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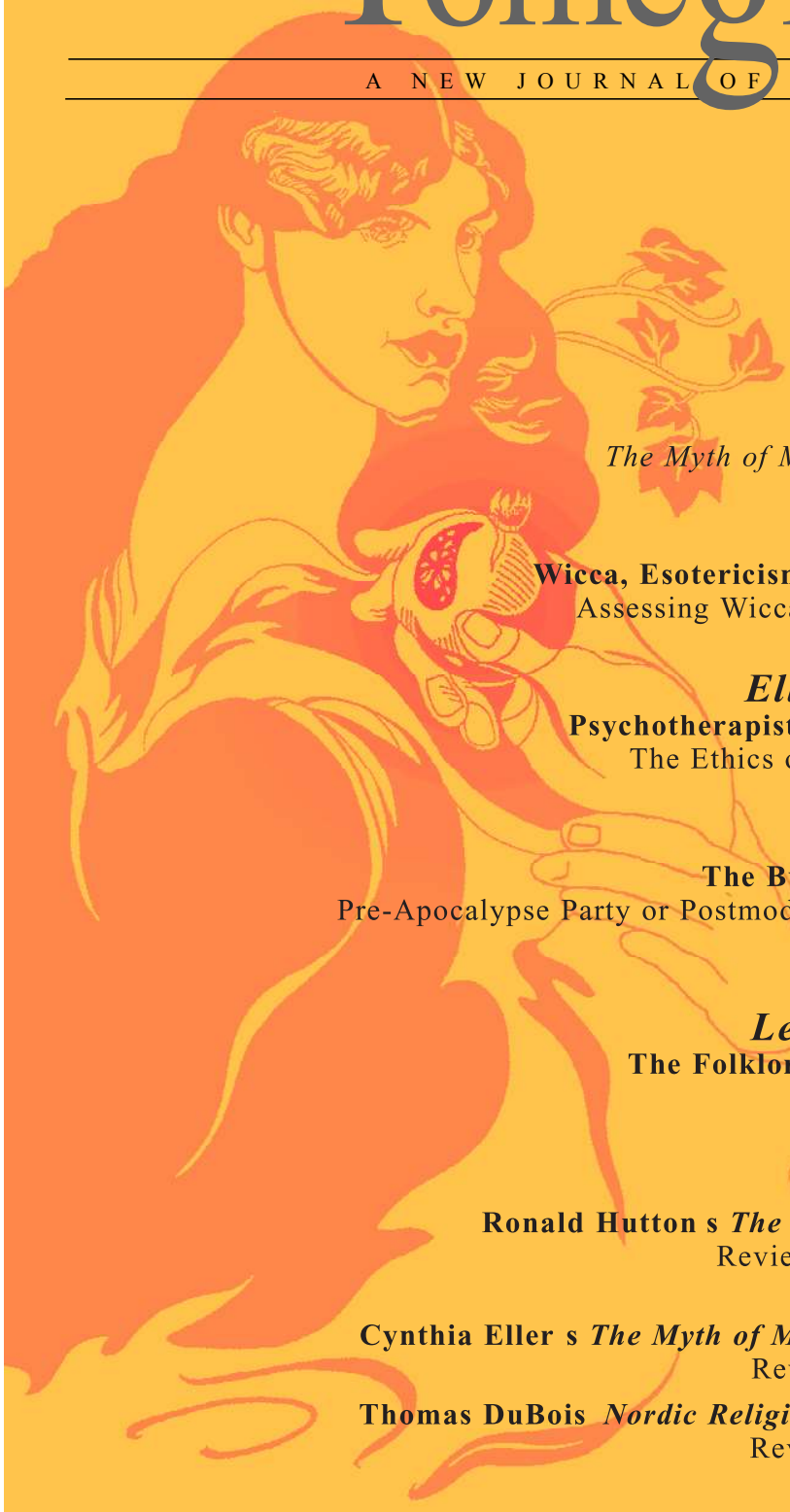
The Pomegranate

No. 14

The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



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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 homincular sculptures has become a feature of several Pagan gatherings, at Beltaine, Lammas, or the post-Samhein 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 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.

I am a feminist who believes that matriarchal myth runs counter to feminist interests.

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 thealogian; 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 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, thealogy. 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).

'Nature Religion' is a relatively recent academic construct under which a variety of religions have been grouped including ... Paganism, eco-spirituality, and indigenous religions.

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 primordial 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', 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.

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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: correspondences, 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 Trimegistus, 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 Symons, 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,

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.

'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.

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

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 Tolkein'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.

We might do well to question the role of imaginative fiction in turning people on to nature. ... does Tolkein'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?

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 overemphasis 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?

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 environmental 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.

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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

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. As I have suggested, the Wiccan response to Nature is often ill thought-out and confused, and as academics we must ask those questions which are not always necessarily welcome. In this paper, I have asked 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.

> … 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 …

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Psychotherapist and Wiccan Clergy: The Ethics of a Dual Relationship

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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 fulfiling 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

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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

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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, counsellor-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).

Ofer 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 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?

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.

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 transferential 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 transferential 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 transferential 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 relationships 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.

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The Burning Man Festival:
Pre-Apocalypse Party or Post-modern Kingdom of God?

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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 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.

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.

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 website). 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 Cathedral 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

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 ...

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—"pilgrims 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 brainwashing, 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.

> ... when Americans describe their spirituality they talk most about personal empowerment and self-expression rather than the requirements of community ...

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 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.

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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 unattested 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 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.*

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? 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 conceptual 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 harassment 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.

> 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.

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 & 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 passionel* wouldn't require such elaborate, Rube Goldberg preparations? The plot twists necessary to 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 bádud 7 loscud,* "wounding and drowning and burning" is a standard description for a peculiarly ritual kingly 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 prophesy or series of prophesies 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 prophesy. 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 Cruiach. / 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.

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.

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), 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 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 *voudoun* offers a case study in the way folk paganism can coexist with elite Christian culture.

> … 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.

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.skcldv.demon.co.uk/iafintro.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 flysheet 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.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Two Reviews of *The Truimph 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

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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

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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 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.

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 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 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.

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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 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 Craft: 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 "fundamentalist" 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 Goddess religion), but with the polemical agenda of revealing the supposed threat which the Goddess poses to contemporary society.

While many of his revelations may be difficult for "fundamentalist" Wiccans, it remains clear throughout that he is sympathetic to the Wiccan community.

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
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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-populations, 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 unwarrranted, 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.

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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 Hoglund
Independent Scholar

In *Nordic Religions of 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 continental 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.

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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 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 (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 *Eirîks 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 material 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.