Gordon uses the expression “patterner” to explain his connection. It is not a separate dualistic perception coming out of Greek philosophy or from the Enlightenment project, but is part of the interconnecting web of life. The dualism stems from—in my opinion—people who perceive shamans entranced, rather than those who are shamans, or who take up shamanic practice. In a trance, shamans are in “this” world and in “that” world at the same time. It is the very idea of a split between “enhanced” or “entranced” reality and “normal waking” reality that reinforces the dualistic view.

According to MacLellan, the shaman’s or “pathfinder’s” trails through life are therefore

routes across the Web, lines of connections for the community to follow that brings them safely through the maze with as little disturbance and as much harmony as possible. Often the deepest commitment a shaman can express is his commitment to the Web.” (23)

A couple of pages later he says: “It is easier for the shaman if he separates his meetings with the spirits from his everyday life. So shamans speak of the ‘spirit world’, the Otherworld, a land where shamans and others walk with and talk to the spirits around us. In reality, the Otherworld is all around you, beside you all the time.” (25)

Thanks, Chas, for raising the issue. I had never seen them as dualistic, but had Aboriginal mentors who showed me the Dreamtime is not some ancient time in the past or some mythological place. So I was really pleased to see Gordon’s book. It made my day.

VIVIANNE: I don’t think English Traditional Craft is “definitely polytheistic”, as Gus claims. There are too many different approaches within these traditions, and, not being theologians, people live with the complexities and ambiguities without worrying too much about it.

GUS: Sorry, I’ve never heard of an English Traditional line that did not recognize and honor both the Lord and the Lady, or some other way of expressing a divine two-some, which seems “poly” to me.

MICHAEL: *Poly* means ‘many’. This sounds more “duo” to me.

GUS: “Duotheism”, perhaps? Maybe then some Wiccans could be linked logically and theologically with Manicheism where there are two fundamental forces: good and evil. Perhaps someone can come up with an interesting reason to separate duotheism from polytheism, but I can’t imagine what it might be. As an ultimate theoretical concept, I think duotheism sheds no light anywhere unless it is to put more weight on sexual or gender dual-

ity than I think it can bear. And that is a really ironic position for those who are critical of so-called patriarchal dualism.

ADRIAN: If we need personal deities, let’s keep them diverse (and preferably more than two – duotheism has a tendency to build on, and further ingrain, conceptions of gender difference); but if we need interconnectness, let’s not reduce it to a personal (anthropomorphic) being.

JANE: Manicheism wasn’t the only theology or philosophy that was dualistic. And I don’t see why dualism necessarily has to have anything to do with a “duotheism”. Why do they have to be connected?

VIVIANNE: We’re getting into the realms of definitions that practitioners wouldn’t stop to think about, but inherent in some Wiccan ritual and “liturgy” is the idea that deities (however many in number) emanate from a single source. Hindus and African Traditional Religionists might argue that this is pantheism or panentheism, monism, or qualified monotheism rather than “true” polytheism in the sense understood by many, say, in the Northern Tradition.

GUS: Given the nature of traditional Wicca, I would hold that it is panentheism because the Dryghton is completely non-polytheistic in the Northern Tradition sense and is non-pantheistic and non-monotheistic as well. So, in the usually encountered sense of the word, traditional Wicca is polytheistic, regardless of whether Female and Male divinities are all aspects of one Goddess and one God, or are genuinely multiple. (Setting aside the spiritual status of Lords of the Watchtowers, Kings of the Elements, etc.)

I would suggest that, like the person who suddenly discovered he had been speaking prose all along, traditional Wiccans are panentheists but, when lacking the word for it, often simply say polytheists. If “mono” and “poly” are the choices, “poly” it is!

SOME OF THE PEOPLE ENDORSING PSYCHOLOGICAL POLYTHEISM ALSO STRUGGLE WITH THE DUALISM THAT SEEMS INHERENT IN THE TYPICAL DESCRIPTIONS OF SHAMANISM: THE SPIRIT (BETTER?) LEAVES THE BODY (LESSER?) AND GOES ON JOURNEYS.

JANE: Perhaps, but I think many people are looking for another word. In the past “polytheism” has been used for religions that were not monotheistic—without distinction. Many Wiccans who do not consider themselves polytheists recognize that the belief in deities as aspects of two “basic” deities is different from those who believe in many distinct beings.

GUS: Point taken. They are different—although I cannot help but wonder if most or all of the difference rests on uncertainties as to the real meaning of terms such as “aspect”.

JANE: Maybe, but not always. I recall discussing one goddess with someone who was into the aspects thing. He kept saying, “But when she’s this goddess and that goddess and...” It took me a while to get through to him that to me, these were all different beings, though they might have common concerns or characteristics.

GUS: I am not convinced by your example – this sounds like an unanswerable argument. But I am also agnostic as to whether Goddesses are all aspects of one Goddess, or whether they are separate—in part because I am uncertain as to what “aspect” means. From a panentheistic position (or at least from my own), the question is not really very crucial.

I have no problem with people being agnostic about whether there is a dimension that transcends the Gods. In my opinion, a

person’s personal experience is the best guide in matters spiritual, insofar as that person is pursuing a practice. My disagreement is with those who *deny* there is a transcendent realm, or who argue that believing in such a realm is ultimately world denying.

As to what we might term “true polytheism”, which would presumably argue that there are no ultimately unifying spiritual forces, I think the Northern Tradition has a lot to wonder about and explain. I think the concept of “true polytheism” is in need of a pretty good defence to be taken seriously.

At this point, Jebny Blain offered us an argument for radical polytheism:

JENNY BLAIN: The Western 19th and 20th century construction of “indigenous religions” has tended to privilege “gods” over other beings, deny specificity, and seek for “universals”. This has moved through travellers’ tales into academia and popular discourse and appears today in neo-shamanists’ and others’ abstraction of local “spirits” into something they call “Spirit”. At least some of us in Heathenism are endeavouring to deconstruct this and return to specificity and multiplicity. Not everything has the same agenda as people.

CHAS: We might as well assign blame where it is due: Dion Fortune, with her “all the gods are one god and all the goddesses are one goddess and there is one initiator” teaching, had, I think, an enormous affect on Neopagan the-

THE WESTERN CONSTRUCTION OF "INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS" HAS TENDED TO PRIVILEGE "GODS" OVER OTHER BEINGS, DENY SPECIFICITY, AND SEEK FOR "UNIVERSALS".

ology, as loose/inchoate as that might be.

CHRIS CHASE: This raises a question for me—Chas, do you think Dion Fortune is a (or the) modern inspiration for what we might call (for lack of a better term) “collapsing polytheism” [CP]? I think Helena Blavatsky was even more in that role and think she had a large influence on Neopagan theology (and New Age versions of CP as well).

CAT CHAPIN-BISHOP: Helena Blavatsky needs to be recognized as a contributor to this concept, but don’t forget James Frazer, while we’re at it. His influence went places Helena’s never could...

FRANCINE: An idea doesn’t take root and flourish unless it has both persuasive spokespersons *and* a receptive audience. My sense is that wherever it originated—and it almost seems to have done so simultaneously—it’s an approach to deity that speaks persuasively to our times.

GUS: I am not denying specificity to Gods, or to other spiritual beings either. I use Spirit as an all inclusive term for the Spiritual dimension, but that hardly denies specificity within that dimension.

As to worshipping one Goddess and one God, through different aspects, or worshipping different Gods and Goddesses—well, I suspect that we will never know as human beings which is more accurate. My guess is that spiritual reality is extraordinarily plastic, and that our senses of individuality in deities is radically incomplete. It may well be that

our own sense of individuality is radically incomplete as well.

FRANCINE: I agree our understanding of the nature of “the gods” is probably quite limited. On the other hand, ancient Celtic belief is built on the premise that there are many, often quite localized beings, not just two.

GUS: Here is where it all gets tricky. What is a god as distinct from a daimone or a hero or a power of nature, etc.? Thales said all things are full of gods. In West Africa, there are orixas for virtually everything of which you can conceive. But are they deities in the sense of the Goddess, or Isis, or Kali? Some equate orixas with gods, others with forces of nature as distinct from gods, and so it goes. And then there are spirits that are seemingly more like astral fauna than anything possessing even human intelligence. And there are animal spirits, elementals, and so on.

Many Pagans can argue that all goddesses are aspects of one, ditto for gods, and still believe in these other spiritual or astral entities. Certainly they invoke powers and elementals and guardians while casting a circle. Are they duotheists or polytheists? I suspect it comes down to how one defines a god and how one defines an individual.

SHERI STANLEY: I decided long ago that my title for myself was “practical polytheist”. I have this overwhelming pantheistic worldview, but I do so much aspect-specific work that I might as well be a polytheist. Is there really any difference in practice? So I decided to stop worrying about it and just responded

to the Gods as I felt led to respond.

GUS: As a practical matter, I think Sheri’s point is true and important. But I want to return to the issue of so-called “true” polytheism. I am skeptical as to the depth of its insight. For it to make sense I would imagine its advocates would have to argue that, at bottom, there is a spiritual plurality that is radically divided and separate. So far I have seen no very strong argument in its favor, and I can think of many reasons why it is not to be taken seriously. For example, it cannot account for the widespread existence of mystical experiences throughout an enormous variety of cultures, all of which indicate an ultimate spiritual unity.

FRANCINE: To me, this says more about human capacity: we are essentially the same beings, so the total number of possible experiences may be limited by our biology. But if, for example, you look at cross-cultural studies like Karlis Osis did on near- and at-death visions, you see that there are both similarities and differences in the experiences.

GUS: This same observation is true of mystical experiences (see John Hick’s *An Interpretation of Religion*). There does seem to be an irreducible cultural element. But these reports all point towards experiences which appear to be quite similar in important respects: there is an ultimate unity, this unity is Good, Loving, etc., and it provides the ultimate context in which everything occurs and is ultimately redeemed / healed.

True polytheism also cannot account for the fact that in other Pagan communities, the relationships with deities are fluid. I certainly have never experienced the gods and goddesses as sectarian.

FRANCINE: While many communities experience deities in non-sectarian ways, most non-Wiccan Pagan communities who are trying to use traditional customs focus on a few deities of Celtic origin—by choice.

GUS: Your observation doesn’t imply any distinctions or realities not contained in panentheism. For example, Plotinus would hold that everything is ultimately an emanation from the One. He hardly denied the existence of individuals, only that they were ultimately and irreducibly individual. And individuals have preferences and boundaries.

MICHAEL: But as I tried to explain in my *Pomegranate* article on “Defining Paganism”, Plotinus is nominally pagan, but not generically pagan. He may have tried to attack the Gnostics, but he still presents a transcendental understanding. I have nothing against transcendental realities, and I even think that is one of the directions towards which we are heading, but I become more uneasy over the notions of transcendental origins. And it is precisely on this point that panentheism remains unclear. Paganism differs from Judaeo-Christianity on the notion that the cosmos is not understood as created by some outside/external force or Mind or transcendental deity. Mind/consciousness is a consequence rather than an *a priori* independent condition.

As Hesiod understood it, Gaia is the mother of the cosmos which includes the gods and humanity. There may have been an original single unity, but this was the tangible. The unity of the Good or Love which Gus posits is, I think, the goal of Paganism, not the source of the cosmos. It is not something to which we want to get back to, but onto or towards. It is the fruit of the tree rather than its root. God (she, he, it or even they) is the ongoing culmination.

That is the beauty of process theology. There is nothing static about deity. Nor is there anything predetermined. If the all exists within god as something less than god, then how can it be the all? Rather, pantheism can refer to the all as both matter and spirit, even if god may have been originally the material

which gives birth to, or from which evolves, spirit.

The difference between my pantheism and Gus' panentheism may, at the end of the day, be only semantic, but my resistance to Gus' preferred term is that I see it as essentially a creation of theists to by-pass or defeat pantheism, to have their cake and eat it too. In other words, it is an attempt at another theistic con job—all the more ironic, then, when someone like Colin Gunter thinks that panentheism 'collapses' into pantheism. If it does in fact, so much the better.

GUS: Perhaps we are in the realm of what term is least likely to lead one astray, since either can be used accurately and either can be misunderstood. Many people calling themselves pantheists seem to leave little room for Spirit. When they do, I agree with them. When they don't, I don't. I think panentheism is valuable in part because it automatically distinguishes between pantheism in the form that denies Spirit from theism in the form that sees only Spirit.

MICHAEL: With what Gus finds tricky, namely the distinction between gods, daemons, heroes, spirits, elements and powers of nature, pantheism has no difficulty. All is divine, and yet all can be different.

GUS: I find it tricky only in the sense of trying to come up with clear classificatory schemes. In other words, it is only tricky when trying to do philosophy and get a clear understanding of how entities relate to one another. In terms of practice, or my own understanding of ultimate reality, it is often delightful, sometimes surprising, and something to think about after the ritual is over.

MICHAEL: I think, personally, that pantheism more aptly applies to what most pagans believe or are. It is a term which embraces or allows both the duotheism of Goddess and God as well as the polytheism of more traditional paganism. Polytheism itself can be

nominal or radical. Radical polytheism simply takes that bold step that there are several 'ultimate' forces or deities and makes no attempt to reduce them to one or another.

GUS: I think I did not make my argument clear. The unity of the Good, or Love, is from my perspective not primarily an origin from which we have fallen nor a goal towards which we are going. Rather, it is the abiding context that always exists. It may be that we are all tending towards greater and greater realms of wisdom. Certainly in the course of a well lived life, one tends to grow wiser and kinder.

MICHAEL: But, Gus, is this still not Plotinus' and Ken Wilber's position? The holding to an abiding context that always exists is a gnostic stance.

GUS: I think you are right. What is at issue is whether that position is in any sense necessarily world denying. I grant that in Plotinus' writings, and in much of Wilber's, this *is* the case. But it need not be. Setting aside my own personal experience, there are many Pagan traditions which appear to hold the same position. I have a great deal of company. I think we are entering into a very arbitrary and even disrespectful space when we argue that traditional peoples who have such an outlook are not "really" Pagan because we are now appropriating a word that had long been applied to them!

My own approach here is rather to seek to define Paganism in a way that can encompass *all* societies traditionally called Pagan *plus* the modern Neopagan revival. Michael's narrowly Pagan definition is my Nature Religion definition and his broadly Pagan definition is my Pagan definition—with the one exception of whether what he would term gnostic Paganism as necessarily world denying. So we see the same distinction, but attach different explanations for it.

If Michael is correct, it seems to me that

THE COSMOS IS NOT UNDERSTOOD AS CREATED BY SOME OUTSIDE/EXTERNAL FORCE OR MIND OR TRANSCENDENTAL DEITY. MIND/CONSCIOUSNESS IS A CONSEQUENCE RATHER THAN AN A PRIORI INDEPENDENT CONDITION.

we will find world denying strains dominant in other Pagan traditions that have a gnostic dimension. Using the Crow, Lakota, Navajo, and some West African/Caribbean traditions as examples, I simply do not see it. And it is certainly not present in English Traditional Craft.

MICHAEL: The real beauty of polytheism, as I see it, is that we end up with a godhead by committee. Polytheism allows for a true divine democracy more compatible with both humanity's own thrust and a cosmos for which freedom is a living and vital aspect. Why cannot mysticism rest equally on divine consensus without denying "ultimate polytheism"? If Thor pops up in Umbanda ceremonies, or if many deities are interchangeable, "ultimate radical spiritual diversity" is still not precluded. The proto-Indo-European heptatheon portrays a godhead that divides and multiplies as soon as and whenever it is reduced to whatever momentary basic hypostasis. This last comes close, perhaps, to what Gus refers to as the "extraordinary plasticity of spiritual reality."

GUS: Yes! That is exactly what I meant. The argument I am making in no way criticizes or undermines polytheistic practice any more than panentheism as I have described it suggests that you and I are not individuals and need not be treated as such.

MICHAEL: Maybe the burden of argument rests on we radical polytheists. But whether

one believes in the Christian God, or in the Hindu Krishna, or in a collection of Santerian orishas, this is choice and/or conditioning—not something that anyone can prove. I think possibly the Nordic pagan position on radical polytheism might claim that this is a fundamental and distinguishing feature that can be distilled from within the pagan tradition in general and is what properly or at least partially separates paganism 'ultimately' from the Abrahamic, Dharmic and atheistic rival theologies. We can still have organic cosmogonies as reflective metaphors whilst affirming more than two irreducible fundamental cosmological realities.

GUS: Michael makes the point that all spiritual experience is culturally mediated. I am not certain this is the case in terms of raw experience, but I agree with him as soon as we try either to describe or to interpret that experience. What impresses me is the widespread universality of a particular kind of experience, one that is reasonably termed transcendental, in a wide variety of cultures and times. A theology which denies the existence of such a spiritual dimension because its advocates have not experienced it themselves is akin to one that denies the existence of the Goddess because they have not experienced Her—with the difference that a deeper philosophical point is at stake when we discuss the existence or non-existence of the purely transcendental.

To return to the question of radical poly-

**... NEITHER REALITY NOR NATURE CAN BE
TRANSCENDED IN ACTUAL PHYSICAL
TERMS. ... REALITY/NATURE IS FAR MORE
COMPLEX THAN HUMAN IDEAS OF IT.
TRANSCENDENCE IS IN RECOGNIZING THAT
THERE IS MORE TO KNOW ABOUT THE
WORLD, NOT IN ESCAPING THE WORLD.**

theism. If I remember Norse mythology correctly, the Gods ultimately die, the world is destroyed, and a new world comes into being, one can ask whether there is in fact a deeper unity, and if that unity is aware and underlies all things, then voilà, a form of panentheism! **FRANCINE:** The cosmic destruction and re-creation at the end of an age seems to be pan-Indo-European. But, forgive me, I don't follow your point.

GUS: My point is that the gods can not be the ultimate components of reality within this mythology because after they are destroyed, they rise again. And, if there is an orderly destruction and creation, whatever is the source of that order is superior to the gods. If it is also in some sense aware, you are approaching, if not actually describing a panentheistic perspective, since if the world is destroyed, what survives must, by definition, be transcendent to it. So polytheism is not an ultimate spiritual foundation within the Norse or any other Indo-European framework.

MICHAEL: This confuses the historical, local and mythological gods/goddesses of personality with the ground of being itself—whether theistic, pantheistic, panentheistic, and so forth. The gods are metaphors if not something more as well, but they are primarily access routes or points to the divine. They partake of the divine but need not be all of the divine. Gus would call this panentheism, but

the very theistic heritage behind the notion of panentheism and against which I am objecting is the one which fosters such concepts as 'superiority.' There is no need to consider ultimate components of reality panentheistically and not pantheistically, and there is no need to entertain that any components of reality are necessarily 'ultimate.'

ANNE-LAURE D'APREMONT: I also think there are several readings of the myth of the world ending and re-starting. If Wyrð affects people and other beings, it is because all is linked in the 'multiverse.' And if gods and goddesses disappear, die, it is allegory. It describes an internal process, an alchemical one in some cases, where people in their lives know different deaths. It means also that at the end of Ragnarok, you are totally free. Balder, the most perfect god, can come back because we overcame our human limits, our ego, we could say.

GUS: Regarding Michael's comment, we need to get clear as to what "superior" means. If the Ultimate is characterized by perfect and unconditional love and creativity, in what sense is it superior to that which manifests from it? Not in any sense that demands subordination, abnegation, judgement, or power hierarchy. All these kinds of 'superiority' violate the quality of unconditional love. Nor need it imply that we should seek to return to It. If we are Its manifestations, why is It cre-

ative except to flower with beauty and variety and abundance? I think Michael is applying ultimately political concepts of superiority into a context where they are inappropriate—but his worry is historically well taken. Institutionalized spiritual hierarchies have always done this, and then used this distortion to justify their own power and privilege. I think they always will do this, which is why I don't want 'em.

My argument is with the claim that there are no unifying spiritual principles or realities from which local and individual powers, and you and I, and everything else, takes their/our ultimate existence. Spirit is not irreducibly plural. Even the yin-yang symbol is careful to include its opposite at the point where one side or the other is most dominant—within the unity of a circle.

But this is a philosophical position that could be wrong. It is a very human attempt to make some sense of the super-human. For me, the ultimate basis for it is the mystical experience as widely reported. That I had such an experience is important for me, but need not impress anyone else. That many people from many cultures and with many beliefs have also had what seems to be quite similar experiences *is* an important datum, however, and any theology of value needs to be able to account for them. 'Pure polytheism' cannot do so.

MICHAEL: Gus, it seems to me that you are conflating ideas about deity (-theism of whatever form) with ideas about transpersonal principles or 'realities' of an impersonal sort. Yin and yang refer to 'forces' of a kind, but not to gods. It may be fine for many pagans to blur the distinction between personal gods or spirits and impersonal forces or principles, but why should we (as scholars) impose that practice on people for whom there is a distinct difference? **GUS:** But I think the blurring is unavoidable. We have no settled definition of a god, a force of nature, and the like. Even within ongoing

and strong Pagan traditions there are differences among practitioners. Some in Afro-Brazilian traditions treat the orixas rather like the Greco-Roman deities. Others refer to them as natural forces. We try to define the spiritual using words which themselves have very blurry boundaries. I have no problem with this so long as we recognize what we are doing, and so know that it can be difficult (not impossible) for us to be very sure we are talking about the same thing even when we use the same words in the same context. That's one reason I am so glad that what unifies Pagans is more practice than dogma! At least the Christians usually agree over the text they want to fight about. We'd have trouble even there!

My argument is not meant to imply that I think we should ignore the Gods and seek to encounter the One. Far from it. If we experience the immanent world as sacred and beautiful—as I do—then it seems quite enough to seek to live more lovingly and harmoniously within it rather than seeking to reject it to join/rejoin the godhead. Gardnerians do not focus on the Dryghton, we focus on the Goddess and the God, but we do acknowledge that It is the source of all.

MICHAEL: Theism, pantheism, polytheism, panentheism ... I hope we all realize this is simply an academic/theological question. Regardless of our own preferred terminologies, God is God is God. But that is only, that is, if the GBWII is not simply a creation/projection of we humans in the first place. But this much being said, I think terminologies are important because they sharpen debate and interchange, and paganism has been too long excluded from the theological roundtable of discussion. If we are to regain a bona fide recognition, theological nuance becomes important. What have we to offer that is not already out there? I think the answer is 'lots', and part of that answer rests with how we understand deity that is different from the Abrahamic, Dharmic, and atheistic

traditions.

BARB DAVY: I've recently changed my position on transcendence, mostly due to reading Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*. I used to associate transcendent views exclusively with world denying or world rejecting philosophies/beliefs. For Levinas, the idea of infinity is transcendence: the idea that there is more to the other than the categories the self might apply to it. This is transcendence that is found only in the particular, in actual lived reality. For Levinas, a person only finds God in relating with other people in this metaphysical relation of perceiving the infinite in the other. There's nothing world denying about this. In my own work, I discuss this sort of relation between humans and other than human persons, developing it into an environmental ethic.

In my view, neither reality nor nature can be transcended in actual physical terms. This is all there is, but reality/nature is far more complex than human ideas of it. Transcendence is in recognizing that there is more to know about the world, not in escaping the world.

VIVIANNE: As an aside, I'd never heard of panentheism until around ten years ago when the recently retired Canon of Durham Cathedral, who came around to thinking we were OK people, told me that this is what Wiccans are. I thought being theologically defined by a Christian theologian had its amusing/ironic side.

ADRIAN: I find it amusing/ironic as well, but also find it useful as a way of delineating a potential common ground between some pagans' views and some Christians' (and other monotheists') views. At the same time, I'm not convinced of that attribution for Wicca. The term 'pan-en-theism' suggests a kind of all-in-one-God-ism, where God is seen as both immanent and transcendent, but where there is no questioning of the oneness (monology) or personal nature of God. Most forms of (at least

British Traditional) Wicca, to me, do seem duotheistic—a term I find quite satisfactory. Duotheism can take a Manichean dualist form according to which one of the two deities is valorized over the other (because they are seen as locked in opposition), or a complementarian form (that of 'partnership', to use Riane Eisler's term), and the latter, I would say, describes Wicca rather well.

GUS: Several people here apparently consider English Traditional Wicca as duotheistic... but this argument ignores the Dryghton. And that is a central tenet of English Traditional practice as I have experienced it both within Gardnerian and King Stone contexts.

If we take the entire Gardnerian liturgy seriously we can say something like this: From the Dryghton all things come, including the God and Goddess. From them come all aspects of Gods and Goddesses. But just as we do not try contacting the Dryghton as a means of contacting all deities, so often we do not try and contact The Goddess, but rather focus in good polytheistic fashion on Bridget, Hekate, and so on. Other times we do the generic invocation. At the level of practice, it sure seems polytheistic to me.

The Dryghton is *not* personal. It is the Source. It is acknowledged, regarded as important, honored, and then the work focuses on the Goddess and the God, either as a duo or polytheistically.

This discussion took place on an email list maintained by the Nature Religions Scholars' Network, whose members study religious traditions that regard nature as a source of spiritual authority. The group meets and hears research presentations each year during the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. For more information, visit <http://www.uscolo.edu/natrel>

If Witches No Longer Fly: Today's Pagans and the Solanaceous Plants

by Chas S. Clifton
University of Southern Colorado

On the summer solstice of 1966, Robert Cochrane (magical name of Roy Bowers), an important figure in the British Witchcraft revival, died from a self-inflicted combination of sleeping pills, whisky, and *Atropa belladonna* or deadly nightshade. Although a subsequent inquest returned a verdict of "suicide while the balance of the mind was disturbed," some of Cochrane's friends and coveners believed his act had been one of ritual communion with the gods, while others leaned towards a deliberate self-sacrifice on the model of the Divine King.¹ The people who knew him most closely, however, viewed his death as suicide resulting from a marital break-up and a failed love affair.²

Whatever the motivation for Cochrane's death, his influence has persisted. His correspondence during the years just before his death with a young American Air Force enlisted man heavily influenced, through a typically tortuous chain of transmission, several American Witchcraft traditions, including "1734," the Roebuck, and the Mohsian tradition, and he is remembered by one of his former coveners, the English writer Doreen Valiente, as "perhaps the most powerful and gifted personality to have appeared in modern witchcraft."³

In one sense, Cochrane carried on an

unfortunate tradition of misadventure attached to modern users of solanaceous entheogens. As well as the edible tomato, potato, chile and sweet peppers, and tomatillo, the botanical family of Solanaceae includes that global drug of choice, tobacco. In addition, the Solanaceae include several plants with extensive associations with magic and shamanism, associations that spread from Asia to the Americas. Notable among these are the several species of *Datura* ("thorn apple" or "jimson weed"), *Atropa* ("deadly nightshade"), *Mandragora* ("mandrake"), and *Hyoscyamus* ("henbane").⁴ None of these plants is an illegal "narcotic" in America; in fact, some are grown as ornamental garden plants as well as for pharmaceutical use and genetic research.

The term *entheogen*, meaning "becoming divine within", was developed by three leading writers in the field: the late R. Gordon Wasson, Carl A.P. Ruck, and Jonathan Ott. Ott, for instance, writes that he uses entheogen as "etymologically and culturally appropriate [and] non-prejudicial," compared to such terms as "narcotic" and "psychedelic."⁵

Cochrane's death, while intentional, also reflected just one of a series of experiments with solanaceous entheogens that historically have been associated with European witchcraft, according to records left by prosecutors and witnesses of the witch trials from the 15th to 17th centuries.⁶ According to his contemporaries, he had earlier conducted less-lethal experiments using old "flying ointment" recipes. Although I would claim that the "flying ointments" (and other herbal preparations) represent a significant, verifiable link to an ancient European shamanic practice—perhaps the nearest

... "FLYING OINTMENTS" REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT, VERIFIABLE LINK TO AN ANCIENT EUROPEAN SHAMANIC PRACTICE—PERHAPS THE NEAREST THING TO MARGARET MURRAY'S "OLD RELIGION".

thing to Margaret Murray's "Old Religion,"—my research suggests that North American and British Neopagans today largely avoid them. The exceptions, however, tend to insist—along with some historians of religion such as Huston Smith—that the ritual use of these substances is to some degree essential, placing the users in touch with the "sacred wildness" at the heart of these modern nature-based traditions. Sharon Devlin, a California Witch, told writer Margot Adler in the 1970s, "Flying ointments were used in ancient times. Our ancestors definitely used drugs. Frankly, most Pagans and Witches are stumbling around in the dark ... I want people to start getting off. Drugs ... are an essential part of magical rites."⁷

As Devlin rightly noted, solanaceous entheogens are ancient as well as geographically widespread. Commenting on portrayals of *Datura* in the art of pharaonic Egypt, the ethnobotanist William A. Emboden, Jr., writes: "Its psychoactive properties are extraordinary, and one of the usual modalities in the *Datura* experience is that of mystical flight, an out-of-the-body sensation."⁸ Emboden's mention of flight leads to the famous employment of the Solanaceae in the "flying ointments" of the witch-trial period. During the 16th century, several skeptical physicians conducted experiments with ointments seized from

accused witches. These men, such as the often-quoted physician Andres de Laguna, offered an essentially materialist counter-argument against the theological arguments of both secular and religious courts. Against the belief that the "witchcraft" being prosecuted involved actual gatherings of devil-worshippers, the skeptics pointed out that the flying ointments merely produced a stupor from which the "deluded" user awoke, claiming to have experienced nocturnal flight, orgies of food and sex, and so forth. Therefore, prosecuting them for "witchcraft" was a waste of time.

What Andres de Laguna and other "rationalist" critics of the witch-trial process apparently failed—or did not wish—to do was to see the theological content of entheogen use. Given these preparations' risky nature, the person seeking recreational "highs" would have more likely turned to alcohol. As the Dutch botanist Peter A. G. M. de Smet wrote by analogy, "The essence of the Catholic mass for the churchgoer is certainly missed by saying that mass wine is prepared from *Vitis vinifera* L. (Vitaceae) and that it contains about 13 percent of the inebriating substance ethyl alcohol before it is diluted by the priest."⁹

Various fragmentary recipes for flying ointments survive: in the 1970s, the Danish botanical writer Harold A. Hansen announced that only sixteen

recipes were "comparatively reliable."¹⁰ Reliability does not imply safety; among the historians and occultists who themselves tested these recipes, at least one other besides Cochrane, Karl Kiesewetter, died from an overdose. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, I would argue that the danger of these recipes, combined with the centuries-long tradition of their use, is the best argument for any "Old Religion" surviving from pre-Christian times. Without some sort of oral tradition of preparation and dosage, similar to that of the *ayahuasca* shamans of South America, the risks would be too great. Medical journals contain occasional descriptions of emergency-room visits and occasional deaths from the casual use of *Datura* and other solanaceous plants.

Neopaganism's growth period commenced with the "Psychedelic Sixties" (and Seventies) when fascination with entheogens zoomed upwards, following a period during the 1950s when mescaline, LSD, and other substances were restricted to a few adventurous psychotherapists and selected patients, plus certain medical researchers and intelligence agencies.¹¹ At the same time, partly due to the popularity of the books of Carlos Castaneda (which in turn followed Allen Ginsburg's and William Burroughs's writings about *ayahuasca*), some would-be "psychonauts" developed an interest in "natural highs," leading to an observation made in the mid-Seventies by a North Carolina emergency-room doctor: "The return to nature advocated by the counter culture has been characterized by a lack of oral discrimination. Besides drugs, glue, and a number of non-medical organic compounds [i.e., LSD and other synthetic entheogens], nutmeg, catnip,

cherry bark, and a host of seeds and weeds have been used, often with disastrous results, by a new generation of experimentalists."¹²

Further discussion of contemporary entheogen use has been complicated by the "war on drugs" waged at various levels in Western countries, which has complicated both academic and practitioner-based discussion of any entheogen. That attitude may now be changing, for as Dr. Albert Hofmann, the nonagenarian Swiss discoverer of LSD, remarked in a recent interview, "After years of silence, there have recently been some investigations [of scientific research on "psychedelic" drugs] in Switzerland and Germany and also in the United States."¹³

Given contemporary Pagans' extensive mining of earlier Pagan cultures, complete with study of dead or marginal languages (for example, Old Norse or Irish), archaeological sites and artifacts, texts, and imaginative reconstructions of the past, the omission of ancient ritual entheogens from this looking backwards seems noteworthy. Gerald Gardner, who published the first significant book on revived Witchcraft, *Witchcraft Today*, in 1954, begins his second chapter, "There Have Been Witches in All Ages," with a description of the Craft as, in effect, the Oldest Religion, rooted firmly in Paleolithic times. Yet neither there nor subsequently did Gardner assert that entheogens played any significant part in the religion.

Gardner could not overlook the "flying ointments," well-attested in the historical record, and consequently asserted in *Witchcraft Today* that medieval witches knew "certain incenses" that aided clairvoyance and spiritual vision. "In medaeval times many ingredients came from the

Near East, but originally the most potent herbs seem to have been local ones, and among these some were poisonous... . To use [poisons] to gain a trance state harms no one except yourself.”¹⁴

Within Gardner’s initiatory lineage, still active today, ritualentheogens play little part. One of the senior members, born in Wales and now living in Canada, said, “one of the distinguishing marks of Gardnerian Craft is that there is a *lack* of herbal knowledge ... What little is being done nowadays is more in the nature of general experimentation ... Bowers [Robert Cochrane] was the one who did the ground-breaking experiments in this area.”¹⁵ The University of Bristol historian Ronald Hutton, author of *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*,¹⁶ has said that the only evidence of Gardner and his associates using mushrooms or any otherentheogens came from Louis Wilkinson’s claims about Gardner’s New Forest coven, reported by Francis King in *Ritual Magic in England*. Against that claim, Hutton said, “I must set the personal hostility to drug-taking as a path to the centre expressed by Gardner in 1950s recensions of the Book of Shadows—the ‘Eight Paths’ section. It might, of course, reflect disillusion rather than lifelong opposition, but it stands with the dislike of drink which he records in his ghosted autobiography, *Gerald Gardner: Witch*, having seen its effects in the colonies. Cochrane and ‘Taliesin’ were much wilder characters.”¹⁷

As revealed by his letters and the memories of those who knew him, Robert Cochrane’s view of the Craft was less dogmatic than Gerald Gardner’s. As Cochrane himself said, he taught by “poetic inference,” and proclaimed him-

self heir to gypsies, horse-whisperers, and lineages of rural English magic workers. His rituals were performed in caves and on hilltops, and his letters contain oblique references to *Amanita muscaria* and “nightshade wine.” According to those who knew him, his death left the remaining coveners less than enthusiastic about carrying on research on traditionalentheogens, turning instead to physical methods of trance-induction through ritual, dance, and masking.¹⁸

North American Pagans tend to shy away from the traditional Eurasianentheogens (including *Amanita muscaria*). Pagans dispute whether this disapproval is based on the overall societal disapproval of “illicit drugs” (even though the plant-basedentheogens are mostly legal), or whether it comes from seeing other people suffer the consequences of untutored use.¹⁹ The Pagan writers (here I would include Asatrú and Heathen as well as Craft) discussing traditionalentheogens tend to borrow language (“plant allies”) and concepts from anthropologists such as Carlos Castaneda or Peter Furst rather than from the medieval-to-early modern users of flying ointments, wanting no doubt to reject the Christian imagery of the last. As one contributor to the “Pagan Leaders” email list wrote, “Working with a plant ally is probably more dangerous than just taking the drug experimentally. Regardless, I don’t think that the prejudices against drugs [within the Pagan community] are based strictly on a misunderstanding ... It seems more likely to me to be a manifestation of the ‘tribal consciousness’ and that sense of interconnectedness, realizing that if connected, there is a responsibility to all, and that a person taking drugs affects the rest.”²⁰

GIVEN CONTEMPORARY PAGANS’ EXTENSIVE MINING OF EARLIER PAGAN CULTURES ... THE OMISSION OF ANCIENT RITUAL ENTHEOGENS FROM THIS LOOKING BACKWARDS SEEMS NOTEWORTHY.

