# Fritz Muntean Collection

ms150/24/01-11

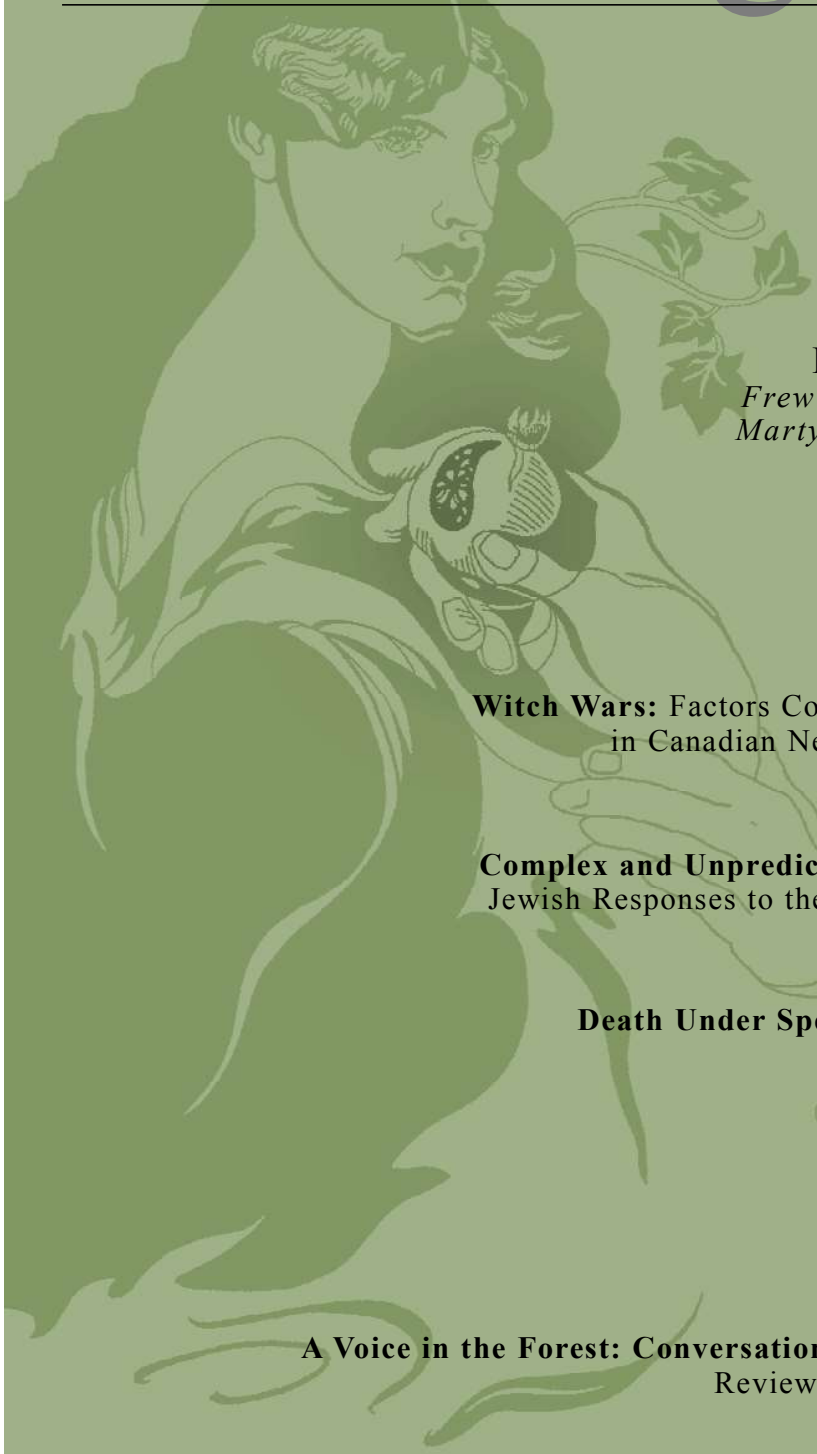
February 2000

# The Pomegranate

No. 11

# The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT






ISSUE NUMBER 11 FEBRUARY 2000

# The Pomegranate



*The Pomegranate*
is published quarterly.
ISSN 1528-0268 refers to this Journal.

Subscriptions:
4 issues: US$20 — 8 issues: US$37.50
by surface mail anywhere.
Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds, or Checks drawn on US banks to
*The Pomegranate*
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,
Corbett, OR 97019
Subs email: antech@teleport.com

Submissions:
Editorial email: fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca
See the inside back cover for our Call for Papers.
Ask us for our Writers' Guidelines, or read it on our website:
www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/
Deadline for submissions:
the Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.

The Cover:
Drawing by Tina Monod
from *PROSERPINE* by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1874



*The Pomegranate* is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

## Notes from the Underground

The editors of *The Pomegranate* were mortified when, after the publication of Bron Taylor's "Religion, Violence, and Radical Environmentalism" in *Pom* #10, we were reminded by him that his permission to publish excerpts from this article was contingent also on our receiving permission from the editors of *The Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence,* which originally published the full version, and indicating where the full version could be found. We regret to say that this fell through the cracks. We wish to apologize to Professor Taylor, and the journal's editor, David Rapoport, for the oversight. The complete article can be found in *Terrorism and Political Violence* v. 10, #4 (Winter 1998), pp. 1-42.

SUBSCRIPTIONS RISING

*The Pomegranate* is pleased to announce that our long-term goal of financial viability is, if not within our grasp, then surely visible on the far horizon. All that's required is (ahem…) a modest rise in the price of subscriptions. As of our next issue (#12, May 2000) the cost of a year's sub (4 issues) will be US$20, two years for $37.50, and back issues will $5 each—all by surface mail anywhere. The good news, especially for those of you whose eagerness to support *The Pom* is matched by your speedy reflexes, is that until the first of May this year all new subscriptions, renewals, and requests for back issues will be charged out at the old rates—regardless of length or quantity. We hope that our dedicated readers will greet this news with understanding, and cheerfully rise to the occasion as well.

A PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL

The wheels are also turning which will, probably in the course of the current year, convert *The Pomegranate* into a peer-reviewed journal. In other words, articles will be submitted to a panel of reviewers for evaluation. These reviewers will independently decide whether to accept the piece as it stands or to recommend to the editors that it be revised according to their suggestions. Not only do we hope that being so designated will enhance our status and acceptability, but we believe that it also will greatly increase the volume of articles submitted. Several scholars of Nature Religions have already volunteered to serve on this panel, and when their year of service has ended, we will solicit new reviewers. Prospective reviewers should contact Chas Clifton directly at <clifton@uscolo.edu>.

In order to continue offering our readers the broad range of topics and sources that has thus far distinguished *The Pom,* we intend to subject only our major articles to peer-review. Our 'Workings', 'Essays' and 'Book Reviews' sections (as well as, of course, our 'Readers' Forum') will continue to solicit writing from both within and beyond the academic community. These will be subjected only to the interest and whims of the editors themselves, who continue to be passionately interested in providing a venue for those many areas of inquiry which do not already have an established niche in the popular Pagan press.

IN THIS ISSUE

Those of us involved in Nature Religions in general and Neopaganism in particular often point with pride to the diversity evident in the

*continued on page 56*

# *The Pomegranate* Readers' Forum

*Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended.*

JOHN YOHALEM WRITES:
To the Editors:

I always get a kick out of *The Pom's* letters column, but your issue #10 presented a bumper crop. I enjoyed them all very much—especially, perhaps, Jenny Gibbons (whose writing I always adore), and Prudence Priest's explication of the difference between 'unmanly' and 'unmanned'. Our society has become so skittish over anything that might be construed as a critique of one's sexual persuasion that decent English has been sacrificed to illiterate insecurity. Prudence, by insisting that words mean what they're supposed to mean, demonstrates the most antique sort of culture. Brava.

[*Editor's note: Mr Yohalem's interest in the issues raised by Ms Priest's comments have moved him to offer* The Pom *an article on the subject, which we are happy to pass on to our readers.* *See page 45.*]

I want to add my two cents, however, to the excellent comments of Sabina Magliocco concerning the myths of the Burning Times and why so many modern Witches feel a need to identify with the victims. (I use the word 'myth' here, of course, not to mean 'lies', but 'enhanced' truths: sacred narrative.)

Magliocco writes, pithily and well, on a subject from which treatises obviously could be quarried—the need so many groups feel in our society, perhaps in any society, for a self-justification based on past persecution, in order to "claim ... legitimate and authentic identity". This means, of course, that the mere fact of being, say, a Witch, a Pagan, a Native American, an Afro-American, queer, a Jew (an example, perhaps the ur-example, that Magliocco curiously omitted from her list, perhaps because she is focusing on North American society, where Jews have had it comparatively easy) does not provide enough 'identity' to those who feel the need for victimhood as well. Many Native Americans, Afro-Americans, gays, lesbians, Jews and (I think and hope) Witches and Pagans do feel their identity strongly enough not to require twisting history to make themselves supreme victims. I have always been suspicious of those who seem to justify their individuality on ancient history and on separatist interpretations of it. They seem to doubt the reality of their professed beliefs unless they are being attacked by someone else for their differentness. Separate identity by itself seems to require a perceived orthodoxy to defy as much as the great mass identities tend to require a perceived 'other' to persecute and stand above.

It has always seemed to me that either my Pagan religion had a spiritual justification ipso facto or it did not. Twenty million martyrdoms would not justify it if it did not fulfil the criteria of faith. Consequently, the fact that my rather personal version of classical Paganism, derived from ancient texts, contemporary writings and delving into personal instinct, has tenuous links at best with the religion of Homer or Euripides or Augustus Caesar has not made it hollow to me.

Similarly, the fact that the overwhelming majority of those put to death for Witchcraft during the Burning Times were Christians of one sort or another, and that those who did practice Witchcraft did nothing that resembled the modern Wicca in which I have been trained, has not invalidated Wicca for me. I have found it fulfiling on spiritual levels, and have observed it work for many others. If Wicca lacked spiritual content (and that, of course, is necessarily subjective), no number of martyrs, female, innocent, Pagan survivalists, whatever, would give it one.

John Yohalem
New York City

DON FREW WRITES:
Dear *Pom* Readers,

In letters printed in the last *Pomegranate* (#10), Hanna Kassis of Budapest, Hungary, and Aaron Walker of UC Santa Cruz make some statements critical of my article "Harran: Last Refuge of Classical Paganism" (*Pomegranate* #9).

Some confusion may result from Dr Kassis' use of the term 'Sabaean' where I used 'Sabian' in my article. This may seem a small point, but it focuses attention around the ambiguity of the term. In modern parlance, 'Sabian' (with an 'i') is often used of the people of Harran. 'Sabaean' (with an 'ae') is often used of the Mandaeans of Southern Iraq, followers of John the Baptist. While 'Sabean' (with an 'e') is often used of the people from Sheba (as in 'Queen of ...') in Southern Arabia.

Dr Kassis notes that "What exactly was the religion of the town [Harran] and its people remains open to question." This is not quite correct. The religion of the Harranians was described in some detail by many contemporary Muslim scholars. All agreed that it included Hermetic and (what we would call) Neoplatonic elements, aspects of the indigenous cult of the Moon God, rites addressed to the seven Planets, etc. What "remains open to question" is whether or not this was indeed the "Sabianism" mentioned in the Qur'an. My article presented my views on this question.

Dr Kassis mentions "... the report—again by Ibn an-Nadim—that a rift over ideological and philosophical issues occurred between Th. Ibn Qurrah and his townsfolk to the point that he had to leave the town", and asks "How does one interpret this?"

I failed to discuss this rift in my article as I thought it an unnecessary detail and omitted it for the sake of brevity. Also, I have found no discussion of any substance concerning this rift, save that Thabit is sometimes described as "more liberal" than his co-religionists. Walter Scott says:

> We are not told what the quarrel was about; but it may be conjectured that the learned men and students of philosophy differed so widely in their views from the uneducated vulgar, that it was found impossible for the two parties to act together. (Scott, Walter, ed. & trans., *Hermetica: Introduction, Texts and Translation,* Boulder CO: Hermes House, 1982, p.103)

Conjecture, indeed. Michel Tardieu doubts there was any 'rift' at all. Summarizing Tardieu's comments at the 6th International Congrees on Gnosticism (U. of Oklahoma, 1984), Ilsetraut Hadot reports:

> [Thabit's] departure for Baghdad was not the result of a 'schism', according to Tardieu. Rather, it would appear that Tabit b. Qurra was attracted by the Caliph's subsidies and had chosen Baghdad 'for social and political reasons, as the Abbasid capital

*continued on page 53*

# DEFINING PAGANISM

*by Michael York*
*Bath Spa University College*

*From a general Western perspective, paganism is a largely misunderstood phenomenon. The advances made by the coalition of pagan delegates during the recent Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town may in time represent a significant turning of the tide toward a more enlightened understanding of what paganism is and represents. Still, there often appears to be a confusion among contemporary Western pagans themselves—one which is abetted by a constantly affirmed independence and freedom of thought among practitioers. Coupling this with a general Western inability to recognize the spiritual in the tangible, it is important for the theological roundtable of the world to include the voice of 'physical spirituality' within its ongoing dialogue.*

PAGANISM is a religious orientation whose historical trajectory has produced an overall misunderstanding which survives into present times. In fact, there appears to be little mutual understanding concerning what paganism is. For some, it is to be equated with nature religion; for others—both practitioners and critics—paganism is a form of atheism. On the other hand, there exists a popular connotation that often equates paganism with satanism. At the same time, even for contemporary Westerners who consider themselves pagan, there is a widespread and detectable unfamiliarity with, if not ancient and classical forms of paganism, at least other contemporary religious expressions that generically conform with what can be delineated as a pagan paradigm of general features and elements. It is the purpose of the present undertaking to elucidate a tentative understanding of paganism vis-à-vis the world's other religious traditions.

To begin, paganism occupies a particular theological niche. It can be placed into comparison with the other major world religions. The reason why this theological niche has not been generally recognized, however, can be largely attributed to the Judaeo-Christian global dominance which has caused a hegemonic exclusion in considering paganism among the full range of theological speculations. This exclusion also parallels an apparently 'natural' human tendency that exalts the spiritually transcendent while dismissing the spiritually immanent. Why this last is so—and so ubiquitously or nearly universally—is something upon which we can here only speculate.

Material existence, however, is intimately interconnected with the physical 'laws relating to pain and loss'. To enjoy physical incarnation and the tangibility of possession subjects each of us to the possibility, probability or even inevitability of suffering and deprivation. Underlying the physical embodiment is the foundational principle of desire with its dynamics of attraction and repulsion. Because of this, there appears to be an innate human propensity to reject the physical in religious terms, i.e., in those terms which involve questions of ultimate meaning and value. We see this in Buddhism's quest for *nirvana*; in Hinduism's search for *moksha* or release; in Christianity's need for atonement from 'original sin'; in Islam's picturing of a more perfect form of existence in the heaven of Allah; and even in paganism's own historical shift to gnosticism.

Physical form is ephemeral, and a basic religious impulse is to seek the permanent which is unaffected by change. While on the one hand, we might be able to detect a well-nigh universal behavioral response that we could label as pagan, on the other, in religious aspiration, most people appear to react to the inevitability of *Weltschmerz* and decay and countenance instead the transcendental. The world-denying is a pervasive refuge for the world-weary. In this light, paganism is a religion of youth and for youth. It appeals to those with energy, optimism and concern with the here-and-now. This of course does not mean that paganism is a religion only for the young. Far from it. But it is a religious sentiment and challenge which appeals to the youthful aspect of the spirit of humanity.

> The numinal … encompasses the supernatural, the mythic, the miraculous, the mystical, the metaphorical and the imaginal.

Every religion codifies some kind of relational attitude to the world, to humanity and to what we might loosely refer to as the supernatural or numinal. Each religion develops its unique understanding of what these are, how they are meaningful and valuable, and what their mutual relationships to each other might be. Some religions, quasi-religions and/or religious perspectives take a reductionistic approach to the human, the natural or the supernatural. Some, for instance, devalue the human by excluding certain groups, races or ethnicities and exalting a privileged few. We find this tendency in the Hindu caste system, in Calvinism, among Jehovah's Witnesses, and especially throughout the Identity Movement. The idea of 'mud races' as espoused by the World Church of the Creator led earlier this year to heinous acts directed against Asian-Americans, African-Americans and Jews by a 21-year old adherent with the name of Benjamin Smith. From such a perspective, the terms 'humanism', 'cosmopolitanism', 'pluralism' and 'multiculturalism' are regarded as 'dirty words' representing humanitarian tendencies that are to be fiercely combated.

The idea of conformity to a single human standard in order to be considered worthy is an age-old tendency of many of the world's more traditional religions. The notion of 'holy wars' directed against other people has existed at least since the beginning of recorded history. The Roman Catholic Church still manages today to occasionally incite parishioners to shoot abortion providers. The Mormon church has targeted the homosexual community in California in its vehement campaign against same-sex marriage. Shiite priests of hatred in Tehran have launched persecutions of both Baha'i and Zoroastrians. If religion is a key determinant in developing a sense of identity, it has also often been as much the precursor and ongoing parochial vehicle for anti-humanitarian myopia.

But religions might not only be reductionist vis-à-vis the human; some also are reductive considering the world itself. In the Gnostic offshoot of classical paganism—whether the non-pagan or merely 'nominally' pagan teachings of Orpheus, Pythagoreus, Plato or Plotinus, or the quasi-Jewish and Christian sects of the first few centuries of the Christian Era (*eg,* Marcionism, Manichaeism, or even the much later Catharism of the 12th and 13th centuries), a strict, hierarchical dualism is posited between the world and spirit. Matter becomes the furthest—and lowest—emanation and degrading of the

Godhead, the One, the Source, the Good, the Spirit. The body itself becomes regarded as a tomb, the *soma sema* concept, something from which to escape. Physicality and its phenomenal nature—including sensuality—are rejected as valueless impediments to true and emancipating gnosis. Spirit alone is true and real; the corporeal is an imprisonment. It becomes meaningless in and of itself.

Vedantic Hinduism takes this gnostic concept even further and posits the idealistic belief that all material phenomena are illusions of *mâyâ*. Whether Vasistha Advaita, American Transcendentalism or the (New Age) Church Universal and Triumphant, the phenomenal world of nature is a veil which must be penetrated before one reaches spiritual truth behind the masquerade. Buddhism takes a closely similar position. Like Hinduism, the purpose of life is to escape life, to end the cycle of rebirth, to reach *moksha, samadhi, nirvana, satori*. Although Theravada does not deny the reality of matter, it still devalues it for the ineffable ultimate goal of disinterested wisdom and compassion. The common attitude and orientation of both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, Brahmanic Hinduism, Gnosticism, Transcendentalism, Theosophy and even today's New Age is to achieve emancipation from ignorance and extinction of all attachment. This translates as release from the physical and its concomitant laws of suffering and loss.

A third reductive approach within a religious or quasi-religious framework is one which denies the spiritual itself. In its extreme forms, we have here the philosophical schools of materialism, mechanism, atheism, positivism and secular humanism. A more religious form might be the Satanism taught by Anton La Vey, the atomism of Democritus, or the hylozoistic teachings of the early Ionian philosophers. On the other hand, a quasi-religious, worldly-minded materialism might be understood as either Marxism, Epicureanism or Stoicism. In all these schools of thought and/or religious perspectives, the material world is the fundamental, perhaps only, reality. Ethics are determined by conformity to natural law alone. There is no consideration of the numinal or the spiritual as something beyond the parameters of the empirical world. The supernatural is regarded as a fiction and at best a superstition appealing to the ignorant and gullible alone.

> … nature or the material world is not the whole of the sacred in the full pagan view of things. … in its full scope, paganism is, or at least embraces, naturism, humanism and animism of some sort.

These last are often not considered as religions because they have no room for the transcendent sacred. Like scientific materialism, they deny the supernatural. But I want to argue that they are no less religions in the broad sense of the term. They have simply denied the supernatural as the gnostic orientation denies the material. In all cases, there is a position taken on the human, material and numinal domains of ontology. The numinal is simply that realm of cognition that is non-phenomenal. It encompasses the supernatural, the mythic, the miraculous, the mystical, the metaphorical and the imaginal. It is perhaps Baudrillard's 'hyperreality', but it is definitely that which cannot be known directly through the senses. The effect of people's reactions to the supernatural, or at least their perceptions of the supernatural, can be objectively studied but not the supernatural itself.

In the 'narrow' sense of religion, all religions entertain some concept of the numinal or supernatural as real. In the 'wide' sense of religion, all religions take some position—whether pro or con—on the validity of the mystical/magical other. Paganism conforms to both senses: to the wide sense completely, and to the narrow sense mostly. Like the Abrahamic religions, it generally endorses the human, tangible and spiritual modes of possibility without reducing any one of the three to the others. Whereas, however, Christianity and Islam accept and sometimes honor the world as God's work, they nonetheless share with Judaism an explicit or implicit condemnation of the heretical worldy-mindedness of the *Apikoros*. A puritanical streak runs through the Levantine religions which inevitably suggests a lesser valuing of the temporal world compared with, if not humanity, at least with divine spirit.

In paganism, the world or nature is itself divine—and as divine as either humanity or the numinal or both. While there may be pagan nature religions which deny or reject the super-sensory as having any kind of ontological reality, a pagan expression which does such is simply a 'sect' or 'denomination' which has focussed on one cosmological reality by reducing the tripartite range of totality. Such a position would still be pagan though simply not expressive of paganism as a whole—much in the manner that the Hari Krishnas or the Vasistha Advaitas are still Hindu, though they consider, respectively, Krishna or Vishnu as the entire godhead and not merely one deity or avatar among several.

Part of the difficulty in understanding or defining paganism comes with its relationship to the emergent rubric of 'nature religion'. While there has been some debate on the nature religion list concerning which category, paganism or nature religion, includes the other, even though such world religions as Christianity and Islam might cherish nature as a divine gift, they do not comprise nature religions. Instead, I argue that any religious perspective which honors the natural as the sacred itself made tangible, as immanent holiness, is pagan. My further argument, however, is that nature or the material world is not the whole of the sacred in the full pagan view of things. The human and the preternatural are as divine as the phenomenal world of nature. In other words, in its full scope, paganism is, or at least embraces, naturism, humanism and animism of some sort.

So in answer to the question how does the contemporary Western pagan recognize that Chinese folk religion, Confucianism, Shinto, Siberian shamanism, Kahuna, Australian aboriginal religion, Amerindianism, the Afro-Atlantic practices of Santería, Macumba and Voodoo, various tribalisms of sub-Saharan Africa, and so forth are pagan is because they are pagan. They all share in an essential this-worldliness. Earth is sacred, the sacred source or mother of existence. The material is understood as the matrix in which and from which the world, the human and the gods have their being, though not necessarily their end. In each of these religions we have the implicit pantheism, animism and polytheism that Margot Adler recognized as the constituent features of paganism. I would also add humanism and naturism. There is neither the denial of phenomenal reality as we have in Hinduism and Buddhism, nor the exclusion of humanity from godhead as we have in

Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Consequently, paganism can be understood as both a behavior and a religion. As a behavior it is to be seen in the spontaneous and auto-reflexive quality as well as venerational ritual of cultic expression. The cultic is the passionate, and while all passion may not be cultic, all cult is something which is emotionally intense. The very term itself derives from *cultus*, the Latin past participle of a verb meaning 'to till the earth, to cultivate, to pray or worship'. In other words, the origins of pagan cultivation and worship are directly connected with the earth and assisting its growth and produce. Cultic behavior and pagan behavior are in origin one and the same.

> ... the pagan theological position ... sacralizes not only the world, the cosmos and humanity itself but also the nonempirical reaches of the imagination.

But paganism is also a religion, albeit a marginalized and neglected one in the advent of Judeo-Christian-Islamic ascendancy. As a religious generic, however, it can be contrasted theologically with gnosticism. Creation for the gnostic is a descent or fall. Physical life represents a loss of an original state of grace, and the gnostic agenda is to re-trace the ladder of being to the Ultimate Source, the One or the Good. The spatio-temporal world is a linear one in which history ends with the re-gaining of the original state of being. In its salvational plan, gnosticism represents its agenda as a completion of a circle.

But despite its circular agenda, gnosticism is not cyclic. There is a fixed end which is sought. Paganism, by contrast, rejoices in the cyclical round of nature, of birth, death and rebirth, as an open-ended plethora of possibility. There is no point to which to return. Earth is the divine womb of unlimited challenge, discovery and growth. It or she is the divine ground of being, advent and imagination. The tangible presents an unending arena of opportunity. It is to be honored rather than spurned and rejected; cherished as a gift rather than renounced out of horror and disgust. And because the pagan movement is out from the single point rather than back to it, it is multiple and forever varied and different. Rather than aiming for a Hegelian logic of the same or a traditional encounter with a uniform One, paganism champions multiplicity, plurality and polytheism. It allows a full scope of interpretation and invention beyond any confines of dogma, doctrine or judgments of heresy.

In fact, because of its peculiar nature when compared not only to gnosticism but to other world religions, what is most appropriate to paganism is poly- and ad hoc definition. By its very nature, it is more encompassing that any single definition. What distinguishes paganism from most other major and minor world religions is its extreme polymorphism. There is no canon or authority which speaks for paganism as a whole. While there may be some strictly defined forms of paganism within the pagan category as a whole, its overall diffusion and variety exceeds that found within Christianity, Buddhism and even Hinduism. This is because pagan identity is locally determined—by both individuals and communities. It has neither central administration or ecclesiastical council. But paganism is polymorphic not only in its determination but also in how it perceives the divine. The sacred or spiritual itself can assume many different forms. This multiformity of the divine might be omniform or pantheistic, or it might simply be multiplex and polytheistic. At the same time, the heterogeneousness of divine reality from a pagan perspective may also be understood as subsumed within or as some kind of monistic unity. But even here, this is not necessary for a perspective to still be pagan. In a word, paganism represents a celebration of variety that challenges the very limits of human conception and imagination.

Nevertheless, it would be amiss in a paper on 'Defining Paganism' not to offer at least a tentative and pragmatic definition of the subject at hand. To this end, I offer two definitions. The first seeks to allow a definition that can include all forms of paganism—both generic and nominal. The second excludes the nominal forms of paganism such as Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Neo-platonism, Cabalism and even Theosophy. The first definition holds that:

> *Paganism is an affirmation of interactive and polymorphic sacred relationships by individual or community with the tangible, sentient and/or nonempirical.*

The second definition allows that:

> *Paganism is an affirmation of interactive and polymorphic sacred relationship by individual or community with the tangible, sentient and nonempirical.*

The only difference between the two definitions, in fact, is in the use of the 'and/or' conjunction/disjunction in the first and its replacement with the simple conjunction 'and' in the second. In the re-wording, simply nominal forms of paganism are excluded, and paganism becomes understood as an endorsement of relationship between physical and supernatural realities as well as human (and possibly other forms of) consciousness. It may accept the supernatural as only approachable through metaphor (religious icons and symbols), or it may also entertain that the supernatural appears and is accessible through the miraculous. But along with its supernaturalism or proclivity for the nonempirical, its humanism and naturism are equally weighted. In other words, even if paganism or particular pagan identities may exalt the special or the numinously distinguishable over the whole, or the theistic or even polytheistic over the pantheistic, the divine or sacred is found ubiquitously. Paganism, therefore, allows the divine to manifest in and as the material, whatever else it may be. But paganism eschews any true hierarchy between the temporal and permanent, between the physical and spiritual, or between this-world and the otherworld. In paganism, all realms of being and possibly non-being partake in a dynamic partnership or colloquium that functions between potential equals. We can conclude our understanding of paganism by recognizing that emancipation from parochial and restricting ways of thinking and feeling is the full consequence of the pagan theological position which sacralizes not only the world, the cosmos and humanity itself but also the nonempirical reaches of the imagination.