More simply, however, contemporary Pagans’ avoidance of the traditionalentheogens reflects a modern split between medical-culinary herbalism and shamanic herbalism, a split displayed in the works of literate herbalists since the Renaissance. Modern herbals follow a tradition established by the 16th century English herbalist John Gerard, who crusaded against the nightshades and urged his readers, “Banish therefore these pernicious plants out of your gardens, and all places neere to your houses, where children or women with child do resort, which do often times long and lust after things most vile and filthie; & more after a berries of a bright shining black colour, and of such great beautie, as it were able to allure any such to eate thereof.”²¹ In the words of “Jack Prairiewolf,” a contemporary Witch from Indiana who claims a special affinity for the spirits of nightshade and mandrake, “Not everyone knows about plants in general or poisonous plants in particular, given the (perhaps lamentable) urbanization of Pagans today. Those folks who go out of their way to learn about plants usually focus on the herbs, flowers, edible plants, trees, etc, instead of the poisonous power plants.”²²

Indeed, works on so-called “magical herbalism” by such popular Wiccan writers as Scott Cunningham and Paul Beyerl tend to recommend *against* plant-based

entheogens.²³ A long-time Berkeley, California, practitioner who attended a class on making flying ointments reported to me that while solanaceous plants were discussed, the main recipe given out was based on essential herb and flower oils with henbane optional. Another recipe circulated contained no solanaceous plants at all, but did contain mugwort, a traditional herbal aid to dreaming, as well as the sedatives skullcap and wild lettuce.²⁴

Interest in traditionalentheogens is highest among that minority, both within the revived Norse and Witchcraft groups, who consider themselves to be “shamanic.” According to Asatrú follower Susan Granquist of Seattle,entheogen discussions are not infrequent on her tradition’s email list, ASATRU-L. But this group is a minority both within “Heathen” and Craft communities, where, in Jack Prairiewolf’s words,

[T]he type of power we’re discussing here really does not appeal to most of the contemporary Neopagan movement. A majority of the Neo crowd ... well, they don’t like the Wild or else they’re afraid of it, and the same can be said of anything ‘dark’ at all.... You get to talking about the magical application of poisonous plants, and the Bambi Wiccans & Co. are going to squick in very short order. They prefer to deal with a sweetness & light world and its attendant powers. Show them a glimpse of the Ancient Wild and they freak out. They will howl that working with any poten-

tially poisonous plant is inherently evil (never mind that *most* medicinals are poisonous if improperly used). I think that part of that is cultural upbringing, and part of it is wariness of anything unfamiliar, and much is fear of anything so mighty and awesome. I mean, these plants have been around for millions of years, some of them; their collective history quite outstrips the entire human race Some of the Neopagans just can't get comfortable with that.²⁵

Yet another reason why plant entheogens are little used among North American Pagans is that a higher-than-average number, in my informal perception, claim to be unusually sensitive to all inebriants, as well as displaying a high frequency of environmental sensitivity to perfumes, tobacco smoke, and the like. "Hypoallergenic" ritual gatherings, where participants pass an alcohol-free chalice, are not uncommon.

A division can be made between those Witches and other Pagans who speak of plant "allies," "spirits," or "faeries" and those for whom, as one herbalist put it, "the plant spirit issue isn't much considered; much more commonly there is a formulaic attitude towards the plants. For example, 'Mandrake is good for x, y, and z'; 'Myrrh is a purifier'; 'Mugwort is for visions,' and so on and so forth."²⁶ Both this writer (Robert Brown) and "Jack Prairiewolf" suggest that urban Pagan herbalists are more likely not to encounter the plants that they use as living beings throughout their life cycles, and consequently more likely to regard them as processed products "used for _____," the very attitude taken by Cunningham and Beyerl, mentioned above.

Based on these and other interviews, I suggest that contemporary Pagan entheogen users prefer a "shamanic"

model to a "clerical" model for their place in the community, and, as Robert Brown comments, describe themselves as more oriented to "wildness" rather than to human society.²⁷ This group is perhaps more likely to read ethnographic and anthropological literature than the fantasy novels and historic reconstructions that seem to inform much of North American Neopaganism.

These contemporary Pagans using traditional entheogens are cautious about discussing them. Too many of these substances have been publicized as "legal highs", and in a society which is accustomed to seeing "drugs" as neat little pills and capsules, the dangerous and "edgy" use of traditional entheogens with their occasionally messy side effects may not appeal even to self-described Witches. Thus, for all the claims made of connections with the victims of the "Burning Times," the majority of contemporary Witches and other Pagans have chosen to turn their backs on what may indeed be the one connection with an earlier era of shamanic practice—traditional Eurasian entheogens.

NOTES:

1. Doreen Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (London: Robert Hale, 1989), 135.
2. Ann Finnin, *The History of the Roebuck* (Los Angeles: Ancient Keltic Church, 1991), 4.
3. Valiente 136.
4. Charles B. Heiser, Jr., *Nightshades: The Paradoxical Plants* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1969), Chapter 7 *passim*.
5. Jonathan Ott, *Pharmactheon: Entheogenic drugs, their plant sources and history*. (Kennewick, Washington: Natural Products, 1996), 104.
6. Michael J. Harner, "The Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft,"

in *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, ed. Michael J. Harner (London: Oxford University Press, 1973). See also Hedwig Schleiffer, ed., *Narcotic Plants of the Old World* (Monticello, NY: Lubrecht & Cramer, 1979).

7. Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981 [1979]), 139. In the same interview, Devlin acknowledged that one of her own experiments with belladonna could have proven fatal.
8. William A. Emboden, Jr., "Art and Artifact as Ethnobotanical Tools in the Ancient Near East with Emphasis on Psychoactive Plants," in *Ethnobotany: Evolution of a Discipline*, ed. Richard Evans Schultes and Siri von Reis (Portland, Oregon: Dioscorides Press, 1995), 105.
9. Peter A.G.M. de Smet, "Considerations in the Multidisciplinary Approach to the Study of Ritual Hallucinogenic Plants," in *Ethnobotany: Evolution of a Discipline*, eds. Richard Evans Schultes and Siri von Reis (Portland, Oregon: Dioscorides Press, 1995), 370.
10. Harold A. Hansen, *The Witch's Garden*, trans. Muriel Crofts (Santa Cruz: Unity Press, 1978 [*Hexens Urteigård*, 1976]), 90.
11. Martin Lee, *Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD, and the Sixties Rebellion* (New York: Grove Press, 1985).
12. Don W. Moore, MD, "The Autumnal High: Jimsonweed in North Carolina," *North Carolina Medical Journal* 37:9 (September 1976), 492.
13. Charles Grob, MD, "A Conversation with Albert Hofmann," MAPS (Bulletin of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies) 8:3 (1998), 30.
14. Gerald B. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1973 [1954]), 118.
15. Gwyneth Cathyl-Harrow, "GBG & entheogens," email, 29 June 1998. Emphasis in the original.
16. Oxford University Press, 1999.
17. Ronald Hutton, "GBG & entheogens," email, 1 July 1998. "Taliesin" was the pen-name of another active figure in 1960s British Witchcraft.
18. Evan John Jones with Chas S. Clifton, *Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance* (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1997), in particular the final chapter, "Robert Cochrane: Magician or Tregetour?"
19. I recall how the word went around camp at one of the "Enchanted Mountain" Pagan festivals in New Mexico's Jemez Mountains, in about 1987, that several attendees had attempted ritual use of Datura root and become quite ill.
20. Susan Granquist, "Plant Helpers," Pagan Leaders list, 11 August 1998.
21. John Gerarde, *The Herball or General Historie of Plantes* (London, 1597) quoted in Hedwig Schleiffer, (ed.), *Narcotic Plants of the Old World* (Monticello, New York: Lubrecht & Cramer, 1979), 147.
22. Jack Prairiewolf (pseudonym), "Solanaceous plants," email, 16 October 1998.
23. For example: Paul Beyerl, *A Compendium of Herbal Magic* (Custer, Washington: Phoenix Publishing, 1998); Scott Cunningham, *Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1985).
24. Anna Korn, "Datura," email, 27 October 1998.
25. Jack Prairiewolf, "Solanaceous Plants," email, 17 October 1998.
26. Robert Brown, "Solanaceous plants & magic," email, 26 October 1998.
27. Robert Brown, "Solanaceous plants & magic," email, 15 November 1998.

Chas S. Clifton teaches at the University of Southern Colorado, where he is currently co-director of the university writing program. He is at work on a history of North American Paganism for AltaMira Press. He may be reached at <clifton@uscolo.edu>.

Frey, God of the World

by Ann Gróa Sheffield
Allegheny College, Pennsylvania

Open any standard work on Norse mythology, and you will find Frey described as a “fertility god” (e.g., Simek 91; Ellis Davison, *Myths and Symbols* 119). Early scholars sought fertility gods in every pantheon, but I believe that the limited “fertility god” concept now contributes to a distorted view of Frey. Consider the names and adjectives applied to Frey in primary sources. A few are appropriate to a “fertility god,” but other titles seem equally apt: War-god. Priest-god. Bright god. High god.

In this paper, I seek a more complex understanding of Frey in which his gift of fertility is simply one among many. An extended quotation from Snorri Sturluson’s “Ynglinga Saga” will serve to introduce the major themes to be developed. In the early part of the saga, the gods appear but are treated as earthly kings that a credulous populace honored as gods. The first such “king” is Óðhin; he is succeeded by Njörðh, who is followed in turn by his son Frey. The passage below describes Frey’s reign (7-8):

So Frey took the rule after Niörd; he was called *Drott* (or Sovereign) of the Swedes and took scot [= tax] from them; he had many friends and brought good seasons like his father. Frey built near Upsala a great temple, and set there his chief seat [...] In his days began the peace of Frode; then there was also a good season over all the land. The Swedes gave Frey credit for it, and he therefore was much more worshipped than the other gods, as the land folk in his days became richer on account of peace and good seasons than ever before [...] Frey then fell sick, and as he

neared death, his men took counsel, and let few men come to him; and they built a great howe [= mound] with a door and three holes in it. And when Frey was dead they bore him in loneliness to the howe, and told the Swedes that he was still alive; they watched him then for three years, and all the scot they hid down in the howe [...] The good seasons and peace continued [...] When all the Swedes marked that Frey was dead, but that good seasons and peace still continued, they believed that it would be so, so long as Frey was in Sweden; therefore, they would not burn him, but called him god of the earth, and ever after sacrificed to him, most of all for good seasons and peace.

Snorri’s account has several interesting features. First, there is the emphasis on “good seasons and peace.” The word *ár*, which Mosen translates as “good seasons,” appears six times in the Old Norse text of this brief chapter; *fríðh* (Mosen’s “peace”) occurs five times. The same terms—*ár* and *fríðh*—recur in other chapters of “Ynglinga saga,” where they are repeatedly used to describe the reigns of successful kings. This relates to the next key point about Snorri’s account—Frey is the founder of the Yngling dynasty that ruled Sweden for generations. The blessings brought by Frey are associated both with living kings and with ancestral kings in the grave-mound. Frey himself is said by Snorri (*Heimskringla* xxxv) to have introduced the custom of mound-burial, which replaced the earlier practice of cremation. Archaeological evidence shows that burial and cremation were in fact practiced contemporaneously (Ellis), so Snorri’s account records a myth rather than a historical fact, but this does not lessen the significance of the association of Frey with mound-burial. Ellis also discusses additional literary evidence for sacrifice to kings’ burial mounds in heathen Scandinavia. Her data confirm that the “dead” king/god in the mound was seen as an active presence—he

EARLY SCHOLARS SOUGHT FERTILITY GODS IN EVERY PANTHEON, BUT I BELIEVE THAT THE LIMITED “FERTILITY GOD” CONCEPT NOW CONTRIBUTES TO A DISTORTED VIEW OF FREY.

received sacrifice, and cared for his people in return.

In this paper, each of these ideas—divine kingship, *ár*, and *fríðh*—will be examined in detail. An additional section will tackle the difficult question of Frey and sexuality—difficult, because sex had a peculiar horror for the Christian clerics who recorded most of the evidence, so the sources are few and hard to interpret. Finally, I will bring these ideas together and present my conclusions about Frey.

SACRED KING, DIVINE ANCESTOR

The connection between Frey and kingship is clearest in Sweden, where Frey was considered the ancestral deity of the royal house. The “good kings” in Snorri’s “Ynglinga saga,” like Frey himself, rule a land where the people prosper. The vital importance of the king is illustrated by the story of King Domaldi. In his day there was “famine and need” (10). The first year, the people sacrificed oxen, but the famine continued. The second year, they sacrificed men, but the crops failed again. The third year, they sacrificed Domaldi himself. The ill-fated king was succeeded by his son Domar, and once again “there were good seasons and peace” (11).

In Denmark, the blessings associated with Frey are connected to “King Fróðhi.” The traditions surrounding this king, or rather kings, are difficult to sort out. Several historical and semi-historical characters

bore the name. Saxo Grammaticus describes a number of them, and Ellis Davidson (Saxo 114) notes that Saxo has conflated the stories of Fríðh-Fróðhi (“Peace-Fróðhi”) and Fróðhi *inn fræknae* (“Fróðhi the Bold”). The former is important here—Snorri says that, during Frey’s reign in Uppsala, “the peace of Frode” [*Fróðhافرíðh*] held sway (“Ynglinga saga” 7). Another connection between the king and the god is the name “Fróðhi” itself. In “Skírnismál” in the *Poetic Edda*, Frey is called *inn fróðhi* (“the wise”). Among humans, the phrase “inn fróðhi” is applied exclusively to men of exceptional learning (Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed.).

Saxo’s account (157-8) of King Fróðhi’s death bears a striking resemblance to Snorri’s description, quoted above, of the death of Frey:

[The] nobles kept [Fróðhi] embalmed for three years, since they feared the provinces would revolt if their sovereign’s end became known. They particularly wanted to keep his death concealed from outsiders, so that they could [...] with the support of their leader’s old power draw the customary tribute from their subjects. For this reason, they would draw his lifeless body about, not, so it seemed, in a hearse, but a royal carriage.

Saxo also gives his version of a poem originally written by the skald Hjarni. The verse repeats the information that Fróðhi’s dead body was carried through the land and adds that he is “now buried under turf” (Saxo 162). Just as in Frey’s case, the nobles

THE SAGA-WRITER WAS AN UNSYMPATHETIC CHRISTIAN WHO WANTED TO RIDICULE THE HEATHEN SWEDES, AND HE DESCRIBES HOW FREY IS REPLACED BY ONE GUNNAR, WHO CONVINCES THE DULL-WITTED POPULACE THAT HE IS THE GOD.

conceal the death of Fróðhi for three years, during which they continue to collect scot (tax) or tribute. It is also noteworthy that Fróðhi, like Frey, is buried rather than burned.

The procession of Fróðhi's body around the countryside provides another connection between the mythical king and the god Frey. First, according to Snorri, Frey himself drives a chariot drawn by his boar (Prose *Edda* 50). Second, a ritual procession involving a chariot is specifically attested for two of the Vanir. The 1st century Roman author Tacitus describes a procession of the Germanic goddess Nerthus (134-5). Nerthus is the female form of the name Njörðh (Simek 230); in later Scandinavian mythology, Njörðh is one of the Vanir and Frey's father. The visit of the goddess in her chariot was a time of peace and rejoicing. Over a thousand years later, a medieval saga-writer described a similar procession for Frey himself in "The Tale of Ögmund Bash." The story tells of an idol of Frey that is worshipped by the Swedes and served by a "young and beautiful woman" (141) who is considered the god's wife. The saga-writer was an unsympathetic Christian who wanted to ridicule the heathen Swedes, and he describes how Frey is replaced by one Gunnar, who convinces the dull-witted populace that he is the god. Omitting the text that describes this replacement, however,

leaves an illuminating account of heathen belief (142-3):

Now it came to the time that they set out from home, and Frey and his wife were to sit in a cart while their retainers walked in front [...] They went round to feasts throughout the winter [...] But when some time had passed, it became clear that Frey's wife was pregnant. That was taken to be excellent, and the Swedes were now delighted with this god of theirs; the weather too was mild and all the crops so promising that nobody could remember the like.

This connection of Frey with wagons occurs again in the Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem in the verse describing the rune *Ing*. "Ing" is Frey—in the Norse sources, the god is called Yngvi-Frey, Ingunar Frey, and the like, and the dynasty he founds is named the Ynglings. The Rune Poem reads (my translation):

Ing was first among the East-Danes
Seen by men; until he afterwards east
Departed over the wave; the wain ran after
Thus the hardy ones named the hero.

Two points in this verse are of particular interest. First, the cryptic half-line "the wain ran after" can be interpreted to refer to the Vanic processions described above. Second, the god-king appears and disappears rather mysteriously and goes back "over the wave." The word translated "departed" [*gewát*, from *gewitan*] in the Rune Poem has the same dual sense as does "departed" in modern English; "gewitan" means "go, with-

draw, go away," but also "die, pass away" (Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*). This description applies well to another mythical king, Scyld Scefing, whose story is told in the first 4-52 lines of *Beowulf*. Scyld is found abandoned in a boat as a child. The boy becomes a king in Denmark and has a long and prosperous reign. After his death, his people lay his body in a ship heaped with treasure and send it out across the ocean. Scyld's reign, like Frey's and Fróðhi's, is remembered as a blessed time for his people. Both Scyld and Frey are the founders of royal dynasties; in *Beowulf*, Scyld's great-grandson Hrothgar rules a people called synonymously the *Scyldinga* (after Scyld) and the *Ingwina*, "friends of Ing."

In Norse lore, the arrival of Njörðh, Frey, and Freyja in Ásgardh echoes the mysterious arrivals of Ing and Scyld. The deities come from Vanaheim, an enigmatic place—we are told almost nothing about it in the surviving sources. After Ragnarök, Njörðh (and perhaps Freyja) will return to Vanaheim, which is not destroyed in the final conflagration. Thus, Vanaheim is a special place set apart from the other worlds.

Both Frey and Njörðh are also associated with ships. Frey's magic ship Skíðbladhnrir is one of the treasures of the gods. In the *Poetic Edda*, "Grímnismál" calls Skíðbladhnrir "best of ships" and says that Njörðh's home is Nóatún, "Harbor." In Germanic culture, ships are connected with death, the journey into ultimate mystery. In 1942, Ellis summarized the archaeological evidence for ship-burial. At the time she wrote, literally hundreds of ship-burials dating from 500 CE onwards were known in Scandinavia, and new examples continue to be discovered. The literary sources also speak of ship-funerals: Snorri's *Edda* relates that the god Baldur was sent on his journey

to Hel's realm on a flaming ship sent out over the water (49-50). On a more human scale, of the three prominent saga-age Icelanders noted for their devotion to Frey, two—Ingimund in *Vatnsdalers' Saga* (68) and Thorgrím in the *Saga of Gisli* (25)—were given ship-burial, and the third (Hrafnkel) had renounced all gods before his death ("Saga of Hrafnkel" 455).

To summarize: Frey, and kings whose stories suggest that they are identified with or assimilated to the god, are associated with reigns noted for their prosperity and blessedness. Frey is the divine ancestor whose blessings are brought forth again and again by his worthy successors; he is the benevolent god of the grave-mound who receives sacrifice and grants abundance in return. However, his ultimate origins are wrapped in mystery, and we will return to this numinous quality when we consider his association with the sacred in the third section.

ÁR—PROSPERITY AND ABUNDANCE
One of the blessings brought by Frey and by all the "good kings" whose reigns echo the god's is ár. This word means both a calendrical year and, more often, a "good year"; it is often translated "good seasons." The Old Norwegian Rune Poem indicates that ár is the gift of Frey/Fróðhi (my translation):

Ár is good for men;
I guess Fróðhi was open-handed.

The Old Icelandic Rune Poem begins the same way but gives a fuller description of ár itself (my translation):

Ár is good for men,
and a good summer,
and a thriving field.

In ancient Scandinavia, the year was divided into two seasons, summer and winter. The major work of raising and harvesting crops as well as fattening the live-

stock for winter all occurred during the summer season, and a “good summer” was thus a productive one.

An additional piece of evidence links Frey specifically with agricultural production: “Lokasenna” in the *Poetic Edda* gives the names of Frey’s servants as “Byggvir” and “Beyla.” *Bygg* simply means “barley,” and Loki sneers at Byggvir for “twittering under the grindstone” (92). Beyla’s name has been the subject of considerable debate, but Simek (36) reports that the most widely-accepted theory relates “Beyla” to *baula*, cow. In “Lokasenna,” Loki calls Beyla *deigia*, “dairymaid” (Cleasby and Vigfusson), and also describes her as *dritin*, “shitty”—a probable result of working in the cow-barn! Ellis Davidson (“Milk” 92) has pointed out the critical importance of milk as a food in the Scandinavian countries and has also noted that dairy-work was the province of women. Together, Byggvir and Beyla represent two of the most important food sources in Northern Europe—grain and milk.

Another important food was meat. It was less common than grain or dairy products but was therefore more highly valued. A discussion of its significance leads beyond simple agricultural production and “fertility.” In this context, two food animals associated with Frey—cattle and swine—are relevant.

In Norse culture, cattle were frequent beasts of sacrifice, and *Viga-Glums Saga* (72-3) specifically mentions the sacrifice of an ox to Frey. Cattle also represented worldly wealth; the Norse word *fé* means both “cattle, livestock” (also “sheep” in Iceland) and “money, wealth.” Frey and his father Njörðh are strongly connected with the cattle/wealth concept denoted by *fé*. Snorri’s *Edda* describes both Frey and Njörðh as *fégjafa*, “wealth-giving” (75). The Viking poet

Egil Skallagrímsson wrote that Frey and Njörðh gave Arinbjörn “wealth’s force” [*féar afli*] and that Arinbjörn is blessed with “endless wealth [*audhs*]” (“Egil’s Saga” 163). Here, Egil uses a second word for wealth, *audh*, in addition to *fé*. *Audh* lacks a specific association with livestock, but like *fé*, it is often used in connection with the Vanir. In the case of Njörðh, this connection was proverbial: in the *Vatnsdælars’ Saga*, a man is described as “rich as Njörð” [*audhigur sem Njörðhur*] (127), and Snorri’s “Ynglinga saga” names the god Njörðh *hinn audhga*, “the Wealthy” (2).

Wealth is also a striking feature of the reign of the ubiquitous Fróðhi. In his *Edda*, Snorri states that “Fróðhi’s meal” is a kenning for “gold.” He describes a myth in which King Fróðhi sets two giantesses to work an enchanted mill and grind out “gold and peace [*fridh*] and blessedness” (107). In “Gróttasöngur,” the giantesses sing (*Poetic Edda* 260):

Wealth [*audh*] let’s grind for Fródi,
grind out happiness,
Grind many possessions [*féar*]
on the wonderful stone!

The myth of Fróðhi’s mill illustrates how the blessings of cattle/wealth are bound together with the idea of divine kingship represented by Fróðhi/Frey.

The second animal associated with Frey is the boar. According to Snorri, Frey’s own boar Gullinbursti (“Golden-Bristled”) was one of the treasures made for the gods by the dwarves (*Edda* 97). The saga of King Heidhrek the Wise (*Saga Heidhrebs konungs ins vitra*) describes the sacrifice of a great boar to Frey at Yule. Before it was offered, the beast was led around the hall, and men laid their hands on its bristles to swear oaths. The practice of swearing oaths on a boar at Yule is also mentioned in the prose text accompanying “Helgakvíða Hjör-

FREY, AND KINGS WHOSE STORIES SUGGEST THAT THEY ARE IDENTIFIED WITH OR ASSIMILATED TO THE GOD, ARE ASSOCIATED WITH REIGNS NOTED FOR THEIR PROSPERITY AND BLESSEDNESS.

vardhssonar” in the *Poetic Edda* (129).

The boar of Northern Europe, whether wild or (more-or-less) domesticated, was intelligent, prolific, and tough. Boars were associated with warriors and battle (Ellis Davidson, *Myths and Symbols* 49-50) as well as with virility. A story from *Landnámabók* illustrates how boars were viewed. Ingimund the Old was one of Iceland’s original settlers. He built a great *hof* (temple) to Frey on his land and was a successful and wealthy man. At one point, “Ingimund lost ten pigs, and when they were found the following autumn they numbered a hundred and twenty” (85). When the settlers set out to catch the pigs, the herd-boar leapt into the water and swam so hard that his hoofs came off and he died of exhaustion. Ingimund, an exceptional Freysman, had a boar who was equally exceptional in both fecundity and fighting-spirit.

Though boars were noted for their fertility, their ferocity and their role in the swearing of sacred oaths are hardly connected to the concept of wealth and abundance denoted by *ár*. Boars, like Frey himself, cannot be interpreted simply in terms of fertility, or even general prosperity. Instead, the linked ideas of strength and holiness lead us to the next section, where we take up the subject of *fridh*.

FRIDH—INVIOABLE PEACE

Fridh is usually translated “peace,” but *fridh*

is more than the absence of conflict, and its meanings include “inviolability” and “sacredness” (Cleasby and Vigfusson). The “peace of Fróðhi” [*Fróðhafridh*] was a legendary time when entire nations achieved the holy state of *fridh*. According to Snorri, it began during Frey’s reign, and “the Swedes gave Frey credit for it” (“Ynglinga saga” 7). Other sources provide further information about this mythical, golden age of *fridh*. In “Gróttasöngur,” the giantesses grind out *fridh* for King Fróðhi (*Poetic Edda* 61):

Here no one shall bring harm to another,
nor plot evil, nor conspire against someone’s life,
nor shall he strike with a sharp sword,
though he should find, trussed up,
his brother’s slayer.

This would have seemed a remarkable state of affairs to the poet’s audience. Among the Vikings, blood-vengeance was a duty, and violence was commonplace. Saxo Grammaticus writes that, in establishing the *Fróðhafridh*, Fróðhi set up gold rings at crossroads, but “Frothi’s royal authority was so influential that the gold, to be had for the taking, was preserved as if behind steel bars” (156). Saxo brings out a key point here: to maintain widespread peace in an age of bloodshed requires a king/god of extraordinary strength.

A more personal story about Frey reveals a similar theme. “Skírnismál” in the *Poetic Edda* tells of Frey’s love for the giant-woman Gerðh. To persuade his servant Skírnir to

TO REJECT FREY IS TO BE DEPRIVED OF GOOD FOOD, GOOD DRINK, GOOD SEX, AND GOOD COMPANY—ALL THE PLEASURES THAT FREY PROVIDES.

act as emissary to her, Frey gives Skírnir his sword and his horse. A famous weapon and mighty stallion were *de rigueur* for the ideal Viking warrior, and to surrender them voluntarily was an extraordinary act by the standards of the day. Yet, the loss of these tokens of masculinity impairs neither Frey's sexual potency nor his martial prowess. The prose *Edda* records that, for lack of a sword, Frey kills the giant Beli with a stag's antler, but Snorri adds, "It did not matter much [...] Freyr could have killed him with his fist" (32). In other words, Frey's willingness to give up sword and steed can be seen as a proof of his strength; he has no need of the trappings that others require.

Frey's unusual status as a warrior without sword or stallion connects him to holy places and the priests who serve them. First, Frey himself is described as a sacrifice priest [*blótgodhi*] and temple-priest [*hofgodhi*] of the gods in *Sörla þáttur* and "Ynglinga saga," respectively. Second, certain heathen priests did not carry weapons or ride stallions. The Venerable Bede writes that, for Coifi, the pagan "chief priest" of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria, "It had not been lawful [...] to carry arms or to ride anything but a mare" (130). On converting to Christianity, Coifi arms himself with sword and spear, mounts a stallion, and desecrates the heathen temple. The Christian King Ólaf Trygvason also rides a stallion when he destroys the hof at Trondheim (Ellis Davidson, *Lost Beliefs* 104).

The stallion desecrated by Ólaf had been

intended as an offering to Frey. The *Saga of Hrafnkel Frey's Godi* tells of another horse dedicated to Frey. Hrafnkel owns a splendid stallion named Freyfaxi. The hero dedicates half of Freyfaxi to Frey and swears to kill anyone who rides the horse. A farmhand named Einar rides Freyfaxi, and Hrafnkel must fulfill his oath and kill Einar: "Why did you ride the horse [...] ? I would have forgiven you this one time if I had not sworn such a serious oath" (442). The tradition of sacred, inviolate horses is an ancient one in Teutonic culture. Tacitus writes that the Germanic tribes had "horses kept at the public expense in the sacred woods and groves [are] undefiled by any toil in the service of man" (109). In addition, horse-meat was a sacred food among the Vikings. When Iceland converted to Christianity, eating the flesh of horses was one of the few heathen customs that was specifically permitted to continue. King Hakon the Good, a Christian, was compelled by the heathen people of Norway to consume horseflesh as part of his sacral duties as their king (Snorri, *Heimskringla* 89-90). Thus, certain horses were held sacred in Germanic culture, and consuming their flesh was essential to heathen religious practice.

The oath that compels Hrafnkel to slay Einar is also significant. In the saga, it is clear that Hrafnkel likes and respects Einar. Nonetheless, the priest of Frey must fulfill his vow, for Frey is a god of oaths. As described in Section II, Yule-oaths were sworn on a boar that was sacrificed to Frey.

According to Simek (9), an oath-swearing formula recorded in *Landnámabók* and *Ólaf's saga Tryggvasonar* invokes Frey, Njörðr, and the "all-powerful god."

Frey is associated, not only with sacred animals and with oath-swearing, but also with the inviolable fridh of sacred places. Hof's, assembly-places, and other holy sites were set apart from ordinary life. Violence was forbidden in such places, especially in those dedicated to Frey. The peace of such a fridh-stead could not be broken even by the gods: when Baldur is slain on holy ground, "no one could take vengeance, it was a place of such sanctuary" (Snorri, *Edda* 49). *Vatnsdalers' Saga* tells of a hof to Frey where it was forbidden even to carry weapons; this recalls Tacitus' description of the procession of Nerthus, when "every iron object is locked away" (135). However, an entry in *Landnámabók* hints that the ban on violence did not extend to ritual sacrifice: a *godhi* named Thorhadd takes land in Iceland and "declared the whole fjord sacred [...], forbidding people to take any life there except domestic cattle" (117). *Viga-Glúms Saga* tells of another prohibition associated with hofs: the hero Glúm harbors an outlaw, but he must do it secretly: "Outlawed men were not supposed to be there, because Frey, to whom the temple there was dedicated, did not allow it" (100). Outlaws were by definition outside of the community and therefore outside the common fridh; the Old Norse expression "forfeit fé and fridh" means "be outlawed" (Cleasby and Vigfusson). In general, then, the fridh of a hof represents a local, limited version of the Fródhafridh, which extended to whole nations.

Thus, the establishment and maintenance of fridh is Frey's special concern, and two stories illustrate the implacability of the god when his fridh is violated. The first

comes from Saxo Grammaticus (29-30). On a whim, the hero Hading kills a sea-creature while swimming. A woman then appears to him and tells him that the killing has offended the gods and that the earth and all the elements will be against him until he atones for his crime. Her words are fulfilled: Hading's ships are destroyed by storms, and the house where he takes shelter collapses. His terrible luck continues until he institutes an annual, national sacrifice to Frey.

The second example is more subtle. In *Viga-Glúms Saga*, the eponymous hero enjoys supernatural protection symbolized by a spear and cloak. While thus warded, Glúm transgresses against Frey in three ways. First, he slays his neighbor Sigmund in a field called *Vitadhsgrjafi* ("Sure-Giver"). This field is adjacent to a hof of Frey and, it is implied, forms part of the holy fridh-stead where violence is forbidden. Second, Glúm secretly harbors an outlaw, which again violates Frey's laws. Finally, the hero swears a deceptive oath on a sacred ring in Frey's hof itself.

While Glúm is repeatedly offending Frey in this way, Sigmund's kinsman Thorkel offers an ox to Frey and asks the god to drive Glúm away from the area (72-3). Viga-Glúm nonetheless prospers and seems to have escaped the consequences of his acts. Then, he makes the fatal mistake of giving away his spear and cloak and with them the special protection that he has enjoyed. It seems that this frees Frey to act: almost immediately, Glúm has this dream (121):

[H]e dreamed that large numbers of people had come to Thvera to meet Frey, and that he saw a large crowd of people on the gravel banks beside the river, while Frey sat on his throne. He dreamed that he asked who had come there. They replied: "These are your bygone kinsmen, and now we're asking Frey that you may not be driven off the land at Thvera, but it's no use, for Frey answers

shortly and angrily and remembers now
Thorkel the Tall's gift of an ox."

Shortly afterwards, Glúm loses his farm and is forced to move repeatedly. He never again achieves success or prosperity. In other words, neither ár nor fridh ever come to him again.

SEX AND SENSUALITY

The word fridh implies sacredness and inviolability, but it also has erotic connotations and can be translated as "love." It is related to the words *fridhla*, "mistress" (in the sexual sense), and *fridhgin*, "lovers" (Cleasby and Vigfusson). These associations hint that Frey may be connected to human sexuality. This idea is confirmed by the 11th century cleric Adam of Bremen, who describes the idols at Uppsala as follows (qtd. in Page 220-1; "Fricco" = Frey):

In that temple, which is all fitted out with gold, the people honour the statues of three gods [...] 'Thor,' they say, 'has dominion over the atmosphere.' He is the one who governs thunder and lightning, winds and pouring rain, fine weather and fertility. The next is Wodan, which is to say 'Fury.' He wages war and gives a man courage in the face of the enemy. The third is Fricco, distributing peace and sensual delight to mortals. His image they portray with a huge erect penis. [...] If a plague or famine is nigh, the sacrifice is to the idol Thor; if war, to Odin; if a marriage is to be solemnized, to Fricco.

Interestingly, Adam identifies Thor as the primary god of fertility; Frey's province is specifically "sensual delight." Another hint of Frey's sexual nature is the association of the Vanir with incest. Snorri's "Ynglinga saga" (3) and the poem "Lokasenna" (*Poetic Edda* 91) both record that Frey is the son of Njörðh and Njörðh's sister, and Loki also accuses Freyja of lying with her brother Frey (*Poetic Edda* 90).