*Michael York is a Research Fellow with the Department for the Study of Religions at Bath Spa University College. He coordinates both the Bath Archive for Contemporary Religious Affairs and the New Age and Pagan Studies Programme in Bath and co-directs the Academy for Cultural and Educational Studies in London.*

# WITCH WARS: Factors Contributing to Conflict in Canadian Neopagan Communities

*by Sîân Reid*
*Charleton University*

Neopagan Witchcraft is often portrayed, in books directed at practitioners and by the practitioners themselves, as a tolerant religious or spiritual movement, in which a wide range of beliefs and practices co-exist without normative prejudice. However, when one actually speaks to Neopagans about the Craft, and what they like and dislike about it, almost invariably, the subjects of 'politicking', 'bashing' and 'Witch wars' arise. These terms reflect the perceived presence of conflict between Neopagan groups. "I hate the trad bashing. And I hate the eclectic bashing. You know, I don't see this as being anything else but drawing virtual lines in virtual sand. It's so silly" (Francine). "... from what I know and have seen in [city], there's ... a lot of politics and infighting ..." (Martha).

This animosity is visible not only to those inside the movement, but also to those approaching from the outside. Kevin Marron, a Canadian journalist who, in 1989, published *Witches, Pagans and Magic in the New Age,* based on interviews with Neopagan Witches across the country, notes,

> ...the present day Craft is beset with factional differences. There are many versions of Witchcraft and the followers of each often engage in disputes over strongly held philosophical conflicts. This tendency towards infighting is notorious among Witches (91).

As some measure of conflict is inevitable in human interactions, it is interesting that participants should single it out over and over again as a particular problem in the Neopagan setting. Available data suggest that there is a certain construction of 'ideal' interaction, which, combined with structural features of Neopaganism and characteristics of the Neopagan population more generally, acts to make conflict particularly evident and particularly difficult to contain.

The data upon which the analysis in this paper is based come from a range of sources, including books published by, for or about Neopagan Witches, as well as 187 survey responses collected from a non-representative sample of Neopagans across Canada, 18 semi-structured interviews designed to supplement the survey information, and countless conversations with Neopagan practitioners during my 16 years of involvement with the movement as a student, teacher, priestess, resource person, occasional occult store employee, and, most recently, as a researcher. This paper is intended to be preliminary, speculative, and Canadian, as I have reason to believe that the dynamics of the American and British Neopagan scenes are sufficiently different from ours to require different characterizations. I have set out, in this research, to generate somewhat general observations and broad linkages that could be refined through subsequent fieldwork in specific communities or locations.

For the purposes of this discussion, 'Neopagan community' will be considered to be two or more Neopagan groups who are engaged in sustained interaction at some level. Conflict within a single group, although it certainly occurs, requires a different level of analysis than the one I am proposing here. Similarly, two groups in geographical proximity who are not interacting in any way are part of the same 'community' only in a much broader sense than is meant here. A 'Witch war', as opposed to other kinds of conflict that may also be prevalent in any given community, tends to display two central features. First, the conflict is conducted in a fairly open and public manner that is visible to the community members; second, it permeates and polarizes the community to such an extent that community participants are left with two choices: either to choose a side, or to withdraw from participation in the community until the conflict finds some resolution. These are not arbitrary definitional distinctions on my part, but abstractions arising directly from the usages of participants, who only describe some conflicts as 'Witch wars', although they themselves are often not entirely certain why some things seem to 'qualify' better than others.

*[A Witch war] permeates and polarizes the community to such an extent that community participants are left with two choices: either to choose a side, or to withdraw from participation in the community ...*

This paper will suggest that 'Witch war' type conflicts in Neopagan communities are the result of the difficulties experienced by practitioners in negotiating successful interaction between groups and individuals with competing visions of Witchcraft, in situations that are perceived to involve authority or legitimacy. There are three main types of factors that contribute to the proliferation of different visions of Neopagan Witchcraft. The first is structural, the second is ideological, and the third factor is personal. Each of these will be discussed below.

## ELEMENTS OF NEOPAGAN 'COMMUNITY'

Neopagan Witchcraft is not a homogenous movement. In fact, there are three broad categories of groups, which can engage in considerable amounts of borrowing and overlap in both ideology and practice: traditionals (Gardnerians, Alexandrians and those other mystery-based traditions that have persisted for more than a single generation, but which cannot be reliably attributed to Gardner); Goddess-spirituality groups (generally eclectic in style, distinguished by a more explicitly woman-centered approach, often privileging the Goddess over the God, or omitting the God in worship entirely, and frequently restricting ritual celebrations to women); and eclectics (the broad residual category of individuals and groups who do not fall clearly into one of the preceding categories).

The fundamental unit of Neopagan Witchcraft is the individual. Solitary practice is not uncommon and is seen as a legitimate mode of spiritual development, in most strands of the Craft, especially the more eclectic ones. The fundamental unit of social organization in Neopagan Witchcraft is the coven. Covens are generally small, rarely exceeding 13 members, and strive to maintain a high level of intimacy,

*Many people ... encounter this ideology of tolerance, diversity, and respect that the movement is supposed to embody before they encounter other Neopagans or the enacted realities of Neopagan communities.*

trust, friendship, cooperation and contribution among members. They are intended to be fully autonomous entities, regulating themselves and organizing their practice according to the needs and wishes of their membership, not accountable to any 'wider' body or organization. Even among traditionals, who tend to maintain more of a sense of connection with others in their own tradition, there is a very specific acknowledgment that once practitioners are senior enough to found an independent coven, they are no longer required to be subject to regulation by their initiators (Farrar & Farrar 1985:22).

Some urban centres, in addition to covens, which are small and private, have 'churches', 'groves' or 'temples', which are open to the public and are usually the extension of a vision of a more accessible Neopaganism that might eventually be able to get some form of legal standing with the Canadian government. Groups of this type include the Wiccan Church of Canada [Ontario], the Covenant of Gaia [Alberta] and the Temple of the Lady [BC]. These are not ecumenical assemblies of previously existing groups, but rather are modified and extended versions of a coven, inasmuch as they train and initiate their own priesthood and set their own standards independently. 'The Grove' in Montreal, is an ecumenical assembly, and relies upon priesthood from other traditions to conduct its rituals. The Pagan Federation of Canada (PFPC) is an organization that faciliates efforts by Neopagans to combat discrimination, to provide accurate information about Neopaganism to government authorities, and to facilitate prison ministry and other similar programs. They neither hold rituals nor train priesthood and are the organization in Canada that is the most strongly similar to the Covenant of the Goddess (COG) in the US. However, like more mainstream 'churches', and unlike the case with most covens, members of these larger pagan organizations are not required to make an explicit commitment to the group in order to participate in the classes and rituals that the group runs for the public.

The prominent public position of these large pagan organizations, however, is often a source of irritation and conflict in those cities where they are found. Media outlets frequently go to the representatives of these organizations when they need comments from 'a Witch', with the result that their version of 'Witchcraft' is presented to the non-pagan public as 'Witchcraft', period, without any acknowledgment that there are other groups or beliefs around. Sometimes this represents a real attempt by the larger organization to assert a hegemonic vision, but other times, it is more the result of reporter's agendas and editorial practices. In addition, the fact that these organizations are numerically so much larger than any individual coven means that they can often 'swamp' events that were intended to be ecumenical, leaving the members of other groups feeling marginalized or excluded.

The decentralized nature of Neopagan Witchcraft, combined with the principle of group autonomy, means that 'community', in the sense that I have described it earlier, is not an inevitable and natural outgrowth of the movement itself. The development of 'community' requires a focus, a reason for bringing groups together. These foci can have primarily religious, social or practical goals, and are most often a combination of all three. However, any sustained inter-group activity requires a continual negotiation of interaction. It is by no means guaranteed that the norms, values and practices that are taken for granted by one coven will be shared by, or agreed to, by another coven, group or individual. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that many Neopagan Witches use precisely the same language to represent related concepts with different underlying content.

The word 'Wicca' is a particularly good case in point. Traditionals, Alexandrians and Gardnerians in particular, tend to reserve this word exclusively for their style of practice. In Britain, where the bulk of Witchcraft is 'traditional', this usage of 'Wicca' is taken for granted in books and other publications. Other styles of practice are simply referred to as 'Pagan', and 'traditional' refers to those family traditions of Witchcraft that cannot be reliably traced to Gardner. In North America, however, 'Wicca' has been adopted by many branches of eclectic Witchcraft as an interchangeable and less controversial term for Neopagan Witchcraft more generally, while being retained by the traditionals as a word exclusively denoting their practice. This creates tension between people with very different visions of 'Wicca' as well as a kind of territorial dispute over the 'entitlement' to the label. A couple of my traditional respondents made comments to the effect of "You know, I don't really care what the pagan community does with itself; I just wish they wouldn't call it Wicca!"

The difficulties of a shared vocabulary without shared connotations are exacerbated in the case of larger pagan organizations, where the demands of their larger size and public presence require very different emphases in structure and practice that those which are utilized in covens. Language touching on authenticity (what is a 'real' Witch), legitimacy (what is a 'real' initiation) and authority (who is qualified to do what, and on what basis) tends to be particularly contested, and it is on these issues that most 'Witch wars' hinge.

In the context of any individual group, generally some, often implicit, consensus has been reached on the content of such concepts as 'priesthood' and 'initiation'; members understand the roles and requirements of their negotiated structure, and express their agreement with the group's organization and procedures by staying within it. There is generally some understanding about how conflicts and disagreements within the group will be handled, and even in the cases where there are no explicit guidelines, members are always free to leave if they are dissatisfied, and in fact, are often encouraged to do so (Valiente 1983:176). In a 'community' setting, there is no consensus on the meaning of key concepts, and there is generally no structure or procedure through which disagreement and conflict can be mediated. This leads to a situation where groups and individuals with competing visions of

Witchcraft are trying to establish their authority and authenticity in an unregulated environment, where the language used by all parties, although superficially similar, often has very different connotations.

The different emphases, styles, orientations and 'standards' of Neopagan Witchcraft groups, although all perfectly legitimate in their own contexts, can pose problems when groups try to join forces for 'community' events. Those events that specifically involve 'theological' concerns and those in which a status-based hierarchy are implied are particularly volatile. As one Witch noted, there does tend to be a shared value orientation in the Craft, but it can be obscured by the plethora of liturgical minutiae that differentiates groups, especially when those groups are trying to negotiate which of their stylistic peculiarities is going to be incorporated into an inter-group ritual. Situations that force Neopagans to confront their differences in a manner that is concrete and requires consensus or resolution, and those that explicitly focus on people's individual practices and opinions about what is 'right' or what works 'best' in the Craft, are always going to hold the potential for conflict, as the parties involved advance positions in which they have placed considerable emotional and intellectual investment. Among these situations of high potential conflict are the organization of inter-group rituals, festivals and classes, where 'qualification', 'legitimacy' and gatekeeping can become issues, and in discussion fora, such as some newsletters and more recently on-line newsgroups, that highlight theological issues.

## NEOPAGAN IDEOLOGY AND 'IDEAL' COMMUNITY

Clearly, the decentralized nature of Neopaganism in general acts as a crucible for conflict. However, the ideology of Neopagan Witchcraft is such that conflict 'should' not occur, because a whole range of beliefs and practices are accepted as valid and legitimate. Individuals are expected to develop their own understanding of the meaning of their practice, and come to their own conclusions about appropriate morality and ways of 'being' in the world. There is a widely expressed and almost postmodern belief that these are very personal decisions and choices, and that although they can be 'different', it is difficult to characterize them as 'wrong'. So, although there is no prescriptive text or practice to which all Neopagan Witches can refer for their vision of the Craft, normative visions still emerge on a small scale, for an individual, negotiated by a group, or presented by an author. Although it may not be possible to say that there is a 'right' way to do something for everyone, in practice, there is still a sense that there is a 'right' way for me, or for my group. These visions, however, are theoretically bounded, restricted to the individual or the group, because the underlying ideology is that no one is empowered to impose their version of the Craft on other people.

Many people involved in Neopagan Witchcraft encounter this ideology of tolerance, diversity, and respect that the movement is supposed to embody before they encounter other Neopagans or the enacted realities of Neopagan communities. A third of the people who responded to my survey indicated that their first awareness of the Craft came through books, about the same number said that they first became involved in the movement through books. The authors cited most frequently as having been particularly influential by my respondents were Starhawk (*Spiral Dance,* 78 out of 187), Scott Cunningham (*Wicca for the Solitary Practitioner,* 40), Janet and Stewart Farrar (various, 37) and Margot Adler (*Drawing Down the Moon,* 21). Of these, Starhawk presents a feminist eclectic perspective, Cunningham takes a different, but also eclectic approach, Janet and Stewart Farrar are traditionals, and Margot Adler's book tries to present the range of Neopagan approaches prevalent in the United States. All use some or all of the words 'pagan', 'Neopagan', 'Wicca' and 'Witch' in ways that may seem almost interchangeable (and in some cases, are interchangeable), and can leave the novice with the impression that the movement is far more cohesive than it actually is. Adler, in particular, creates the impression that there is a 'Pagan community' that somehow encompasses all of the groups that claim the labels 'pagan', 'Neopagan' or 'Witch'. She writes,

> Individuals may move freely between groups and form their own groups according to their needs, but all the while they remain within a community that defines itself as Pagan. The basic community remains, although the structures may change (1986:33).

Kevin Marron notes, "'Perfect love and perfect trust' are the traditional passwords for initiation into a coven. The phrase represents the kind of total understanding and acceptance that Witches feel they must have in order to work together" (1989:91). It is also, I believe, the unspoken and somewhat naive expectation of those venturing into Neopagan 'community' for the first time, and helps to explain why conflict between groups is singled out as a problem. The levels of agreement, consensus and intimacy that are possible within the confines of a coven do not translate well to larger, more diverse groups. That is precisely the rationale that most authors give for keeping covens small, but the coven experience somehow becomes 'typical' of the kind of interaction one should be able to expect in Neopagan Witchcraft, and that leads to disappointment and even disillusionment when one steps outside the coven boundaries.

*... the decentralized nature of Neopaganism in general acts as a crucible for conflict.*

The contrast between the portrayals of Neopagan Witchcraft as tolerant, diverse and unified around some vaguely articulated core of 'values' and the reality of bickering, sniping, and status games creates the perception that the latter is somehow an unfortunate aberration, and causes it to stand out. People know that the same thing happens in other kinds of groups, in the workplace, in society in general, but somehow they still cherish the belief that those involved in Neopaganism should be 'above' or 'beyond' that kind of thing. In fact, the composition of the Neopagan movement may well make it particularly susceptible to conflict centering around issues that touch upon people's religious beliefs and practices, because these tend to be tightly bound up with people's sense of identity and, more generally, their relationship to authority.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF

*Some traditionals are dealing with their disapproval of 'eclectic Neopagandom' by withdrawing from community interaction, which prevents the eruption of conflict, but also deepens the division.*

## NEOPAGAN WITCHES

When I surveyed Craft practitioners in 1995-96, I asked both how long they had been involved in the Craft, and how old they were when they first became involved. What I found was that, of 183 people who answered the first question, half had been involved for five years or less, an additional quarter had been involved between six and thirteen years, and the remaining quarter had been involved for more than thirteen years. In terms of age at first involvement, of 186 people who answered, half were involved by the time they were 22, another quarter by the time they were 30, and fully 90% of my respondents were involved by the time they turned 40. This suggests that the Craft contains a much larger proportion of young people than most other religions. These also suggest that people in their mid- to late 20s may have, in many cases, been actively involved in their Craft practice for almost a decade, giving them a level of 'seniority' and a claim to leadership that they would not have in more institutional religions.

Unfortunately, extensive experience with meditation, visualization, trance work, ritual writing, and the many other skills that are associated with the practice of Neopagan Witchcraft do not, in and of themselves, confer the interpersonal skills necessary to manage harmonious and productive relationships among a group of people with diverse views and interests. People in adolescence and early adulthood are engaged in the process of establishing themselves as independent and autonomous individuals with the ability to develop their own beliefs and identity in line with the values to which they subscribe. Many are disinclined to merely accept the authority or pronouncements of others, preferring to decide for themselves, or find their own way. In addition, older people sometimes find it difficult to accept the leadership of those significantly younger than themselves.

A highly individualistic attitude is not confined to the younger or newer members of the movement, however. In the survey, I asked people to tell me what the three things were that appealed to them most about the Craft when they first became involved, and what appealed to them now. Just shy of 20% of all the responses I received to the first question had to do with the individual and personal orientation of the Craft: the flexibility of the beliefs; the requirement for the individual to take full responsibility for their morality and their life choices; the requirement to engage in self-reflexive and personal development practices; the empowerment of the individual to make choices and changes in their life; and the facilitation of a deeply personal relationship with the sacred, unencumbered by intermediaries. Twenty-three percent of the responses I received to the second question highlighted the same elements. Most of those involved in Neopagan Witchcraft do not want a vision of the Craft that is presented to them as a fait accompli; the level of personal and spiritual autonomy that is provided is a central appeal of the practice.

In addition, when interviewed, many respondents described their disillusionment with their previous religious identification—and three-quarters of my survey respondents had some previous religious identification—as arising out of perceived restrictions on their ability to hold certain beliefs, act in certain manners, or play certain roles. It is not unreasonable to expect, then, that many people who are drawn to Neopagan Witchcraft are already predisposed to resist normative constructions of their spirituality and spiritual practice, and are likely to take umbrage at the suggestion that perhaps they are not a 'real' Witch because of differences in viewpoint, practice or standards with somebody else.

The tendency to take these differences of opinion very personally, and to respond to them defensively, which is one of the factors that contributes to the escalation of conflict in a community once it has begun, is, I believe, bound up in the central identification that practitioners make between their Craft and who they are. In interviews, many people expressed the sentiment that Neopagan Witchcraft reflected the essence of who they are, and who they had always been. Some also expressed the idea that they could not possibly do or be anything else, and that people who choose the Craft do so almost inevitably, following what, if it were occurring in a Christian context, might be termed as sense of 'vocation'. When the authenticity or legitimacy of an individual's religious practice is challenged, in this context, it can also be experienced as a challenge to them personally, as a belittlement or disparagement of who they are, even if that was not the intent.

Finally, it has been the observation of many of those I have spoken to that many people come into the Craft with weak interpersonal skills. I am not prepared, in this paper, to challenge the accuracy of their perceptions, or to make any assertions about whether this is any more common in Neopagan Witchcraft than it is in other religions or segments of our society. But, like 'Witch-wars', it is something that many participants highlight when they speak about their experiences with Neopagan Witchcraft.

When confronted with a disagreement or dispute, especially one that centers around miscommunication, many of these people may not have the skills or experience to deal with it constructively. Instead of being resolved quietly at a fairly early stage, as might be the case if there were some formal mechanism in place, the disagreement can escalate and become not only polarizing, but also the focus of other tensions that might not, by themselves, be sufficient to cause a conflict.

## CONCLUSIONS

'Witch wars' are polarizing conflicts that may occur when Neopagan Witchcraft groups interact. They are most often centered around issues of authenticity, authority and legitimacy, and are triggered by some perception that an individual or group is attempting to impose their particular vision of the Craft hegemonically. Various structural and ideological features of the Neopagan Witchcraft movement, combined with some of the features of participants, can both provide fertile ground for these conflicts and make them difficult to resolve.

Structurally, the most significant change going on in Neopagan Witchcraft right now is the push by some large pagan organizations to acquire legal standing as 'churches' with the federal and provincial governments. This would allow these organizations to benefit from tax treatments available to other religious bodies, as well as to offer religious services, such as marriages, in a legally recognized context. Despite the generally well-intentioned motivations behind these activities, they are likely to increase conflict rather than decrease it. The perception of many Witches is that if such recognition is given to the large organizations, it will reside with them exclusively, effectively creating two classes of Witches: those whose practice has legal standing and those whose practice does not. This will force those who want the benefits of legal standing to affiliate with and conform to the practices of the larger organizations, which is unlikely to sit well with those who already feel that the large pagan organizations are attempting to assert a kind of hegemony. These concerns about a certain lack of transferability are legitimate, given the way in which legal recognition is organized (Reid 1994). The Pagan Federation of Canada (PFPC) is engaged in a struggle to prevent just such an outcome by lobbying government departments to treat pagans in the same way that Quakers and native aboriginal elders are treated, as these are similiarily decentralized groups.

In many ways, it could be argued that the pagan organizations are in a 'no win' situation here. If they go forward to obtain legal standing, they reinforce the perception among many other pagans that they are seeking a hegemonic position, when in fact it is the governments' constructions of legal recognition that produce much of the apparent hegemony, not the intentions of the pagan organization. This source of conflict is likely to become more pronounced as more pagan organizations obtain legal standing.

Another clash of visions that appears to be deepening is that between traditionals and eclectics. Kevin Marron also notes this division, although he highlights the politically and environmentally activist eclectics, whom he calls 'radicals', in particular.

> These two groups are on a collision course. The radicals tend to see the traditionalists as failing to live out the principles of a religion based on respect for nature, which should oppose a society that exploits the earth. The traditionalists regard the radicals as people who have latched onto Wicca for their own political ends (1989:94).

When I have spoken with Witches, the 'activist' tensions have been less apparent than tensions based around the focus of the practice itself. Traditional Craft constructs itself very much as a mystery tradition and puts a relatively greater emphasis on the esoteric and mystical aspects that are highlighted in their received material than do most eclectics. Eclectics are far more likely to focus on the creative and celebratory aspects of the practice, with the esoteric and mystical components being available, but not essential, elements of the spiritual practice. This leads to tensions between the two groups because of the way in which each constructs and construes the other's practice. Eclectics often perceive traditionals as hidebound, hierarchical, and slavishly adhering to received material, while traditionals view eclectics as fundamentally missing the point of the entire practice, diluting the mystery tradition to the point of unrecognizability with 'surface' rituals.

Because the number of people involved in eclectic practice are increasing at a much greater rate than those involved in traditional groups, these tensions are unlikely to vanish. Some traditionals are dealing with their disapproval of 'eclectic Neopagandom' by withdrawing from community interaction, which prevents the eruption of conflict, but also deepens the division. Again, there is no easy resolution to these differences. The traditionals are entitled to hold whatever views they wish, but as long as there is a perception that the traditionals' view is that everyone else is practicing a 'debased', and therefore less legitimate and authentic, form of the Craft, tensions will exist whenever people from both persuasions try to work together in any setting that highlights theology and practice.

*Despite the generally well-intentioned motivations behind ... the push by some large pagan organizations to acquire legal standing as 'churches' with ... governments, [these activities] are likely to increase conflict rather than decrease it.*

One of the most successful ways to minimize the possibility of 'Witch wars' is to develop community in arenas that are not inherently 'theological', that do not require an authority structure and are not subject to gatekeeping on the grounds of legitimacy, but only on grounds of respectful behaviour towards others. Social settings, such as brunches, pub moots and coffee klatches, in which people participate voluntarily as individuals rather than as members or representatives of groups, allow Neopagans of various traditions to meet one another, interact and trade ideas without any intrusion onto what could be considered the territory of 'coven autonomy'. The individual nature of participation in these events allows people to get to know one another as people first, and as traditionals, or eclectics, or whatever, second. This means that people are less likely to react first out of the stereotypes that they carry about other types of practice, because it is not immediately obvious, or even necessarily relevant, what the particular practice of the other party to the interaction is. Once social interaction is established and people know each other and are familiar with the peculiarities of the way they communicate, then it may well be possible to organize a 'community' ritual or a festival, or another more theologically-invested event, with a greatly reduced likelihood of outright war breaking out on the organizing committee. Those individuals who feel particularly strongly about the value of intergroup interaction might consider getting some training in mediation, conflict resolution, or other peer-focused techniques so that the resources will be available to recognize and address incipient conflicts before they become polarizing and cause long term damage to relationships within the community.

Although maintaining strict separation between groups is certainly a guaranteed way to almost eliminate open intergroup conflict, being able to participate in a broader community has real advantages for Neopagans. It can allow them to trade ideas, techniques, songs, and fragments of liturgy. It can give them a wider group of people to discuss the various challenges

they encounter in being pagan in a non-pagan culture. It can provide a market to those people who enjoy making tools or robes or other paraphernalia, and who may have previously done so only for their own group. It can make setting up co-ops for buying supplies, or baby-sitting, possible. Most importantly though, it reinforces the idea that people are not alone in their beliefs, practices, values and orientations to the world.

Neopagan communities are constituted and re-constituted on an ongoing basis as their memberships shift and change. Individuals leave and other individuals arrive on a continuing basis. In the 'best case' scenarios, the regular events, locations and interactions around which the community exists can survive this personnel 'churn'; in the worst case, interaction must be negotiated again from scratch every time a key organizer withdraws their participation. However, as long as the notion of 'community' retains some practical or ideological appeal for participants, efforts to initiate and support it will continue to occur. The success of these would seem to be dependent on the participants' abilities to find and maintain a type of interaction that does not entail giving any of the participants the right, or the perceived ability, to dictate to others. For although Neopagan communities will often come together to combat pressures and challenges from the 'outside', the bonds within the communities themselves are nonetheless fragile, and will disintegrate if any one part pushes too hard on any of the others.

REFERENCES


Adler, Margot. *Drawing Down the Moon.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Clifton, Chas (ed). *The Modern Craft Movement: Witchcraft Today.* St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1993.

Crowley, Vivianne. *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age.* Wellingborough, England: Aquarian Press, 1989.

Cunningham, Scott. *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner.* St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1988.

Farrar, Janet, Stewart Farrar and Gavin Bone. *The Pagan Path.* Custer, Washington: Phoenix Publishing, 1995.

Farrar, Janet and Stewart Farrar. *The Witches' Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft.* London: Robert Hale Publishers, 1985.

Kelly, Aidan. *Crafting the Art of Magic: Book I.* St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1991.

Marron, Kevin. *Witches, Pagans & Magic in the New Age.* Toronto: Seal Books, 1989.

Reid, Sîân. "Illegitimate Religion: Neopagan Witchcraft and the Institutional Sanction of Religion in Canada" Paper presented to the Annual General Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, 1994, unpublished.

Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess.* San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979.

Valiente, Doreen. *Witchcraft for Tomorrow.* London: Robert Hale, 1983 [1978].