The greatest source of information about this aspect of Frey's nature is "Skírnismál" in

the *Poetic Edda*. This poem contains the only major myth about Frey that has survived, and it tells of the god's desperate, consuming desire for the giant-maiden, Gerdh. Sick with love for her, Frey sends his servant Skírnir to court the lady. Gerdh agrees to wed Frey in nine nights' time, and the poem ends with the anguished cry of the ardent lover (Bellows' translation):

Long is one night, longer are two;
How then shall I bear three?
Often to me a month has seemed less
Than now half a night of desire.

This poem has one aspect that is disturbing to modern readers: to compel her agreement, Skírnir threatens Gerdh first with violence (a threat she scornfully defies), then with an elaborate and terrible curse. The nature of this curse is revealing, however. Gerdh is to be deprived of all sensual pleasures—food, drink, sex. She is to have no mate at all, or else to be coupled with a giant—a repulsive and hateful fate. As Skírnir's curse reaches its height, he says (*Poetic Edda* 67):

"Giant" I carve on you and three runes:
lewdness and frenzy
and unbearable desire[.]

In the original, the word *thurs* specifically means an especially brutish and hostile kind of giant. "Thurs" is also the name of a rune described as *kvenna kvöl*, "torment of women," in the Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian Rune Poems, and the three "runes" listed in the poem represent sexual frustration to the point of madness. This story has an odd parallel in that of King Fróðhi (again!). Saxo Grammaticus describes two weddings of the king with reluctant maidens. In the first episode, the king sends emissaries to the princess Hanuda, but she "disdained Frothi" (120). Götvara, wife of one of Fróðhi's counsellors, gives the maiden a "love-potion [that] turned the

IN A WORLD WHERE KINGS HAVE BECOME AN ANACHRONISM, FREY IS STILL THE VERALDRGODH, THE GOD OF THE WORLD, WHOSE POWER AND PASSION SHINE THROUGH IT.

girl's inflexibility to desire, destroyed her prejudice and substituted erotic passion" (120). Love-potion notwithstanding, the marriage ends badly, and Fróðhi sends a new group of emissaries to court a second wife for him. A woman in the party gives the latest prospect "a drink mixed with something which channeled the girl's desires into love for Frothi" (139).

What is going on here? For Frey, and for the earthly King Fróðhi whose story parallels Frey's in so many ways, a reluctant woman is won over by magic that arouses lust so strong it is "unbearable." I suggest that the "magic" of the runes and potions represents Frey's power to awaken sexual desire. In pagan Scandinavia, marriages were viewed as family alliances. Noblewomen scorned suitors who were not high-ranking or accomplished enough, and love was viewed as a socially-disruptive force. In such a culture, romantic passion would indeed seem a form of madness, and "magic" would both explain and excuse it. In Hanuda's case, at least, some excuse would have been necessary. Hanuda initially rejects Fróðhi because he has not yet earned "worldly reputation" and suffers from "want of renown" (Saxo 120); in other words, he was a thoroughly unsuitable match by the standards of the day.

Gerdh's situation is more subtle and more complex; she is not simply drugged into a state where Frey seems irresistible. However, there are hints in "Skírnismál"

that her union with Frey was in some way socially forbidden. Early in the poem, Frey laments, "None of the gods and elves wishes that we should be together" (*Poetic Edda* 62). After she has agreed to wed Frey, Gerdh says wonderingly, "I had never thought that I should ever love one of the Vanir well" (67). And, when Skírnir arrives, Gerdh has an odd foreboding: "I am afraid that out here may be my brother's slayer" (64). Does she mean Frey? Has he killed her brother, and has that created enmity between their families? There is also a subtle implication in "Skírnismál" that Gerdh does in fact desire Frey; after she agrees to the wedding, she names the time and place and says "there to the son of Niord Gerdh will grant love" (67). The word translated by Larrington as "love" is *gaman*, which means "game" or "amusement" as well as "love." In other words, Gerdh is promising Frey love-play, which seems a light and affectionate choice of expression; it hardly suggests that she is feeling coerced.

But what of the curse? It is never fulfilled; the threat alone is sufficient excuse for Gerdh to agree to the wedding. But, the nature of the threatened curse is nonetheless revealing: it promises both to excite "unbearable desire" and to deny its satisfaction. To reject Frey is to be deprived of good food, good drink, good sex, and good company—all the pleasures that Frey provides.

THE "GOD OF THE WORLD" IN A WORLD WITHOUT KINGS

So far, this paper has considered how Frey was worshipped and understood by heathens in the past. A key to that understanding is the concept of divine kingship. However, I am a practicing heathen in the 21st century, and I have no desire to live in a monarchical state, divine or otherwise. So, I have a personal interest in the final question I will address in this work: what is Frey's role in a post-modern world? The answer I propose draws on scholarship, but it also reflects what I have learned in my own experiences with Frey as a real and complex being.

The case of Iceland provides a first approach to the question. Many of the Freysmen and hofs to Frey already mentioned were Icelandic, and early Iceland was a republic, not a kingdom. So, what was the nature of Frey-worship in Iceland, and how did it resemble what we know about Frey as the god of Sweden's royal dynasty?

Some answers are suggested by the Icelandic examples already cited: Frey was a guardian of fridh and the protector of holy places and sacred horses. He accepted sacrifices and favored those who offered them. In Iceland, Frey continued to be associated with ancestors and with burial mounds, but the howes were now the graves of his followers rather than those of the kings. In the *Saga of Gisli*, Thorgrim Thorsteinsson was an Icelander devoted to Frey. After his death, people wondered at "something [...] that seemed to have a strange meaning, that snow never stayed on the south-west side of Thorgrim's mound, and it did not freeze there; [men said] he must have been so favoured by Frey for his sacrifices that the god was unwilling to have frost come between them" (25).

The case of Ingimund the Old provides

further insight into Frey's role in Iceland. The story is told in *Landnámabók* and more fully in the *Vatnsdalers' Saga*. Ingimund's tale begins in Norway. A Lappish seeress predicts that Ingimund will make his home in Iceland, and "as a proof she said that something had vanished from his purse and wouldn't be found till he started digging for his high-seat pillars in the new country" (*Landnámabók* 83). The "something" is a silver image of Frey.

Ingimund repeatedly declares his intention never to settle in Iceland, but the seeress' words prey on his mind, and at last he consults King Harald of Norway (*Vatnsdalers' Saga* 44):

Then Ingimund said to the king: "I am well content [...] yet it does stick in my throat how the Lapland woman prophesied I should change my way of life. For I have determined never to leave the home of my fathers."

The king answered: "I am not sure but what happened may be to some end, and that Frey let the amulet come to rest where he wants his seat of honour set up."

Ingimund takes the king's advice and travels to Iceland. He builds a great hof to Frey and, as foretold, finds his lost image of Frey when they excavate the site for his high-seat pillars. Once he finds the amulet, Ingimund no longer resists his fate and says, "We'll settle here with a good heart" (50). He soon becomes famous for his wealth and prosperity.

As for Frey himself, King Harald's words suggest that the god wanted to go to Iceland and be honored in the new land. In Iceland, no king was needed to mediate the blessings of ár and fridh—they flowed directly from the god. Frey himself granted prosperity to his followers and punished those who desecrated his holy places with bloodshed or false oaths. He remained associated with burial mounds and ancestors, but they were now the howes of his followers and the

family ancestors of the settlers of Iceland.

The god of Swedish kings and Icelandic farmers is the same god honored by heathens today. He protects holy places and sacred oaths and punishes those who defile them. He is the god of the honored dead who continue to care for the living. Finally, Frey is the vigorous god who brings wholeness, abundance, and pleasure. The Norse word *nenna* is applied to Frey in "Skírnismál." It means "active, striving, energetic," and I believe this word comes close to expressing Frey's essential nature. Flourishing crops and strong livestock; two lovers taking delight in one another; a healthy, wealthy, thriving society—these are the blessings of Frey. In a world where kings have become an anachronism, Frey is still the *veraldrgodh*, the god of the world, whose power and passion shine through it.

Freyr is the best of all the bold riders in the courts of the Aesir; he makes no girl cry nor any man's wife, and looses each man from captivity. "Lokasenna" (*Poetic Edda* 91)

A note on orthography: Case-endings for Old Norse words have been omitted except where a source is quoted exactly. Hence, "Frey" rather than "Freyr," "Óðhin" rather than "Óðhinn," etc. Throughout, the character "edh" is represented by "dh" and "thorn" by "th".

WORKS CITED

- Bede. *Ecclesiastical History of the English People; with Bede's Letter to Egbert and Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede*. Trans. Leo Sherley-Price, R.E. Latham, and D.H. Farmer. London: Penguin, 1990.
- "Egil's Saga." Trans. Bernard Scudder. *The Sagas of Icelanders*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2000. 3-184.
- Ellis, Hilda Roderick. *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature*. New York: Greenwood, 1968.

- Ellis Davidson, Hilda. *The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- . "Milk and the Northern Goddess." *The Concept of the Goddess*. Ed. Sandra Billington and Miranda Green. New York: Routledge, 1996. 91-106.
- . *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1988.
- Landnámabók* (=The Book of Settlements: *Landnámabók*). Trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards. Manitoba: U Manitoba P, 1972.
- Page, R.I. *Chronicles of the Vikings: Records, Memorials and Myths*. London: British Museum, 1995.
- The Poetic Edda*. Trans. Carolyne Larrington. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.
- The Saga of Gisli the Outlaw*. Trans. George Johnston. Toronto: U Toronto P, 1963.
- "The Saga of Hrafnkel Frey's Godi." Trans. Terry Gunnell. *The Sagas of Icelanders*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2000. 436-462.
- Saxo Grammaticus. *The History of the Danes, Books I-IX*. Trans. Peter Fisher. Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1980.
- Simek, Rudolf. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*. Trans. Angela Hall. Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1993.
- Snorri Sturluson. *Edda*. Trans. Anthony Faulkes. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1987.
- . *Heimskringla, or The Lives of the Norse Kings*. Transl. Erling Monsen. New York: Dover, 1990. Contains "Ynglinga saga," among others.
- Tacitus. *The Agricola and the Germania*. Trans. H. Mattingly. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1970.
- The Vatnsdalers' Saga*. Trans. Gwyn Jones. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1944.
- Viga-Glums Saga, with the Tales of Ögmund Bash and Thorvald Chatterbox*. Trans. John McKinnell. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987.

Ann Gróa Sheffield is an active Heathen in the northeastern US and has written for the Asatru journals Idunna and Lina. She also holds a PhD in Analytical Chemistry and is an Associate Professor of that science at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania. In her spare time, she spins, knits and dyes, writes an occasional poem, and runs marathons.

BOOK REVIEWS:

WITCHCRAFT AND MAGIC IN EUROPE: ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

by Bengt Ankarloo & Stuart Clark, eds.
Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1999

Reviewed by Dana Kramer-Rolls, PhD

The University of Pennsylvania Press has taken a place alongside Pennsylvania State University Press, noted for the *History of Magic* Series, with its own *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe* series, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark. The thrust of the series of compiled essays by leading scholars is to integrate the accumulated knowledge about the practices of witchcraft and magic, and to contextualize them both in society at large and in the landscape of religious belief and practice. As with any monumental task, credit must be given for the work done, rather than the work left undone. One of the great difficulties in approaching wide-ranging historical research is that each period and place calls to itself scholars who form a cohesive community, each of which develops somewhat idiosyncratic methodologies, thus establishing places of intraneine conflict, academic life and death concerns somewhat incomprehensible to any out-group. Perhaps the greatest contribution of this series is the opportunity for the student of witchcraft and magic to examine the field globally, drawing from the work of folklorists, classicists, Medievalists and Early Modernists in an attempt to integrate and define patterns of practice and public perception.

With the first volume on *Biblical and Pagan Societies* still forthcoming, the series begins with *Ancient Greece and Rome*. In "Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls," the first contributor, Daniel Ogden, University of Wales, Swansea, reviews the over 1,600 clay, wood and lead tablet and "voodoo dolls" (an unfortunate term left over from a less enlightened age) which were made to curse, petition and protect. Found at gravesites, crossroads and deposited in rivers and sacred wells at least from the 4th century BCE to the 1st century CE, these items describe, often quite colorfully, the intent of the supplicant, and appeal to a wide range of names and unnamed deities, including a range of chthonic gods (Hermes, Hecate, Kore, Demeter), their Latin equivalents, Egyptian gods of the underworld, Hebraic Adoni, Iao (= Yahweh), the Babylonian Erischigal, local deities (Bath's Sulis), angels, and a variety of syncretic hybrids (44ff.). These objects were used to guarantee legal decisions in favor of the supplicants, find lost property or curse the thief, obtain satisfaction in erotic and romantic exploits, and generally bind another to the supplicants purpose sympathetically though the treatment of the tablet or doll (twisting, smashing, use of particular materials such as lead) and by petition to the addressed deity.

While the issue of professional *vs* amateur manufacture of these tablets is still open to academic debate, we know manuals of magical instruction existed, indicating at least some standard or guide for the production of spell objects. The pre-Christian world was not immune to book burning, and much has been lost by these periodic frenzies of suppression, such as the 2,000 magical manuscripts reputed to have been burned by order of Augustus in 13 BCE (56).

Ogden suggests that these tablets and dolls may be useful in cracking open the hidden world of the marginalized, particularly women and slaves. Except of the fragments of Sappho's works and a few letters by Roman women to soldier

sons or merchant husbands, the unfiltered voice of women is virtually absent from the historical record except in many of these tablets (60-67). A particularly poignant one is a petition by a prostitute not to be relegated to a workhouse, the human equivalent of the glue factory (67-68). Likewise trade and judicial petitions often come from the working poor. This is a dense and well-constructed survey, although I would have appreciated the inclusion of curse bowls as well, which like the poppets (a much better term than Voodoo dolls) have polyvalent utility, holding the words of a spell, but also being used ritually in the spell.

The second essay by George Luck, Johns Hopkins University, titled "Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature" is a compellation of antique witches, sorcerers and magicians. Something of an abstract of his *Arcana Mundi* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) the major question asked, although not definitively answered, is that of the differences between "religion" and "magic", and between "philosophy" and "magic". The antiquity of magic as a technology, the question of folk *vs* academic practice and belief, the introduction of Mystery religions, and the competition between variant schools of philosophy makes this question almost unanswerable. Theurgists, mediums and healers were variously categorized as practicing religion, philosophy, licit science, although natural magic used by the rural population could be considered superstition, witchcraft or healing magic. Luck notes that what was a state religion for the Persians might well be considered theurgy or even an illicit cultic practice in the Hellenic or Roman world. Apollonius of Tyana was called a magician by his enemies and a scientist/philosopher by his supporters. The degree of the confusion can be seen in the case of Anaxagoras, whose defense that he was a scientist rather than a magician fell on deaf ears, as both were judged atheists.

Nor were invented or new practices of magic and religion unknown. One Alexander of Abon-

tuteichos, as satirized by Lucian based on an historical reality, founded the cult of Glycon, the sacred snake, anointed himself chief priest, and managed to con the local inhabitants into building him a temple. To Alexander's credit, he not only played on the naiveté of his flock, but he offered them the promise of salvation and supported their need for religious comfort. But we must note that the winners write history, and although Alexander's memory is linked with the sobriquet "False Prophet", we don't know how sincere or wise he might have been.

Here, too, gender issues complicate the matter. Early Greek sources claim "witchcraft" not to be religion as it takes place at night, is unlawful, and has no established temples (97). Many of the female magic workers Luck cites are called witches, such as Medea and Circe, whom he identifies as demoted goddesses. By including Moses as magician (remembering the healing serpent staff and the magical competition leading up to the Exodus), Jesus, and the Peter *vs* Simon Magnus literature (more about which below), Luck reintegrates the classical pagan world with the Judeo-Christian one, thus drawing the Middle and Near Eastern magical world closer to the Hellenic and post-Hellenic one. While this essay lacks the extensive passages from primary sources, which the book length study affords, it provides a useful compilation of historical and mythological sorcerers and sorceries. Of particular utility is the glossary of magical terms (98-101).

Perhaps the most important of the essays in this volume is Richard Gordon's "Imaging Greek and Roman Magic." In a methodology reminiscent of the Annales school search for *mentalités* in medieval studies, Gordon proposes to disclose contemporary Graeco-Roman attitudes toward magic and witchcraft. Because of the loss of period documents the author rejects historical narrative as a methodology, thus avoiding the critique of the post-modernists regarding the relativistic meaning generated by the reader/text



conversation. By applying a more systematic approach, Gordon is able to describe a political-social landscape in which the problem of magic can be placed in a contextualized foreground.

Conflicting factors were simultaneously at work throughout the late Classical through the Late Antique periods. For one, both in the Greek states and in Rome, civic religion took precedent over theological debate, and moral-political issues over salvific promises. That is to say, the line between what was legitimate intercourse with the Otherworld and what was suspect or downright illegal was fuzzy, crooked and often moving.

He identifies four categories of magic workers: wise men and women, who practiced various rustic arts such as herbalism or smithcraft, with or without charms or blessings; root-cutters, who had a more extensive knowledge of poisons and probably some astrological and philosophical knowledge as well (the equivalent of the British nineteenth century cunning folk); learned ritual magicians; and finally priests or priestesses of cults other than those prevalent in the local society. All of these could work for good or ill. All of these delved into the Marvelous, had some intercourse with the Otherworld, including the dead and ghosts, and all of these faced a sliding scale of licitness or illicitness at any time and place. Over time in the Greek societies, the gods themselves were made more moral in order that they might serve with greater utility in a stable and rational civic religion. As this happened, the line between “good” and “bad” magical practitioners shifted to the right. The *daemones* which served the more highly educated magic workers were now subject to legal scrutiny themselves.

The licitness of any magical activity, therefore, depended on both its social and political location. Love magic, for example, was just fine, if it gave a man some extramarital success, but if it led to a wife's infidelity or a subsequent abortion or poisoning of a husband, the state took notice. And throughout the classical world, poison and spells were far more available to a woman who wished

to redress a wrong than was a civil trial against some wrongdoer.

What separated Greek from Roman attitudes toward magic was the difference in their respective legal systems. Hellenistic Greeks fancied themselves historians, and magic based on the occult sciences of other cultures was cut some slack. Also, the code of law was far more situationally structured than that of Roman law. The guilt or innocence of a Socrates or a local witch depended on how well his or her accusers could be convinced of the benign or efficacious nature of the magical act or notion. Without doubt, the fate of an accused under Roman law depended to a large extent on the skill of a hired orator to sway a jury, and the rich were acquitted of greater crimes than those which brought on the summary execution of some poor prostitute or slave, however codified a legal system was in place.

It is important to note that the “witch craze” was not unique to Christian Early Modern Europe. In the years 184, 180-79, and 153 BCE Roman magistrates ordered the execution of thousands of magic workers accused of *veneficia* or malign magic. In one case 2,000 were killed and in another 3,000 (254). The critical point of law was the malign nature of the magic, and the critical question, “Was some innocent injured by another by magical means?” Local magistrates held most of the trials and many of the accused were brought to trial by the denouncement of their neighbors, often magical practitioners themselves. Confession and supporting testimony was secured through the use of torture and intimidation. The parallels to the Reformation trials are more than clear.

The final essay in the collection is Valerie Flint's “The Demonization of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinition of Pagan Religions”. Taken on face, this essay appears to merely acknowledge the demotion of *daemones* to evil spirits in league with magicians, and the proper use of magic in the hands of the

Christians (to promote proper fear and to demonstrate their superiority, and therefore the superiority of their god). It is only in comparison to the book *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) that this essay furthers the matter of magic across the bridge from the Pagan to the Christian West. Her thesis at that time, and to some extent in her essay, was that magic was a tool used by the early Church to maintain a sense of wonder, a potent tool against the logic of the philosophers and an emotional substrate upon which to accomplish wide-scale and lasting conversion. She argues for a symbiosis among the notions of folk magic, the logical or natural magic of such arts as astrology and medicine, and the miraculous acts of the godly.

Miracle *vs* marvelous is the key. In the tales of Peter and Simon the Magician, Peter's acts are miracle, while the defeated Simon's parallel acts are merely marvels, for which read something between stage tricks and the action of those evil demons. The line between licit and illicit magic again is socially and politically determined, in this case by a clerical body rather than a civic one. The flaw I find in the essay is the top-down methodology. Popular religion no longer seems to exist here. She depends heavily on the writings of the Early Church patriarchs, which expose more of the internal squabbles of the hierarchy of the Early Church than they do the practices of magic of either the un- or semi-converted or the popular notions of the clerical community itself. There is much more in the legendary literature, over and above the Peter-Simon corpus, which might flesh out and test her thesis. Moreover, to take an anthropological or sociological stance, are we to assume that country *stregae* ceased their herb collecting, or that literate Roman Empire Christians rejected astrological charts for their newborn children? Perhaps the days of civic auguries over a dead chicken were over. However, it seems unlikely that the notions of the Church fathers shut down traditional magic, especially in the light of their sympathy toward it as a public relations tool and its rapid “re-emer-

gence” in the form of folk magic and clerical magic alike.

Taken as a whole, the series of essays provides the modern scholar of magic with a sense of the continuity of the magical arts, not perhaps the Holy Grail of “survivals” but as a method by the marginalized and literate alike to deal with the unknown. The names of the gods may change, but spells and rituals went on. The state religion may periodically change, but in times of social stress a flash point of persecution may be sparked by the accusations of soured milk or unchurned butter, the appearance of a comet or a dangerous notion.

These essays are valuable not only to the scholar of magic and witchcraft, but also to the practicing modern witchcraft and pagan communities. In the classical period, as in the modern one, what one was called rather depended on who was doing the name-calling. The Greeks were just as able to call Persian and Egyptian practitioners “primitive” and “superstitious” as were the Protestants apt to apply those same names to Catholics in the Early Modern period. Rather than the textbook notion of The World's Great Religions (and Sanctioned Philosophers), new religions rose and fell. In point of fact, all religions were at one time “new”, as witnessed by Christianity, Islam, and Wicca, not to mention Scientology, Bahai and a host of others. The dividing line between “religion” and “cult” is still fuzzy, and the point at which service yields to exploitation is still a matter of ethical dilemma, as witnessed by the phenomenon of televangelists. Finally, the collection points out that the popular sport of witch burning was not a post-Christian invention, but rather a human activity based on greed, fear, local authoritarian excess, and a tendency to prey on one's neighbors.

In a future review, I will look at the two volumes which cover the 18th and 19th centuries and the 20th century, and I look forward to the publication of the three volumes to come, which will include the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.

Two Reviews of *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld*.
By Susan Greenwood. Berg: Oxford University Press, 2000.
ISBN 1 85973 450 2, Pbk.

Reviewed by Daniel Cohen
Wood and Water magazine

Anthropologists usually study cultures from the outside, claiming that this gives them a distance essential for scientific work. Against this it can be argued that one cannot understand cultural meanings if one is not fully participating. Tanya Luhrmann, in *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*, followed the traditional approach in her study of magic and the occult in Great Britain. Susan Greenwood takes the braver course of maintaining a creative tension between studying from the outside and participating from the inside. Her account includes reports of her own experiences and feelings as a student of high magic and of Wicca and feminist witchcraft, her later reflections on these, as well as accounts of her discussion with other practitioners.

The book has its origins in a PhD thesis, and in parts is hard reading when it is addressed to anthropologists and uses their technical language. Even here, it is fascinating to observe her challenge to the profession with her claim that "[T]his deliberately participatory approach is essential to an understanding of contemporary Western magicians' otherworlds, and as such is a valuable tool of research and should not be contrasted with 'scientific truth' or seen to threaten the anthropologist's objectivity." She uses the word

continued next page

Reviewed by Douglas Ezzy
University of Tasmania

This is one of the most stimulating and rewarding ethnographies of contemporary Witchcraft I've read. Greenwood has worked hard, and it shows in the quality of her findings and analysis. Her writing is clear, insightful, and draws on a sophisticated theoretical framework. She describes herself as a communicator between the worlds of academia and magical counter-culture. She is clearly widely read both in the academic literature and the magical texts, more than competent in both worlds, and skilled at revealing one to the other.

The book was originally a PhD thesis in anthropology at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Covering High Magic, Wicca, and Feminist Witchcraft, Greenwood draws on extensive fieldwork and participant observation. It appears she was initiated into each of these traditions and her discussions covers each of the traditions equally. After an introduction to her research there are two chapters that introduce High Magic and Witchcraft respectively. The following three chapters examine more general themes that run through the practice of magic and the experience of the otherworld. She discusses: healing and identity, the role of power in magical identity, sexual identity and politics, and understandings of good and evil.

A smattering of her conclusions provides a sense of the value and sometimes provocative nature of her work: "I suggest that magical

continued next page

Cohen review continued:

'magician' to denote any practitioner of magic; this usage is deliberately chosen, but will jar with many pagans. However, most of the book is of value to pagans, with its outsider-insider's account of the otherworld. She describes the otherworld as both inner and outer, as associated with spiritual beings, as involving a shift of consciousness, and as a time and space distinct from, but also very closely connected to, everyday reality. She gives detailed descriptive accounts, both from her own training and that of others.

Her outsider status enables her to criticise magicians in useful ways; some of her criticism would apply to mainstream religions, but we may think we have solved these problems. For instance, she remarks that witchcraft's emphasis on Nature owes more to 18th century Romantic interpretations of Nature than to an engagement with the natural world. She argues that relying on the otherworld as a source of morality and ethics can, on the one hand, lead to a group consensus that is unspoken and so cannot be challenged by members, and on the other hand can bypass all connections with the wider society. She remarks that "Women are venerated in most magical practices (especially witchcraft), but it does not necessarily follow that high evaluation in the otherworld translates into equal status for women in the ordinary world. The religious aspect of worship does not equate with the changing the social world; indeed it frequently reinforces it, giving gender stereotypes romantic or even divine legitimation." All in all, a valuable but inexpensive book which is highly recommended.

Ezzy review continued:

identities are structured through a psycho-spiritual interaction with the otherworld, rather than constructed from social discourses of the ordinary world" (p. 118). "I suggest that most people become involved with magic because it is associated with the acquisition of power" (p. 135). "Only feminist witchcraft offers a practical political model for women's empowerment in the socio-economic world" (p. 177). Each of these statements, somewhat baldly stated here, are supported drawing on extensive extracts from interviews, notes from participant observation, rituals, and notes from Greenwood's own magical work. While I do not agree with all the conclusions, the book made me think about the issues in much sharper focus.

I was fascinated and thrilled to read an academic monograph that takes spiritual experience and the otherworld seriously. Young and Goulet's collection, *Being Changed*, opened up this intellectual space for me some time ago, and Greenwood begins to map it out. Rejecting a Western rationalist view of magic, Greenwood argues that spiritual experience should not be explained away, but accepted as a source of knowledge. She provides a thoughtful critique of previous ethnographies that have failed to respect the beliefs and experiences of the otherworld (such as Luhrmann's *Persuasion's of the Witch's Craft*).

Greenwood's approach is truly groundbreaking and I applaud her courage and insight in presenting the argument that spiritual experience should be taken seriously. Like other recent innovations in research methods, I know I will have trouble convincing my colleagues to take this seriously. The hold of rationalist Enlightenment method is still strong in academe. However, as the number of studies like Greenwood's grows the distanced pseudo-objectivity generated by the rationalist tradition will increasingly be seen as a methodology that systematically misunderstands spiritual

experience. Her work gives me hope and courage!

Greenwood has a short discussion of the theory of hermeneutics and the social construction of 'reality' (pp. 42-44). However, she seems not to have worked this fully through her analysis. To take the 'otherworld' seriously, as a genuine site of knowledge, does not require an uncritical acceptance of magician's talk about the otherworld as some of her earlier statements seem to suggest. Although, in fairness, her analysis is not uncritical. Rather, she privileges the magicians' understanding of the otherworld. However, it almost seems that the influence of social processes comes as a surprise that not only contradicts the claims of the magicians, but also surprises Greenwood. She argues that despite magicians' claims, the power and experiences derived from the otherworld are shaped by this worldly concerns with status, power, and identity claims. This signals a tension at the heart of the book between the desire to respect the otherworld, as an experience that cannot be explained away by social processes, but at the same time her findings that the magicians who participate in the otherworld are profoundly shaped by social and political processes.

I'd argue that all worlds, mundane and alternate, are socially and culturally constructed. As I see it, the ethnographic move (sociological, anthropological, or hermeneutic) is to understand reality as always and already constructed. The problem with Western rationalism is not simply that it has tried to explain away other realities, but that it has ignored its own mythological character, setting up a false dichotomy between objective truth uninfluenced by social factors and subjective experience that is socially constructed. Greenwood takes the first step, arguing that alternate realities should not be explained away. Given the simplistic and culturally insensitive approaches of past ethnographers, this is a

huge and immensely important step. However, I'd argue we need to go further and reject the false dichotomy. Rather than trying to present the otherworld as an unproblematic reality, and then problematize it, I'd begin with the expectation that practices, knowledge, and experiences of the otherworld will be shaped by the social background of the magician, by politics, power games, and identity processes. The key question is how the otherworld and the social world interact.

I felt a little uncomfortable with what she describes as a fundamentalist flavour in some of the magical schools. I was not sure if she was really talking about fundamentalism in the sense of a closed mind, high symbolic boundaries, and a narrow social group, or whether she was using the term to describe her experienced difficulty with the requirement to believe in order to participate. It is nearly impossible to participate in any social group without participating in their symbolic world. Even more so when participation requires such intense personal reflection and work with symbolic worlds. The suspension of disbelief is quite different from fundamentalism. Maybe magical groups do have fundamentalist tendencies, but I think the term needs to be used with care, even though it is only a relatively minor aside in the book.

The book contains a wealth of suggestions and ideas for new directions for research. It sets a high standard and has initiated some searching questions that deserve careful discussion. I hope to see many more like it. If I should meet Susan Greenwood I'd ask her: Did you enjoy your fieldwork? Do you think the academic study of mystery religions is a good idea for those who want to practice them? What sorts of responses have you had from your academic colleagues? I'm sure there would be a lot to talk about ...

THE GODDESS AND THE ALPHABET: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN WORD AND IMAGE

by Leonard Shlain
Princeton UP, 1983. xii + 154. pp.
Two Appendices. Index. Selected
Bibliography. ISBN 0-691-03131-2.

Reviewed by Ken McCormick

Scribes transferred the authority previously vested in the shaman's charged spells, to the written word.

The Goddess and the Alphabet is a delightful read for Neopagans that builds a case for a unique philosophy of history proposing that literacy and patriarchy walk hand-in-hand.

In this revealing book, Leonard Shlain leads us through the muddy waters of prehistory, starting with the linguistic developments of hunter-gatherers, then works through cuneiform, hieroglyphs, into the historic development of the alphabet. He thoughtfully proposes: To understand the process of history, you must understand the process by which 'history' is written, and to do so, you must analyze the process of writing and reading itself.

Shlain's philosophy of history reflects the synthesis of two popular theoretical premises:

1. The right brain/left brain cognitive theories proposed by recent research in neurophysiology, and
2. The communications theories of Marshal McLuhan, suggesting that: 'The Medium is the Message'.

Combined together, this synthesis of ideas offer us a unique perspective on the development of literacy and its impact on the evolution

of patriarchal systems.

Goddess worship, feminine values and women's power depend on the ubiquity of the image. God worship, masculine values and men's domination of women are bound to the written word ... Whenever a culture elevates the written word at the expense of the image, patriarchy dominates.

While much of this ideology borrows heavily from modern feminist thought, I've not seen it stretched so tightly onto one frame of reference. *The Goddess and the Alphabet* has a single-mindedness of purpose that doesn't allow for much straying off the path.

Shlain shares with us the literary lives and written culture of the Hebrews, Greeks, Indians, Chinese, Romans ... right through to the early Christian church, Augustine, Islam, and the seminal invention by Gutenberg with its impact on the development of Protestantism.

The clique that controls the flow of information in any given culture inevitably gains mastery over the other classes. History would subsequently provide repeated examples of the quill's superiority over the blade.

Leonard marches us through the ages at an engaging stride, century-by-century through what we know of history. It is, however, a pleasant journey. His words beckon with compelling interest, faltering only once or twice in pulling you forward through time. Literate folks will enjoy its breezy and polished style.

But don't expect an spiritual analysis. Shlain shapes his message for a popular audience, not towards one either oriented to Neopaganism or one spiritually attuned to the divine nature of the Goddess Herself.

It's hard to dispute the sheer volume of research that Shlain packs into 464 pages. While many of the historical periods he covers lie outside of my own studies, the historical eras of which I have some awareness seem to be handled in a relatively fair, if somewhat selective fashion. And although later chapters in the book cross some historical boundaries rather



awkwardly, I have some forgiveness of detail over the sheer weight of the material Shlain brings forward.

I also find it interesting that this book was written by a man, because it offers a unique male analysis of patriarchy. And I would be very interested to hear comments on his theory from a feminist perspective.

The written word issues from linearity, sequence, reductionism, abstraction, control, central vision and the dominant hand—all hunter/killer attributes. Writing represented a shift of tectonic proportions that fissured the integrated nature of gatherer/hunter communication and brain cooperation. Writing made the left brain, flanked by the incisive cones of the eye and the aggressive right hand, dominant over the right. The triumphant march of literacy that began five thousand years ago conquered right-brain values, and with them, the Goddess. Patriarchy and misogyny have been the inevitable result.

My major disappointment with *The Goddess and the Alphabet* is structural in nature. While the title suggest that this book provides an analysis of Goddess-inspired imagery, Shlain only delivers a study of the written word. The book carefully develops the impact of alphabetic literacy upon culture, yet contains a surprising absence of any discussion on the development of visual literacy. Shlain has not persuaded me that the loss of visual literacy is the direct consequence of the increase in alphabetic literacy.

With such a large body of work on the subject to draw from, you would expect *The Goddess and the Alphabet* to provide better analysis of well-dated visual imagery relating to the Goddess. Aside from his dismissal of the work of Marija Gimbutas and a short reference to Egyptian visual hieroglyphics, Shlain appears strangely silent on the issue of Goddess imagery. The structural analysis of historic visual artifact has been well developed in the academic fields of art history, communications theory and anthropology. There is an extensive body of academic work dedicated to 'visual lit-

eracy' and the conventions of form, mass, line, texture and symbol developed over millennium in multiple cultures, as well as the 'cinematic literacy' that western culture has developed to adapt non-linear imagery along linear paths.

The entire field of oral history is also left out of Shlain's analysis, an important omission because words meant to be spoken, recited or sung offer us an experience and historic point of view far different than that of the word written specifically to be read.

Songs are history too, and not always written down at their creative initiation. In many indigenous, pre-literate traditions, a song is owned by the family who created it and can offer outside cultures insights into the deeply sacred as well as historic nuances of cultures with strong ties to earth-based and Goddess-centered spirituality. Much of this 'soft history' falls directly on the altars of The Goddess.