*Sîân Reid is a Craft practitioner and a PhD student in sociology at Carleton University, where she previously completed an MA in Religion. A longer version of this paper was presented at the Qualitative Analysis Conference in May 1999. You can contact the author at <slreid@ccs.carleton.ca>.*


# Complex and Unpredictable Consequences: Jewish Responses to the Catastrophe of 1096

*by Fritz Muntean*

*In the Autumn of 1095, Pope Urban II called for a 'military pilgimage' to the Holy Land in order to safeguard and provide unrestricted access to the many sacred Christian sites which were then under Islamic control. In response to this papal request, European authorities spent the winter in preparation for what was to be the first (and the only successful) of a series of such adventres that later bore the name 'Crusades'. But this papal decree also set in motion, in several European backwater communities, preaching programs that inevitably escaped close scrutiny and control. In the Lowlands, a charismatic named Peter the Hermit, with the patronage of one 'Count Emicho', was able to raise an army of unemployed soldiers and peasants with the intention of marching to Palestine across the continent of Europe. By the Spring of 1096, however, this sizable mass of people had only succeeded in reaching the beginnings of the traditional pilgrimage route up the Rhine Valley and were reduced to laying waste to the surrounding countryside as they passed. At this point, their leaders began to realize that they were unlikely to reach the Holy Land, and so determined to use their strength of numbers locally in order to accomplish what appeared to them as the next best thing to the liberation of Palestine from the Muslims: the forcible conversion of Rhineland Jewry to Christianity.*

*The Jewish communities of the Rhine Valley had been in existence since the time of the Romans, and towns like Speyer, Worms, and Mainz were strong mercantile centres as well as being important centres of Torah study. These communities enjoyed, to varying degrees, the protection of local ducal and royal courts, and the Rhenish bishops saw the Jews not only as useful supporters of urban culture and economic development, but also as valuable allies in the balance of power between the Church and the rising independence of the burghers. Before the events of 1096 there was a sense that survival among the Gentiles was possible, or at least negotiable.*

*Between the middle of March and the end of April, Worms, Speyer, Mainz, Cologne, Trier, and Metz were stormed, and the enormous mob, fueled as it was by an fanatic-ecstatic religious hatred of the Jews, proved too much for the defenses of these cities. The Jews had full knowledge of the threat; some fled to the countryside, others were hidden in the homes of their neighbors. In Mainz the remainder took refuge in the episcopal basilica, but the bishop's guard was quickly overcome, and the Jews were forced to withdraw deeper into the palace. In an upper dining room they took counsel among themselves and vowed to die as martyrs rather than to submit to forced conversion by the mob. A scene of horror ensued as women strangled their children, turning "the faces of the tender, lifeless children toward the Gentiles" (Eidelberg 110). The men cut the throats of the women, and either slew one another, fell on their own swords, or threw themselves from the windows to the courtyard below. Similar events occured in other Rhenish*

*cities. Scholars now estimate that about 5000 Jews may have perished in this and other massacres before the mob was halted at the borders of Hungary by an imperial army and destroyed.*

In his 1984 work, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature,* Alan Mintz represents the Rhineland Crusader massacres of 1096 as a decisive turning point in medieval Jewish history. According to Mintz, the image of the martyr in the literature that was generated by the events of 1096 became the sovereign standard by which all future behaviour was "measured, adapted, or found wanting" (98). He maintains that the norm of response to catastrophe created in European Jewish culture by this literature had an enormous effect—not only on the self-image of the survivors, but on Jewish-Christian relations as well—for the next eight hundred years. Robert Chazan, however, in his 1987 book *European Jewry and the First Crusade,* emphasizes the limited impact of Crusader violence on these communities. He disagrees with the notion that 1096 was an important watershed, calling this idea "a commonplace of modern historiography" (8), and claiming that it reflects "a seriously flawed understanding of the historical process" (199). According to Chazan, the afflicted communities were quickly restored, and Jewish intellectual life revived itself as well, continuing to produce significant works of liturgy and law, mysticism and exegesis (208). Even Mintz would agree that Franco-German Jewish society itself experienced little in the way of long-term discontinuity in the wake of the First Crusade. Trade and commerce were quickly reestablished, and the towns that had been depopulated were resettled within a short period of time (98-99).

In this paper, we shall explore the possibility that the long-term effects of these catastrophes derived less from the actual incidents themselves than from what was written about these events by the survivors, immediately afterwards and during the following generation. Beginning with a comparison of the positions on this issue held by Mintz and Chazan, we shall examine the image-making capacity of the religious mentality as we do so and in the process, comparing the reputed standards of behaviour in the face of forced conversion among European (Ashkenazic) Jewry with the differing Sephardic (Middle Eastern Jewry) tactics for survival in the face of adversity. We shall then turn our attention to the idiosyncratic process by which catastrophe could be fitted into the comforting patterns of the past, to the possible fate of scholarship in an environment given over to the glorification of martyrdom, to the idea that the conflation of the past and the present can actually break a culture's connection with the past and drain both of their instructive value. We shall then discuss several modern theories of the mechanisms by which memory is created and maintained as well as the social and political uses of collective memory, concluding that the importance of the events of 1096 lay not in the behaviour of the martyrs, which could certainly have remained an historical anomaly, but in the transformation of these acts into a future norm of response to catastrophe.

Chazan urges us to consider the behaviour of both the besieged Jews and the attacking Crusaders in the context of the tumultuous social environment of the 11th century. Noting the small cities of the era and their tiny Jewish populations (28), neighborhoods that may have been predominantly Jewish but were certainly not exclusively so (25), and the wide-spread reports of Jews taking refuge in the homes of their Christian neighbors (5-6); he argues convincingly that the Jewish community of this time was fairly well integrated into its environment. Even though we may judge the degree of racial tension during the 11th century by the report, found in the Bar Simson Chronicle, that the bishop of Speyer felt the need to wall the Jewish community for its own protection, Chazan maintains that under normal circumstances the Jews enjoyed a level of safety and security which, although quite minimal by modern standards, was little different from that of their Christian neighbors (37). Unfortunately, the Church's policy of tolerating and even encouraging Jews, while at the same time disputing the validity of Judaism, seems only to have been viable during untroubled times. The disruptive forces that were unleashed by the First Crusade clearly exceeded the intentions of those in authority, and subsequently proved impossible to control. As a result, the early months of 1096 were tumultuous in the extreme, and the fragile security of Rhenish Jewry was swept away.

... the long-term effects of these catastrophes derived less from the actual incidents themselves than from what was written about these events by the survivors, immediately afterwards and during the following generation.

Still, the attacking Crusaders and the besieged Jews may have shared more of a common spiritual environment than they themselves might have believed. Both seem to have possessed a strong sense of cosmic conflict, an absolute certainty in the ultimate victory and vindication of their own religious vision, and an unshakable belief in eternal reward for self-sacrifice and martyrdom (193). According to Chazan, the extreme conduct of both Jews and Christians could therefore be seen as little more than an unfortunate side effect of the 11th century tendency towards radical behaviour, especially in the realm of religious expression: an effective argument against the precedent-setting nature of the causes and motivations for the massacres. He admits that the acts of martyrdom produced a "striking break with earlier patterns" and had a profound short term effect (221), but maintains that much of their radical nature was domesticated and effaced over time and the actual behaviour of the martyrs was noticeably softened in subsequent memorialization by the "confirmation of older styles of Jewish martyrdom" (9). It is, however, these very references to traditional forms of kidduch ha-Shem, particularly those involving sacrifice, which appear in both the Chronicles and the piyyutim written in the wake of the massacres, upon which we shall base our arguments in favour of 1096 as a decisive turning point in medieval Jewish history.

THE CHRONICLES

It is to Mintz, as a scholar of Hebrew literature, that we now turn for direction in our evaluation of the events of 1096 as represented in the Crusader Chronicles. Mintz does not disagree with Chazan's position concerning either the societal arrangements or the martyrological beliefs that preceded the massacres, neither does he question the rapid reconstruction and resettlement which followed. In spite of the tragic and impressive death toll, his evaluation of 1096 as a watershed for European Jewry derives less from what the Crusaders did to the Jews than from what the Jews themselves did in response (86). Mintz maintains that the "image-making capacity of the religious mentality" expressed in those Hebrew Chronicles which were written in response to the massacres caused a genuine and significant divergence in subsequent Jewish history (99). We will evaluate the importance of the Crusader martyrdoms by examining these documents in terms of these, essentially symbolic, considerations, but first let us look take a close look at Chazan's perspective on these documents.

Chazan refers to the Chronicles as a new kind of historical writing which emerged from the violent events of 1096 and demonstrated "the general pattern of spiritual and intellectual creativity" that characterized the literary activity of late 11th and early 12th century Europe (7). They may appear frankly tendentious to modern sensibilities, but according to Chazan this is understandable, since they were written in the emotionally-charged atmosphere immediately following the catastrophes, in response to the pressing need for theological and spiritual insights as well as the alleviation of gnawing doubts (45). The reports are not histories, per se, and because they chronicle what can only be thought of as a devastating military defeat, they do not covey any expectation of miracles or divine intervention (150). Instead of thanksgiving, they emphasize justification and the fervent hope of future redemption. They present supplications to the Deity, while at the same time placing heavy emphasis on the courage of the martyrs who, under the most extreme duress, remained heroically steadfast in their commitment to the God of Israel (151). It is because of this relentless portrayal of the martyrs in such a favourable light that, according to Katz, the European Middle Ages are said to "outshine all other periods of Jewish history as an epoch of heroic steadfastness" (85). But even a dramatic improvement in self-image does not a watershed make, nor was steadfast behaviour in the face of death a phenomenon unique to European Jewry.

> ... the intellectual giants of the 11th century remain vague and shadowy figures to this day compared to the hero-martyrs ... [these] observation gives us pause to consider the fate of scholarship in an environment given over to the glorification of martyrdom ...

In fact, it is the self-inflicted nature of the Rhenish martyrdoms that makes these acts unique, not only in the sense of being unprecedented in Jewish history, but also as possibly being unjustified by Jewish law—even to the point of being in violation of its spirit. Although the heroic suicides at Massada may immediately spring to the modern mind as a famous precedent, we should remember that the dramatic story of Massada was available only in Greek during the Middle Ages and was not read by European Jewry until well into the modern era. The same thing is true in regard to the suicides at Jodphata, which are reported in Josephus but were later dismissed in a 10th century Hebrew critique as being misguided and contrary to the teachings of Judaism (Mintz 88). European Jewry's Middle Eastern coreligionists dealt with their own, not inconsiderable, experiences of enforced conversion in a considerably different manner. According to Mintz, the comparable Sephardic texts "are neither liturgical nor poetic nor focused on concrete historical acts"; rather they emphasize consolation through the contemplation of the meaning of history (85). Sephardic writers such as Maimonides give rationally-based answers that limited the duty to martyrdom to the prescribed minimum. In contrast to the Crusader Chronicles, these texts read much like legal briefs arguing for reasonableness and personal survival in the face of adversity. But, according to Katz, for the European Jews it was completely inconceivable, for instance, that one should refrain from martyrdom merely because there were an insufficient number of witnesses (84). The determination of the Rhenish martyrs had not been enfeebled by what they must have thought of as the subversive forces of philosophy and rationalism (85), and as a result, their speeches read as heart-wrenching pleas, and make use of compelling symbolic language to rouse exceptional acts of self-sacrifice (Chazan 153). If European Jewry can be said to have thus set new standards for behaviour in the face of enforced conversion, that would certainly qualify as a precedent. There are, however, more important issues to be discussed, as an examination of the liturgical poetry written in the wake of 1096 will show.

THE POETRY

Phenomenology, according to Casey, is devoted to discerning that which is obscure or overlooked in everyday experience (xi). Likewise, it may be the business of the historian to isolate idiosyncratic and unique elements from what is otherwise a universal and timeless reaction to violent death (Garland ix). The most unusual representations of the events of 1096 are certainly found in the *piyyutim,* the poetic works, in which elements of these massacres are frequently represented by allusions to biblical stories and classical texts: references direct and indirect which, as we shall shortly see, are often idiosyncratic in the extreme. Ignoring the sometimes startling implications of these allusions in favour of their 'universal and timeless' characteristics, Chazan maintains that, since the *piyyutim* lack the immediate historical impact found in the Chronicles' gruesome descriptions of bloodshed and endless tales of slaughter, the poems are not as effective at evoking emotional responses as the more artless and direct works of prose (154): we may be shocked by the endless descriptions of bloodshed and slaughter in the Chronicles, but we cannot help but be impressed by the

monumental heroism of the victims (163). However, as has been previously noted, if we are to identify 1096 as an important watershed we must look beyond heroic steadfastness or the improvement of self-image.

To Mintz, the poetic works represent just such another level of importance. Rather than working his way back through layers of literary and mythical devices in order to arrive at some kind of historical actuality, his intention is to work forward from the events themselves, focusing on the processes of image-making in the poetry, where they are most intensely at work, in order to discover the ultimate effect of their symbology and style (90). Mintz directs our attention to the Bar Meshullam *piyyut,* a poem which provides a considerable degree of harrowing realism as well as a graphic depiction of particularly violent acts. What makes these descriptions so 'idiosyncratic and unique', however, is that they refer to events that did not actually take place during the massacres themselves. While the pious martyrs of Worms and Mainz did slay one other, they certainly did not engage in the picking apart of organs and dismembering of limbs, the images of which so dominate the poem. According to Mintz, these descriptions may be resolutely realistic, but the reality depicted is not that of the events of 1096, but rather of the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple (96).