I also think Shlain missed an opportunity to offer us more perspective on the key shifts in human consciousness provided by spoken language itself. I would have liked more of his speculations on the development of spoken language by the hunter on his hunting technique—and the gatherer on her gathering knowledge.

For literate Neopagans, however, this is a book that offers an interesting intellectual challenge. For as we rely on "history" to conduct our research on the Old Religion, we bump into the dilemmas and prejudices of the written word itself.

Our studies bring us into contact with the unwritten initiation ceremonies of indigenous people, the nature of "sacred sight", "truths" that are flexible over time, and all the academic examination of the interrelationship between art and religion among preliterate peoples.

The Biblical scholarship in *The Goddess and the Alphabet* certainly gives us much to contemplate, and will add a powerful voice in the contemporary discussions Neopagans have with

religious fundamentalists—Christian, Judaic and Islamic. For this item alone, Shlain's book will prove valuable for the Neopagan community.

How did a landless, powerless, nomadic people, wandering in a dusty, rock-strew environment, come to two such ideas (monotheism and a code of morality that stands above human intercourse) by themselves? The key is that Yahweh expected all His chosen people to read what He had written. To mandate this new approach to religion, He forbade anyone from visualizing any feature of His person or from trying to imagine all forms of another god. From Sinai forward, He proscribed the making of all images—He sanctioned only written words. It is not mere coincidence that the first book written in an alphabet is the Old Testament. There is none earlier.

While Shlain's scholarship is comprehensive and revealing, I propose that the link between literacy and patriarchy is still a theory-in-progress. I believe that the other half of Shlain's equation—the visual half—hasn't been written yet, so we can't say that the corollary of his thesis is true.

Let us also note that, although Shlain's title suggests a connection to Goddess scholarship, it does not make any steps forward in the unveiling of the Goddess and the myriad of ways by which She reveals Herself to us. It does, however, do a pretty fair job of proposing how patriarchy works. And why.

While the social history of the world may not pirouette so gracefully around literacy as Leonard Shlain suggests, much of the official written accounts of history do. And for those of us who employ words in the service of our trade, I believe we are made better managers of our own words by understanding the deeply inherent biases of the written word itself.

As you contemplate the history of literacy outlined in *The Goddess and the Alphabet*, you may also come to realize that there's very little magic in much of the Western literary tradition.

Literacy is, alas, only words.

READERS' FORUM
continued from page 3

and 'hokum'. This is not the language of either objective scholarship or dispassionate journalism. I doubt that Ms Eller would write an article on new biblical scholarship and then dismiss Jewish theology or Christian mythology as "bunk". I doubt that the *Atlantic Monthly* would publish her if she did. In today's world, people of good will of every religion are striving for tolerance, understanding, and sensitivity to other traditions. By resorting to religious attacks under the guise of scholarly critique, Ms Allen demeans herself and your magazine.

Starhawk

Author of The Spiral Dance

MICHAEL YORK RESPONDS:

Having read Charlotte Allen's "The Scholars and the Goddess" and then Starhawk's response letter, I found the latter cogent and carefully worded. But then, having re-read Allen's *Atlantic Monthly* article, I am no longer convinced that it merits the attack it has received. I believe a careful reading of Allen reveals an argument that is balanced and, rather than hostile, is surprisingly favourable to Wicca. While Starhawk argues that Goddess spirituality is "based on experience, on a direct relationship with the cycles of birth, growth, death and regeneration in nature and human lives," Allen ends her article with a lengthy quotation from 'Diotima Mantinea': "It doesn't matter to me how old Wicca is, because when I connect with Deity as Lady and Lord, I know that I am connecting with something much larger and vaster than I can fully comprehend. ... This personal connection with Deity is what is meaningful. For me, Wicca works to facilitate that connection, and that is what really matters." If Allen intends to produce a "religious

STARHAWK ... ASSUMES THAT IF ONE CRITICISES ANY ASPECTS OF A RELIGION, THIS AUTOMATICALLY AMOUNTS TO A RELIGIOUS ATTACK. BUT ALLEN IS CAREFUL TO DIRECT HER ATTENTION TO "THE WICCAN NARRATIVE" AND NOT THE PRACTICE, EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF THE RELIGION.

attack," why end with this citation?

It increasingly seems to me that Starhawk wants to have her cake and eat it too. She assumes that if one criticises any aspects of a religion, this automatically amounts to a religious attack. But Allen is careful to direct her attention to "the Wiccan narrative" and *not* the practice, experience and meaning of the religion. Her critique centres on (1) the foundational story concerning a pre-patriarchal egalitarian culture, (2) the assumption that witches have "a history of persecution exceeding even that of the Jews," and (3) the question of polytheism. She delineates an emerging scholarly consensus (Hutton, Davis, Eller, Meskell, Hodder, Lefkowitz) that casts archaeological and historical doubt on all these elements of the narrative. But Starhawk seems to infer that because Allen produces the Catholic page on Beliefnet and has written a book on Christ, she and her conclusions must be suspect. Nevertheless, Allen acknowledges that "Wiccans appear to be accommodating themselves to much of the emerging evidence concerning their antecedents ... [and] are coming to view their ancient provenance as inspiring legend rather than hard-and-fast history." It seems to me that Starhawk, in her own words, says the same.

But Starhawk's argument against Allen

rests nevertheless on some dubious points. She objects to having been quoted "at length from the [highly significant and influential] book I wrote over twenty years ago." But this is the name of the game. Often our words—especially when written—come back to haunt us many years later. It is a risk we all take when we commit anything to writing, and the critical feedback that continues to spring at us is something we must be willing to accept and engage with candidly. Moreover, Allen includes complaints made by Starhawk "[in] her introduction to a new edition of *The Spiral Dance*." Nevertheless, for Starhawk, Allen's "use of perjorative terms such as 'bunk' and 'hokum'" reveal her own bias and are "not the language of either objective scholarship or dispassionate journalism." But what Allen actually says is this: "... despite all the things about it that look like [not "is"] hokum: it gives its practitioners a sense of connection to the natural world and of access to the sacred and beautiful within their own bodies." And the concluding words of 'Diotima Mantinea' are simply prefaced by how "[she] summed up her feelings on the debunking of the official Wiccan narrative ..." Starhawk's shift here is disingenuous and not commensurate with her own status. [The use of the term 'bunk' in the article's subtitle is obviously the pub-

lisher's ploy and not the author's.]

The real heart of the disagreement between Starhawk and Allen probably concerns Marija Gimbutas, and Starhawk's financial commitment to a film about Gimbutas may only complicate matters. My own connection with Gimbutas stems from a shared interest in Indo-European origins and a shared Lithuanian ancestry. I was in fact literally writing a letter to her that began by deploring the bleak outlook for our ancestral country when the news came over the radio that Lithuania had just gained independence from the Soviet Union. This dramatic timing has always given me a feeling of unique connection with the remarkable lady. And, certainly, there is a virtual unanimous agreement among scholars concerning the excellence of Gimbutas' earlier archaeological work. Her concluding works, by contrast, are a different, more questionable and more contentious matter. Starhawk resolves the matter by saying that Gimbutas' theories and the ancient images she presents are "valuable" and thereby skirts over the question of whether they are true or not. Truth and value, however, are two different and often separate things, and each, since the days of the Sophists, Socrates and Plato, may be prioritised by different peoples differently. Allen is talking about the one; Starhawk, the other.

Personally, and as a part of a beleaguered polytheistic minority that tends to feel that Wicca and Goddess spirituality have largely appropriated the term 'pagan', I liked Allen's brief paragraph on polytheism best of all. But for Starhawk, "She utterly misses the point that we are polytheists, now, today," but there is no further explanation on how this is so, and then two sentences later proclaims that the term 'polytheistic' comes "out of a framework that actually makes no sense to us." In response to Starhawk's water

analogy (is it one or many?), I will argue that the Nile is not Niagra nor Lake Michigan the Mediterranean unless one wishes to throw out locality and difference altogether. At the world's theological roundtable, the pagan position of polytheism has been too long absent, and I do not feel that the muting influence of currently popular bi-theistic understandings are completely helpful. The development of the notion of a Great Goddess has for me been best articulated by Hutton, but, like all scholars, he too can make mistakes. He tells Allen, for instance, that "The equinoxes seem to have no pagan festivals behind them ..." This is untrue—as any close examination of the March celebrations in the ancient Roman festival calendar will reveal.

To conclude, I want simply to say that I feel that Starhawk in her own way has probably done more singlehandedly to promote the expansion of understanding deity as a direct relationship embodied in the natural cycles than anyone else in contemporary times. I applaud and totally agree with her that divine images are portals to the otherworld and its dynamics of death and regeneration. And I would certainly walk with her in approaching everyday miracles both practically and with a sense of awe, wonder and gratitude. But she is not God (double entendre intended) and can make mistakes. Shooting too quickly from the hip—especially without truly sizing up and assessing the target—does not help the cause.

Michael York
Bath Spa University College

MAGLIOCCO REPLIES TO GRIMASSI

Thank you for allowing me to respond to Raven Grimassi's rejoinder to my article on witchcraft, folk magic and healing in Italy in *The Pomegranate* 13. It is a rare privilege for an anthropologist to engage in this kind of

... STREGHERIA AS DESCRIBED BY RAVEN GRIMASSI IS LARGELY A MODERN ITALIAN-AMERICAN CONSTRUCTION BASED ON A PARTICULAR INTERPRETATION OF THE PAST, RATHER THAN AN ARCHAIC RELIGION SURVIVING AS AN ORGANIZED CULT FROM ANCIENT TIMES.

open discussion of her work with members of her field community, and I am deeply appreciative of this opportunity.

I had the pleasure of meeting with Raven Grimassi during the summer of 2000, unfortunately after the final draft of my article had already been submitted to *The Pom*. He was very gracious and helpful to me. From information he revealed during our interview, I can say with reasonable certainty that I believe him to have been initiated into a domestic tradition of folk magic and healing such as I describe in my article. In addition, his mother, whom I have not yet had the pleasure of interviewing, seems to be an active bearer of Italian folktales, some of which involve the personification of astronomical phenomena. Similar folktales have been documented by Italian folklorists in archives dating back to the beginning of the 19th century. These tales, and the folk healing traditions in his mother's family, are undoubtedly of some antiquity, although dating them precisely is difficult if not impossible. But the Stregheria of Mr Grimassi's books differs markedly from the family traditions he described in our interview. Mr Grimassi, as an active bearer of his tradition, has introduced many new elements and interpretations to adapt the traditional material to a more contemporary context, ensuring its survival, at least in some form. In

this aspect, he is working as an innovator within his folk magical tradition. Innovation and re-interpretation are important parts of the process of tradition without which folklore would never be able to adapt to new cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that Stregheria as described by Raven Grimassi is largely a modern Italian-American construction based on a particular interpretation of the past, rather than an archaic religion surviving as an organized cult from ancient times.

Instead of arguing Mr Grimassi's points specifically, I would like to explain to readers why he and I have such different interpretations of the same data. My analysis is based on a contemporary academic approach known as 'social constructionism,' in which categories that people tend to take for granted as existing in some 'natural' way, such as race, nation, ethnicity, or even tradition, can be regarded as 'inventions,' in the sense of "widely shared, though intensely debated, collective fictions that are continually reinvented" (Werner Sollors, ed, *The Invention of Ethnicity* 1989: xi). Social constructionism does not deny the existence of real differences between social and cultural groups; instead, it sees social differentiation as emerging from very particular sets of cultural, historical and political conditions. History is never just a matter of facts; it is always

constructed based on current social, political and cultural interests. Whenever I hear essentialist claims such as those made by some contemporary Witches and Pagans (e.g. "Our traditions stretch back in an unbroken line to the ancient Druids/ Etruscans/ Vikings/ etc"), I start looking at how that historical link is being constructed, and I ask why this particular construction is being applied now, under this particular set of cultural conditions.

I apply the same set of questions when I look at historical sources. Compare, for instance, Mr Grimassi's interpretation of Francesco Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608) with my own. In Guazzo's descriptions of an organized witch cult, Mr Grimassi sees evidence of the existence of such a cult in Italy in the early 1600's. When I look at the same data I see the cultural construction by members of the Italian elite (the Catholic clergy and its supporters among the upper classes) of a classic 'subversion myth,' in which members of a real or imagined social group are accused of performing unspeakable acts and blamed for the existence of societal problems. Using Guazzo as evidence of the historical reality of the witch cult seems to me akin to using Jack Chick comics as evidence that contemporary Witches are part of a vast Satanic conspiracy. Anthropologists, folklorists and historians tend to take into account the particular bias of the narrator when evaluating historical sources, which is why we look with skepticism at the survivalist claims of Charles Godfrey Leland, J.B. Andrews, and Lady Vere de Vere. These individuals were wedded to a survivalist paradigm which saw in European folklore the remnants of ancient, 'primitive' practices. Survivalism ultimately worked to keep the elites in power by disenfranchising the beliefs and practices of the peasant and working classes, even as it appeared to romanticize them.

It is exactly this survivalist attitude which

many Italians encountered upon emigrating to North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their rich folk traditions were interpreted as savage survivals by the American Catholic clergy, as well as by social workers, teachers and others of the dominant class, who saw it as part of their duty to 'civilize' these 'uncouth' immigrants. Under the influence of this social stigma, many Italian folk magical traditions were lost. Raven Grimassi's Stregheria represents, I believe, 'folklore reclamation': an attempt to reclaim, albeit in new cultural circumstances, aspects of a folk tradition previously interrupted. Folklore reclamation generally signals a break with tradition and the deep-seated need to erase that break from collective memory, or at least make it more palatable. It is in this context that Grimassi's elaborations on Italian folk magic must be understood. Moreover, this reclamation is taking place as the status of Italian-Americans is changing in North American culture. Once reviled as the newest wave of unacculturated immigrants, many have now become part of the middle classes, and are the targets of hostility from newer immigrant groups who see them as white oppressors. On the other hand, the projection of historical categories into contemporary nationalisms has allowed other European ethnics to vilify Italian-Americans as the descendants of imperial Romans, responsible for the destruction of Celtic and Germanic cultures. The discourse of Witchcraft allows Italian-Americans and other European-American ethnics to create identity in part by aligning themselves against the dominant cultural and religious paradigms and with oppressed minorities. This is a vitally important phenomenon deserving of scholarly attention and cultural recognition.

*Sabina Magliocco
California State University, Northridge*

GRIMASSI REPLIES TO MAGLIOCCO

First, I would like to thank Sabina Magliocco for what I regard as several personal compliments in her letter of reply. Although we have different views on the subject of Witchcraft, I respect her academic approach and admire her character. Prof Magliocco suggests that my writings on witchcraft belong to the "sacred" rather than the academic/historical arena. Admittedly, I do not confine my research to the terms of the accepted methodology employed by modern scholars. However, I would not agree that the background material I extract from the literature on witchcraft is of no historical value. I also see value in the material gathered by such folklorists as J.B. Andrews, Lade Vere, Roma Lister and Charles Leland. These folklorists independently investigated Italian witchcraft in Naples, Florence and Rome and discovered essentially the same beliefs and practices despite the regional differences of custom and dialect. To me this seems significant and requires careful consideration.

As Prof Magliocco noted, we had the opportunity to meet and discuss the Italian tradition I learned over the years from my mother and my Italian relatives. Much of what I discussed with Sabina Magliocco is different from my published material, which Prof Magliocco acknowledges in her letter. The chief reason I do not present this material in my books is due to the fact that my family tradition is intensely personal to me. Therefore I have been unable to bring myself to subject it to the dispassionate critical analysis of scholarly examination. Likewise, I am extremely reluctant to allow it to become fodder for the mean-spiritedness that has become the earmark of many Internet Pagan and Wiccan chat rooms/lists. As I pointed out in the introduction to my book *Italian Witchcraft / Ways of the Strega*, the material I present in public is a modern system based upon an old tradition

mixed with some Wiccan elements. Therefore I have little disagreement with Prof Magliocco regarding her assessment of my published material.

Sabina Magliocco has pointed out that we interpret the same data differently and I would agree that often this is the case. The writings of Francesco Guazzo are one example. Prof Magliocco views such works as the *Compendium Maleficarum* as a "subversion myth" orchestrated by the "Italian elite" to explain the social ills of the time. I agree and then take it one step further, seeing the willful denigration of an existing subculture consisting of herbal healers, enchanters, and diviners. To clarify my position, I certainly do not believe that accounts such as Guazzo's are in whole an indication of what witchcraft was actually like during this era of history. But as it has been said that the best lies are based upon the truth, I view the contemporary lore regarding witches mentioned by Guazzo as being the available foundation upon which was built the creative misinformation generated by Church and State concerning witchcraft as a whole. Therefore I believe that references to such things as the use of beech wood wands, for example, are likely remnants of actual folk magic practices of the times. It seems doubtful at best that the Church would manufacture fake trivia of this sort when the political goal was something much greater. Reasonably the best way for the Church and State to proceed was to incorporate the available folklore/witch lore and folk magic of the times into the fabric of the greater cloth of deception. Therefore, I would be reluctant to regard such works as the *Compendium Maleficarum* as being of no value to us regarding magical and ritual concepts of the era. If indeed a witch cult existed during Guazzo's era, it is likely to have incorporated some of the folk magic and folk practices of the day. It is for this reason that I examine the minutia contained in all literary sources deal-

SCHOLARS POINT TO MODERN WITCHCRAFT AS SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FROM ANCIENT WITCHCRAFT. THIS IS TRUE, AND THE DISSIMILARITY HERE IS DUE TO EVOLUTION, WHICH IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM FABRICATION OR RE-INVENTION.

ing with witchcraft.

For a cult that supposedly never existed there remains an extraordinary consistency of theme in the literature on witchcraft that spans over 2500 years from the era of Hesiod and Homer to modern times. One of the allegations made by scholars is that one cannot equate ancient witchcraft with modern witchcraft because modern Witches present themselves as "good" and historically witches have always been portrayed as evil. This has always stuck me as similar to saying that modern humans can have no connection to "cave men" because contemporary humans are civilized by comparison. Scholars point to modern Witchcraft as something entirely different from ancient witchcraft. This is true, and the dissimilarity here is due to evolution, which is something different from fabrication or re-invention. To many scholars a lack of evidence equates to non-existence, and many use this to maintain what, at best, might be described as their personal doubts. In closing, it is interesting to note historian Peter Kingsley's comment in *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*: "Academically, doubt is a virtue. It is wise to be cautious, virtuous to allow for different points of view. The problem arises when this attitude hardens: then doubting becomes a certainty in itself, and we forget the importance of doubting our doubt."

Raven Grimassi
San Diego CA

DIZEREGA ON STAUDENMAIER

Peter Staudenmaier's "Fascist Ecology" serves a useful purpose by alerting many Pagans and environmentalists to the shadow side of environmental thinking. Much as we may love Nature, our love does not automatically give us moral superiority over others. Unfortunately, this pretty much sums up the article's positive contributions. In my opinion, the author's analysis contains logical, philosophical, and historical errors, and advances an agenda that appears hostile to certain spiritual values.

What Staudenmaier terms "ecofascism" is in fact "eco-Nazism." Fascism today has lost most of its original meaning, serving mostly as an epithet, and Staudenmaier begins by criticizing the popular misuse of this term. During the period under discussion in this article, Fascism referred to a specific ideology, rooted mostly in Italian thought. Fascism itself was *not* environmentally oriented, nor did it consider race a biological category. Many Italian Jews were members of the Fascist Party. Nazis, by contrast, were deeply committed to a biological conception of race. Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, and others were forever excluded from membership in the German *Volk*. No such thing as "ecofascism" ever existed.

If one were to eliminate all references to race, German, or *Volk*, from Staudenmaier's description of German environmental

**TODAY'S WESTERN ENVIRONMENTALISTS
... ENDORSE INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS,
POLITICAL FREEDOM, AND TOLERANCE
OF A DIVERSITY OF VIEWS.
NOR ARE THEY RACISTS,
BIOLOGICAL OR OTHERWISE.**

thought, we would read views with which we could often agree. But racism and anti-Semitism existed independently of environmental thought, as well as of any mystical conceptions of Nature. Staudenmaier admits as much in his descriptions of Goebbels and Goring as anti-environmental. They were certainly Nazis.

If Staudenmaier used the term eco-Nazism, readers would have been alerted to the fact that the worst crimes of the Nazi regime had nothing to do with environmentalism and everything to do with racism. Its complete inapplicability to contemporary environmentalism would be obvious. But this would detract from Staudenmaier's reasons for writing this piece. In my opinion, Staudenmaier's real target is *contemporary* environmentalism, particularly its Deep Ecological and Neopagan dimensions. He emphasizes the "irrational," "neo pagan," and "mystical" elements of German environmentalism as the central reasons why many Germans embraced Nazi ideology. As he writes: "the displacement of any social analysis of environmental destruction in favor of mystical ecology served as an integral component in the preparation of the final solution." (18) He contends that "the substitution of ecomysticism for clear-sighted social-ecological inquiry has catastrophic political repercussions." (19)

Only at the most superficial level is this

true. In fact, the Weimar Republic faced a uniquely hostile environment, one in which many millions of Germans disliked both it and the liberal democratic values for which it stood. Even so, a Nazi triumph was never foreordained. A tragic record of stupidity and wishful thinking played a decisive role in Hitler's rise to power.

But there is a deeper error in Staudenmaier's analysis. He emphasizes that the Nazi environmentalists disliked science and cities, suggesting this animus towards modernity helped lead them to Nazism. Absent is any reference to the other totalitarian movement of the time: Marxism-Leninism, which explicitly *endorsed* modernity, cities, factories, science and all the rest. Marxism-Leninism also emphasized the evils of capitalism and the necessity of "correct" social analysis. It also led to mass murder and other equally catastrophic political repercussions.

Obviously, anti-modern romanticism is not uniquely prone to totalitarianism, for it also appealed to people who would have endorsed everything Staudenmaier writes that is critical of German environmentalists. Perhaps what is missing here is a discussion of democratic liberalism, an ideology emphasizing democracy, peaceful politics, individual rights, and toleration. Totalitarian horrors do not arise in a liberal culture. Where a culture is not liberal, it is prone to such excesses, whether in the name of

modernity and science or Nature and the countryside. Nazism, Fascism, and Marxism-Leninism all attacked liberalism for its various alleged failings.

Today's Western environmentalists are overwhelmingly in favor of the expression of liberal democratic culture and values. In almost every case they endorse individual rights, political freedom, and tolerance of a diversity of views. Nor are they racists, biological or otherwise. Even if we worship the Goddess.

Staudenmaier, and Janet Biehl, his co-author, are advocates of "social-ecology," a variety of left-wing thought rooted in the work of Murray Bookchin. Bookchin has frequently employed the "eco-fascist" epithet to Deep Ecologists and Biehl has attacked eco-feminism for the "irrationality" of Goddess worship. Staudenmaier's is simply another, albeit more temperate, attack on deep ecology and Nature religion. I have extensively criticized Bookchin's so-called "social ecology" in the name of both liberalism and Deep Ecology, and I am posting this article on my web site <www.dizerega.com>. Check it out in the Ecology section. My essay "Deep Ecology and Liberalism" is also worth a look in this regard, as is "Nature Religion in the Modern World" in the Spirit section.

*Gus diZerega
Whitman College*

GALLAGER ON STAUDENMAIER

The Staudenmaier article printed in Issue 15 of *The Pomegranate* may have raised some hackles in our nature-revering Pagan community, but it does raise some valuable and legitimate points in relation to current strands in the environmental movement. The article makes it clear from the outset that it refers to strains within the political culture of environmentalists as 'marginal'. I

agree with Staudenmaier that this demands our attention—provided that we keep within a proper perspective.

My own research on racism in the movement in Britain has taken me into some odd places, and it is true to say that the emphasis on Blood and Soil into early antecedents of environmentalism is still alive and well, and classing itself as Green. Moreover, environmentalists not necessarily classing themselves as Right Wing or even vaguely conservative are sometimes found making strange avowals about the relationship between human and non-human nature that link directly to the historical strands of the movement described in Staudenmaier's article. I have heard population control proposals from Greens that are so frankly racist that it makes my palms itch.

Luckily, I practice, as far as I am able to, non-violence, apart from a sharp tongue, and those making the proposals have lived to blush another day. More worryingly, I have experienced alarming correlations made between Blood and Soil ideologies and Paganism—by people professing themselves to be Pagan.

Staudenmaier's references to the notions of 'nature law' and 'natural order' are particularly relevant to the main concerns of the article—and to issues that should, hopefully, concern those of us keen to distance ourselves from the type of chauvinism and bigotry this framework so often supports. The application of 'natural law' to the way that humans relate to each other in society is often found to be applied as the basis of analysis and the solution to social ills by those who fail to see that humans' perception of nature is, itself, profoundly socially constructed. Therefore, this reference to what happens 'in nature' can be used to justify the use of 'might is right', the separation of the so-called 'races' (though no biological

THE APPLICATION OF 'NATURAL LAW' TO THE WAY THAT HUMANS RELATE TO EACH OTHER IN SOCIETY IS OFTEN [PROPOSED AS] THE SOLUTION TO SOCIAL ILLS BY THOSE WHO FAIL TO SEE THAT HUMANS' PERCEPTION OF NATURE IS, ITSELF, PROFOUNDLY SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED.

basis for difference of 'race' exists), and supports the notion of the 'survival of the fittest'. It is this last, distorted interpretation of animal survival and evolution, that has helped to fund ideologies that enable the mistreatment and eradication of peoples deemed not to be fit enough for society. In the past, this has included gays, blacks, Asians, Gypsies, political dissidents and Jews. Another tendency supported by the legacy of environmentalism's history is that of some 'Deep' ecologists, whose tendency towards the 'oneness' of human and non-human nature has led them to conveniently overlook the differences of privilege, access to basic resources and abilities between humans.

What Pagans might quite rightly take exception to in Staudenmaier's stand against ecofascism is his implication (and I stress implication rather than outright statement) that any form of mysticism associated with nature is automatically about 'Oneness' in the sense that he describes as 'fatal'. In this, he is perhaps no more culpable than many others in the business of theorizing around environmentalism. Ecofeminists, in particular, have become used to being 'written off' as poor, benighted and puddle-brained New Agers without a political bone between us. We have, in the past, been cast as actually *anti-feminist* and damaging to the cause of

environmentalism by those who generally don't stop to ask what we actually believe in, either spiritually or politically. The stable that Peter Staudenmaier comes from is replete with these sorts of assumptions. Explicit, punctilious and specific in every other way, and exhorting us all to do the same, environmental theorists are sadly lacking in these qualities if the issue of spirituality arises.

However, this should not prevent us from taking the more important points that Staudenmaier's study offers; it behoves us all to consider the implications of some of our pronouncements on Paganism's relationship with nature, in the light of the historical alliance between environmentalism and fascism.

Incidentally, the Thule Seminar is still going, and recruiting over the internet.

*Ann-Marie Gallagher
University of Central Lancashire*

KANTOLA ON CHAOS MAGICK,

I read Dave Green's article in the February 2001 issue with great interest. Comments were solicited from practitioners of chaos magick, but perhaps you'd be willing to hear from adherents to the other religion discussed in his paper: the cult of science.

Mr Green and I are in complete agree-

ment that science and religion can and should peacefully coexist. It is no surprise that science, as a human endeavor, can function as a gateway to numinous experience. The complicated interrelationships and orderly underpinnings of natural phenomena, explicated in detail through careful observation, can certainly serve to underscore the miracle and wonder of the universe within, throughout, and around us. Indeed, in my case, it was my doctoral work in the hard sciences which led me to nature religion and subsequently to neopaganism.

From this perspective, then, it was troubling to see that this article was rooted in and promoted many misconceptions about the practice and observations of science. Perhaps this is not surprising, since the reference list is heavily tilted toward popular works which enliven science through imaginative treatment. Such writings are a joy to read and, at best, are an enticement to delve more deeply into their intriguing topics, but to base scholarship upon them is dicey—akin, perhaps, to Arthurian scholarship which uses *The Mists of Avalon* as a primary text.

For example, Mr Green joins a crowd of writers who invoke the wonderful field of quantum mechanics as something of a metaphysical "free pass", a logical loophole which renders anything and everything possible, a scientifically credible-sounding excuse for bypassing intellectual obstacles. Surely the author appreciates the irony that the truly ultimate "reductionist science" (single particles! single photons! regarding matter and energy solely in mathematical terms!) is used in an attempt to discredit other "reductionist" scientific disciplines.

One of the tenets of quantum mechanics which somehow escapes metaphysical attention is that as the system under study reaches macroscopic dimensions, the behavior converges to the classical (*ie*, Newtonian, "mechanistic") result. "Macroscopic" here means several orders of magnitude smaller than the smallest subcellular structure in your smallest brain cell. Recalling a phrase from Dave Lee quoted in the article, it would make more sense to predict a similarity between the behavior of milkshakes and that of brains, because both are composed of water, fats, sugars and protein, than to predict that your central nervous system is going to manifest any of that groovy behavior described by the math in quantum mechanics.

I could (and would!) quibble all day about details ("science ... justifies ... its most loathesome features, such as the technological features of warfare"). Instead, I'll proudly state that I place my faith, to use Mr. Green's operative word, in the worldview that made possible the computer on which I write, the agriculture that produced my breakfast, the medical technology which saved my daughter's life. Engage in language games however you may; in my view, "Epistemological, ... postmodern and late modern critiques" have "dented the intellectual credibility of science" about as much as a text by Foucault would dent the hull of a 747.

Seekers are invited and encouraged to revel in the Scientific Mysteries. Initiation is available, at moderate cost, at your local college or university. *Modern Physics* by Tipler (Paul A., NOT Frank J.) or *Quantum Chemistry* by McQuarrie are great undergraduate texts and are strongly recommended. Should upper-

MR GREEN JOINS A CROWD OF
WRITERS WHO INVOKE THE
WONDERFUL FIELD OF QUANTUM
MECHANICS AS SOMETHING OF A
METAPHYSICAL "FREE PASS", A LOGICAL
LOOPHOLE WHICH RENDERS ANYTHING
AND EVERYTHING POSSIBLE ...

division chemistry and physics courses which explore quantum mechanics not appear in the curriculum, it's probably not (as the *Templum Nigri Solis* postulates) because the administrators fear to challenge the orthodox view of the universe, but rather that enrollment is too low for classes with so many hard science prerequisites.

Angeline Kantola
University of Washington

PEARSON ON MURRAY:

For anyone who's interested, I mentioned in my article in *The Pom* #14 that Sylvia Townsend Warner may have read Murray's *Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921). Further research has revealed not only that she had read it, but that she also 'took tea' with Murray just after the publication of *Lolly Willows* and said 'I wish I could be in her (Murray's) coven—perhaps I shall be!' Obviously, that's not evidence that Murray was in, or had, a coven! When Townsend Warner later met up with Virginia Woolf, Woolf asked her how she came to know so much about witches and she replied, 'because I am one!' Proves nothing, but fun nonetheless!

Jo Pearson

PANGAIA



Earthwise
Spirituality
for the
21st Century

80 pages to feed your soul in every
issue. Free sample upon request,
visit us at www.pangaia.com
P O Box 641, Pt. Arena, CA 95468
877-PANGAIA, (877-726-4242.)



The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



Readers' Forum

Jo Pearson on Margaret Murray
Daniel Cohen on Entheogens
More on that Atlantic Monthly article

1

Ronald Hutton

A Modest Look at Ritual Nudity
An excerpt from an upcoming book on Wiccan origins

4

Nick Freeman

'The Terror of Unseen Things':
Saki and the fin-de-siècle Pagan Revival

20

Sîân Reid

Two Souls in One Body:
Ethical and Methodological Implications
of Studying What You Know

34

Christine Rhone

Weather Magic and Global Warming

40

Book Reviews

45

Philip Heselton's *Wiccan Roots*
Review by Juliette Wood

Leonard Shlain's *The Goddess and the Alphabet*
Review by Brian Hayden

Helen Berger's *A Community of Witches*
Review by Sîân Reid

Morganna Davies & Aradia Lynch's *Keepers of the Flame*
Review by Stephanie Martin

Judy Harrow's *Wiccan Covens*
Review by Fritz Muntean



The Pomegranate

Copyright
© 2001 *The Pomegranate*. In every case,
copyright returns to the authors of articles
and letters. Permission to reprint must be
granted by these writers,
and we will be happy
to forward your requests.

ISSN 1528-0268 refers to this Journal.

Subscriptions:
4 issues: US\$20 — 8 issues: US\$37.50
by surface mail anywhere.
Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds,
or Checks drawn on US banks to
The Pomegranate
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019
Subs email: thepom@cascadeaccess.com

Submissions:
Our readers are both scholars and
nonscholars. We seek submissions
written in language that is
engaging, clear, and jargon-free.
See the inside back cover for further details

Deadline for submissions:
the Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.

The Cover:
Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874

General Editor:
Fritz Muntean

Business Manager:
Diana Tracy

Managing Editor:
Chas S. Clifton,
University of Southern Colorado, Pueblo

Editorial Assistance:
Melissa Hope
Siân Reid

Board of Editorial Consultants:
Vivianne Crowley,
Heythrop College, University of London
Douglas Ezzy,
University of Tasmania
Adrian Ivakhiv,
University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh
Jo Pearson,
The Open University
Sarah Pike,
California State University, Chico

The Pomegranate: The Journal of Pagan Studies is published for the interdisciplinary study of contemporary and classical Pagan religions, including Wicca, Witchcraft, Druidism, Ásatrú, Odinism, as well as other forms of revived and diaspora Paganism. We welcome articles and essays from historians of religion, environmental historians, social scientists, and independent writers and scholars whose work engages or is informed by current academic research.

The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.

JO PEARSON WRITES:

Editors' note: Jo Pearson continues her commentary on Sylvia Townsend Warner and Margaret Murray, begun in her article "Wicca, Esotericism and Living Nature" (Pom 14: 4-15) and in her letter to our Readers' Forum (16: 56):

Another influence on Sylvia Townsend Warner was Pitcairn's *Trials of Scotland*, in which the account of the witch trials was of particular import. Pitcairn had stressed that 'the actual speech of the accused impressed upon me that these witches were witches for love; that witchcraft was more than Miss Murray's Dianic cult; it was the romance of their hard lives, their release from dull futures' (ibid.: 1989: 59). This something Townsend Warner was certainly trying to get across about women's lives in the early 20th century, though we may now argue with any definition of witchcraft as a mere escape from hard lives and dull futures!!! Nevertheless, I would argue that there is still some truth in that, though it should be looked at more positively, in terms of empowerment, who needs it, and where they find/get it. But that's another issue.

The reference [in Prof Pearson's earlier posting] is to Harman, Claire (1989), *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography*,

London: Chatto and Windus, which is where I dug out this information.