According to Yerushalmi, even the most terrifying events can be less distressing when they are stripped of their bewildering specificity and subsumed to familiar archetypes (36). Still, the radical language of the poem implies a expectation quite different from that of simple comfort, and although the familiar archetype of sacrifice is invoked, it seems to be strangely transformed. Perhaps the poems, as Yerushalmi suggests, show only a superficial interest in the incidents themselves because the writers are so intent on unraveling the meaning of the events and their place in God's plan (39). There is certainly precedent for this, both in biblical and post-biblical writings. The sages virtually ignored the actual battles of the Maccabees, concentrating instead on the story of the miraculous cruse of oil that burned for eight days (25). But the martyrs dominate these poems much as the Bible is dominated by God, and the biblical stories to which the poem refer seem far less heroic, less epic, than these medieval accounts.

Chazan states that under the circumstance this is understandable, due to what he feels is the necessity of validating the suicidal, even homicidal, behaviour of the martyrs, even if it means granting them an absolutely biblical level of respect (158). The short-term effects of this validation may be comforting, but the reader is forced to wonder what the consequences of this way of thinking would be for European Jewish culture. To focus on miracles rather than on feats of arms can perhaps be expected of the writers of canon, but when Chazan informs us that the intellectual giants of the 11th century remain vague and shadowy figures to this day compared to the hero-martyrs, whose human attributes are given unusually distinct dimension by the poets (153), his observation gives us pause to consider the fate of scholarship in an environment given over to the glorification of martyrdom, particularly considering the degree to which the wisdom of the past, not to mention the often unequivocal counsel of the halakhists themselves, had been contradicted by the behaviour of these martyrs in particular. The use of biblical archetypes in the service of comfort, not to mention as justification for the most violent sort of behaviour imaginable, seems questionable to the modern reader, especially considering the intrinsic strangeness which the familiar biblical stories seem to assume in the poetry of commemoration.

As we read of the priest slaughtering the victims and placing their dismembered bodies on the woodpile, and of the pleasant smoke rising to God's heaven, the millennium that separates Rhenish Jewry from Jerusalem is suspended, and the alienation imposed between God and Israel by the Diaspora disappears (Mintz 97). But what is unique here also appears to the reader to bear more than a touch of the sinister. The objects of this sacrifice are not sheep or oxen, but the faithful themselves, and more, their children. In the *piyyut* of Bar Meshullam, the author mourns that Israel can no longer rely on the merit of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac and prays that the multiple sacrifices of 1096 will "protect us and call a halt to our miseries!" In the *piyyut* of Ephriam of Bonn, Abraham is portrayed as actually slaying Isaac, and when Isaac is resurrected, preparing with fierce determination to kill him again. In all the reenactments of this drama, the biblical and the contemporary events are compared in such a way as to demonstrate how the latter have outstripped the former (90). As audacious a boast as this is, it is basically a perverse one as well (91), since the ostensible point of the biblical story was to extend the claim that the people of Israel were, from the time of Abraham on, determined to distinguish themselves not only from those around them who continued to offer human sacrifice, but perhaps from their own more primitive past as well. Would the poets have been so eager to have transformed the images of sacrifice in this way if they had been aware of the dark world that stood (perhaps at no great distance) behind the Patriarchs and Temple cult? We shall examine this question in greater detail later, but first let us explore another issue of no less importance which has been raised by the reading of both the *piyyutim* and the Chronicles.

> ... factors appear to have combined to allow the Rhenish memorializers to conflate the events of 1096 with traditions of the past in such a way as to drain both ... of much of the instructive value they might otherwise have had ...

## DIVINE JUSTICE

What stands out in all the descriptions of these events, especially when compared to the accounts we have of the destruction of the First and Second Temples, is a lack of even the slightest sense of human misbehaviour on the part of either the victims or the memorializers. Despite the occasional invocation of the sin-punishment pattern, nowhere in the Chronicles or *piyyutim* are

any failings on the part of the Jews specified. To the contrary, according to Chazan, the afflicted Jews are never really depicted as sinful; they are unfailingly portrayed only in the most glowing terms (161-62). Free to speculate on the nature of those called to make the supreme sacrifice, the poets unabashedly portrayed the martyrs as the élite of all generations, chosen by Heaven to atone for the many former failings of Israel (Katz 87). In the history of Jewish notions of theodicy, according to Mintz, this is a unique and unprecedented approach to the problem of divine justice. If the suffering of exemplary individuals is taken as an indication of divine favour, then suffering can be seen as a sign of righteousness rather than turpitude (91), and a causal link between God's justice and suffering that does not involve human misbehaviour has been advanced.

... it is important for us to realize ... how much of the public's memory is intentionally constructed and ... to what extent the consequences of this historical understanding match the intention of the constructing agencies ...

In order to more carefully examine the significance of what appears to be a precedent-setting divergence from the norm, let us turn to Steven Knapp's article, "Collective Memory and the Actual Past", in which he discusses the ethical consequences of 'authoritative narratives' and the socially shared dispositions which they shape, particularly in regard to the question of their origins in historical actuality. According to Knapp, the purpose of theodicy, specifically of divine punishment, is to make certain that the recipients identify with their own (actual or inherited) past actions in order that they will anticipate, as they consider performing acts in the present, the disapproval merited by those acts, and that this disapproval will subsequently become a permanent part of their ethical repertoire (139). This is a key point that the chroniclers and poets appear to have ignored in their determination to emphasize the unparalleled perfection of the martyrs' generation. If persecution and suffering are the natural result of being in exile, and if exile itself is the bitter fruit of ancient sins (Yerushalmi 36), then the sins themselves are of great importance. Unfortunately it is not entirely easy to determine the precise nature of these sins. The destruction of both Temples was assumed to be due to the sins of Israel, but the nature of these sins had changed in the centuries that had intervened between 586BCE and 70CE. At the time of the First Temple, the operative sin was idolatry, but what sin caused the destruction of the Second Temple? Our sources are, by and large, strangely silent on this subject: Yerushalmi (113) posits the following as a *locus classicus:*

> Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three things which prevailed there: idolatry, immorality, bloodshed. ... But why was the Second Temple destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, precepts, and the practice of charity? Because therein prevailed hatred without cause (TB Yoma 9b).

'Hatred without cause' certainly seems to lack specificity, and this may have been an important factor lurking in the periphery of the Ashkenazic consciousness. Any level of contemplation on the already tense dialectic of rebellion and obedience which, as Yerushalmi informs us, is inherent in the paradoxical struggle between the free will of humanity and the divine will of an omnipotent Creator (8), requires at least some degree of specific understanding regarding the instructive intentions of God.

In the face of an active and unavoidable theodicy, expectation of the divine disapproval that is merited by forbidden actions can be expected to become a permanent part of the way a group evaluates its own behaviour only if some sort of consensus concerning the specific nature of those actions can be achieved. The historical consciousness of the Jews, particularly the history of the consciousness of choice, can be seen as an ongoing attempt to achieve at least some level of this theodicic specificity. At best, the contemplation of God's justice is a complex and difficult task, and one that is not made easier when a catastrophe such as the massacres of 1096 is 'stripped of its bewildering specificity' and subsumed to familiar patterns in such a way as to, even unintentionally, encourage the neglect of these issues of theodicy. To whatever extent 1096 can be thought of as a decisive turning point in medieval Jewish history, at least one new norm of response to catastrophe may to have been created that could have long-term consequences of doubtful value. But the commemorative literature may have effected even more significant cultural divergence, particularly in the way European Jewry came to regard its own history. Resolute as the poets and chroniclers appear in their confident reorganization of complex theological issues, Mintz tells us that they are even more notable for their determination to assimilate their subjects into the rhythms of mythical time (85). In light of this observation, topics that have already been mentioned, such as the historical consciousness of Jewish culture, and the contemporary consequences of the ancient sins of Israel, now require us to engage in an examination of still more complex issues, particularly the mechanics of memory and the meaning of history, and specifically the ways in which these elements are employed in the documents of the Rhineland massacres.

## HISTORY

Although Judaism has been traditionally absorbed with the meaning of history, according to Funkenstein, historiography has had virtually no role to play in the sphere of traditional Judaism: "the interest in history was never identical to historical consciousness or historical memory, even though they were close to each other at the time of the Scriptures" (11). Yerushalmi points out that while memory of the past has always been a central component of the Jewish experience, the historian, at least until the beginning of the 19th century, was never its primary custodian. This may be entirely understandable, since suffering and persecutions, combined with the lack of a state and political power (ordinarily the prime subjects of history), may have dulled the historical consciousness of medieval Jewry (52). According to

Yerushalmi, a reason for the European rabbis' disinterest in the cultivation of history per se, and one that relates directly to the issues at hand, was that they may have felt that they already knew as much of history as they needed to know. Perhaps they were even wary of history as they knew it (21), and possibly for good reason. Even though, for instance, minute historical details can be reconstructed from Jewish apocryphal writings, we can find no trace of historiography in them, only a search for prophetic clues and signs of the final conclusion to history, simultaneously feared and hoped for, with its conflated past and present and its never-changing scenario (37). On the other hand, this lack of interest may be the result of a level of confidence and self-sufficiency that our own culture no longer possesses (34). We have already seen what strange paths can be embarked on when an inflated sense of self-confidence interacts with a need to be comforted in the face of disaster, so let us now examine in closer detail the problems relating to Yerushalmi's notion of the conflation of past and present.

Ancient Israel had replaced the Pagan notion of conflict among the gods with the more poignant relationship of God and humanity, and it was this relationship, as Yerushalmi reminds us, that caused Judaism to first assign a decisive significance to history: 'The Heavens', according to the psalmist, might 'declare the glory of the Lord', but human history revealed God's will and purpose (8). To grant authority to a text written (albeit indirectly) by God is to assume, as a conservative believer must, that God's intentions have not changed since the text was set out, and therefore one can simply open the book and read in order to find out what God requires of us in the present. Knapp, however, warns us that the same thing cannot be said, with any sort of casual certainty, about history, unless one supposes that God has been providentially manipulating all the events of the past in order to produce a kind of dramatic or moving-picture tutorial for the benefit of the faithful (129). History may reveal God's will, but only to the diligent and discerning reader, whose autonomy in the face of cultural upheaval must seem to us to be a necessary component in the search for God's message in the 'bewildering specificity' of history. The tendency, even today, of Jewish historic writing to refer to paradigmatic years and places—586, 1492, Mainz, Auschwitz—as a sort of mnemonic shorthand for what were actually vast and complex catastrophes, may be seen, according to Mintz, as a clear statement of how historical events can be drained of their discreteness and absorbed into larger traditions (102-03).

It appears that the situation in 11th century Europe was certainly more than simply prone to these problems. Medieval interpreters generally felt no need to distinguish between text and commentary nor to develop a systematic method which would enable them to evaluate the way in which life in the past differed from that of the present, and as a result their work suffered from what Connerton terms "an imaginative conflation between the life of antiquity and the life of the contemporary world" (100). This situation was further exacerbated by the medieval use for figurative imagery, a style associated with European Christian influences, as against allegory, which is to the modern reader a more familiar literary structure deriving from as it does from the Classical sources of antiquity. Figurative imagery identifies events or institutions of the past as prefigurations, unfulfilled images of archetypes that will be more fully revealed in the future. It is in this manner that Christians scholars came to regard Old Testament incidents or statements as the prefigurations of parallel images and events that were to find their fulfillment in the more real and significant forms of the New Testament. According to Mintz, the martyrs of 1096 were hailed as having fulfilled their precursor *figura*, not only as expressed in the story of Abraham and Isaac, but also in the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple, and this subsequently served to stimulate a new kind of hermeneutic in which the past was evaluated less through exegesis than through figuration (99-100).

> ... these implicit background narratives contain not only the consistent, the enduring, and the reliable, but also the fragile, the errant, and the confabulated.

We have seen how European Jewry's notion of history prior to the events of 1096 had been marked by a sense of self-sufficiency in the present, a typically medieval propensity to use the past as a source of figurative imagery, and a wariness of history that had been created by the prior use of the past as a source of prophecy and apocryphal portents. All of these factors appear to have combined to allow the Rhenish memorializers to conflate the events of 1096 with traditions of the past in such a way as to drain both, to an important degree, of much of the instructive value they might otherwise have had to future generations. Modern theories of memory, to which we will now turn, demonstrate the mechanisms by which such acts may be seen to effect the cultures in which they occur.

MEMORY

More than fifty years ago, Maurice Halbwachs argued that we acquire and recall our memories within the mental spaces provided to us by membership in a social group—particularly, but not necessarily, a religious association (Connerton 36-37). He hypothesized that all memory is structured by social framework, and that collective memory is not a metaphor but "a social reality transmitted and sustained through the conscious efforts and institutions of the group" (Yerushalmi xv). The defining character of memory, as it applies to our inquiry, is that memories are public and shareable; one person's memories are supported by those of others in the same group (Halbwachs 12). Stressing the connection between collective and personal memory, he contrasted them both to historical memory—the reconstruction of the past by historians whose task it is to replace sacred liturgical memory with secular liturgical memory, essentially by conflating the two and by making more-or-less abstract religious symbols concrete, even if it involves creating some of them. This does not seem to be an inaccurate description of

the activities of the chroniclers of 1096, particularly those of the poets, as they invoked both Abraham/Isaac and Temple cult in an effort to sacralize the contemporary behaviour of the martyrs. Having noted this possible connection between modern theories of memory and the subject at hand, let us now turn our attention to the long-range effects that the catastrophes of 1096 may have had on the commemorative memory structures of subsequent generations of European Jewry.

> ... for those people of today who ... seem to have been waiting for a new, metahistorical myth, even an unabashedly fictional form of narrative ... may provide at least a temporary surrogate.

We have already noted how cultures lacking a modern sense of historiography may be remarkably oblivious to the differences between period and qualities of time. This may be due to the topocentric nature which Funkenstein attributes to collective memory (9), because of which events and historical institutions of the past merely serve as prototypes and are not recognized for their uniqueness. According to Yerushalmi, the single most important response to medieval disaster was the composition of *selihot,* penitential prayers which "themselves militated against too literal a concern with specific details"—the poet being able to take it for granted that the community was sufficiently familiar with the 'facts' (45-46). Yerushalmi also tells us that religious memory flows through two channels: ritual and recital (11), likewise Casey suggests that memory is basically as much a function of the human body as it is the human mind (x), and Connerton draws our attention to Durkheim's account of the non-cognitive strategies by which societies celebrate symbols of themselves in commemorative rituals that derive their power from the emotional effects of social interaction (103). In light of these observations, we may believe that whatever memories were invoked by these penitential liturgies were perhaps not matters of intellection alone, but may also be seen as being literally imbedded in the physiological makeup of the participants.

According to James Young, in his recent book on Holocaust monuments and memorials, it is important for us to realize how much our understanding of events depends on this construction of 'historical' memory, how much of the public's memory is intentionally constructed and, most important, to what extent the consequences of this historical understanding match the intention of the constructing agencies (15). The evaluation of the long-term effects of officially cast memory in a given society, to ask not only how people have been moved, but toward what ends they have been moved, has implications which bear directly on our topic of 1096 as a watershed for European Jewry, especially as they apply to the consequences, both short- and long-range, of this kind of activity.

## POLITICS

The concept of memory as social is especially important to our evaluation of 1096, especially when we consider Knapp's observation that religious values take the form of doctrines that are themselves dependent on the remembered patterns of behavior, our own and those of others who have gone before us (145). Yerushalmi tells us that personal memory is among the most fragile and capricious of our faculties (5), and yet the very way in which we employ images of the past, particularly in order to legitimate our current social order, presupposes a significant volume of mutually shared memory (Connerton 3). Historical consciousness and the consciousness of being 'Chosen since the beginning of history' are intertwined in the Scriptures (Funkenstein 13), but we must be aware that the aim of any group, religious or political, is to create a store of common memory as a foundation for unification (Young 6), since official memory of events in a people's past may be used to affirm the righteousness of a people, even their divine election (2). By selecting contemporary secular events, such as battles lost or won, and conflating them with sacred liturgical memories, the symbolic past is made concrete in the present. Unfortunately, there appear to be several problems with the idea of intentionally creating a ritually unified remembrance of the past.

Our experience of the present may very largely depend on our knowledge of the past, but the most important failure of collective memories is that across time they become far too easy to deny (Knapp 142). We are not speaking here of denial in the psychological sense of pathological strategies for dealing with conflicting memories, but rather of a tendency for long-term and often disastrous error to occur when the leaders of cultures whose recorded history is only a small part of their collective memory are required to make decisions in crises which they can not wholly understand and whose consequences they cannot foresee. Religious leader who resort to rules and beliefs the elements of which 'go without saying' and are taken for granted, may often unintentionally achieve a level of social transformation that is more radical and in an direction different from anything that was originally intended. Casey reminds us that these implicit background narratives contain not only the consistent, the enduring, and the reliable, but also the fragile, the errant, and the confabulated (xii), and it is the ability, particularly in those in religious authority, to shift among domains of reference at will, while denying that any such process is occurring, that has caused many modern thinkers to become uncomfortable with too close an overlap between religion and politics.

## AUTHORITATIVE NARRATIVES

It is the thesis of this paper that intentional modifications to the structures and symbols of collective memory are capable of producing complex and unpredictable changes in both the content of historical narrative and the ritual elements which depend upon these narratives for their authenticity. Let us therefore examine the role these narratives play in the shaping of a culture's ethical or political dispositions. Historical narratives can play what Knapp terms 'normative' roles, and specific narratives possessing this normative status can be said to bear collective 'authority' in so much as they supply criteria which can

shape or correct community behaviour (123). In both the Hebrew Bible and the prayer-book, 'remembrance' is the narrative process by which the major formative events in the history of the community are recalled and recuperated. But Funkenstein reminds us that the development of myths and historical fictions is an unavoidable part of the process of forming these narratives of historical consciousness, and that these historical fictions, like the sacrificial confabulations which we have already noted in the *piyyutim* commemorating the Crusader massacres, are often deliberate historical fictions (18).

Knapp, for one, would disagree with the idea that even deliberate historical fabrication must necessarily be a disqualifying factor. Modern reaction against the notion of fiction or myth as the source of a normative or authoritative narrative, he tells us, usually involves the claim that historical actuality really matters; that canonical texts ought to be subjected to some sort of "demystified account of the actual historical conditions under which those texts were produced" (132). Likewise, Yerushalmi reminds us that the legendary elements of the Bible or the scriptures of Homer have become part of our collective memory to the point that they are not considered 'fictions' in a pejorative sense. Myth and poetry were certainly legitimate, even inevitable, modes of perception and historical interpretation in ancient times, and for those people of today who, while not always rejecting history out of hand, at least seem to have been waiting for a new, metahistorical myth, even an unabashedly fictional form of narrative such as the novel may provide at least a temporary surrogate (98). Knapp rejects the notion that a special authority attaches to the actual as opposed to the remembered or the imagined; for if genuine ancestral narratives can express values which may be, as we have seen, remote from any we can now embrace, then we can only truly consider the past as a source of analogies. Thus particular past events may provide us, by analogy, with norms of behaviour, but so may analogies borrowed from other traditions or even from fiction (131-32).

Chazan, as we have seen, states that the post-martyrdom narratives tell a story which is focused entirely on human volition, and is stripped of complex political and doctrinal issues. As a social historian, he views both the savagery of the attacking Crusaders and the remarkable Jewish readiness for martyrdom as resulting from the 'common spiritual environment' this frenzied period of history. But Mintz maintains that the importance of the events of 1096 lay not in the form of behaviour, which could have remained an anomaly (89) but in the transformation of the acts themselves into a future norm of response to catastrophe; into what Knapp terms an 'authoritative' narrative.

Knapp's thesis thus comes to bear directly on the issue of 1096 as a turning point in European Jewish history. According to Knapp, a culture identifies itself not only with remembered action, but with actions it does not remember but may be convinced occurred, just as an amnesiac might come to take pride in an unremembered but reliably reported accomplishment (137). However, if the purpose of theodicy is seen, not as justice, but simply as a means of inducing obedience, then any connection to actual past events is clearly irrelevant (135), the only purpose of divine punishment then being to make a people identify with an element of the past in a manner that requires them to take responsibility for it, regardless of its historical actuality (138). On balance, it would appear that what is in question in the process of determining whether the long-term effects of the Crusader massacres of 1096 represent a significant divergence from tradition is not the actuality of either the recent or the ancient past. What is far more important is rather the religious and cultural quality of the commemorative literature as an authoritative narrative, especially if we agree with Knapp's societal concept of collective punishment as an attempt to cause people to identify with a collective future.

... memorial narratives are capable of taking on lives of their own that are often stubbornly resistant to the intent of their original makers.

## THE FUTURE

Young reminds us that, once created, memorial narratives are capable of taking on lives of their own that are often stubbornly resistant to the intent of their original makers (3). Of what Mintz calls the "mighty confluence of factors that had gone into the making of 1096", two stand out to the modern eye: the generation's extraordinary sense of its own righteousness; and the monumental hatred between Christians and Jews (101). The first of these relates to the point taken earlier about the new paradigm of punishment as a sign of righteousness that arose out of the memorial literature. After 1096, no transformation from an already attained state of perfection seems to have been deemed necessary. It appears as if the seemingly endless search for that unknown sin hidden within the ancient Jewish soul, which was believed to have originally caused the Diaspora and henceforth all the woes that followed, had somehow had a more benign effect on European Jewish culture than the newly advanced system of divine justice which connected suffering with righteousness without involving any more than the nominal mention of sin.

The most notable effect of this new paradigm, not surprisingly, was the shifting of the burden of anger from God to the enemy. Katz states unequivocally that "In the Ashkenazi Middle Ages, the act of martyrdom was deliberately and pointedly directed at the Christian world" (92), the concept of the Jewish community's religious mission as one of antagonism to Christianity being nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the attitude and behaviour of the Jewish martyrs (90). In their furious indignation, the chroniclers put anti-Christian sentiments in the mouths of the martyrs that are so excessive that later generations have found them to be substantially unrepeatable (89). It is particularly interesting to note, as Mintz points out, how many of the invectives in the Chronicles against Christianity take the form of the curses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, "in which the Israelites are told of the horrors awaiting *them* if they fail to uphold the covenant" (93).

We must agree with Chazan's sense that the creative lines of thought which devel-

oped in the late 11th and early 12th centuries not only continued to have a profound effect on subsequent European history, but came to dominate the world scene well into the 20th century. Unfortunately the ritualized nature of these self-sacrifices, which the Jewish chroniclers considered to be so sublime, were viewed by their Christian counterparts, once the Crusader Chronicals and the *piyyutim* had been translated from the Hebrew, as barbaric in the extreme (221). The reported Jewish rejection of any form of surrender or any degree of accommodation to the, admittedly violent and frightening, but surely temporary, demands of the besieging hordes, lead to a shattering on the part of the Jews of normal moral and ethical constraints. According to Chazan, "One might easily hypothesize a connection between the 1096 reality of Jewish parents willing to take the lives of their own children rather than submit to conversion and the subsequent image of Jews capable of taking the lives of Christian youngsters out of implacable hostility to the Christian faith" (213). The pervasive nature of the violence which has ever since periodically engulfed European Jews and Christians alike can thus be seen as the offspring, at least in part, of the violence of the open age of the 11th century, accidentally promoted into the future by the myth-making activities of the chroniclers of the Crusader massacres of 1096.

REFERENCES:


Casey, Edward S. *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

Chazan, Robert. *European Jewry and the First Crusade.* Berkeley: UC Press, 1987.

Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember.* Cambridge UP, 1989.

Eidelberg, Shlomo. ed. and trans. *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades.* University of Wisconsin Press, 1977.

Funkenstein, Amos. "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness." *History and Memory* 1 (Spring-Summer 1989): 5-26.

Garland, Robert. *The Greek Way of Death.* (London: Duckworth, 1985)

Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory.* 1950; trans. F.J. and V.Y. Ditter. New York: Harper Colophon, 1980.

Katz, Jacob. *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times.* Oxford UP, 1961.

Knapp, Steven. "Collective Memory and the Actual Past." *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 123-49.

Mintz, Alan. *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature.* New York: Columbia UP, 1984.

Schwartz, Barry. "The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory." *Sociological Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1986): 147-64.

Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory.* Seattle: UW Press, 1982.

Young, James E. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning.* Yale UP, 1993.



*Fritz Muntean has an MA in Religious Studies from the University of British Columbia and is co-editor of* The Pomegranate.


# Death Under Special Circumstances: An Exploration

*by Leah Samul*

We are fortunate to belong to a religion that does not shroud death in fear of eternal damnation as punishment for a life that has not been lived in the proper way. Many of us believe in reincarnation and feel that we have another time around at life that can be used as an opportunity to do things differently. With fear out of the picture, we are able to honor death as a release to the Goddess.

Partly for this reason, and partly because we are young as a religious community, there have been no in-depth treatises on death until recently, though there have been articles and essays in magazines and anthologies.[1] *Into the Summerland* by Edain McCoy was published in 1996, and *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying* followed in 1997. These are the first two books devoted entirely to addressing the issue of death in essays, poems, rituals and prayers.

This article deals with death under three circumstances that were not examined at any length in the above books. The first circumstance is the execution of a convicted criminal by the state. The other two include death in the line of duty: the death of a Pagan or Witch in the military, and the death for a Pagan or Witch on the police force.

A shorter version of this piece was originally submitted to the book *Crossing Over,* which later became *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying,* put out by the Reclaiming Collective. Although originally in the queue for inclusion in the earlier book, Starhawk and other Collective members interpreted Reclaiming's non-violent charter as extending to an article like this one,[2] and they rejected it for fear that the essay could be construed as condoning a military mentality or police brutality.[3] Starhawk was also worried that her reputation as a non-violent peace activist would be damaged by including it in a book that came out under her name and the Collective's aegis.[4] Additionally, she believed that these three situations didn't warrant a special category—she felt they were covered elsewhere.[5]

*The Pagan Book of Living and Dying* does contain material that could be used to cobble together rituals out of existing chapters in the book and applied to these three special circumstances.[6] But it is useful to have the information discussed all in one place for those to whom it applies. And the complex issues involved in these situations can't be addressed by simply cutting and pasting from existing sources.

This complexity is offered here in hopes that the multi-faceted nature of it will give Pagans and Witches a vantage point from which to view things as they put together ceremonies for members of our community who fall into these categories. I have presented no rituals per se, preferring instead to simply raise the topics so that Witches and Pagans can think about them and perhaps use some of the ideas contained in this essay. As regards the deities I suggest, they are examples and not meant to limit you to any pantheon or point of view.

## EXECUTION BY THE STATE

No matter what side of the issue you are on, it is obvious that capital punishment is a fact of life in many countries. The death penalty always carries with it the monstrous possibility that the condemned person is innocent

and therefore being put to death unjustly. It is impossible to know how often this occurs, but it probably happens more frequently than we'd all like to admit, especially for minority prisoners.

Any ritual for a case like this would include a call for justice to be done with the real perpetrator being discovered, even though it would happen after the fact. Many condemned prisoners have been through numerous appeals and have been on death row for years. Judging from the number of requests for information Covenant of the Goddess receives from prisoners, our religion is growing rapidly in correctional facilities.[7] It seems that many long term prisoners become interested in Witchcraft and Paganism while they are incarcerated and awaiting execution. I know of one recently executed inmate who did exactly that.