Jo Pearson
The Open University

DANIEL COHEN WRITES:

I've just read Chas Clifton's article in *The Pomegranate* 16. It brings to mind a question that has interested me for some time.

There is a psilocybin mushroom (*psilocybe semilanceata*, known as the Liberty Cap mushroom) which is so common in the British Isles that there have been regular 'psilocybin festivals'. Because they grow naturally, picking and eating them is legal, and the natural process of drying them in the sun may (I am not sure) also be legal. Anything like oven-drying counts as processing and immediately becomes illegal.

Despite its prevalence, I have never seen any mention of this mushroom in herbals and magical writings. I would like to know why. I can think of several possible reasons, but I have no evidence for any of them. Among the possible reasons are:

1. That I have not read enough sources. That's certainly true as regards old texts, but I have read a lot of modern magical works and (as in your article) it has not been mentioned.
- 1a. That modern writers know of this mushroom (by now, that must be true), but, because of its prevalence and harmlessness, have not mentioned it for fear of being accused of promoting drug use.
2. That it is a comparatively recent import and did not exist in the British Isles when the herbals were written. If this is true I don't know how one would find out. It's not particularly likely to be mentioned as a new arrival in any writings about the country.
3. That its uses were not known to the old writers. That seems very unlikely, considering the knowledge of other plants and

fungi. It's also fairly common in continental Europe, according to the books on fungi that I've looked at. Incidentally, it would be interesting to know how the current knowledge came about.

4. That its use was known but was a genuine secret, never disclosed.

I tend to go for this last explanation, because it is the most romantic, in the absence of any evidence for other possibilities.

On a vaguely related topic, I've felt for a long time that there would be a really interesting research project (not for me, though) on looking at strange ingredients in magical recipes and comparing them with vernacular names of plants. Then, perhaps, someone could test for efficacy! As an example, I was once asked where to buy adder's tongues, and was able to point out that adder's tongue is a type of fern.

Daniel Cohen
London

JILL ADIX WRITES:

I received a copy of *The Pomegranate's* issue 16 in the mail and was pleased to have been made aware of this publication and its format. I have recently concluded my master's degree from Antioch University, Yellow Springs, OH in Psychology and Womens' Studies, and with that behind me I am able to devote more time to my individual reading choices as opposed to volumes at a time. However, after I read some of the articles in your publication I find myself perplexed over some of the discussions that are transpiring within this format. Since you are interested in additional insights I have decided to offer mine to the turmoil.

First, the discussion regarding the article in the *Atlantic Monthly* by Charlotte Allen and her insights into the goddess spirituality movement of which she mentions and critiques Starhawk, her published works, and her involvement or commitment to the movement itself, are of

concern to me. I offer as my defense my perception of the understanding, or lack thereof, that Ms Allen suggests regarding the material and its intent. The comments are somewhat similar to the response letter that Starhawk, herself, wrote.

Any scholar (seeker) should realize that when involving oneself in a particular theoretical discussion or research project that there are going to be discrepancies and differences of opinions regarding the "factual" evidence. Furthermore, tangled within there is the problem of what is considered actually "factual" and from what source the facts are derived. As Starhawk mentions, Ms Allen used references from books that Starhawk had written 20 years ago. And then Mr York's comment—that our words of early writings are to come back to haunt us—appears as a slap in the face to anyone who strives to be involved in the continued evolving of one's mind and opinions as one ages and becomes more diverse and enlightened in one's understanding of life and its many elements. Would Henry Ford be held responsible (chastized) for not including power steering and brakes in the first automobiles he made? Do we fault Thomas Alva Edison for the current electrical power problems of the California area? These two examples show the results of the expansion off/from the original theory. As additional aspects of the original theory became known to diverse observers or researchers' inclusions and expansions on the original theory's format may be realized, notwithstanding that all inclusions are not for the best or supportive of the original intent.

With this in mind, as students of the world and life we look to our own involvements and perceptions for examples and referencing. I know for one that I did not know in fourth grade how to do logarithms in math or anything about the new math that now is the part of an accepted teaching curriculum. For one, I was too young and the other had not been "invented" as yet. But if we use restricting

... FROM WHOM DID MS ALLEN GET HER RESEARCH INFORMATION? IT WOULD NOT APPEAR THAT SHE THOROUGHLY RESEARCHED THE GODDESS MOVEMENT ... OR ITS PARTICIPANTS BUT RELIED ON THE UNDERSTANDING AND BELIEFS OF OUTSIDERS.

conditions as prescribed by Mr York (haunting words), does this mean I am wrong now if I learn anew, expand my capabilities, or learn from my mistakes? The point being that as we go, we grow, hopefully.

Yet, is that in fact what is happening? It would not appear so.

With the rejection of materials that are controversial or contrary to the accepted norm, or the opinion of only one theoretical paradigm, a methodology that is controlling and one-sided emerges, it would seem. That is the problem that seems to be a part in Ms Allen's understanding of the "goddess movement", it is not only one theory nor is it one of a female dominated religion, theory, premise, or practice. The goddess movement, as with Wicca, holds to a shared position, ie, Riane Eisler's term partnership way. The Wiccan belief promotes a shared theology that exists between/among the two: male and female, yin and yang, light and dark, etc. It is not one, that is of itself, otherwise there would be no other. This separation makes for comparison/contrast to a one, not to control or dominate, but to co-operate.

The theology that has emerged within the Judeo-Christian motifs is seen from what appears as a western Indo-European cultural based practice which was focused on the sun/son, hero/god motif. Making the sun/son the dominator/god theme excluding other gods

and goddesses in its wake. While pagans, which includes Wiccans, Native Americans, Astrau, Druids, etc, have come to understand and utilize the male/female duality with its varied aspects. An attempt is then made to realize and actualize this duality within ourselves as well as others. The diversity and complexities of universality with all its ramifications is sought. This is often done in motifs that are familiar and related to our own individual conscious knowledge. Due to each of us being an individual as well as a part of the whole, each experience is individual to the participant and still a part of the whole. Carl Jung used the term archetype to attempt to define these motifs.

Ms Allen seems to misunderstand the premise of Wicca and the goddess movement as a female dominated sect, which is not my understanding of the pathway, of which I for one am personally involved in.

For me the concept of the archetype relates to a symbolic understanding of a much more elaborate and complex ideology allowing for the diversity and understanding of the potentiality of more than one possibility. The son/sun hero/god theology does not exemplify the male/female motif as a partnership or shared relationship, which is a point in many goddess circles rites, where there is an honoring an acceptance of the yin/yang in each and all.

continued on page 55

A Modest Look at Ritual Nudity

by Ronald Hutton
University of Bristol

This article is an excerpt from an upcoming book on Wiccan origins. It has been lightly edited for brevity; lacunae are clearly indicated by ellipses.

In the spring of 1990 I concluded the writing of a book on what was known of the pagan religions of the ancient British Isles, with a section which drew a series of comparisons and contrasts between those religions and the set which made up modern British paganism. One of the differences which I suggested specifically concerned the religion of modern pagan witchcraft, called Wicca: that 'no known cult in the ancient world was carried on by devotees who all worshiped regularly in the nude', as some varieties of Wiccan certainly do.¹ I would not subsequently have used the word 'cult' in this context, for although it was employed here to refer to specific forms of ancient religion for which it might well be valid, it could create confusion by seeming by extension to include Wicca itself. In a later publication I was to look more closely at these formulations and declare that Wicca was more complex than cults, and deserved to be distinguished from them as a full-blown religion.² Since 1990, I have also had further opportunity to reflect upon the rest of that statement. On the one hand, the more that I knew of other magico-religious practices, the more convinced I

became that my wording had been essentially correct: that Wicca was remarkable in its use of ritual nudity. On the other, it became ever clearer to me that this single sentence represented an entirely inadequate consideration of the subject. This article sets out to substantiate both opinions.

First, it is necessary to look more fully at the place of nudity in Wicca itself. Wiccans themselves have traditionally supplied two justifications for its importance in their workings. One, which has regularly appeared in print for five decades,³ is that the body naturally releases a field of magical energy which clothes obstruct. The other, which I have often encountered in conversation, is that the nudity of all members of a coven reinforces a feeling of equality and democracy between them. Neither seem particularly satisfying to me. The first may well be a self-fulfilling justification, in that people who are used to being naked to work ritual magic would very probably feel disempowered if made to do it in robes or other dress. It is also true that there seems to be no easy means of evaluating the practical success of groups who practise magic in the nude against those who do not, whether magic is defined as a symbolic system, a means of self-transformation, or a process by which practical results can be achieved by the literal operation of apparently arcane power. What seems disturbing about the concept that clothed magicians are inherently second-rate is that it would consign to this inferior category the most famous and sophisticated societies for the practice of ritual magic which are known to history, including the Golden Dawn, the Stella Matutina, and the Ordo Templi Orientis. Both a sense of justice and common sense

[RITUAL NUDITY] CONVEYS A VERY POWERFUL SENSE THAT ... THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CIRCLE HAVE CAST OFF THEIR EVERYDAY SELVES AND LIMITATIONS AND ENTERED INTO A SPACE IN WHICH THE EXTRAORDINARY CAN BE ACHIEVED.

should run against such a conclusion. As for the idea that ritual nudity reinforces equality within groups, it encounters the problem that most Wiccan covens are organized according to a hierarchy of training and responsibility, with a single person or couple in clear overall charge. They may operate consensually, but are emphatically not based upon a principle of equality of membership.⁴ There may, however, be a symbolic truth in the statement, if a mutual state of nudity reinforces a sense of common purpose and identity among group members.

In a more recent book,⁵ I suggested from my personal acquaintance with Wiccans that there were two practical reasons for the persistence of the custom. One was that it demands a high degree of trust and confidence between members of a coven, and so provides a powerful test for the existence of harmony and unity, without which the rituals cannot be effectively worked. The second was that, in combination with other components normally present, such as candlelight, incense, and music, it conveys a very powerful sense that something abnormal is going on; that the participants in the circle have cast off their everyday selves and limitations and entered into a space in which the extraordinary can be

achieved. If the experience generates a degree of nervousness—which is initially the case for most people—then this can have the effect of increasing their sensitivity and receptivity and so call forth more powerful ritual performances from them.

None of these considerations, however, explain what ritual nudity is doing in Wicca in the first place. A straightforward answer to this question, which I have sometimes heard, is that it reflects the personal tastes of the individual who was certainly the first great publicist of the religion, and perhaps the main force in its conception: Gerald Gardner. There is no doubt that he was a convinced naturist, with an ardent belief in the physical, moral, and magical benefits of nudity,⁶ and left to itself this could indeed make a complete explanation. The latter appears trivial, however, if a step back is taken and this aspect of Wicca is examined in relation to all its other characteristics, as manifested when it first appears at the end of the 1940s. It gave a particular value and emphasis to precisely those phenomena which Western societies had long feared or subordinated, honouring the night above the day, the moon above the sun, the feminine above the masculine, and wild nature above civilization,

**... SCULPTURES, VASE-PAINTINGS,
AND WALL ART ACROSS THE
MEDITERRANEAN ... SHOW A LOT OF
NAKED PEOPLE. [BUT] THERE IS OFTEN
NO APPARENT MEANS OF
DISTINGUISHING LITERAL FROM
MYTHOLOGICAL SCENES IN THESE WORKS.**

presenting itself as a form of paganism which made no compromises with Christianity, and holding up the figure of the witch for admiration and emulation. It was as a part of this package that nudity, traditionally used in those same societies most commonly as a symbol of shame and weakness, was turned into one of confidence and power. Its blatant presence in ritual was just one example of the way in which, during the middle decades of the 20th century, Wicca crashed the barriers of convention.⁷

All this has made the point, once again, that Wicca is very unusual. The problem now is to settle the question of exactly how unusual it is in the single respect of ritual nudity. There is no doubt that in this respect it was unique in the context of 20th century Western culture, but did it have ancient prototypes? A scholar moving into this area has few recent signposts. Most of the research into ritual nudity in general, and in ancient Europe and the Near East in particular, was carried out by German academics in the decades around 1900.⁸ The main book in the subject, published by J. Heckenbach in 1911, must have been one of the last academic works to be written entirely in Latin; the learned

author was clearly afraid that if he used any living language, then his subject matter might corrupt the unsophisticated and impressionable. These works argued for a large part for ritual nudity in ancient religion, although Heckenbach stretched the definition very widely to encompass (for example) the common notion that sanctuaries should be entered, or magical rites performed, barefoot.

In evaluating the evidence, any historian faces serious problems of interpretation. Some of these concern material remains. On the one hand, it is true that sculptures, vase-paintings, and wall art across the Mediterranean and the Near and Middle East show a lot of naked people. On the other, there is often no apparent means of distinguishing literal from mythological scenes in these works. In Graeco-Roman artistic convention, many gods, a few goddesses, many heroes, and many nymphs, were traditionally portrayed as naked or near-naked. This was one way in which they could be distinguished at a glance from ordinary humans. The occurrence of nudity in some scenes of Middle Eastern art likewise raises questions of metaphor. The rulers of Sumerian city-states are sometimes shown kneeling unclad before a deity. This may be a literal scene of

worship, but it may be an artistic expression of the comparative lowliness and humility of the human worshipper.⁹

Two particular examples from the Graeco-Roman tradition may serve to point up these difficulties. One consists of the celebrated paintings from the walls of the co-called Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii, which have been connected, from some of the symbolism incorporated, to the mystery religion of Bacchus or Dionysos. In a central scene, a young woman is shown dancing nude, and next to her another is crouched semi-nude over the lap of an older female who is apparently comforting her. She is being scourged by a tall figure, apparently male, who is aiming blows at her bare back. These reliefs have very commonly been interpreted as successive stages of a rite of initiation into the religion, but there is a glaring problem in doing so; the figure administering the beating has large wings. They may, of course, have been theatrical props donned by a human being for the rite, but they may also indicate that the whole assemblage belongs to the world of dream or myth.

The second example consists of an alabaster bowl of unknown date and provenance, with nude figures of seven males and nine females carved around a winged serpent or dragon in the interior. It also bears an inscription which seems to be a passage from a poem associated with another famous mystery cult, of Orpheus. In the 1930s it attracted the attention of three scholars working in the German academic tradition, who interpreted the internal scene as the representation of an actual rite of the cult, involving nude worshippers.¹⁰ This reading may be correct, but there are two major difficulties associated with it. The first is that

although the association between the object and the Orphic mysteries is arguable, it is not firmly proven. The second is that if such a connection exists, then the scene may be, once again, a symbolic rather than a literal one. The human figures may exist in the same realm as the serpent or dragon at the centre or the winged cupids carved on the exterior. One of the inscriptions refers to the creation of the world, and it is possible that the scene portrayed is related to that event.

These case-studies typify the problems of using material evidence in this field, and those relating to literary evidence are no simpler. Nobody ever seems to have tried to argue that the celebrants of the public and established religions of ancient Europe, North Africa, and the Near East undressed to take part in them. Some misunderstanding can be created by references to specific festivals. For example, the poet Ovid stated that the priests who ran around Rome striking at people with thongs on the feast of the Lupercalia were naked. Other contemporary sources prove that he was speaking economically; they were in fact attired in special girdles or loincloths of goatskin.¹¹ Another Roman poet, Martial, could challenge his reader with the question 'Who brings clothes to Flora's festival, and permits whores the modesty of a wrap?'. The implication, in context, is that such actions are absurd, and so at first sight this strongly suggests that the Floralia, the feast with which the Romans welcomed summer, was celebrated with nude rites. Again, a sufficiency of other testimony proves that Martial was referring not to the religious ceremonies but to the games and entertainments with which the festival had become associated, and which were

commonly provided by prostitutes. The younger Cato was so shocked by a striptease act in one of the theatrical performances that he stormed out of the auditorium.¹²

These potentially misleading texts still have their place in the historiography of the subject. They have taken their place among the pieces of evidence assembled by writers such as Heckenbach for a relatively widespread occurrence of ritual nudity in the ancient world. Furthermore, Ovid attributed the rituals of the Luperalia to a god whom he equated with the Greek Pan; a guess which has no basis in objective data, was not made by any other known Roman author, and is rejected by modern scholars.¹³ It is possible, however, that the influence of this famous passage, linking a rite of a horned god to nakedness, may have had some additional bearing on the adoption of the latter tradition by Wicca.

When these distractions are removed from the record, the latter still contains a few references to stark nakedness in the mainstream religions of the European and Near Eastern ancient world; but all seem to be associated with special rites of passage or consecration rather than regular worship. One example is provided by Ibn Fadlan's famous description of the cremation of a Viking chief upon the Volga river in the 920s. The man who lights the funeral pyre has to walk to it, bearing the torch both backwards and completely unclothed.¹⁴ The fact that he reverses the normal direction of movement as well as the normal mode of dress suggests that at that moment he is being set aside from the rest of humanity, and from the general nature of the world, to precipitate the dead man into a different realm. Likewise, the Greek geographer

Diodorus Siculus recorded that when a new 'Apis' bull was chosen to represent divinity in one of the state religions of Hellenistic Egypt, it was kept for forty days at the city of Nicopolis before being taken along the Nile to its shrine at Memphis. During this period it was guarded only by women, who exposed their bodies to it as a religious act.¹⁵ The significance of this was not reported by the ancient author, or not known to him, but if it really happened, then it was presumably linked to concepts of regeneration and fertility. The caution entered against unquestioning acceptance of the report as fact applies even more strongly to the customs reported by Graeco-Roman authors of people whom they regarded as barbarians. Into this category would fall the declaration by Pliny that at festivals of the native British their married women processed naked and painted black.¹⁶ It may be true, because it seems certain from classical sources that warriors of the tribes of north-western Europe sometimes dyed their bodies and rushed into battle naked. It may also be a titillating fable, brought back to Italy by somebody willing to have fun both at the expense of the Britons and of a credulous Roman audience. None of these cases approach the Wiccan tradition of regular ritual nudity for all participants, and they seem to provide the closest equivalents to be found in the official and public religions of the ancient world.

It has not been among these religions, however, that modern scholars have found most of their apparent evidence for the custom. The most productive hunting-ground has been among the mystery religions of the Graeco-Roman world, such as those of Dionysos and Orpheus

... RITUAL NUDITY HAD A PLACE IN ANCIENT EUROPEAN RELIGION AT CERTAIN KEY MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION, BUT ... ANY OTHER ROLE FOR IT IS UNPROVEN AND ... IT VANISHED FROM THE WESTERN RELIGIOUS TRADITION AT THE END OF ANTIQUITY.

mentioned above. In dealing with these, a cautious investigator faces an obvious problem; that the very nature of closed and secretive bodies of worshippers is to provoke curiosity, gossip, speculation, and slander among outsiders, and almost all the relevant sources are represented by writers who were not, or are not known to have been, initiates themselves. In making a link between Orphism and ritual nudity, one of the commentators upon the carved bowl discussed above quoted an early Christian bishop, Epiphanius, who asserted that the Orphic mysteries were particularly worthy of reproach because women were believed to appear in them naked.¹⁷ So indeed they may have done, but the testimony of a fervent protagonist of a rival religion, reporting hearsay while making a catalogue of false beliefs, is not the most reliable form of evidence.

The other two scholars to identify the bowl as an Orphic cult object fell back on Heckenbach for corroboration of an association between Orphism and nude rituals. He provided them with a line from the Athenian playwright Aristophanes: 'it is the custom for novices to enter unclothed'.¹⁸ This throwaway allusion is characteristic of the in-jokes which clutter Greek comedy. We have no certain knowledge of its meaning. It may

not refer to mystery religions at all, let alone to Orphism in particular, and if it did, then we have no evidence that Aristophanes was drawing upon accurate information, as opposed to rumour, concerning ritual practices. There is, moreover, a real possibility that it concerns an altogether different custom. One of the signs of the coming of adolescence to a Greek boy was that he was allowed both to put off the clothes of childhood and to strip naked to participate in the adult male world of the gymnasium. In some places the novice youths were called *ekdyomenoi*, 'those who undress'.¹⁹ This could have been Aristophanes's point.

Likewise, the great Graeco-Roman philosopher Plotinus asserted in one of his lectures that 'those who would rise through the degrees of the holy mysteries must cast aside their clothes and go forward naked'.²⁰ This may be a literal statement, or it may be a metaphor for the need for spiritual purity and candour. Another example of this sort of difficulty attends the women's mysteries celebrated at the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron in Greece, which were rites of passage for young women approaching the age of marriage. Vase-paintings suggest that for some of the time the girls were naked, but

**THE RECORDS FOR CHRISTIAN
UNORTHODOXY ... PROVE THAT RITUAL
NUDITY WAS AN OCCASIONAL CHARGE
USED BY THE ORTHODOX AGAINST
THEIR OPPONENTS, BUT NOT WHETHER
ANY OF THOSE OPPONENTS ACTUALLY
PRACTISED IT.**

again, these scenes may have had a symbolic or mythological significance.²¹

There is, however, good reason for believing that all of these three pieces of evidence may be accepted as references to ritual nudity in religious mysteries, but in a limited and specific capacity: rites of initiation, in which the postulant was completely undressed at the opening and then re clothed at the conclusion. There is a clear metaphor here of rebirth, and also an equally clear cultural context; that in the ancient Greek and Hellenistic world, the custom of a bath followed by dressing in new robes was not merely the usual purification of somebody about to engage in religious rites, but of anybody about to undergo a rite of passage, such as coming of age or marriage. Some Greek sanctuaries, such as that of Artemis Kranaia, had special bath-tubs for the priests. Before initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries, celebrants all bathed in the sea, although this seems to have taken place after dark and with some modesty; when the courtesan Phryne did so in full view of other participants, proud of her beauty, she got into serious trouble.²²

There are two very different items of source material which are good evidence for the occurrence of nudity in ancient initiation rites. One consists of a set of

wall-paintings at a Mithraeum at Capua in Italy. They show an initiation into this most famous of all the mystery religions of the Roman Empire, that of Mithras, and in every one the postulant is naked and blindfolded, while the person leading and directing him is clothed.²³ The other consists of records of ancient Judaic and Christian baptism. Under the Roman Empire, both Jews and Christians were noted for their dislike of the human body and their aversion to its display unclothed. The Greek gymnasia, in particular, disgusted them. This makes it all the more remarkable that contemporary testimony strongly suggests that converts to Judaism were baptized nude and makes it absolutely certain that Christians were.²⁴

Baptism into the early churches was very much a reception into a mystery religion. The postulant had to prepare for two years, and to enter an intensive period of fasting and prayer seven weeks before the event. The actual rite was a private one among a group of initiates, in which the postulant removed all her or his clothes, women loosing their hair as well, and was anointed at several points on the body with holy oil before being immersed in water and dressed anew in white. It was usually directed that in the case of the

baptism of a woman, another female should do the anointing; but if there was no other woman available then the whole process was in the hands of the priest. There is a cautionary tale of a Palestinian monk called Conan, who was asked to baptize a particularly beautiful woman and could not find a female Christian to help him. He fled in panic, only to intercepted by John the Baptist who appeared from heaven to deal with the crisis. John made the sign of the cross three times over Conan's genitals, rendering him permanently incapable of sexual desire; after which everything was fine. It is hard to believe that such a custom would have been incorporated into a religion which loathed and feared nudity as much as early Christianity, unless it was regarded as an indispensable, or at least common, part of initiations into mystery faiths.

All this data seems to be tending to a conclusion: that ritual nudity had a place in ancient European religion at certain key moments of transformation, but that any other role for it is unproven and that it vanished from the Western religious tradition at the end of antiquity. If this is so, then one significance of its presence in Wicca could be that the latter religion seeks to sustain throughout all its workings the intensity and transformative power of initiatory experiences. This may be so, the conclusion would be premature, for it ignores the association between mixed-sex nude rites and Christian heresy. Such rites were a recurrent theme of denunciations by orthodox churchmen of deviant sort of Christian from the second to the 17th centuries. It must be admitted that it was not a very common theme. Heretics were mostly, and persistently, accused of devil-

worship, cannibalism, sexual orgies, incest, and child sacrifice.²⁵ It must be thought that in that catalogue nudity would be such a tame or incidental item as to be hardly worth mentioning. This can, none the less, be argued the opposite way; that those few cases where it is included may be the more significant.

The trouble with those cases is that none of them are supported by the two sorts of source-material which give real insights into the beliefs of the unorthodox: writings produced by heretics themselves, or confessions provided by them under interrogation and deposited in legal archives. They are found instead in accusations made against aberrant traditions by churchmen determined to blacken their reputations, who may have had no first-hand knowledge of them. This phenomenon, and its attendant difficulties, has already been encountered in the case of Epiphanius and the Orphic mysteries. The same bishop is found again, in a different work, accusing the closed, quasi-Christian sect of the Barbelo Gnostics of enacting certain rites in which the initiates were 'completely nude'.²⁶ An episcopal colleague of his, Hippolytus, denounced members of another Gnostic sect, the Naasenes, for allegedly holding a nocturnal ceremony by firelight, in which the worshippers, all men, 'must undress and become as bridegrooms' to a female entity representing one form of an indivisible supreme deity.²⁷ There are also references to the Adamni, a small group of Gnostics who were believed both to live and to worship naked—an ancient naturist club. All these references are from the south-eastern end of the Mediterranean, and there is a single one from the opposite corner; the Synod of

Saragossa in 380 condemned the Spanish heresy of Priscillianism because (among other things) its members reputedly read and interpreted the Bible in the nude.²⁸

...
The records for Christian unorthodoxy, therefore, prove that ritual nudity was an occasional charge used by the orthodox against their opponents, but not whether any of those opponents actually practised it. It is not surprising that it became associated at times with the supreme heresy of the later Middle Ages and early modern period, the newly-identified religion of satanic witchcraft. From the early 15th to the early 18th centuries some churchmen and lay magistrates made a speciality of describing the characteristics of this religion and trying those accused of adhering to it. For the purposes of the present enquiry, it is remarkable how little attention they paid to the role of nudity in the rites and festivals attributed to witches. Thumbing through the classic texts of demonologists in the period—the 15th century *Formicarius* and *Malleus Maleficarum*, and the later works of Jean Bodin, Martin del Rio, Henri Bouguet, Nicholas Remy and Pierre de Lancre—a historian finds little or no reference to the practice. Nor does it feature much in the confessions extracted from alleged witches. This may, again, be a matter of priority, for the scholars and magistrates were most interested in the more spectacular aspects of the religion which they were attempting to eradicate, which were the familiar litany of accusations made against earlier heretics, of devil-worship, child-sacrifice, sexual orgies, to which was added the making of magic to destroy and injure other humans. It is interesting, however, that when nudity is mentioned, it some-

times echoes the ancient tradition of initiation into mysteries. For example, a woman interrogated in 1480 at Calcinato in northern Italy claimed that when she made her pact with the Devil, she did so nude and kneeling.³³

By contrast, the nudity of witches is a very prominent feature of the art of the period, especially that of northern Europe and above all of Germans. From the opening of the 16th century, artists regularly portrayed witches attending the sabbat and casting spells as unclad. This may have been a reflection of the fact that most of the alleged practices of the witch religion on which the demonologists concentrated did not lend themselves to respectable representation in works of art. To paint or draw witches nude may have been an easy way of representing their essential depravity. It may matter more, however, that to portray witches was one of the very few socially sanctioned ways in which artists in Germany in particular could express the female nude. It must be significant in this context that the first notable artist thought to represent the nude witch, Albrecht Durer, used poses drawn ultimately from ancient depictions of pagan goddesses. It is not even absolutely certain that he ever depicted witches at all. Of his two works normally placed in this category, one shows four women posed in attitudes taken directly from classical representations of the Graces, and may portray the three goddesses of the Judgement of Paris receiving the apple of discord. The other, showing an old woman riding on a goat or capricorn, echoes a medieval figure commonly used to personify lust, and taken in turn from an ancient iconic pose of Aphrodite or Venus.³⁴

There is no doubt, however, of the

... ONE OF THE MORE COMMON AND WIDELY-DISPERSED BELIEFS OF THE HUMAN RACE IS THAT WORKERS OF EVIL MAGIC OPERATE NAKED, AS PART OF THEIR GENERAL SYMBOLIC FUNCTION OF BREAKING THE RULES OF CONVENTIONAL HUMAN BEHAVIOUR.

identity as witches of some of the women portrayed by two of Durer's pupils, Albrecht Altdorfer and Hans Baldung Grien, probably inspired by sermons upon the witch religion preached in the city of Strasbourg, where they worked, during the 1500s. Grien in particular made them into one of the main themes of his work, and famously used it to conflate the image of the female body with associations of sin and menace to turn it into a diabolical vessel in itself. His obsessive treatment of it in this way may have been rooted in his own psyche, but it may also have been provoked by the epidemic of syphilis then sweeping Europe. Whatever the reason, his influence seems to have been decisive in ensuring that for the rest of the century, the primary concern of artists engaged in portrayals of witchcraft was not the emphasis on the devil as the source of witches' power, made by the literary demonologists, but on the moral and sexual disorder represented by the unclad female body.³⁵ Even when Satan became more prominent in the genre, the convention of nudity remained. When Pierre de Lancre produced his celebrated book on the witch religion in 1611, he placed no emphasis on the state of dress of witches at the sabbat, preferring instead such

details as their reversal of social norms by such customs as dancing back to back. When the second edition appeared, two years later, it was decorated with a very elaborate engraved frontispiece of a sabbat by a Polish artist, Jan Ziarnko, which incorporated all the features described by de Lancre and added nudity for the celebrants.³⁶ This provided some of the most famous images of witchcraft to emerge from the whole early modern period, and helped to reinforce an artistic tradition of the naked witch which was to continue steadily through the work of major later figures such as Goya, and persists until the present.

The question of whether early modern witches actually worked naked is rendered a non sequitur by the total absence of evidence for any actual witch religion in the period; the satanic cult of the demonologists does seem to have been a complete fantasy. The single emergence into anything like reality seems to be in the Affair of the Poisons in late 17th century France, when one of the mistresses of Louis XIV apparently allowed a Black Mass to be performed over the naked body of a woman with the aim of securing her power over her royal lover.³⁷ Even this, however, is still a long way from a tradition of ritual nudity

... THE PLACE OF NUDITY IN WICCA IS
DEPENDENT NOT SO MUCH ON ITS
CHARACTER AS A COUNTER-CULTURAL
RELIGION ... AS ON ITS CHARACTER AS A
MAGICAL RELIGION. ... WICCA
SELF-CONSCIOUSLY DISSOLVES THE
TRADITIONAL EUROPEAN DISTINCTION
BETWEEN RELIGION AND MAGIC.

among worshippers. The only text before the 20th century, in fact, which makes it a general rule for witches at their rites is the very late and utterly unique one, Charles Godfrey Leland's purported gospel of witchcraft, *Aradia*. This states unequivocally, and famously, that 'as the sign that ye are truly free, ye shall be naked in your rites, both men and women also'.³⁸ It is notoriously hard, however³⁹, to determine how far *Aradia* actually reflects a genuine peasant tradition, let alone a genuine witch religion. As a result, this strange work of the 1890s cannot yet be used as any conclusive evidence for the matter.

There is one slight indication, however, that in the matter of ritual nudity a real popular tradition may underpin both or either the passage in Leland's text and the artistic convention descending from the 16th century. This is that the few references to it in the early modern records seem to derive from reports by common people. For example, the famous work of demonology by del Rio contains an anecdote set near Calais in 1587, where two soldiers claimed to have shot a naked woman out of a fast-moving cloud. She turned out to be middle-aged, very fat, and very drunk,

and only slightly wounded; and refused to answer any questions. They assumed her to have been a witch⁴⁰. Likewise, children who claimed to have attended sabbats during a panic about witchcraft at the German city of Augsburg in the 1723 asserted that these meetings were full of naked people.⁴¹ It is possible, of course, that by these dates popular culture had already been influenced by the artistic tradition, mass-marketed through woodcuts. There may also be a functional explanation for the belief; that many people of the time slept naked, and witches were presumed to travel to sabbats direct from their beds. The European material alone provides no resolution of this problem.

... It might be suggested again, therefore, that Wicca boldly goes where no religions have gone before, either by taking a Christian stereotype of bad behaviour and giving it positive connotations, or by investing the whole of its workings with the intensity and transformative effect of rites of passage, or by giving all its participants the empowering status normally associated only with liminal figures representing spirits or deities. It might be suggested, but this hypothesis would once

again be premature, for there is another dimension to the subject which has hitherto been neglected in this study, and which must be recognised now. It is based upon the fact that in every inhabited continent of the world there are peoples who have believed in the figure to whom the English traditionally give the name of witch. That is, a human being who works secret and malevolent magic against other members of the same community or district from motives of pure malice, and in a hidden tradition passed on by inheritance, training, or contact with evil powers.⁴⁸ All over the world, likewise, peoples who have believed in this figure have also often believed that witches work naked.

...

It can therefore be suggested that the nude witch is a very widespread and powerful cultural stereotype. Whether it was ever translated into practice among these extra-European peoples is a difficult question to answer. Certainly most of the actions of role-reversal ascribed to the witch-figure, such as riding on dangerous wild beasts or flying, were flatly impossible in nature. It is possible, however, that people sometimes took on other traits of the figure in order to work destructive magic, including nudity. ... All of these stories may well be products of fantasy or error; but they need not be. What cannot be doubted is the strength of the stereotypical image.

Once again it seems possible to work towards a conclusion: that one of the more common and widely-dispersed beliefs of the human race is that workers of evil magic operate naked, as part of their general symbolic function of breaking the rules of conventional human

behaviour. Again also, it seems possible to credit Wiccans with investing that symbolic function with positive qualities, and its worldwide distribution strengthens a characterization of Wicca as a counter-cultural religion par excellence. Once more, however, a conclusion would be premature, for the most revealing way of putting this image of the witch into perspective is to take a sideways step, into the broader world of operative magic.

Here I am putting my weight behind a wholly traditional distinction between religious and magical activities, one used by many anthropologists and most ancient historians until recently, but first formulated by the ancient Greeks and built into subsequent Western culture.⁵⁷ According to this, in acts of religion the human being is essentially a supplicant, asking the divine for favours and then wholly dependent on the divine will for results. In acts of magic the human being has some measure of operative control over the result, at the least by an arcane understanding of the mechanisms of the natural world, and at most by compelling superhuman entities. In holding to this distinction, I do not deny that religion and magic represent different points on a spectrum or overlapping phenomena rather than two different and opposed forms of activity. I do not deny that acts of magic often take place in religious contexts, and vice-versa, and I certainly do not suggest that magic is in some way inherently inferior to religion, or that the distinction between the two need necessarily apply to non-European cultures. I just find that this distinction works well in certain contexts, and one of them happens to be that of ritual nudity. Acts of magic, after all, represent ritual applied to special and extraordinary occasions,

requiring a shift of consciousness or a redefinition of being, every bit as much as rites of passage. It should not be a surprise, therefore, to find that nudity plays a prominent part in them.

It features in what is still the best-known text in Western culture, the Bible, where Saul 'stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, is Saul also among the prophets?' Here one of the most famous kings of the Hebrews is apparently transforming his status from monarch to prophet, on being possessed by 'the Spirit of God', by the simple act of removing the garments which indicate his familiar status. This interpretation is reinforced by the parallel account of the prophet Isaiah walking 'naked and barefoot three years for a sign', putting off all the clothing which symbolically attached him to the world in the manner of an Indian fakir.⁵⁸ Such texts had a significant impact upon later, Bibliocentric, Christians: there may be no conclusive evidence of nude worship among Christian sects, but it is absolutely certain that in the years 1653-55 at least a dozen of the first English Quaker missionaries preached naked in public places in imitation of Isaiah and as a challenge to worldly and materially-minded attitudes.⁵⁹ It may also have been that they believed that the act of undressing would itself facilitate contact with divine revelation, a conclusion which could be drawn from these Biblical passages.

The same motif is found in ancient Greek and Roman literature, where certain potent herbs are specified as to be picked by a naked person operating at night, to maximize or supercharge their power.⁶⁰ Pliny described a cure for an

abscess consisting of a poultice applied by a nude virgin woman speaking a particular charm to Apollo three times⁶¹. The fact that she had to fast beforehand as well as be naked and virginal suggests that her state of dress was part of a package of purity which set her apart from the corruptions of the world. Nudity also occurs in medieval and early modern European accounts of magic. In particular, it was supposed to be employed by young women in solitary spells and charms by which they sought either to find a husband in general or to win the heart of a particular man. Several appear in collections of 16th century charms.

...

It may be wise to suppose that different symbolic systems might well be in operation across this range of examples. In some of them, the connotations of reversal are apparently most important in the significance of the nudity, while in others those of sexuality and fertility seem to be paramount. What appears to link all together, however, is the sense of the empowerment of an ordinary human being by the act of removing the garments by which she or he is usually recognised or familiar. This is not very far from one major function suggested earlier for the practice in Wicca; of separating off the participant from the everyday world. It may, in fact, be identical. In this perspective, therefore, the place of nudity in Wicca is dependent not so much on its character as a counter-cultural religion, apparent though that is, as on its character as a magical religion. As I have argued elsewhere,⁷³ Wicca self-consciously dissolves the traditional European distinction between religion and magic.

...

Wicca is not then unique in this respect, although it is unusual. In having this particular feature, it does not seem to have been responding to the views of one man, or to certain functional benefits, or even to the impulse to challenge cultural norms in a modern or postmodern context. It is, rather, in a tradition of magical activity which is not merely ancient but virtually worldwide. In reaching this conclusion I have had recourse to a methodology, of prising information from context in a wide variety of historical and ethnographic sources, which is regarded with disquiet in related scholarly disciplines and runs counter to prevailing techniques in them. During the past thirty years historians have tended even more than before to specialize in a particular period of time, to understand it as thoroughly as possible, and to learn how its political, social, economic, and cultural characteristics inter-related. In the same span of time, anthropologists have generally emphasized the primacy of a close and discrete studies of particular societies, and the dangers of attempting to translate concepts between cultures and languages. There is no doubt that these approaches produce excellent results, and that the perils against which they warn, of facile comparisons between decontextualized data, are very real. None the less, it may be suggested that there are some historical and anthropological problems which cannot be adequately treated by a monographic approach alone, and which are best approached by a broad and comparative method. This essay has been offered as an example of that contention.

ENDNOTES:

1. Ronald Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 337.
2. Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: a history of modern pagan witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 410.
3. Gerald Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider, 1954), pp. 19-24; Justine Glass, *Witchcraft: The Sixth Sense—and Us* (London: Spearman, 1965), p. 101; Patricia and Arnold Crowther, *The Witches Speak* (Douglas: Athol, 1965), p. 148; Doreen Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* (London: Hale, 1978), pp. 98-99; Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 60; Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Life and Times of a Modern Witch* (London: Piatkus, 1987), pp. 85-92; Vivianne Crowley, *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age* (London: Aquarian, 1989), pp. 59-60.
4. Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, p. 407.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 399.
6. Plain in his ghosted autobiography, Jack Bracelin, *Gerald Gardner: Witch* (London: Octagon, 1960).
7. Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 205-40.
8. K. Weinhold, 'Zur Geschichte des Heidenischen Ritus', *Abhandlungen d. Kon. Acad. D. Wissenschaften zu Berlin 1896* (philohist. Kl.), no. 1, pp. 1-50; J. Heckenbach, *De Nuditate Sacrisque Vinculis* (Giessen: Topelmann, 1911), pp. 1-63.
9. Cf. H.W.F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1962), pp. 28, 182.
10. R. Delbrueck and W. Vollgraff, 'An Orphic Bowl', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 54 (1934), pp. 129-39; Hans Leisgang, 'The Mystery of the Serpent' (1939), repr. in Joseph Campbell (ed.), *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (Princeton University Press: Bollingen Yearbooks xxx.2, 1955), pp. 194-260.
11. H.H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), pp. 76-78. Ovid's account is in his *Fasti*, II. 267-440.

12. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies*, pp. 110-11. Martial's comment is in his *Epigrams*, I.35.8.
13. Such as Scullard, at n. 11 above.
14. The passage is translated in G. Jones, *A History of the Vikings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 425-30.
15. Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, I.85.3. By contrast, the description by Herodotus, of a similar gesture employed by women en route to the religious festival at Bubastis in the Nile delta, seems to belong to a different category. In his account, they formed part of groups of revellers travelling to the festivities by boat along the river and making merry as they went. When they passed a riverside town, some of the women exposed their genitals to the inhabitants as one of a number of gestures which also included the shouting of mockery at local females. The context seems therefore to be one of ribaldry and playful insult rather than of piety; the equivalent of the modern 'flashing' or 'mooning'. The festival at Bubastis was both the biggest in Egypt at that time and particularly associated with drunkenness: Herodotus, *Histories*, II.60.20.
16. Pliny, *Natural History*, XXII.2.
17. Leisgang, 'The Mystery of the Serpent', p. 254; the quotation is from Epiphanius, *Catholicae et Apostolicae Ecclesiae Fidei Expositio*, 10.
18. Delbrueck and Vollgraaf, 'An Orphic Bowl', p. 132; Heckenbach, *De Nuditate*, p. 13; Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, line 498.
19. Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 29; and *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p. 261.
20. Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.7.
21. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 263.
22. Ibid., p. 78. For Phryne's famous adventures and misadventures, see Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, XIII.590-91.
23. M.J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, The Secret God* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), pp. 131-33.
24. This and what follows is based on Jonathan Z. Smith, 'The Garments of Shame', *History of Religions* 5 (1965-66), pp. 217-38; and Margaret A. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), pp. 37-49.
25. For which see Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (Falmer: Sussex University Press, 1975), pp. 1-125, and sources cited there.
26. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, XXVI.5.
27. Hippolytus, *Elenchos*, V.8.41-43.
28. David Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 257-58.
33. Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, p. 260.
34. Peter Streider, *Durer: Paintings, Prints, Drawings* (London: Muller, 1982), pp. 182-84; Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (London: Murray, 1956), pp. 315-16; Charles Zika, 'Durer's witch, riding women and moral order', in Dagmar Eichberger and Charles Zika (ed.), *Durer and his Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 118-40.
35. Zika, 'Durer's witch', pp. 131-40; Charles Zika, 'She-man: Visual representations of witchcraft and sexuality in 16th-century Europe', in Andrew Lynch and Philippa Maddern (ed.), *Venus and Mars* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1995), pp. 147-90; Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 323-35; Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, pp. 125-39.
36. Pierre de Lancre, *Tableau de L'Inconstance des Mauvais Anges* (2nd ed., Paris, 1611).
37. Francois Ravaisson, *Archives de la Bastille* (Paris, 1873), 333-36.
38. Charles Godfrey Leland, *Aradia, Gospel of the Witches* (1990 reprint: Phoenix, WA: Custer, 1990), p. 7.
39. Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 141-48; Leland, *Aradia*, trans. Mario and Dina Pazzaglini (London: Hale, 1998).
40. Martin del Rio, *Investigations into Magic*, ed. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 197. See also p. 97 for a general comment that people were sometimes cited abroad without clothes and assumed to be travelling to or from the sabbat.
41. Lyndal Roper, 'Evil Imaginings and Fantasies: Child-Witches and the end of the Witch Craze', *Past and Present* 167 (May 2000), pp. 107-39.
48. For a full development of this perception, see Ronald Hutton, 'The Global Context of the Scottish Witch-Hunt', in Julian Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press).
49. John Beattie, 'Sorcery in Bunyoro', in John Middleton and E.H. Winter (ed.), *Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa* (London: Routledge, 1963), pp. 27-55; T.O. Beidelman, 'Witchcraft in Ukaguru', in Ibid., pp. 57-98; Robert F. Gray, 'Some Structural Aspects of Mbugwe Witchcraft', in Ibid., pp. 143-73; Robert A. LeVine, 'Witchcraft and Sorcery in a Gusii Community', in Ibid., pp. 221-55; E.H. Winter, 'The Enemy Within: Amba Witchcraft and Sociological Theory', in Ibid., pp. 277-99; R.G. Willis, 'Kamcape: An Anti-Sorcery Movement in South-West Tanzania', *Africa* 38 (1968), pp. 3-4; J.R. Crawford, *Witchcraft and Sorcery in Rhodesia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 26, 121; E. Jensen Krige and J.D. Krige, *The Realm of a Rain-Queen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), p. 251; Hugh A. Stayt, *The BaVenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 273-74; Harriet Ngubane, 'Aspects of Zulu Treatment', in J.B. Loudon (ed.), *Social Anthropology and Medicine* (London: Academic Press, 1976), p. 328; Gunter Wagner, *The Bantu of Western Kenya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 113; May Mandelbaum Edel, *The Chiga of Western Uganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 165; Isak A. Niehaus, 'Witch-Hunting and Political Legitimacy: Continuity and Change in Green Valley, Lebowa, 1930-91', *Africa* 63 (1993), p. 503; Suzette Heald, 'Witches and Thieves: Deviant Motivations in Gisu Society', *Man* NS 21 (1986), p. 74.
50. Krige and Krige, *Realm of a Rain-Queen*, p. 251; Stayt, *The BaVenda*, p. 274; Wagner, *Bantu of Western Kenya*, p. 113.
51. Beidelman, 'Witchcraft in Ukaguru', pp. 57-98; LeVine, 'Witchcraft and Sorcery in a Gusii Community', pp. 221-55; Winter, 'The Enemy Within', pp. 277-99.
52. Julius Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidenthums* (Berlin, 1897), p. 159.
53. W. Crooke, *An Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Allahabad, 1894), pp. 352-56, 366-67.
54. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: Routledge, 1922), p. 242; Waldemar Bogoras, *The Chukchee* (Brill, 1909), pp. 448-49.
55. Clyde Kluckhohn, *Navaho Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1944), ch. II.3.
56. Edel, *The Chiga*, p. 165; LeVine, 'Witchcraft and Sorcery', p. 232.
57. For my defence of it, see Ronald Hutton, 'Paganism and Polemic: The Debate over the Origins of Modern Pagan Witchcraft', *Folklore* 111 (2000), pp. 104-106.
58. I Samuel 19.24; Isaiah 20.2-3.
59. Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, pp. 277-78.
60. Anne-Marie Tupet, *La Magie dans La Poesie Latine* (Paris: Societe d'Edition "Les Belles Lettres", 1976), vol. 1, p. 60.
61. Pliny, *Natural History*, XXVI.60.
73. Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 394-97.

Ronald Hutton is Professor of History at the University of Bristol, England. He is also the only person to date who has been elected a member for life of both the Council of the British Pagan Federation and the Council of British Druid Orders.

'The Terror of Unseen Things': Saki and the *fin-de-siècle* Pagan Revival

by Nick Freeman

University of the West of England

Hector Hugh Munro, better known as Saki, has enjoyed a cult following since he emerged in the early 20th century in the aftermath of the Oscar Wilde scandal. His sophisticated and arch short fiction spoke unfailingly to a younger generation keen to read his acid dismissals of parental (and indeed any) authority. Between the wars, Saki was read by those who sought out the comedic forebears of fashionable humorists such as Aldous Huxley and Evelyn Waugh, and it is this status that he has retained ever since. A cruelly comic master of the 'short' short story—most of his tales are only 5-10 pages long—Saki was enshrined as the missing link between Wilde and Noël Coward when the latter introduced Penguin's edition of *The Complete Saki* in 1967 and claimed him as one of the most significant influences on his career (Saki 1982:xii). From such an introduction, Saki's appearance in *The Pomegranate* seems unlikely, but there is throughout his work, a strongly pagan sensibility that exalts the natural world and pays devout respect to its inhabitants. Read in this context, Saki becomes not simply a celebrated humorist but a part of the upsurge of paganism in English culture from the late Victorian era to the First World War, in which he was killed in 1916. In this essay, I shall use 'Munro' to refer to incidents in the life of H.H.

Munro, and 'Saki' to refer to the writer of the stories discussed.

The pagan revival of the period roughly between the 1860s, when Algernon Swinburne shocked Victorian propriety with his *Poems and Ballads: First Series* (1866) and the Edwardian era of E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, Kenneth Grahame and Aleister Crowley, amongst others, has received considerable attention in recent years. Patricia Merivale's study of Pan (1969) has been followed by scholars such as Glen Cavaliero (1977, 1997), R.D. Stock (1989), John Boardman (1998), Ronald Hutton (1999), and William Greenslade (2000). It is not the intention of this article to reprise the narrative underlying these works, or to expand upon Jo Pearson's essay in *Pomegranate* 14. Instead, the piece intends to give a brief overview of the concerns of English writers of the *fin-de-siècle* and its aftermath, and to examine ways in which Saki's fictions both ally themselves with wider movements and pursue a complex series of personal affinities with the natural world.

The late 19th century saw a Britain that was increasingly industrialised. Urban centres faced hitherto unimagined levels of pollution and overcrowding, leading to disease, anxieties concerning 'racial fitness', and a general concern with the supposed virility of the nation (Greenslade 1994:41-46). Many commentators felt that England in particular had cut herself off from her 'true' essence: by embracing modernity with such a reckless disregard for any consequences beyond the immediately economic, she had seen the health of her citizens eroded and her position as a world power come under increasing threat. Napoleon might have called the English a nation of shopkeepers, but many preferred to regard themselves as a nation of farmers,

[SAKI] GREW UP IN A PLACE IN WHICH THE DAILY DOINGS OF THE WORLD WERE NOT ALWAYS DETERMINED BY THE LAWS OF SCIENCE OR THE ORTHODOXIES OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH.

or rather, many middle class urbanites had a sentimental regard for 'the countryside' that persisted often through their ignorance of agricultural practices. Despite the best efforts of informed rural observers such as Thomas Hardy, Richard Jefferies, and Edward Thomas, country and city became increasingly distinct and separated from one another. Jefferies was both an accomplished novelist—his *Wood Magic* (1881) is an intriguing animal fable that deserves to be reprinted—and an essayist who specialised in portraits of rural life. Some, such as *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879), were fairly realistic in style: others revealed a more mystical sensibility. The collection of his essays edited by Edward Thomas, *The Hills and the Vale* (1909) contains pieces such as 'Nature and Eternity' that reveal a deeply spiritual response to the natural world. Roger Ebbatson (1980:30) communicates this idea particularly well:

The cutting-off of man from Nature, whether wrought by Christianity, intellectual consciousness, industrialism and mechanisation, or by an insidious combination of all these forces, resulted in a civilisation based upon democracy and technology.

Munro (1870-1916) had little time for such a 'civilisation', much as he approved of some of its surface comforts. His life neatly encompasses the *fin-de-siècle*, a key period in the transformation of English rural life from almost equal partner to the poor rela-

tion of the burgeoning city. Although he was born in Burma, where his father was a police officer, he grew up in Devon, England. In an incident that could have come from one of his own stories, his pregnant mother was killed by a runaway cow in a country lane. The young Munro and his two siblings were placed in the care of their grandmother, although in reality this meant a pair of tyrannous aunts. While this would have far-reaching consequences as far as his fiction goes—Saki's tales are filled with unpleasant authority figures, often aunts, who suffer painful retribution in varying ways—it is more significant for this essay that Munro should have been raised in Heaton, near Barnstaple. A.J. Langguth observes that in the years Hector spent there:

... he picked up a knowledge of occult mysteries that lived on among the old women. Only thirty years before his birth and well within Aunt Tom [his elder aunt's] lifetime, ancient Nanny Oram, the last known witch in Barnstaple, was still casting her spells. (1981:35)

This is not to suggest that Munro himself had any direct experience of 'occult mysteries' as a child, but to point out that he grew up in a place in which the daily doings of the world were not always determined by the laws of science or the orthodoxies of the Anglican church. Piers Brendon (1975:39) notes that Victorian Londoners often felt that each hundred

... HIS RUSSIAN HISTORY CAUSED
OFFENSE IN BRITAIN AND (ESPECIALLY)
IN THE UNITED STATES FOR DARING TO
SUGGEST THAT CHRISTIANITY HAD
MERELY MERGED WITH NATIVE RUSSIAN
PANTHEISM RATHER THAN
DESTROYING IT.

miles they went from London took them back a hundred years. By this admittedly prejudicial reckoning, Heaton in the 1870s was imaginatively speaking, still living in the 1670s. Owen Davies's recent study of Devon's neighbouring county, Somerset, *A People Bewitched* (1999), gives credence to the idea of rural South West England living if not in the past, then in a different present from more industrialised regions. He quotes a piece from the *Somerset Yearbook* 15 (1916:36-39), published in the year Munro was killed, entitled 'Witches of Exmoor'. The writer, J.E.G. de Montmorency, remarks:

To town-dwellers the belief in witches and wizards seems absurd. They have their own forms of superstition, and scorn the forms of more primitive people, if indeed the belief in witchcraft can be regarded with scorn ... There is a certain broad open-air healthiness about it that is lacking in the crystal-gazing and palmistry affected by the foolish in great cities from the days of Alexandria to those of London. Moreover, there is a certain reasonableness about witchcraft that is attractive. It is an adjunct of the terribleness of nature. (Davis 1999:21)

Early exposure to a world where witchcraft was not a quaint superstition but a folk practice of very recent memory may have encouraged Munro to regard establishment religion with a quizzical eye.

Whether or not witchcraft was still actively performed in late Victorian Devon may be a moot point, but it was certainly talked about. His direct experience of country life certainly instilled in him a life-long respect for 'the terribleness of nature', and an awareness of the fragile relationship between mankind and the natural world.

Munro was a delicate child who did not go to school until he was 15. His formal education finished two years later when his father returned from Burma and took the family on a European tour in which they visited France, Germany, and Switzerland. Munro did not, unlike many of his peers, visit Greece, the wellspring of 'classical' paganism. Instead, he encountered the wild nature of the Swiss Alps and the looming German forests, suggesting perhaps a parallel with his contemporary Algernon Blackwood, who wrote at length about the pagan nature of such places in stories such as 'The Glamour of the Snow' (Blackwood 1912).

From this point onwards, Munro would be resolutely self-educated. At 23, he followed in his father's footsteps and embarked for Burma and a career in the colonial service, but his health was frail and he returned to Devon to convalesce after 15 months. Interestingly, in this respect, Saki is the opposite of another minor English

colonial servant, Gerald Gardner (1884-1964), who journeyed to the East partially because of ill-health. He might also be compared with Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), who influenced Gardner but whom Saki himself frequently parodied, despite (or because of?) the similarities in their writings on the English countryside. Following this, he left for London, where he became an habitu  of the British Museum Reading Room. In the mid-to-late 1890s, this was haunted by many influential members of London's occult community, such as Aleister Crowley, W.B. Yeats, A.E. Waite, and S.L. MacGregor Mathers, and although it is not known whether Munro associated with them, one wonders if their paths ever crossed. However, like many of London's spiritual adventurers, for instance, 'the young man with spectacles' in Arthur Machen's *The Three Impostors* (1895), Munro's neat attire and studious air concealed a more volatile inner core. Langguth speaks of him 'unleashing elemental passions' (1981:54) in the Reading Room while he was researching his bloodthirsty historical study, *The Rise of the Russian Empire* (1900), and his early comic squibs occasionally displayed considerable nastiness beneath their polished surface.

Despite his assiduous researches he was not initially a professional writer. He worked instead as a journalist for the *Morning Post*, a London newspaper that employed him as its foreign correspondent from 1902-1908. This allowed him to capitalise on his youthful experience of Europe and his Russian researches, and he travelled around the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Russia before settling in Paris before finally returning to London. Unfortunately, little is known of his life, since his sister Ethel, the jealous keeper of the flame, destroyed

his papers after his death. His biographer, A.J. Langguth, suggests that Munro was homosexual and that his sister sought to cover up the fact, but as the editors of *Edwardian Fiction: An Oxford Companion* (1997:352) remind us, 'a lack of evidence' forces such discussion to be 'largely speculative'. Ronald Hutton (1999:48) has no truck with such equivocation, describing Saki as an 'a gay author' in his brief summary of 'The Music on the Hill'.

Indeed, there are many mysteries surrounding H.H. Munro. His sexuality was shrouded in secrecy, and his spiritual attitudes were certainly not the conventional pieties of his time. As a child, he had apparently pushed a hearth brush into the nursery fire and then pursued his siblings with the flaming brand, shouting 'I'm God! I'm going to destroy the world!' (Langguth 1981:13). Indeed, according to Langguth, his Russian history caused offense in Britain and (especially) in the United States for daring to suggest that Christianity had merely merged with native Russian pantheism rather than destroying it (1981:56). In 'The She-Wolf' (*Beasts and Superbeasts*, 1914), Clovis Sangrail claims to have turned a woman into a wolf, or at least, psychically encouraged her to believe that she might be one, through a process of 'the magic craft ... Siberian magic' learned while living for a couple of years in North-east Russia (Saki 1982: 241). Clovis does not say what 'Siberian magic' involves, but there is no reason to doubt his claim to knowing it. 'To Puritan America, his humor at the expense of religious feeling proved distressing,' Langguth continues (1981:57), but whether Munro was motivated by a genuine antagonism towards Christianity and its followers, or whether he was simply a wit who would sacrifice even Christ for the sake of an epigram is

unclear. Even the idea behind his choice of pseudonym, used for his works published between 1906 and 1914 is by no means obvious. The name seems to derive from a line at the end of Edward Fitzgerald's free translation of the 12th century Persian poem, *The Rubā'iyat of Omar Khayyām*, in which 'Sákí' is compared to the rising moon:

And when like her, oh Sákí, you shall pass
Among the guests Star-scattered on the Grass
And in your joyous errand reach the spot
Where I made One—turn down an empty glass!
(Fitzgerald 1859:Stanza LXXV, 1879 version)

Following the praise of John Ruskin, the *Rubā'iyat's* English rendering by Edward Fitzgerald (1859) became hugely popular in Victorian Britain, and made its author so rich that he apparently used banknotes for bookmarks. 'Sákí' however did not appear in the poem until its fourth edition (1879): the above lines originally began 'And when Thyself with shining Foot shall pass', changing to 'And when Yourself with silver Foot shall pass' in the 1868 version. 'Sákí' was very much a late addition to the poem, though Munro may not have known this as a variorum edition did not appear until the early 20th century, by which time he had already copied the above lines into his commonplace book and decided on his pseudonym. The *Rubā'iyat* is, in Valentine Cunningham's words (2000:183), 'a sceptical, cynical even, exposition of an "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" nihilism' that stands in stark contrast to avowedly Christian Victorian productions such as Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850). That said, Cunningham does not properly acknowledge the poem's more profound metaphysical questions in its investigation of the nature and purpose of life. However, the poem's recognition that the disputation of the intellect is nothing

beside a life of pleasure struck a chord with Victorian bohemians, although the poem later assumed a much wider popularity:

Ah, fill the Cup:—what boots it to repeat
How time is slipping underneath our Feet:
Unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday,
Why fret about them if To-day be sweet!
(1859:Stanza XXXVII)

While the reasons why Munro chose his pseudonym remain open to debate, it certainly set the tone for his writing, conveying as it did mischief, mystery and exoticism (see Langguth 1981:60-62). There is no doubt that it was well suited to his literary productions of the years ahead, though as with many pseudonymous writers, it is difficult to know where 'Munro' ends and 'Saki' begins. Was the Persian *nom-de-plume* a mouthpiece through which Munro could advance pagan ideas or sympathies without having to fully admit to them as his own; an outlet for the side of his personality that revolted against Edwardian conformity; or simply a memorable coinage that he discovered early in his career and stuck with as a literary brand name? It is impossible to say, but the former is certainly an appealing idea in the light of some of the fiction discussed below.

Time and again Saki's stories explored a world in which nothing was certain but the passage of time and the ridicule of circumstance. In the stanzas from the *Rubā'iyat* that Munro copied into his commonplace book, Omar mourned:

Yet ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!
The Nightingale that in the branches sang,
Ah whence, and wither flower again, who knows!
(1859:Stanza LXXII)

Langguth's reprinting of the entry from Munro's commonplace book suggests either that Munro miscopied the poem, or that the biographer's printer made a mistake in

... WE MIGHT WONDER WHETHER SAKI'S FAVOURITE CREATURES HAVE MORE TOTEMIC POWERS. HIS RECOGNITION OF THAT OF WOLVES IN PARTICULAR ... HAS AFFINITIES WITH CONTEMPORARY PAGAN CONCERNS.

reproducing his notes. The original version of Fitzgerald's work has 'Alas' instead of 'Yet ah', and 'flown' in the final line where Langguth gives 'flower'. As the 'flown' obviously refers to the Nightingale and not to the Rose, I have corrected the quotation above. A commonplace book is an informal journal in which favourite or significant passages from other literary works are copied for personal use. In such a world, where as Walter Pater remarked in his notorious conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873), 'all melts under our feet', life must be grasped and savoured. Such enthusiastic *carpe diem* sits uncomfortably alongside Victorian and Edwardian convention. One wonders whether, as a man impatient with prevailing religious attitudes and influenced by Oscar Wilde, Munro endorsed Pater's encouraging his readers to 'burn always with a hard, gem-like flame', or else on 'this short day of frost and sun ... sleep before evening' (Pater 1973:46). These are certainly views that Saki's young protagonists endorse throughout his work, and it might be asked whether Munro was drawing, however indirectly, on a personal ethic that combined, however implicitly, two strands of what Edwardian Britain would have seen as 'pagan' thought. The *Rubā'iyat's* enthusiasm for the good life combined with ideas drawn from Greek philosophy in Pater to produce the basis of a revolutionary lifestyle, or at least, stimu-

lating literary texts for others to act upon. Pater, a mild-mannered Oxford academic, was deeply shocked when he saw undergraduates taking his words as a sanction of youthful excess. He immediately suppressed the conclusion of *The Renaissance*, and later editions of the book featured it only in a watered down form. Nonetheless, it achieved an 'underground' status in late Victorian culture, and was widely quoted by Wilde and his followers. His novel, *When William Came* (1912), depicts a Britain defeated by Germany in war, and contains what is virtually an address to the reader on what has led to the loss:

They [the British] grew soft and accommodating in all things; in religion ... they had come to look on the Christ as a sort of amiable elder Brother, whose letters from abroad were worth reading. Then, when they had emptied all the divine mystery and wonder out of their faith naturally they grew tired of it ... they were tired of their faith, but they were not virile enough to become real Pagans; their dancing fauns were good young men who tripped Morris dances and ate health foods ... (Saki 1982:767)

Although one can never assume a straightforward correlation between the utterances of characters and their author, such speeches nonetheless suggest a writer pinpointing a profound spiritual malaise in the contemporary world, one requiring radical change that the English are

**SAKI [DEPICTED] A WORLD IN WHICH
CHRISTIANITY IS FREQUENTLY
IMPOTENT OR PLAIN FOOLISH, AND IN
WHICH NATURE'S POWER CAN NEVER BE
TAKEN FOR GRANTED, EVEN IN THE
APPARENTLY TAME CONFINES OF A
FARMYARD OR A SUBURBAN GARDEN.**

unwilling or unable to accommodate.

Saki's major writings comprise six volumes of short stories and three novels, originally published between 1904 and 1924. At first, he was content to set his tales in upper class English society, picking up where Wilde and Max Beerbohm left off. However, there was even in the early stories of *Reginald* (1904) a suggestion that the humour of those writers had been given a keen new edge. In 'Reginald on Christmas Presents' (1982:8), the young dandy rejects a 'George, Prince of Wales Prayer Book' as a suitable gift, before offering a gloriously backhanded defence of Christianity: 'People may say what they like about the decay of Christianity; the religious system that produced green Chartreuse can never really die' (1982:10). Such flippancy may have amused Saki's smart young readers, but they were unlikely to promote a pagan reimagining of British life. Saki was neither a dandified Catholic decadent such as those discussed by Martin Green (1977), nor one of the group of English ruralists surrounding Rupert Brooke that Virginia Woolf dubbed 'the Neo-pagans' (Delany 1987:41). Neither could he be claimed as a follower of Edward Carpenter, George Meredith, or nature mystics such as Richard Jefferies. Instead, Saki offered a unique mix of town

and country, drawing on the witty banter of the social smart set, and depicting a nature that was rarely romanticised and was often the scene of menace, even tragedy.

Saki's fiction often depicts witty, beautiful young men who endeavour to live life to the full by evading adult responsibility for as long as possible. Characters such as Reginald, and his successor Clovis Sangrail, whose deeds were first collected in *The Chronicles of Clovis* (1911), were paradoxically conservative anarchists who ate at the tables of the great and good but nonetheless ridiculed the manners and beliefs of their class. Clovis, like Reginald, is no friend of mealy-mouthed conventional Christianity, and indeed has a number of the characteristics that Hutton (1999:27) notes as instantly recognisable as 'pagan' to late 19th century readers: 'freedom' and 'self-indulgence' being the two most obvious ones, though his surname encourages one to believe he possesses a third, 'ancient knowledge'. He is also quite prepared to ridicule Christianity, or at least, its priggish followers. In 'The Unrest Cure' (*Chronicles of Clovis*), he shares a railway carriage with a boring, prematurely middle-aged clergyman, J.P. Huddle (one of many significantly apt names in Saki's work), and decides that the man needs to be galvanised into new life. This he

attempts by convincing Huddle and his household that they are caught up in a *coup d'état* in the middle of the English countryside, with riotous consequences.

Clovis lives a life informed by the *Rubāiyat's* enthusiasm for earthly happiness:

One moment in Annihilation's Waste,
One Moment, of the Well of Life to taste –
The Stars are setting and the Caravan
Starts for the Dawn of Nothing—Oh, make haste!
(1859:Stanza XXXVIII)

The Clovis stories often see a combined assault on convention from their hero's droll asides and from the ungovernable intervention of animals, often domestic ones. Animals force humans to review their relationships and surroundings: the feline protagonist of 'Tobermory' (*Chronicles of Clovis*) is a talking cat who causes havoc by revealing the contents of private conversations. Tobermory is an unnatural beast, who has been trained in the art of human speech by Cornelius Appin, an eccentric scientist, whose name coincidentally recalls the renaissance scientist and mage, Cornelius Agrippa. Human pretensions are mocked to excellent comic effect, but in the end the natural order reasserts itself and Tobermory dies a feline death in a fight with the rector's tom-cat. Appin is later killed by an elephant at Dresden Zoo, perhaps because he was attempting to teach it 'German irregular verbs' (1982:115). The message is clear in such tales. Despite man's scientific advances, nature is not to be trifled with. The minor novelist Rodney Harley (Vansittart 1985:148) remarked that 'Civilisation is against nature, and we are surprised when nature gets the better of the fight.' Saki's fiction pitted nature and civilisation in bitter combat.

While Saki's comic targets in his early fiction were invariably pretension and

vulgarity, his childhood experience of a world outside that of rational explanation and conventional Christianity surfaced at frequent intervals. In 'Gabriel-Ernest' (*Reginald in Russia*, 1910), the English gentleman Mr. Van Cheele is told 'There is a wild beast in your woods' (Saki 1982:63) and sets out to investigate. Although he lives in the countryside, Van Cheele has lost touch with nature, not only believing that he owns 'woodland property' but also violating the natural order:

He had a stuffed bittern in his study, and knew the names of quite a number of wild flowers, so his aunt had possibly some justification in describing him as a great naturalist. (1982:63-64)

Wandering through the woods, Van Cheele encounters a beautiful naked youth, sunning himself following a dip in a woodland pool. Van Cheele and the boy engage in verbal sparring with a homoerotic edge, during which we discover that the boy lives wild in the woods and eats animal flesh. 'I can't have you staying in these woods,' Van Cheele blusters, to receive the coolly ambiguous reply, 'I fancy you'd rather have me here than in your house' (1982:65). Van Cheele's aunt is keen to 'save' the wild boy, christening him 'Gabriel-Ernest', a mixture of the knowingly Christian and the implicitly homosexual ('Ernest' had been a loaded term in the British sexual underworld since the heyday of Wilde in the early 1890s), but he is beyond her help.

It transpires that the young man is a werewolf, who kills a small boy and disappears into the woods. Here, though there is a comic element at work—'He dismissed the idea of a telegram. "Gabriel-Ernest is a werewolf" was a hopelessly inadequate effort at conveying the situation' (1982:68)—the story is deeply unsettling. The unpunished killing of a child is a

surprising topic for a supposedly comic writer, all the more so for 'the Toop child' having been an innocent bystander entrusted to Gabriel-Ernest's care by Van Cheele's aunt. The Van Cheeles's prissy effort to own and control wild nature, whether woodland, a stuffed bird or a werewolf who symbolises what E.M. Forster would call 'the forests and the night', rebound upon them in dramatic and terrible fashion. E.M. Forster's Maurice feels at one with 'the forests and the night' following his recognition of his homosexuality and consequent 'outsider' status in the Edwardian world. See *Maurice* p.196. See too broader contextualisation of his experiences in Hutton (1999:48-50). The fact that Van Cheele is clearly attracted to the young man, who perhaps offers him the chance to regenerate his life through sexuality, only adds to the subversive nature of the story.

'Sredni Vashtar' (*Chronicles of Clovis*) sees another grisly encounter between wild nature and the forces of human conformity. Conradin, a delicate child, keeps a pet polecat in defiance of his guardian. Although the ferret is nominally a pet, for Conradin he is a symbol of defiance and self-assertion, and is gradually transformed into an idol, then a god: 'One day, out of Heaven knows what material, he spun the beast a wonderful name, and from that moment it grew into a god and a religion' (1982:137). Millions of suburban children keep pets in hutches, but it soon transpires that the relationship between Sredni Vashtar and his acolyte imbues one or both of them with unlikely powers. Conradin rejects his cousin's Christianity and chants hymns of praise to the 'lithe, sharp-fanged beast':

Sredni Vashtar went forth,
His thoughts were red thoughts and his teeth

were white.
His enemies called for peace, but he brought
them death.
Sredni Vashtar the Beautiful. (1982:137, 139)

When Conradin's cousin, or The Woman, as he calls her, ventures down to the wood-shed to dispose of the ferret, something violent occurs. The ferret disappears into the undergrowth with 'dark wet stains around the fur of jaws and throat' (1982:140), and the maid screams upon entering the shed in search of her mistress. As in 'Gabriel-Ernest', the wild creature escapes into woodland at the end of the story, presumably returning to its natural environment. Is Conradin's escape from his guardian's tyranny the wish-fulfilment of a small boy, as with Leo's baleful astrology in the opening of L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953), an accident, or the result of the ferret acting as a genuine divine agency or avatar of one? We are not told. The story is regularly reprinted in anthologies of horror fiction, yet its mystical centre offers intriguing light on supposedly hide-bound Edwardian England. Clearly some, darker, older powers are abroad in the land, perhaps through the combining of a native beast with orientally styled invocation that Saki may have encountered during his time in Burma.

If Christianity could be challenged in a relatively domestic setting—and here Sredni Vashtar might be seen as quite literally, a (back) garden god—how much more threatening could be the natural world. Unlike his contemporaries Algernon Blackwood and Arthur Machen, Saki had little time or narrative space for extended evocations of the beauty and majesty of nature. The luscious description of the ancient Roman fort in chapter four of Machen's *The Hill of Dreams* (1907), with

... IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO GO OUT INTO NATURE; TO SURVIVE, ONE MUST IN SOME WAY BECOME IT, BREAKING DOWN THE DIVISION BETWEEN THE 'CIVILISED' AND THE 'NATURAL'.

its sumptuous recreation of Roman pagan life, or the mystical engagement with nature and the elements in Blackwood's *Pan's Garden* (1912) have no parallel in Saki's fiction. Instead, Saki gives brief details, just enough to set up the central oppositions of his narratives. 'The Music on the Hill' (*Chronicles of Clovis*) is a mere five pages long, but manages to be more memorable and convincing in its evocation of the old gods than many much lengthier fictions.

Saki's world view and writing style might have been very different from Blackwood's, but both writers make a crucial distinction between the description of fear within the story, and the causing of it in the reader. Although it is invariably unwise to speculate about the intended readership of literary texts, Saki surely writes for an audience that shares and is prepared to endorse his view of the natural world and human relationships with and within it. In 'The Music of the Hill', readers side against Sylvia Seltoun straight away through the use of subliminal cues. She is compared to a member of Cromwell's army before the rout of the Cavaliers at the Battle of Worcester (1651), a strong suggestion that for Saki her life is based around mechanistic efficiency rather than creative flair, much less respect for tradition. The allusion also suggests that her triumph will be short-lived, in that while Royalist forces were defeated at

Worcester, the English monarchy was restored within a decade. Having married Mortimer Seltoun, a confirmed bachelor, she retreats with him to his country house in Yessney, thinking that she has secured some sort of social victory, but as with so many of Saki's protagonists, her removal from the land is to be her downfall (1982:161):

There was a sombre almost savage wildness about Yessney that was certainly not likely to appeal to town-bred tastes, and Sylvia, notwithstanding her name, was accustomed to nothing much more sylvan than 'leafy Kensington.' She looked on the country as something excellent and wholesome in its way, which was apt to become troublesome if you encouraged it overmuch.

Such attitudes are ill-suited to a place where:

... a steeper slope of heather and bracken dropped down into cavernous combs overgrown with oak and yew. In its wild open savagery there seemed a stealthy linking of the joy of life with the terror of unseen things.' (1982:162).

This landscape reappears in much English fiction of the *fin-de-siècle* and its aftermath, betokening engagement with the numinous (if sympathetic to it) or fear (if not). The presence of the ancient oak and yew mark out Yessney as a pagan site, a supposition confirmed by Mortimer's belief that the worship of Pan still endures in such places:

HERE IS A WRITER TACKLING ISSUES OF CONSIDERABLE RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY PAGANS, AND WHO OFFERS FASCINATING LIGHT ON THE INFLUENCES THAT WERE TO HELP SHAPE PAGANISM'S DEVELOPMENT IN THE LATTER PART OF THE 20TH CENTURY.

'The worship of Pan never has died out,' said Mortimer. 'Other new gods have drawn aside his votaries from time to time, but he is the Nature-God to whom all must come back at last. He has been called the Father of all the Gods, but most of his children have been still-born.' (1982:162)

Sylvia, who is 'religious in an honest, vaguely devotional kind of way' is warned that Pan rules this part of the world, but despite hearing mysterious laughter in the woods, she disregards her husband's instructions. Finding a small bronze figure of Pan on a stone pedestal, she removes from it a bunch of grapes left as an offering. She sees a 'brown-faced and rather handsome' boy whom she mistakes for a gipsy, until her husband tells her that there are no gipsies for miles around. He then advises her to avoid all horned beasts on their farm as 'the Wood Gods are rather horrible to those who molest them' (1982:164). Inevitably, Sylvia's transgression must be paid for, and she is fatally gored by a stag being hunted on her husband's lands. The final lines of the story tell of 'a boy's laughter, golden and equivocal' ringing in her ears (1982:166). 'The Music on the Hill' is remarkable for its concision but also for its seeming conviction that the presence of the 'Wood Gods' is a very real one. Patricia Merivale sees it as the finest of the Pan stories that were

published in England during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods (Merivale 1969:180). Langguth (1981:222) by contrast asserts that, 'it takes no overingenious reading to know that her true crime has been marrying a contented bachelor', but while this may be part of Sylvia's mistake, the wider engagement with nature and the gods of wild places in Saki's fiction make such an interpretation rather reductive. The point is reinforced by a passage from *When William Came* (Saki 1982:800):

If there had been wood-gods and wicked-eyed fauns in the sunlit groves and hillsides of old Hellas, surely there were watchful, living things of kindred mould in this dusk-hidden-wilderness of field and hedge and coppice.

Here we see nature superficially tamed but yet exuding its ancient divinity.

Beasts and Superbeasts (1914) and the posthumously published *The Toys of Peace* (1919) revealed further inhabitants of Saki's textual zoo. Wolves, hedgehogs, cats, bulls, elks and boars are just some of the creatures that bring about or are brought into, confrontations between humans and the natural world. In 'The Forbidden Buzzards', Clovis Sangrail hatches an ingenious plan to protect the eggs of a rare bird from collectors: though his plan succeeds, the young birds are nonetheless shot 'by a local hairdresser' (1982:333).

This bathetic conclusion gives a chilling glimpse of an England in which ecological equilibrium has been destroyed. Perhaps surprisingly in view of this story, Munro had been a keen egg-collector in his youth, bequeathing a sizeable egg collection to Barnstaple museum. He later graduated to harmless ornithological observation, watching birds throughout Europe and also during his time in Asia. Here he also kept a tiger cub as a pet. Saki himself was an enthusiastic hunter, but even allowing for present attitudes to such, there is a clear distinction between what he would have classed as 'sport' and a hairdresser's casual destruction of endangered wildlife. While Saki's concern for the fate of the natural world might suggest that he has proto-green credentials in some respects, his use of animals and animal motifs in his stories extends beyond such sympathies. Indeed, a modern pagan readership might be inclined to enlarge upon another of Langguth's observations (1981:35):

There was developing a fondness in Hector for skulking animals capable, should the need arise, of inflicting rough justice. Better even than polecats, ferrets and tigers was that most feline of the dog family, the wolf, slinking with yellow-eyed cunning toward its prey.

Langguth sees this fondness for animals as a simple case of identification, but we might wonder whether Saki's favourite creatures have more totemic powers. His recognition of that of wolves in particular, who sing a coronach for a dying aristocrat in 'The Wolves of Cernogratz' (*The Toys of Peace*), or settle an intractable human quarrel in 'The Interlopers' in the same collection, has affinities with contemporary pagan concerns. This is not to suggest that Saki would have considered these creatures as power animals, but their presence in his fiction certainly offers a glimpse of a

divinity far removed from that of mainstream Edwardian piety.

One story that addresses the explicit relationship between the human and the animal is 'Laura' (*Beasts and Superbeasts*). Laura, a mischievous young woman, is dying, and is sure that she will reincarnated as a 'lower organism' (1982:241) because of her pranks:

I shall be an animal of some kind ... I haven't been a bad sort in my way, so I think I may count on being a nice animal, something elegant and lively, with a love of fun. An otter, perhaps.'

'I can't imagine you as an otter,' said Amanda. 'Well, I don't suppose you can imagine me as an angel, if it comes to that,' said Laura. (1982:242)

Laura is indeed reborn as an otter, or at least, her death coincides with the appearance of an unruly she-otter that steals salmon from the larder and generally reprises Laura's human trickery. The animal is hunted down with hounds, and reveals a human look in its eyes at the moment of death. However, this is not the end of the story, for having distinguished herself as an otter, Laura seems to be reborn yet again, as a Puckish Nubian boy who torments her relatives while they are holidaying in Egypt. Throughout the story, the tone is witty and unsentimental, but it is notable that even the seemingly reactionary old buffer, Sir Lulworth Quayne does not dismiss the idea of reincarnation. Of course, the fact that Saki penned a tale on this theme does not necessarily believe that Munro himself was an advocate of similar beliefs, but nonetheless, the story's endorsement of natural cycles and its amused disdain for Christianity is again notable.

Perhaps the attitude towards reincarnation is informed by his life in Burma, or that

his father's accounts of the country, but it is certainly a surprising topic for a seemingly 'main-stream' Edwardian comic writer to broach. Laura clearly identifies with the otter in a way that transcends her deathbed flippancies concerning the joy of daily fresh fish and having an 'elegant, svelte figure' (1982:242). She has no desire to cling to life, and professes herself bored by her nameless illness. It might be argued that Laura shows a pagan resignation in the face of death, realising that while it might be an end for Amanda, it is only a beginning for her, or another point on the great wheel. Laura's casual assumption of a natural hierarchy that seems to run in descending order: rich English woman, Nubian boy, otter, might show her to be less enlightened about race than she is about the workings of the cosmos. If this is a reflection of Munro's own racial views, it exposes another contradiction in his complex personality and attitudes.

Saki never offered an explicit mythos to compare with that of Machen's ideas of the 'Little People' or H.P. Lovecraft's 'Old Ones'. Instead, he created a complex series of stories connected by imaginative association or recurrent motifs that depict a world in which Christianity is frequently impotent or plain foolish, and in which nature's power can never be taken for granted, even in the apparently tame confines of a farmyard or a suburban garden. Arthur Machen's novella 'The Terror' ([1917] Machen 1963), which depicts animals rising up against corrupt human beings is in many ways closer in style to the 'eco-horror' of the 1970s, exemplified by works such as James Herbert's *The Rats* (1974) than it is to Saki, but its concluding paragraphs give some suggestion of the spiritual world that Saki evokes without ever addressing the

reader quite so openly. Machen (1963: 223-224) writes:

For ages he [man] has been putting off his royal robe [spirituality], he has been wiping the balm of consecration from his own breast. He has declared, again and again, that he is not spiritual, but rational ...he has vowed that he is not Orpheus but Caliban. But the beasts also have something which corresponds to the spiritual quality in men ... They perceived the throne was vacant, not even friendship was possible between them and the self-deposed monarch. If he were not king he were a sham, an impostor, a thing to be destroyed.

Saki's recognition of the importance of the natural world should not be overlooked in the champagne bubbles of his society fiction. Here is a writer tackling issues of considerable relevance to contemporary pagans, and who offers fascinating light on the influences that were to help shape paganism's development in the latter part of the 20th century. His concern with the persistence of wild nature even in apparently quotidian environments may be paralleled by the re-enchanted suburbia of some of today's pagan practitioners, while his willingness to see the relationship between human beings and animals as being based more upon complementary qualities than on traditional hierarchy reveals him as a slyly subversive critic of human complacency. Stories such as 'The Music on the Hill' ask penetrating questions concerning 'town-bred tastes', implying that it is not enough to go out into nature; to survive, one must in some way *become* it, breaking down the division between the 'civilised' and the 'natural'. It is perhaps this aspect of his fiction which is the most exciting, and in some ways the most challenging, for a modern pagan readership.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Blackwood, A ([1912] 2000) *Pan's Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* Leyburn: Tartarus Press.
- Boardman, J (1998) *The Great God Pan: The Survival of an Image* London: Thames & Hudson.
- Brendon, P (1975), *Hawker of Morwenstow: Portrait of a Victorian Eccentric* London: Jonathan Cape.
- Cavaliero, G (1977) *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel 1900-1930* Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- , (1997) *The Supernatural in English Fiction* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cunningham, V (ed.) (2000) *The Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry and Poetics* Oxford: Blackwell.
- Davis, O (1999), *A People Bewitched: Witchcraft and Magic in Nineteenth-Century Somerset* Bruton: Self-published.
- Delaney, P (1987) *The Neo-Pagans: Friendship and Love in the Rupert Brooke Circle* Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Ebbatson, R (1980) *Lawrence and the Nature Tradition: A Theme in English Fiction 1859-1914* Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Fitzgerald, E ([1859] 1995) *The Rubāiyat of Omar Khayyām* New York: Smithmark.
- Forster, E.M. (1971) *Maurice* London: Edward Arnold.
- Green, M ([1977] 1992) *Children of the Sun: A Narrative of Decadence in England after 1918* London: Pimlico.
- Greenslade W (1994), *Degeneration, Culture & the Novel 1880-1940* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Greenslade, W. (2000), 'Pan' and the Open Road: Critical Paganism in R.[obert] L.[ouis] Stevenson, K[enneth] Grahame, E[dward] Thomas and E.M. Forster' in Hapgood & Patton (below) pp.145-161.
- Hapgood L & Patton, N.L. (2000) *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel 1900-1930* Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Herbert, J (1974) *The Rats* London: New English Library.
- Hutton, R. (1999), *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jefferies, R ([1909] 1980) *The Hills and the Vale* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kemp, S, et al. (1997) *Edwardian Fiction: An Oxford Companion* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Machen, A ([1895] 1995) *The Three Impostors* ed. David Trotter London: Dent.
- , *The Hill of Dreams* ([1907] 1998) Leyburn: Tartarus Press.
- , ([1917]1963) 'The Terror' in *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural* London: Panther.
- Merivale, P. (1969), *Pan the Goat God: His Myth in Modern Times* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Pater, W (1973) *Essays on Literature and Art* ed. Jennifer Uglow, London: Dent.
- Pearson, J. (2000), 'Wicca, Esotericism and Living Nature: Assessing Wicca as a Nature Religion', *The Pomegranate* 14, November 2000, pp.4-16.
- Saki [H.H. Munro] ([1967]1982) *The Complete Saki* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Stock, R.D. (1989), *The Flutes of Dionysus: Daemonic Enthrallment in Literature* Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Vansittart, P (1985) *Voices 1870-1914* New York: Franklin Watts.

Two Souls in One Body: Ethical and Methodological Implications of Studying What You Know

by Siân Reid
Carleton University

*An earlier version of this paper was
presented to the Qualitative Analysis
Conference in Hamilton, Ontario
in May 2001.*

I did not begin graduate school with the idea of becoming a sociologist. In fact, as a recent graduate with a degree in English Literature and no elective courses outside the Faculty of Arts, I am not sure I could have told you then what a sociologist was, or what sorts of questions they were interested in. My foray into the world of graduate studies was motivated by my personal interest in Neopagan Witchcraft as the religion with which I self-identified. There had been very little academic material produced about Neopaganism as a religious choice by the late 80s, when I began my graduate career, and what there was didn't reflect the vision I had of myself as a practitioner, my perception of the practice, my own experience or the experience of other participants as it had been related to me anecdotally. It was this frustration with not seeing myself reflected in the literature that purported to discuss 'people like me' that propelled me into graduate school in an attempt to give myself the tools to frame the presentation of Neopaganism differently.

During the years I have spent in graduate school, many more works on Neopaganism

have come out of the academy, works in which I could see myself and others whom I know reflected more accurately. Luhrmann (1989), Berger (1999), Orion (1995) and Pike (2001) are all good examples of writing about Neopaganism and Neopagans in which their voices can be heard and in which their perspectives are presented without being negatively prejudged by the author. Each of these works is an ethnography and each contains an account of the process through which the author, who began as an outsider, came to acquire an understanding of the participants' worldviews, narratives and practices, the process which is at the heart of all good ethnography. In some, but not all of those cases, it also resulted in the author adopting a Neopagan religious identity, and redefining herself as an insider.

During the decade that intervened between when I began to define myself as Pagan and when I needed to redefine myself as a sociologist, I engaged in many of the activities that are typical of Craft practitioners: I read books on the Craft and related subjects such as magic, mythology and herbology; I did meditation, visualization and self-knowledge exercises, keeping record both of them, and of my reflections on them; I did spellwork and divination, also keeping detailed records; I wrote down dreams that seemed significant or were particularly clear; I participated in classes at my local occult shop and as I became more experienced I taught a few; I talked to people, mostly non-practitioners, about what it meant to me to be a Witch and tried to dispel misconceptions where I could; I attended public rituals to celebrate and socialize; I went to the occasional festival; I wrote and performed sabbats and esbats, and recorded the feedback I got from others who participated in them; I contributed to a Pagan newsletter; I took a first degree initiation and then, three years later, a second degree; I ran a

**... FRUSTRATION WITH NOT SEEING
MYSELF REFLECTED IN THE LITERATURE
THAT PURPORTED TO DISCUSS 'PEOPLE
LIKE ME' ... PROPELLED ME INTO
GRADUATE SCHOOL IN AN ATTEMPT
TO GIVE MYSELF THE TOOLS
TO FRAME THE PRESENTATION
OF NEOPAGANISM DIFFERENTLY.**

coven; I taught and initiated students; some or all of which is just part of learning to be, and being, priesthood in the Craft. I have seven lined physics notebooks of handwritten notes, feedback, correspondence and diary entries, and another two thick unlined notebooks full of handcopied rituals and ritual elements that are the textual record of my own personal development inside the Craft context. These records extend from 1983 until 1992.

As I moved through my Masters degree in Religious Studies, gradually coming to the conclusion that further work in the Religious Studies department was not going to prepare me to answer the kinds of questions I wanted to ask about Neopagans, and into the Sociology department for my doctorate, I realized that writing ethnographically about Neopaganism was outside of the scope of the possible for me. I had already been socialized into the norms of Neopaganism; I already had an understanding of the worldview and some of how it was expressed through people's forms of living. I could not go back and re-experience my own socialization from a critical standpoint; it was an already accomplished fact. The research process for me would have to involve not how I was going to come to be accepted among Neopagans as a peer, but how I was going to disengage from

that identity and that way of thinking in order to create and establish myself as a researcher.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES

Epistemologically, the chief issue was to problematize my own 'taken for granted' worldview. This is an issue addressed fairly extensively in the theoretical literature. Gadamer, for one, points out that no one approaches an object of study without preconceptions. The structure of knowledge and human knowing dictates that preconceptions, what he calls prejudices or fore-meanings, will arise simply out of one's ability to use a human language and one's position in a historical tradition (1975:191). He suggests addressing the problem of the inevitability of prejudice by problematizing one's relationship to one's own perspective. That does not mean to say that one can divest one's self of it, as the 'objectivity' of the scientific method would seem to dictate, but merely that one is required, if one is to attain understanding, to treat an object as something foreign and in need of understanding even when it seems familiar. This has required the explicit and ongoing acknowledgment that my own perspective is not only simply one interpretation of the lived universe, but also only one of many possible perspectives that could have been derived from my own

**BECAUSE I SHARED A CERTAIN
VOCABULARY WITH THE SUBJECTS OF
MY STUDY, I COULD NOT THEREFORE
ASSUME THAT I AUTOMATICALLY KNEW
WHAT THEY WERE SAYING. I COULD
NOT TAKE MY OWN USAGES AND
EXPERIENCES AS NORMATIVE ...**

peculiar experiences.

Gadamer likens the process of understanding to the process of translation, whereby meaning that exists in one language must be conveyed in a different language. The trick to translation is not only to convey the literal meaning of the words, which often obscures the meaning, but the sense of the work as a whole. The context of a work cannot just be reproduced pristinely so that it can be experienced in exactly the same terms that the author or another reader experienced it, it must in translation acquire part of the context of the horizon into which it comes, if it is to be understood (1975:236-241). Gadamer asserts that the process of understanding is a conversation in which two parties come to an agreement about the object.

The danger inherent in the study of phenomena in which one is involved is the facile assumption that one already enjoys such an agreement. This assumption of an already shared meaning prevents one from grasping the meaning given to the object by the other. This formulation of meaning solely within one's own horizon makes understanding impossible. Because I shared a certain vocabulary with the subjects of my study, I could not therefore assume that I automatically knew what they were saying. I could not take my own usages and experiences as normative,

although I recognized them as that which constructed, and continues to construct, my own fore-meanings. Language is an especially contested domain within the Craft, and the process of trying to understand my respondents required that I consciously bracket off my own assumptions in order to make the attempt to enter into their understandings and their worldviews. In short, I had to make a conscious effort to keep my pagan self out of the middle of conversations between my participants and my researcher self.

**ETHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL
ISSUES**

In addition to discovering that ethnographic research was going to be impossible for me due to my pre-existing status as a participant, I also discovered that participant-observation techniques would be intensely problematic if I wished participants to have the level of confidence in my commitment to respecting their privacy that I wanted them to have. The choices about the sort of research methodology I would use were guided by my own experience of having been a research subject previously and knowing what it was like to feel exposed and betrayed by a piece of research. This led me to adopt a very conservative set of ethical parameters, consistent with my sense that I was entering a 'spoiled' research site.

A 'spoiled' site is one in which potential participants have been exposed to researchers before, with negative outcomes, and in which researchers are therefore viewed with suspicion. The immediate pagan community in which I lived had been the subject of an ethnography carried out by another researcher some years before. Like me, this individual was an 'insider' to the community, and the 'key informants' of the study were the most active individuals in the community at that time. The research was problematic because the events discussed in the study took place up to three years before the individual adopted the identity of a researcher. The events and confidences to which the researcher was privy, they had been privy to as a member of the community, and not as a researcher. When the study finally became available to members of the community, in all but one case after it had been submitted elsewhere, many of the individuals were unhappy with both what was represented and how those representations were made. Some believed that there were strategic omissions in the data so that they would better fit the interpretive paradigm, errors that only community members and not outsiders could catch; others felt that relationships they had believed to be personal had been exploited and betrayed. The manner in which the events were framed and discussed heightened the level of tension in an already tense community and damaged the researcher's reputation not only as a researcher, but as a trustworthy member of the community. It also served to make all researchers somewhat suspect.

Because of this experience, I felt compelled to take what might, under other circumstances, be considered extraordinary measures to minimize any possible ambiguity about my role as a researcher and my motivations for conducting the research by detaching myself from the activities of the community and by

giving participants clear indications of when our relationship was in the researcher-subject mode rather than that of co-participants. This determination to maintain that distinction in the minds of participants was the primary motivating factor both in my use of formalized settings for my interviews, including the deliberately obtrusive presence of a tape recorder, and my decision not to use participant observation as a data-gathering technique. I consistently presented myself, in all correspondence and conversations inviting participation in the research, as an active researcher on Neopaganism, who was incidentally also Craft, so that it was almost impossible to mistake my intentions.

During the interview stage, I made a point of candidly answering questions about both my Craft background and training and my academic orientations and interests. I proactively divulged information about my current and former associations inside the Craft community, particularly with the large Neopagan organizations, whenever the conversation turned in that direction. As some participants had very negative feelings about some of these organizations, I did not wish them to believe that they had been 'tricked' into making negative comments, or be uncomfortable subsequently, if they learned that I was acquainted with prominent members of those organizations.

In addition to these practical methodological steps, I altered my life outside of 'research time' in the attempt to create myself as someone who was not perceived to be aligned with any of the numerous factions that exist inside the Craft. Although it is difficult, in some ways, for an outsider to gain access to the Neopagan community, it is also difficult to do effective research as an insider if parts of the community will not speak to you because you are perceived to be a member of the wrong 'camp'. I began this disengagement

process while still in the planning stages of the research. As early as three years before the survey and five years before the interviews were conducted, I withdrew from coven membership, ceased to take new students, ceased to have any publicly expressed opinion on happenings in both my own community and others I heard of and ceased to attend most public gatherings. I maintained my existing friendships inside the community, but established myself as somewhat 'outside' its religious and social life.

I did this to in order to gain access to the widest possible cross-section of respondents and to give my participants confidence about the extent to which they would be exposed by the research. I also did it to protect myself and my other identity as a trustworthy member of the Neopagan community. Although I chose to be neither active nor visible as a practitioner in the broader community while my research was in progress, I still identify myself as Neopagan and support the principles that guide interaction within the community. Despite my conspicuous absence for almost a decade, I wished to retain the option to return to a more visible practice at some future time with my reputation for integrity intact.

To the extent that these measures were intended to establish me as non-partisan, facilitate access to practitioners, and prevent excessive bias in the reporting of my research results, I think that they were successful. Upon reflection, however, there were costs concealed in the choices I made that I did not anticipate when I began the research, and which, had I known about them at the time, might have dissuaded me from undertaking the project that I did. I could not have known that I would be delivering my survey to the printers on the way to the hospital to have my first child. I could not have known that I would suffer from severe postpartum depres-

sion, and that my decision to remove myself from the community would mean that I lost access to sources of pastoral support and comfort and social opportunities that would have otherwise been available to me. I could not know that I would remain ill for years after the birth, without the time or energy to write and perform the seasonal rituals with my family. Having decided that coven membership was inadvisable, as was attendance at public rituals, this meant that I did not have the opportunity for celebration and reflection that ritual provides, or the companionship of others on the important holidays. It has also meant that my young daughter, although raised in a household in which pagan values are entrenched, has not had the opportunity to be more thoroughly socialized in a context that is supported by the ritual celebrations that punctuate the pagan year.

But perhaps most of all, I had underestimated the extent to which doing a PhD in sociology would turn me into a sociologist. Having taught myself to ask different questions and look beyond and behind what I had taken for granted before, I am not sure to what extent I can ever return. I am not sure if, when I finally feel like it is 'safe' for me to take up the mantle of 'active practitioner' once again, it will even fit the person I have become in the meantime. I do not know if I will ever again be capable of taking a ritual simply as a descriptive statement about the universe in which I live, and not analyse in the back of my mind the way in which it narrates the transformative potential of modernity. I am not sure if I can attend a social gathering and not look for the subtle conversational markers that point to the articulation of broader tensions in the Neopagan movement. I am not sure I can set aside the sociological lens and immerse myself fully in the lived presence of the

PERHAPS THE 'OLD-FASHIONED' ADMONITIONS ABOUT BEING AT AN APPROPRIATE DISTANCE FROM YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS ARE NOT MEANT TO PROTECT THE RESEARCH FROM BIAS AND CONTAMINATION, BUT TO PROTECT THE RESEARCHER'S SENSE OF SELF.

divine. I have gained a way of seeing that has enriched me immeasurably on an intellectual level; it remains to be seen if that has cost me the way of seeing that organized my life, gave definition to my vision of myself and structured my spiritual landscape before I became a sociologist.

Had I known in the beginning the capacity the research process had to make me a stranger to myself, I would perhaps not have chosen to study something that was so close to the heart of my being; yet it was only the urge to study that particular thing that drew me to sociology in the first place. Perhaps the 'old-fashioned' admonitions about being at an appropriate distance from your research interests are not meant to protect the research from bias and contamination, but to protect the researcher's sense of self. Doing responsible sociological research about a vital piece of my own identity has caused me to change the stories I tell about myself, the narratives through which I am constituted. My identity as a sociologist and researcher is too established in my mind and in the minds of others for me to be able to simply set it aside. At the end of the research process that will culminate in my dissertation defense, I will be faced with a different challenge: the task of reflexively constructing a narrative of myself capable of integrating

elements that I am accustomed to bracketing off from each other. Otherwise, I will remain somewhat at odds with myself indefinitely, with two souls in one body.

WORKS CITED:

- Berger, Helen. 1999. *A Community of Witches*. Colombia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1975. *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed & Ward.
- Luhrmann, Tanya. 1989. *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Orion, Loretta. 1995. *Never Again the Burning Times: Paganism Revived*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Pike, Sarah. 2001. *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weather Magic and Global Warming

by Christine Rhone

Heatwaves, hurricanes, droughts, floods—recent years have seen an increase in record-breaking extremes of weather. Scientists have confirmed the fact of global warming. This change in climate is human-made. It used to be commonly believed, before the rise of modern science, that gods and spirits—not people—were in charge of making weather. People could participate religiously or magically in invoking it, directly or through priests, magicians and shamans. We have in some sense come full circle on the issue of weather control with the scientific acknowledgement that people do play a part in what the weather is like.

Of all the phenomena that mediate between sky-heaven and the earth, weather is the natural paradigm. It mediates in the world of nature as it unfolds in time. The connection between time and the weather is so close that the words for them are identical in French. It resonates in the phonetics of time and tempest in English. Other mediating *phenomena*—angels, apparitions, and spirits—do not *show* (Greek: *phainein*) the confines of time but reveal those of culture and outlook. Phenomena in and out of time co-penetrate in weather magic. At their crossing point is needed a respectful offering, food or sacrifice.

A rich illustration of many of these points comes from the early Middle Ages in Europe. In the 9th century CE lived

Agobard, one of the most celebrated and learned prelates in France. Born in Spain in 769, he came to France when he was a child and became archbishop of Lyons in 816 in the early reign of Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne. Agobard later became known as a local saint. The rare book department of the British Library holds some six or seven fine editions of his writings. It is not uncommon for several copies to be checked out at once, as they are a treasure-trove for a number of special interest groups.

Although many hands have dipped into his writings to pick out a treasure, that of fate played a strong part in preserving them. The last remaining copy of the manuscript was snatched from oblivion by a quirk of coincidental timing. By the early 17th century, the manuscript was gathering dust in some corner of a bookbinder's shop in Lyons. One day, Jean-Papire Masson, a historian and geographer and a hunter of rare manuscripts, went on a foray in the old quarter and happened to enter this shop for a browse. At that very moment, the bookbinder had a knife in his hand and was about to cut up the manuscript to reuse bits of it as binding material.¹ Realizing its importance, Masson bought the manuscript and had it printed up, although this first edition contains a great many errors.² Henceforth, St Agobard's treatises came to be included in editions of the collected works of the early Church Fathers. They figure prominently among the writings of their century.

The writings comprise some two dozen Latin treatises and may be divided into three broad categories. The first includes political subjects and the second religious ones. Among the latter is a treatise against the cult of images. Protestant theologians

**OF ALL THE PHENOMENA THAT
MEDIATE BETWEEN SKY-HEAVEN AND
THE EARTH, WEATHER IS THE NATURAL
PARADIGM. IT MEDIATES IN THE WORLD
OF NATURE AS IT UNFOLDS IN TIME.
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN TIME AND
THE WEATHER IS SO CLOSE THAT
THE WORDS FOR THEM
ARE IDENTICAL IN FRENCH.**

have interpreted this to suggest that St Agobard's thought anticipated the Reformation, which took place some six centuries later. In the third category are five treatises on the pernicious influence of Judaism. These are letters to the emperor and members of the imperial court, warning them of the power and influence that the Jews enjoyed in Lyons in the midst of Christian society. These texts were translated by German authors in the 1930s and studied along with such titles as *The Protocols of Zion*.³ In the see of Lyons, the immediate successor of St Agobard brought his relatively modest attitude to an extreme level of anti-Semitism.

The fourth category comprises writings on superstitions and abusive practises, such as duelling and trials by ordeal. Agobard's anti-ordeal position was rare in its time. Christian commentators generally hold him in high regard as a beacon of rationality and critical thinking.⁴ One treatise is entitled "Against the Foolish Opinion of the Mob on Hail and Thunder".⁵ This was written to refute the belief, which was very widespread in Agobard's archdiocese, that the weather

was controlled by local wizards, the *Tempestarii*. St Agobard points out the error in this belief, shared by peasants and nobles alike, and insists that the only entity capable of controlling the weather is the Christian God. He gives a great many Biblical citations to demonstrate this, including some from Hebrew history.

This treatise on weather magic, probably written around 814 to 816, provided the inspiration for the title of a cult classic in the field of UFOlogy, written in 1969, *Passport to Magonia: on UFOs, Folklore, and Parallel Worlds* by scientist Jacques Vallée.⁶ The first edition was a groundbreaking book that went out of print for years and became a sought-after collector's item. It was finally reprinted in 1993 with a new preface. Vallée's main thesis is that the occurrence of UFOs has deep roots in the old folklore of many nations. In the increased frequency of sightings since World War II and their interpretation, we are witnessing modern folklore in the making. Magonia represents an enchanted place beyond time, a magical land or fairy realm.

The name Magonia appears in a passage that St Agobard wrote as a prime example

**PEOPLE, NOT GODS AND SPIRITS,
HAVE PRODUCED GLOBAL WARMING
AND HAVE THUS PLAYED THE PART OF
WEATHER MAGICIANS.
SKILLFUL MAGICIANS, HOWEVER,
FOCUS ON DESIRED RESULTS IN THE
PRACTICE OF THEIR ART. OUR
MAGICAL ROLE IS THUS FLAWED ...**

of the credulity with which he was surrounded. The passage in question reads as follows: "We have, however, seen and heard many men plunged in such great stupidity, sunk in such depths of folly, as to believe that there is a certain region, which they call Magonia, whence ships sail in the clouds, in order to carry back to that region those fruits of the earth which are destroyed by hail and tempests; the sailors paying rewards to the storm wizards and themselves receiving corn and other produce. Out of the number of those whose blind folly was deep enough to allow them to believe these things possible, I saw several exhibiting in a certain concourse of people, four persons in bonds—three men and a woman who they said had fallen from these same ships; after keeping them for some days in captivity they had brought them before the assembled multitude, as we have said, in our presence to be stoned. But truth prevailed".⁷

Sometime in the early 1990s, the details in this passage concerning corn and fruits that had been flattened by wind and magical storms came to be interpreted as a historical instance of a crop circle event.⁸ A cartoon illustration of this incident published in a book for children on the

history of Lyons shows the magical wind flattening the corn in a more or less circular shape.⁹ There is, however, no mention of any specific shape of the flattened corn in Agobard's treatise. Reports of ordinary weather conditions, such as rain or storms, in connection with crop circle events since the 1980s do not point to any consistent pattern, but there are repeated reports of extraordinary weather or mediating phenomena, such as unexplained lights, sounds and UFOs. A few circle events have been found in ice, carpets, and other materials but nearly all have been in food crops—wheat, barley, and rapeseed.

The equation linking extraordinary weather events with food crops is so close that one can be substituted for the other. A good example of this appears in the oldest surviving literary work of any length, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, dated to around 3000 BCE. The epic contains an account of the Great Flood. In Tablet 11, two gods are speaking to one another. Enki, god of water, wisdom and magic is speaking to Enlil, god of air, wind and storms, who is the executive power of the firmament. The water god gives the storm god a disguised warning of the impending deluge. In order not to appear a liar after

the fact, he makes a play on words and substitutes the words "shower of wheat" for "shower of rain". He says, according to Robert Temple's verse translation, "Oh, what great harvest riches shall this land enjoy! Yes, He who orders the grainheads in the evening—What a shower of wheat shall He rain down upon you!".¹⁰ In California, a traditional story of the Shasta people links volcanic eruptions with salmon, their main food source. The hero Coyote traps thieving hornets inside Mount Shasta. He builds a fire and seals all holes in the mountain. Grandfather Turtle helps by sitting on top like a lid. There is a rumbling noise. Turtle steps aside. Suddenly there is an explosion, and out pop the stolen salmon, all cooked, smoked, and ready to eat.¹¹

In religion, weather events often go hand-in-hand with extraordinary foods and sacrifice. The supreme god of the ancient Indian world of the *Rig Veda* was Indra, thunder and weather, who constantly craved drinks of immortal elixir, Soma. The ancient Greek mystery religion, the rites of Eleusis, combined weather with both ordinary and extraordinary foods. At the crux of the rites the initiates, who may have partaken of a psychotropic drink, were shown an ear of barley and the words "Rain, bring fruit" were spoken. Traditional Judaism, a religion in which foods play a consistently important role, retains prayers for good weather in the celebration of Shavuot. Traditional Roman Catholics consult the blood of St Januarius for weather readings.

The art of magic, in contrast to the practice of religion, seeks directly to invoke and influence the spirits, the winds and the weather. The Akkadian-Chaldean inscriptions, thought to date from at least 1800 BCE, are the oldest magical docu-

ments known and contain an incantation concerning the dark counterparts of the planetary gods: "Seven are they! ... They are the day of mourning and of noxious winds! They are the day of fate, and the devastating wind which precedes it!" The Greco-Egyptian Magical Papyri, written down between the 1st and 4th centuries CE, contain an invocation dedicated to the constellation of the Great Bear and these words: "I invoke you, ye holy ones, mighty, majestic, glorious Splendours ... mighty arch-daimons ... ministering to earthquakes ... snow-scatterers, rain-wafters ... tempest-tossing lords of fate ... dew-compelling ... gale-raising ... sky-wandering vagrants ... air-roving ... holy, invincible [magic words], perform my behests".¹²

The connection between food and weather is extended to encompass the process of digestion in the writings of Paracelsus, medical doctor and alchemist of the 16th century and towering figure in the history of western esoteric traditions. In *Archidoxis Magica* he describes the weather as the result of digestive purgation performed by the stars. These empty themselves, thus creating the wind, and "... as man, by natural exercise and the process of excretion, purges the phlegm from his nostrils, so do the stars ... undergo these excretions." The star vapor that flows down by night is called dew, and by winter hoar-frost.¹³

Paracelsus describes the weather in terms of body processes of the stars. The universe is pervaded by a single energy, the astral light or vapor. Three centuries later, another physician, Wilhelm Reich, did much experimental research on controlled weather changes and is said to have been able to produce rain and disperse clouds. This was done through the manipulation

of what he called orgone energy, a single life-force that pervades the universe. This same energy streams through the human body and is connected with sexuality and fertility.

Folklore illustrates the loop of fertility between weather and foodcrops. Female figures were made in many parts of Europe using the last sheaf of corn to be mown. This corn maiden or corn mother was sometimes dowsed with buckets of water to invoke rain for the next year's crops. Rain-making could be done by women who would pull wet ploughs through the fields. Certain springs and holy wells were sources of rain-making, such as the Fontaine de Barenton in Brittany. In Japan, women would go through the village making loud noise and then wrestle naked with each other to induce rain.

The stories of successful weather control effected by magicians, shamans, and medicine men are legion. To mention only one, an eye-witness account is given of a weather miracle performed in 1878 by Last Horse, a Lakota medicine man who was a Thunder Dreamer. As a storm came up suddenly, threatening to disrupt an important feast, Last Horse went to the center of the village with his rattle, raised his face to the sky, and sang a Thunder song commanding the clouds to part. The clouds slowly but surely dispersed and the feast began under clear skies.¹⁴

Weather is nature's paradigm of all mediating phenomena. A change in global climate is going hand-in-hand with changes in other mediations. More and more people in the West are reporting experiences with spirit messengers of all kinds. It is as though the hole in the ozone layer of Earth's atmosphere were also a widening hole in what separates people from such phenomena. Beyond doubt, the

relationship between sky-heaven and the earth is changing.

People, not gods and spirits, have produced global warming and have thus played the part of weather magicians. Skillful magicians, however, focus on desired results in the practice of their art. Our magical role is thus flawed, because global warming does not have a specifically desired outcome. While global warming may improve the climate locally in some areas, on the whole this "magic" has spun out of control. Breaks are showing in the food chain. This suggests that the balance of food offerings and sacrifice has not been respected. To quench the thirst of their weather god Indra, ancient priests offered long drinks of Soma, the elixir of immortality. To our weather god, denied and nameless, we have burned much fuel made from fossils, the liquid essence of mortality. The weather is now showing us a time of phenomenal change.

ENDNOTES

1. *Un humaniste italianisant: Papire Masson (1544-1611)*, Pierre Ronzy, Edouard Champion, Paris, 1924, p. 539.
2. *Sancti Agobardi Episcopi Ecclesiae Lugdunensis Opera*, preface by Papire Masson, Paris, 1605.
3. *Kann ein Christ Antisemit sein?: Die Briefe des Erzbischofs Agobard über die Juden*, Gustav Strobl, U. Bodung Verlag, Erfurt, 1937.
4. *Agobard of Lyons: Churchman and Critic*, Allen Cabaniss, Syracuse University Press, 1953.
5. "*Contra insulam vulgi opinionem de Grandine et Tonitruis*".
6. *Passport to Magonia: on UFOs, Folklore and Parallel Worlds*, Jacques Vallée, Contemporary Books, Inc., Chicago, 1993 (reprint first edition,

1969, with new preface).

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
8. George Bishop, C.C.C.S. Archivist, personal communication, 2000.
9. "The Cereologist", no. 1, Summer 1990, "Flattened Corn Sold to Astronauts", Christine Rhone, pp. 12-13.
10. *He Who Saw Everything: A Verse Translation of The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Robert Temple, Rider, London, 1991, pp. 120-121, note 3 p. 132.
11. *Voices of the Winds: Native American Legends*, Margot Edmonds and Ella C. Clark, Facts on File, 1989, pp. 139-140.
12. *Magic in History: Ritual Magic*, Elizabeth M. Butler, Sutton, 1998 (reprint of first ed., 1949, Cambridge University Press), pp. 6-9.
13. *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, called Paracelsus the Great*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Edward Waite, James Elliott and Co., London, 1894, pp. 219-221. (*Archidoxis Magica* is attributed to Paracelsus but may have been written by Gerhard Dorn ca. 1570).
14. *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, Luther Standing Bear, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston & New York, 1933, pp. 206-207.

Christine Rhone is the author, with John Michell, of Twelve Tribe Nations (Thames & Hudson, 1991), the translator of Jean Richer's Sacred Geography of the Ancient Greeks (SUNY Press, 1994), and the translator of Antoine Faivre's Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition (SUNY Press, 2000). She is a contributor to many small press magazines and journals in the UK and the US and a priestess in the Fellowship of Isis. She resides in London, and may be reached at <christine@rhone.abel.uk>.

BOOK REVIEWS:

WICCAN ROOTS: GERALD GARDNER AND THE MODERN WICCAN REVIVAL

by Philip Heselton. Capal Bann Publishing: Chieveley Berks, 2000
ISBN 186163 1103. £14.95

*Reviewed by Juliette Wood
The Folklore Society*

The book, in the author's words, attempts to explore 'the historical dimension of modern Witchcraft', and where better to start than with the pivotal figure of Gerald Gardner. Heselton's book considers every source possible—books, articles, newspapers, interview material, hearsay, even the occasional flash of Wiccan intuition—in an attempt to throw light on the events surrounding Gardner's initiation into Witchcraft in 1939. Since the time Gardner 'went public' with his announcement that an ancient Witch cult had survived in England, a number of scholars from both historical and folkloric fields have taken issue with all, or parts, of his theory. Much of what Gardner described did not fit in with Witchcraft beliefs and practices that were known, and there were practical difficulties with the notion that the religion represented a continuity from prehistoric times. Current Wiccan thinking concentrates less on ancient continuities and more on the beliefs themselves. Thus the suggestion that

Gardner got his material from comparatively modern sources, such as Rosicrucianism, Masonism, Aleister Crowley's writings and even fantasy fiction or poetry, seems less an attack on the authenticity of religious belief, and more the workings of a dynamic, vital syncretism. Some scholars, such as Jeffrey Russell, a respected historian of Witchcraft, dismissed Gardner's work and assumed that he made the whole thing up. Thanks to the work of Gardner's friend and pupil, Doreen Valiente, the existence of at least one person mentioned by him 'Old Dorothy' (Dorothy Clutterbuck) has been verified. Heselton's book identifies even more people with an interest in spiritual matters who knew Gardner and much of this book is an attempt to clarify their role.

The main question still remains: how much of the tradition was *in vivo* when Gardner discovered it, and how much did he add himself? This book is a balanced attempt to answer that question, supplying information where it is available and using intuition, perfectly understandable in a writer who writes from a Wiccan perspective, to further his arguments. Information is primary in dealing with the people Gardner met while living in Highcliffe. Heselton clearly feels that Gardner did discover a 'surviving Witchcraft tradition' and that Dorothy Clutterbuck, the Mason family and Edith Woodford-Grimes (Dafo) were all members. Gardner attended meetings of a local Rosicrucian group known as the Crotona Fellowship where he met a group of people who recognised him as 'of the blood'. Heselton identifies them as members of the Mason family, and provides evidence that they were involved in theosophy, co-masonry and Rosicrucianism.

However, whether they were hereditary Witches with an independent tradition of their own (and not just participating in the ongoing evolution with Gardner himself) is more difficult to establish. Although interesting, the material suggesting they were Witches (pp.110-115), depends on hearsay and written hints that date to the 1950's at the earliest, the period when Gardner was busy publicising his system and creating a suitable history for it.

The chapter on Dafo, the Witch who initiated Gardner into the Craft, establishes a possible connection with the Mason family, and a more certain connection with Gardner. It also illustrates both the strength and weakness of Heselton's approach. He suggests (p. 120) that Edith Woodford-Grimes added a hyphen to create a more aristocratic sounding name because of its similarity to a composer called Amy Woodforde-Finden about whom she might have known. There follows a short biography of a composer not connected in any way with Gardner's movement. The amount of information given is commendable, but it can be distracting and tangential. There are a number of contradictory accounts of Gardner's meeting with Dafo, but again the question is whether she was instructing him in an independent tradition or close to him during the period when he himself was weaving the fabric of Wicca from multiple sources. She clearly retired from the proceedings when Gardner began to publicise his material for reasons which are not entirely clear. In his study, *The Triumph of the Moon*, Professor Ronald Hutton suggests that she is the actual person behind the persona of Old Dorothy.

This figure is quite rightly described as

**... THE MATERIAL SUGGESTING
[MEMBERS OF THE CROTONA FELLOWSHIP]
WERE WITCHES DEPENDS ON HEARSAY
AND WRITTEN HINTS THAT DATE TO
THE 1950'S AT THE EARLIEST,
THE PERIOD WHEN GARDNER WAS
BUSY PUBLICISING HIS SYSTEM AND
CREATING A SUITABLE HISTORY FOR IT.**

'a character who looms large in Wiccan folklore'. Heselton is convinced, on the strength of her diaries (actually day books mostly in verse) that she was an important member of the New Forest Witch coven with whom Gardner and his friends from the Rosicrucian society joined up. This reviewer did not find the argument convincing. Heselton tries very hard to find pagan references in the rather conventional nature imagery in Dorothy's diary. He claims, for example, that Dorothy referred to 'a nameless being whom we can only identify with the Goddess'. The issue surely is whether Dorothy identified this being with the Goddess. That Wiccans might do so, only creates a circularity in the argument. A second suggestion, that her use of nature constitutes 'strong and deeply felt pagan expression', is highly subjective (pp.164-65). The same intense nature imagery, and lack of obvious orthodox Christian reference, could be found in other writers, the poet Swinburne for example, but this does not a practising Witch make. And to suggest that because Dorothy liked fairies, the 'wicked fairy' in one of her entries was a coded term for 'Witch', does take speculation a little too far (p.200). However, it is good to have

the extracts and the information on Dorothy, and Heselton himself admits that the case for Dorothy's involvement is far from proved.

Factual information is less readily available regarding the circumstances of Gardner's initiation, namely whether a coven existed in the New Forest and the details of a ritual performed to stop Hitler's invasion. All the sources and their variations are assembled and assessed. However the real problem again is not whether an initiation or anti-invasion ritual took place, but whether these rituals belonged to a pre-existing tradition of Witchcraft or to a new one with Gardner himself as catalyst.

The author treats as reasonable the idea that Witches attempted to stop Hitler's invasion and assesses the likelihood of two earlier anti-invasion stories linked with the Napoleonic Wars and the Spanish Armada. He is personally sympathetic, in the context of the New Forest background, to the notion that William Rufus had some connection with a magical fraternity. If there were supporting evidence for these things, then yes the likelihood of a Wiccan tradition going back at least to the 16th century (the original date given by Gardner for his

Book of Shadows) would be a possibility. One cannot accuse the author of slapdash research, and he admits (p.215) that the evidence for a New Forest coven is not proven. The difficulty is that the author relies heavily in this context on the hearsay/survivalist 'what if' kind of arguments that are most likely to be questioned. Anti-invasion folklore is not unknown, and often, like the women in red petticoats convincing the French that they are soldiers, has an element of credibility and a great deal of narrative embellishment. It is equally possible that these stories are simply a re-working by Gardner (or someone) of the Berwick Witches incident in order to cast his Craft as a positive force for good. The suggestion that the Rufus stone was a focus for Witchcraft (p. 232) is a good example of just the sort of tradition Gardner set in motion. Rufus as Witch leader and sacrifice is found in Margaret Murray's writing. More contemporary documents, for example Walter Map (friend and confidant of Henry II), record prophetic dreams before Rufus's death, but nothing of magic.

What does come across in the more speculative ways in which the author handles evidence is the importance of intuition and belief in reincarnation in Wiccan thinking. In this context, a strict historical time-scale would be less important. While Gardner did not fabricate the events, he was a prime mover in creating rituals in which folk tradition forms the least important element in comparison with various occult traditions. It is difficult to reconcile Gardner's highly organised, hereditary, overwhelmingly positive and ritualised Craft with Witchcraft material from southern Britain or indeed anywhere. Instances of

Witch families are recorded in the trials and many practitioners of magic attribute their material to forbears, but this is not quite the multigenerational, carefully nurtured lines necessary to Gardner's view. Witches working in groups are comparatively rare (except in the trial records and this may very well be slanted), and there is little evidence for books and complex rituals. In addition, the actions of Witches tend to have a domestic focus (and often involve cursing), with little evidence for attempts to alter the course of history as Gardner claimed his Witch coven had done in defending Britain against invaders. (It is worth noting that the Berwick Witches were accused of trying to kill the king, not protect the country). If anything, Gardner's material shows some similarity to the work of cunning men and women, but even here, the tight organisations and the concern with world events is lacking. However there are striking parallels (and this has been pointed out by other scholars, notably Aidan Kelly and Ronald Hutton) with the revival of ritual magic in the 18th and 19th centuries. It does seem, on present knowledge, that Gardner fused the idea that the Witch cult had survived as a secret religion (as argued in Murray and Leland) with principles of Rosicrucianism and Masonism as mediated by Crowley's OTO and other organisations. What Heselton's book does suggest is that the input for this process was probably more complex than anyone realised (or Gardner himself let on). If it has not furthered the argument about organised Witchcraft prior to Gardner, it has certainly illuminated and clarified the contemporary context.

THE GODDESS AND THE ALPHABET: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN WORD AND IMAGE

by Leonard Shlain
1983. Princeton UP, xii + 154 pp.

*Reviewed by Brian Hayden
Simon Fraser University*

It is the central thesis of this book that cultures which do not have writing exist in an idyllic pure state of mental, social, gender, and ideological harmony where goddesses reign or co-reign with gods. According to Shlain, the introduction of writing changed all this, leading to left-brain dominance, and therefore analytical, linear, aggressive, patriarchal patterns of thought and behaviour. To wit:

Prior to the Old Testament, there did not exist any society that prevented women from conducting significant sacraments, but the first religion based on a book, and all subsequent Western literate religions, banned women from officiating over important ceremonies. (p. 111)

The perceptions of anyone who learned how to send and receive information by means of regular, sequential, linear rows of abstract symbols were wrenched from a balanced, centrist position toward the dominating, masculine side of the human psyche. (p. 63)

In every society that learned the written word, the female deity lost ground to the male deity ... women lost their hold and fell from grace—economically, politically, and spiritually. (p. 63)
Placing the pen the the fighting hand
etches aggression into the written word ...

Patriarchy and misogyny have been the inevitable result. (p. 44)

Shlain also argues that the Israelites waged wars because they worshiped god through words (p. 102), while ancient Egypt is portrayed as a woman's utopia because picture symbols were used and jewelry was forged instead of swords (p.62).

These are sweeping generalizations and controversial claims, but can they be justified? Shlain's arguments and citations will undoubtedly seem seductive to those with no background in archaeology and anthropology. However, it must be readily apparent to even the most naive student of these disciplines that neither Shlain's information nor his reasoning can bear close examination. One wonders if the entire book has not been put together as a spoof of some of the more outlandish claims by popular feminist writers.

A few simple observations would seem to be in order. First of all, it is hardly the case that preliterate societies generally honoured women or that their roles were balanced and harmonious with those of men. Throughout most of New Guinea, the Amazon, Mesoamerica, and Africa, women's roles in tribal illiterate societies are unenviably low—one needs only to be reminded of such practices as infibulation and female circumcision. Furthermore, if patriarchy developed from writing, why were so many preliterate societies patriarchal? Nor is it the case that every society that did adopt writing became patriarchal. The best prehistoric case is probably Minoan Crete where Linear A and B writing systems were used.

Almost all chiefdoms and states (and many tribes) were established by dint of military might, and as such they tended to be dominated by aggressive males and

... PROGRESS IN WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND
INCREASED STATUS FOR WOMEN
HAS GONE HAND IN HAND WITH THE
TRULY WIDESPREAD INCREASES
IN LITERACY FOR ENTIRE POPULATIONS
WHICH HAS OCCURRED SINCE
THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION ...

their armies. These are the forces that result in patriarchal systems and complex societies. It was the emergence of complex societies that subsequently led to writing as an attempt to deal with the increasing elaboration of sociopolitical systems.

It is also incredulous that anyone could portray Egypt as a non-violent woman's utopia. The position of elite women may have been relatively high, but the power of Egyptian elites was based on military conquests from the start to the finish, as clearly exemplified by the Narmer Palette and the scenes of Rames II leading his armies in invasions of Near Eastern neighbors. Nor did the Egyptians have a monopoly on making jewelry. Virtually every elite in the world—even in the most patriarchal and militaristic states—have underwritten the production of jewelry.

Moreover, Shlain is in a real dilemma trying to explain how such writing systems—confined universally to a very small number of scribes in every society up until the Industrial Revolution—could have had such a pervasive impact on entire communities and large populations. Furthermore, when one considers that progress in women's rights and increased status for women has gone hand in hand with the truly widespread increases in literacy for entire populations

which has occurred since the Industrial Revolution, it is apparent that Shlain's theoretical bucket has so many holes that it will retain nothing of worth. Does he really think that all literate women, past and present, have succumbed to left brain patriarchal, misogynistic aggressiveness?

Perhaps one would not be surprised to find favorable reviews of books like Shlain's *The Goddess and the Alphabet* in popular Pagan magazines, however, it is distressing to see this kind of book taken seriously in a journal like *The Pomegranate* (Issue 16) which has aspirations of scholastic respectability. From the viewpoint of academic archaeology and anthropology, Shlain's book is yet another amateur attempt to interpret the past by someone with no training in the field, but with some reasonable credentials in an unrelated discipline—somewhat like a movie star trying to be president. The result is what might be generously labelled “archaeological science fiction.” As such, it belongs on the bookshelf alongside tomes by Erich Von Danniken and Barry Fell, and it hardly warrants serious attention except as an unfortunate example of sociopolitical fantasy.

*A COMMUNITY OF
WITCHES:
CONTEMPORARY
NEOPAGANISM AND
WITCHCRAFT IN THE
UNITED STATES*

by Helen Berger. 1999
Columbia, SC: University of SC Press
Hardcover, 148 pp, \$39.95 Cdn.

Reviewed by Siân Reid

None can accuse Helen Berger of rushing her research. *A Community of Witches* is the product of eleven years of participant observation work among Neopagans in the Northeast United States, including the observation of one coven from its inception to its dissolution more than a decade later. She has supplemented her qualitative work with a more broadly-based survey to which she received more than 2000 responses.

This is neither a general overview nor a narrowly conceived ethnography, although the extensive use of ethnographic material lends the work much of its colour and richness. Readers hoping to discover broad demographic generalizations about American witches or a *Drawing Down the Moon*-style catalogue of witchcraft groups will be disappointed by Berger. Her goal is much more focused and much more academic; she wishes to explore Neopagan witchcraft as a “religion of late modernity”, following the usage of American social theorist Anthony Giddens, and to

examine the changes it is undergoing as it matures.

Berger's analysis is among the finest examples I've seen of the level of insight one can obtain about Neopagan religion when one brackets aside its ‘unusualness’ and takes it seriously as a legitimate product of its cultural context. Using the same sociological concepts that are used when examining other contemporary phenomena, such as routinization, life politics, communities of choice and moral re-embedding, Berger offers her academic colleagues a fascinating example of late modern cultural innovation and adaptation, and her participants and their peers a thoughtful, serious, and grounded interpretation of how their beliefs and practices intersect with and elaborate some of the leading-edge strands of social theory.

If I have a reservation about Berger at all, it is that most of her information sources and observation locations seem to have been dominated by ‘eclectic’ Neopagans. Any differences in attitude or approach between these respondents and more traditional Gardnerian and Alexandrian practitioners are not brought out in the analysis; both sorts of groups are simply considered under the heading of ‘gender-inclusive’ groups, which has the potential to be misleading. To give her the benefit of the doubt, it may simply have been that she did not have access to sufficient numbers of ‘traditional’ respondents for any differences to become apparent.

On the whole, however, this is an extremely well-written and thought provoking analysis. If Tanya Luhrmann's *Persuasions of a Witch's Craft* occupies a prominent place on your shelves, this is one you'll want to tuck up right next to it.

*KEEPERS OF THE FLAME:
INTERVIEWS WITH ELDERS
OF TRADITIONAL
WITCHCRAFT IN AMERICA*

by Morganna Davies & Aradia Lynch

Reviewed by Stephanie Martin

This book follows in the footsteps of its sisters, *Drawing Down the Moon* by Adler and *People of the Earth Speak Out* by Hopman. Its focus however is limited to interviews with American Traditional Craft Elders, thus filling a niche that has been awaiting its writing.

The authors' intent was to document the experiences, views, and opinions of those who were instrumental in laying the groundwork for traditional Witchcraft as it exists in the United States today. The authors spoke with Craft Elders from a wide variety of Traditions ranging from Alexandrian to the Tuatha de Danann, as well as other Traditional Craft leaders, including those who are known to the public at large such as Hans Holzer, Judy Harrow, Chas Clifton, Jimahl, Raymond Buckland, Leo Martello and those who are mainly known only within the Traditional Craft sphere.

The first part of the book briefly introduces the various Traditions represented and documents the experiences of the Elders of those Traditions as they first discovered and entered into the Craft. These narratives are reminders to those who are relative newcomers to the Craft (post 1980) of the difficulty that these Elders had in finding books and altar materials, not to mention a teacher or coven!

The second part of the book is a question and answer session containing the opinions of

the previously profiled Elders. Issues ranging from Craft antiquity to opinions on the role that Traditional Craft should play in the Contemporary Pagan movement are contained in this section.

The second part contains the meat of the book. With questions such as: "What are your feelings on Craft degrees and hierarchy?" or "Do you believe that traditional secrecy has helped or harmed the Craft?", the extraordinarily wide range of experience and training comes to the fore. The reader can gain insight into the beginnings of the American Craft movement through the Elders' replies which illustrate the experience of having a long-term involvement in the Craft. The variety of the opinions presented help to illuminate the assortment of the people involved in Traditional Craft as well as, to a limited extent, the differences (and similarities) of the Traditions' philosophies.

This book is an important look into the evolution of the Craft movement from the days when secrecy was still of paramount importance to the more public Craft as it exists today in the United States. Early Craft Elders are getting older and, in fact, three interviewees passed away before the publication of the book. This text gives a voice to many of the Elders who, until this time, have either chosen to remain behind the scenes from the beginning of their Craft involvement (and were known to few outside of their Tradition) or those who have 'retired' and become solitary practitioners. For those interested in Craft history, especially the Craft as it has developed in the United States, this book gives valuable insight into both the roots and the development of the Craft through the opinions of Traditional Craft Elders on relevant matters such as the issues of teaching, public tolerance of the Craft, and even the necessity of Traditional Craft in today's world.

*WICCAN COVENS:
HOW TO START AND
ORGANIZE YOUR OWN*

by Judy Harrow
Citadel Press, 1999
285 pages. \$12.95 paper

Reviewed by Fritz Muntean

A shorter version of this review is about to appear in an upcoming issue of Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions. This magazine is highly recommended to our readers, who are invited to visit its website at <www.novareligio.com>.

The last twenty years have seen a noticeable drift away from the coven as the primary organizational unit of modern Witchcraft. A wide-spread desire for acceptance and respectability, combined with a populist call to political action, has led to the current preeminence of large organizations (Wiccan 'Churches' and Witchcraft 'Collectives'). At the same time, the proliferation of popular 'how-to' books about the Craft has convinced many beginners that solitary practice is the norm rather than the exception. By challenging many of the assumptions on which these trends are based, and by providing support and direction to coveners and coven leaders, *Wiccan Covens* may serve to reverse these trends. Harrow's observations on the dynamics of coven organization are based not only on decades of experience, but also on her extensive readings in the sociology of group workings. Considerable progress has been made in this field since the late 70s, and Harrow's readers are provided

with extensive references to state-of-the-art literature.

Harrow encourages her readers to regard Wicca as more of a religious order than a church. Covens, she says, "are not tiny congregations; they are more like non-resident monasteries", and a seminary "is not the same thing as a Sunday School" (83). Although the practice of holding separate events for beginners and experienced practitioners is believed by many to be hopelessly elitist, experience and reflection have convinced Harrow otherwise. Beginner's circles, she believes, are limited to beginning-level activities by the inexperience of the participants, so she recommends that outer- and inner-court activities be separated in order to provide more experienced practitioners with a suitable environment in which to perform their own deeper and more contemplative work.

Harrow makes a firm break with the 20 year-old tradition of militant egalitarianism in Wiccan organization. She states that many groups which begin as non-hierarchical collectives have been observed to develop emergent leadership, whereas lineage-based covens with clearly designated leaders often move toward more collective decision making as they mature. The egalitarian collective may be an ideal toward which many aspire, but it appears to be one that requires more maturity than most beginners can provide (25). What's worse, a premature leap at the ideal state of non-hierarchy may serve to mask the development of covert leadership—with its covert norms, unstated rules, and other unfortunate characteristics—"if anything made more painful by the concealing mask of consensus process" (264).

According to Harrow, the primary value of hierarchical organization in covens is its

**WICCAN COVENS DOES NOT EXACTLY
WAGE A FRONTAL ASSAULT ON THE NON-
HIERARCHICAL, CONSENSUS-BASED IDEAL
... BUT IT CRITICIZES MANY OF THE
ASSUMPTIONS ON WHICH THESE VIEWS ARE
BASED AND SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN AT LEAST
PARTIALLY WRITTEN AS A CORRECTIVE TO
THE RECLAIMING MODEL OF COVEN
ORGANIZATION.**

acknowledgment and support of elders. Wiccan elders are those who have been doing the work longer than others, have earned the respect of the community in the process, and whose presence makes it both easier and safer for beginners to work through the process of initiation (133). All recently received wisdom to the contrary, Harrow promotes the traditional model of one coven leader of each gender, on the grounds that it “allows Wiccan students to observe the full range of human functioning in the clergy role” (215). The Priestess as Goddess and the Priest as God may be “a simplistic view, a caricature of human function”, but as long as we understand that the masculine and feminine energies which Wiccans represent as God and Goddess do not reside exclusively in one gender or another, it does make the Deities of Wicca easier to understand — especially for the beginner (214).

Readers are cautioned against involvement with those needy and insecure people who view magic as a means to achieve power and control. In contrast to the considerable emphasis on self-initiation and self-empowerment in those segment of modern Witchcraft which are most influ-

enced by the Human Potential Movement, Harrow clearly recommends Erik Erickson’s model of maturity (the willingness to move beyond self-absorption by contributing to the human future through teaching or mentoring) over Maslow’s emphasis, in his hierarchy of human needs, on self-esteem and self-actualization (193). Coven leaders are also warned that people whose personal lives and careers are constantly in crisis, or those who are mentally unstable in an obvious way, are notorious for interfering with the focus of a group. While in their early stages of development, covens often function as growth and support groups, but the kind of support which covens can provide must not be confused with therapy. Dealing with the in-depth psychological problems of individual group members “is far beyond the competence of most coven leaders” (111).

Wiccan Covens does not exactly wage a frontal assault on the non-hierarchical, consensus-based ideal promoted by Starhawk and her followers, but it criticizes many of the assumptions on which these views are based and seems to have been at least partially written as a correc-

tive to the Reclaiming model of coven organization.

Unfortunately, a certain amount of slippage is occasionally apparent between Harrow’s professional sophistication and the interpersonal demands of the Wiccan community in which she practices. At one point, she admits that grandiose titles such as a ‘Witch Queen’ or ‘Magus’ are overblown. ‘Grandparent’ “would be both warmer and more accurate”. But she still maintains that (apparent evidence to the contrary) the underlying principles of this practice are psychologically sound (257). On several occasions, she informs her readers that the inability to distinguish between myth and truth—as well as the belief that symbols and metaphors are objective facts—are among the more corrosive symptoms of fundamentalism (251). Newcomers, she recommends, should be advised that Wiccans were not the target of the Inquisition, and that nine million women did not die as a result. In spite of this, Harrow continues to refer to the brutal persecution, repression, and destruction of “Earth-based traditions of Europe” (223) and “Pagan worshipers” (260). It would appear that she is reluctant to make a complete break with the currently discredited, though still popular, belief that modern Witchcraft is descended from a tradition which was actively and violently suppressed in the past.

These minor flaws notwithstanding, this book is highly recommended for both practitioners and students of Witchcraft. Its overall professionalism qualifies it as a singular event among writings by leaders of the movement, and it may prove to be a watershed in the evolution of the Wiccan coven.

READERS’ FORUM
continued from page 3

From the comments made by Ms Allen, I am inclined to agree with Starhawk and ask from whom did Ms Allen get her research information? It would not appear that she thoroughly researched the goddess movement, witches, pagan theology, or its participants but relied on the understanding and beliefs of outsiders.

*Jill Adix
Antioch University*

ELEANOR PEREZ WRITES:

I read the letters in your issue #16 from Starhawk and Michael York with great interest. I find myself in an awkward position: as a long-time fan of Starhawk, I’m disturbed to find myself agreeing with Prof York and wondering what Starhawk can possibly be thinking.

Can it be that Starhawk has become this isolated—and her position so sectarian? Is she not aware that, with one notable exception, the scholarly writers whom Charlotte Allen quotes are, themselves, well-known feminists or devoted Goddess-worshipping Pagans? Some of them, like Ronald Hutton, have more time in the Craft than even Starhawk herself.

Ms Allen must have interviewed a large number of Wiccans for this article—I’m a fairly minor player, and she interviewed me. [*Ed note: Allen and her editor exchanged 34 e-letters with us here at The Pom.*] Did Starhawk believe that she was the only one being interviewed? Or is she unaware that the Neolithic Utopian Matriarchate paradigm, with which she identifies so strongly, carries about the same weight among most of the thoughtful Goddess devotees of today as “God created the world in six calendar days” and “Jesus was born of a woman who never had sexual intercourse” does among thoughtful Christians.

I would hate to believe, as Prof York

**OBSCURANTISM IS A DREADFUL BURDEN
FOR ANY RELIGION TO BEAR, AND IT IS
MORE THAN UNFORTUNATE TO FIND IT
LURKING ... SO NEAR THE VERY HEART OF
PAGAN GODDESS SPIRITUALITY.**

suggests, that it is Starhawk's commitment to making a movie of the life of Maria Gimbutas which has caused her position in regard to Gimbutas' later, more contentious, theories to become so entrenched and to be championed so defensively.

But Starhawk's partner in this venture is Donna Read, the woman whose film "The Burning Times" treats as factual the most marginal, even mendacious, information, and which continues to be a major stumbling block for those of us who are working to improve relationships between Pagans and Christians.

The content of Charlotte Allen's article in the *Atlantic Monthly* is scarcely different from any number of pieces that have been appearing in Pagan and New Age magazines for some time. The best example that comes to mind is an article by Richard Smoley in the issue of *Gnosis* magazine dedicated to Witchcraft and Paganism a couple of years ago. [Ed note: "The Old Religion" (*Gnosis* #48, Summer 1998). The Pom reprinted this article in #6, Fall 98.] I know that there are thoughtful and educated people in Starhawk's Reclaiming Collective. Maybe the time has come for them to encourage Starhawk to read more broadly—and perhaps to choose her causes, and her confederates, with greater care.

Eleanor Perez
UCLA

MARY LOU MOSER WRITES:

It made me very sad to read Starhawk's response to Charlotte Allen's *Atlantic Monthly*

article, but I can't say it was completely unexpected. Those who were surprised and disheartened to find such an unfortunate example of obscurantism, should have been keeping current with Starhawk's more recent writings. In an interview with her and Carol Christ, 'Life, Death, and the Goddess' in *Gnosis* magazine (#48, 1998: 28-34), Starhawk praises "education outside of academia, through [New Age] workshops" and compares it favourably with "the university system of the late Middle Ages, where you have self-organized classes around things people want to learn, with no grades, no external validation for learning ... [where] you can do anything, you can explore anything. You can teach in ways you can't in academia." The introduction and notes to the 20th anniversary edition of *The Spiral Dance* contains a number of equally anti-intellectual and anti-scholarly statements.

Of all the unfortunate policies embraced by the Catholic Church over the centuries, none had quite so negative and long-lasting an effect on civilization as the centuries-long opposition to learning and intellectual enlightenment. Obscurantism is a dreadful burden for any religion to bear, and it is more than unfortunate to find it lurking, as it were, so near the very heart of Pagan Goddess spirituality.

Mary Lou Moser
Toronto