If you know your demons have gotten the better of you in this life, and you don't want to carry them over to the next incarnation, I can't think of a better demon eater than Kali Ma.

There is no set position in Witchcraft or Paganism on the death penalty. Opinion is divided, with some members of the community being steadfastly against execution by the state and some members feeling it is justified. One priestess I spoke with who is against it posited the argument that death by the state is the ultimate 'power over' ploy, and that supporting it imitates the stance of patriarchy, that rules by 'power over'. (As opposed to Reclaiming Witchcraft, which teaches the importance of power from 'within'.) Further, she argues that keeping a person locked up for all his/her life is ample punishment for whatever crimes have been committed. This priestess said that if she were called upon to do a ritual for someone about to be executed she would design the ritual around whatever the prisoner needed to assist him/her in getting through the final ordeal.

A Witch I spoke with (who is in favor of the death penalty) agreed with the priestess cited above regarding ritual. He cautioned that as priestesses and priests who are called upon to minister in an execution situation, we should avoid imposing our own religious agenda on the condemned individual. In other words, we as Witches should not assume that our own views on the Summerland or other parts of our own, personal theology surrounding death would be useful or desired by a condemned person.

Those who feel the death penalty is justified sometimes argue that executing a murderer is simply returning the energy to the sender. Our religion doesn't consider death a frightening thing, and most accounts of after death (sometimes called 'near death') experiences indicate that it is much more beautiful on the other side. Perhaps the most compassionate thing we can do for someone who has murdered is to let the murderer leave this life cycle, go on to healing and be reborn, thus having another chance to go through life and 'get it right'. A ritual from this point of view would comfort the prisoner and focus on what might most help the person process whatever they need to process before they die and have to face rebirth.

DEITIES: Many death row inmates came from a cycle of poverty, hopelessness and abuse that would make anyone turn to violence. Part of the ritual should enable the inmate to feel compassion for what he/she has gone through, and to accept himself/herself as still being a child of the Goddess. Kwan Yin, the Goddess of Compassion who is known as "She who hears the Cries of the World" is an excellent choice for a ritual like this.

One might also think of calling on Kali Ma. If you know your demons have gotten the better of you in this life, and you don't want to carry them over to the next incarnation, I can't think of a better demon eater than Kali Ma. She's the Goddess I'd call on for help. She actually applies to the unjust conviction/execution, also, though it is not recorded in the written tradition. I heard this from an Indian man who sold me a statue of Kali in Berkeley, California. He said that if you have been wronged very severely, and the person who is responsible is fully aware of this (in other words, it can't be an accident), Kali Ma will bring about justice. So for someone who is convicted of murder, but knows that someone else committed the crime and should step forward and admit it, Kali is the Goddess who will straighten out the Karma.

## IN THE LINE OF DUTY

Death as a job factor applies to the military, the police, rescue teams, firefighters and the like. But things are a bit more complicated in the military and on the police force, since both warriors and police officers are often put in the position of having to kill people as part of their job. So it would be necessary to have at least two different types of rituals for members of our religion in these professions: one for the death of a police officer or a warrior, and one to help an officer or warrior deal with having killed someone.

Personnel in both professions face the prospect of death at any moment. Therefore, as part of Samhain preparations each year, it would be wise to include updating (or creating) a will, and even formulating directions for organ donation and the issues around withholding life support systems in case of injury to the point of long-term coma. This would be a good thing for all Pagans and Witches to do at Samhain, but it is especially important when danger and the possibility of death are a routine part of an individual's job.

Another suggestion for police, military, and anyone else who regularly risks his or her own life to save others, would be for the community, comprised of friends and family, to have a ritual of thanksgiving that honors the danger these people willingly accept in order to safeguard the community. This could happen either at the Autumnal Equinox or at Samhain.

Both police officers and warriors are frequently on the receiving end of violence, though police officers generally experience more day-to-day violence over the course of their careers, especially if they work on the street. As part of their jobs, policemen (and women) are repeatedly thrust into an emotionally, verbally and physically abusive environment that the rest of us cannot even begin to comprehend. This is something that other 'line of duty' workers (for example firemen or rescue teams) don't ordinarily have to deal with. It can leave scars of pain and anger on the spirit and soul that build up. If possible, Samhain preparations should contain a short ritual that focuses on releasing or processing the emotions that have accumulated over the course of the year. It is important to understand that the police officer (or warrior) might still feel angry at whomever did violence to him or her. The

ritual cannot eradicate painful emotional wounds at the wave of a wand; human beings are not made that way. Often, time is the only healer. But at Samhain, the officers and warriors can consciously state their intention to release these wounds to the Goddess and the God. Then, if death occurs unexpectedly, the intention has already been set to not carry the pain and/or the rage over into the next incarnation.

## PAGANS AND WITCHES ON THE POLICE FORCE

In police work, a seemingly routine encounter can rapidly escalate to life and death proportions, with innocent lives being endangered. In some cases the 'bad guy' is well-defined and the decision to draw a gun and shoot is clearly the only solution. In an actual crime encounter on the street, this kind of clarity rarely occurs. Even when it does, as the officer writes up the report he or she must still deal with the fact of having killed someone, and second guessing can often occur.

The Neopagan world view has a different perspective on death and the after-life than most western religions. In the situation where death has been caused on the job, this world view greatly assists the process of dealing with the emotional fallout. Whether we are police officers or not, many members of our religion believe in reincarnation, which makes it possible for even the most hardened criminal to get a second chance at things. Nonetheless, taking a life is a difficult thing to deal with, even when the lives of innocent people are saved in the process.

Many police departments offer counseling in these cases to help the officer process his or her emotions around the issue, and mandate that the officer take time off active duty after the incident has occurred.[8] But verbal counseling can only go so far, and even the most thorough discussion of the incident doesn't necessarily make it easy to put it out of the mind when the officer has to get back on the street. This is especially true on the police force, where a similar situation could easily occur again in the course of the officer's daily work. And whether counseling is used or not, it seems implausible that simply taking a week off will wipe the officer's mind so clean that she or he doesn't even think of the incident once returning to work.

At times like this, rituals can be exceptionally useful. The reason that rituals are such potent agents of change is that they get beyond the rational mind's machinations. Just as a picture is worth a thousand words, so too, a ritual is worth hours of talking. The powerful dimensions of ritual can begin a healing process that goes further and deeper than words.

Even a short ritual can greatly facilitate grounding the emotions and putting them to rest. Part of the ritual could include a bath or shower. This would begin the process of letting healing wash over the officer and of letting the sadness and second-guessing wash away. The ritual can be performed more than once if necessary.

When a police officer is killed on the job, the focus shifts to the survivors; the family and friends. In this case, belief in reincarnation isn't necessarily a comfort to those who are left behind. We need to develop memorial rituals that heal the family and friends by affirming the courage of the officer. Police departments, of course, conduct their own funerals, with an honor guard and even pipe bands in some cases. But it is important to hold our own rites for Pagan and Witch police officers, where we can speak of them using their Craft names and calling upon our own Goddesses and Gods.[9] Part of the ritual should include the expression of gratitude in memory of the slain officer, who was willing to take on a job filled with the constant threat of death. It would also be helpful to create rituals to bring to justice whomever was responsible for killing the officer.

## PAGANS AND WITCHES IN THE MILITARY

Several things need to be addressed when creating rituals that deal with death for Pagans in the armed forces. In military duty, death is especially sad because those who are sent to fight a battle or a war are usually young. If they die, there is the vague sense that their lives are over before they had a chance to complete this life cycle. This needs to be honored and spoken to when performing rituals for Pagan and Witch warriors who have died in combat. Like police work, war can have situations where things are not very clear cut; the horrible problem of 'friendly fire' is one example. If a warrior has been the agent of friendly fire, a ritual can help honor the death or injury that has happened because of it.

> Another suggestion ... would be for the community, comprised of friends and family, to have a ritual of thanksgiving that honors the danger these people willingly accept in order to safeguard the community.

Another problem is that of warriors missing in action (MIA). As a group, MIA's constitute a sort of undead because no one knows if they are dead or alive. I have never seen a ritual for MIA's. Precisely because the status of the person is unknown, it would be difficult to write one. But it would focus on the survivors as much as the individual who is missing. The families and friends of MIA's desperately need some sense of closure, and a ritual in this case would definitely be helpful. Even if we don't have many MIA Pagans or Witches right now, we are growing rapidly as a religion and it wouldn't hurt to be prepared.

But the most pressing ritual needs are for ceremonies that facilitate re-integration into society after having killed in battle. There are two reasons for this. First, unlike the police, who constantly live in the society they serve, military combat takes place outside of civilian society. Second, the process of re-integration into society is where the military as an institution most blatantly fails the warrior's needs.

In an insightful article by Judy Harrow,[10] eight Pagans [*Note: your* Pom *editor is honoured to have been one of these*] spoke of their military service as a rite of passage. Harrow shows that rituals of re-integration into civilian (or non-combat) life are sadly lacking in the military. Discussing military training and service as the separation and transformation elements of an initiation, she noted that there are many weeks of basic training and then sometimes years of service. But leaving the service and coming back into civilian life takes only about a day or two and is mostly filled with administrative activities. This is not sufficient for someone who has been away from ordinary life for several years, and certainly insufficient for someone who has seen combat. If a warrior has killed in battle, we can't expect him or

her to come back into the non-combat world without some sort of re-entry ritual.

Indigenous Pagans and native people have always been aware of the necessity of these kinds of rituals. The Dine (Navaho) are famous for their chantway ceremonies that restore a person to balance after a traumatic event has occurred; The Enemy Way is one such ceremony, and is performed specifically for a warrior returning from battle. Though we have no exact figures on how many Witches and Pagans there are in military service, we can certainly be pro-active in designing re-entry rituals for our community. And even more so than for the police, the re-integration rite for a warrior may need to be done more than once.

In addition to rituals for warriors who have died, we need uncomplicated rituals that Pagan and Witch military personnel can perform for themselves before battle …

In addition to rituals for warriors who have died, we need uncomplicated rituals that Pagan and Witch military personnel can perform for themselves before battle, since battle inherently carries the possibility of death. These kinds of rituals should be quick ones that don't need a lot of accouterments and that are made up of parts that are easy to remember; complicated rituals with lots of steps wouldn't be usable right before the battle. The warrior might participate in a longer ritual, including family and friends, before leaving for passage to the war. Parts of the ritual could be called up mentally as the warrior enters the actual fighting. One example of this type of ritual that could easily be adapted to include preparation for possible death in the fray appeared in an issue of the Reclaiming Collective's Newsletter during the Persian Gulf War.[11]

DEITIES: Along with the usual underworld Deities, rituals for both police and the military could call on warrior Goddesses/Gods, any Deity associated with justice, and also Deities of compassion.

In the Greek pantheon there is Themis, the daughter of Gaia and Uranus. Themis ruled over order in the communal affairs of mortals, especially as regards to assemblies. One of her children was Justice (Dike). Another suggestion is Athena. Athena is usually associated with intelligence, but recall that she was born from the head of Zeus, brandishing a shield and spear at the moment of her own birth. She was known for being a true warrior, one who fights for a just cause. As opposed to Aries, who was the most disliked of all the Gods on Olympus because he enjoyed fighting for its own sake. Athena was known for her cool headed logic in the midst of violent conflict, something needed by both police and military personnel.

As with death by execution, Kwan Yin could be invoked to bring compassion to rituals of friendly fire and also to release the sadness over bringing death to another human being—a criminal, in the case of the police officer, or the enemy against whom the warrior is fighting.

EPILOGUE

Our religion is growing exponentially, both in North America and in Europe. Recent events at military bases in the United States indicate that increasing numbers of Pagan and Witch military personnel are willing to practice openly. We have no direct figures on how many Witches are on the Police force, though very likely we are on the rise in all the professions. And while at this point it seems that not many death row inmates enter prison as Witches or Pagans, it's not uncommon for them to find the Goddess in prison and to die having developed some relationship to Her.

So, these three 'special circumstances' are actually not so special at all. Given that fact, it is unfortunate that these issues couldn't be brought to the table in *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying,* which covers death under every other situation imaginable, and does so with great beauty and compassion. And as previously mentioned, *The Reclaiming Newsletter* printed a ritual for a warrior about to go to war. So, there was at least precedent within the Collective for recognizing our brothers and sisters who work in the armed forces,[12] though to my knowledge the *Newsletter* never discussed rituals for the police or for those executed on death row.

In Starhawk's novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing* there is a stirring scene near the end of the book. To stem the take-over of their city by the military, members of the non-violent community attempt to stop it by literally putting their bodies in front of soldiers bearing laser rifles. As they perform this very courageous act they say: "There is a place set for you at our table, if you will choose to join us."[13] Obviously, when a person has died under one of the three circumstances described in this article, he or she cannot choose to "join us" any longer, for they are not alive to make the choice. But what of their surviving loved ones? Should they not be offered a place at the table, a place to be comforted in their grief? Opening out the discussion to include them, by publishing this article in the book, would have been one way to offer them that place.

Moreover, facing down a rifle requires the kind of courage that doesn't come overnight. I really believe that the strength for that kind of courage and compassion has to be built up by practicing many small acts of courage and compassion. How can we expect to have the courage to offer a place at the table to 'the enemy' holding a gun, risking our lives in the process, if we can't even offer bereaved survivors a place at the table in a book of rituals, where no lives are at stake in the outcome?

With the publication of this article, it is hoped that the complexity of issues involved in these three special circumstances will provoke discussion and lead to deeper awareness for those planning rituals in their own Pagan and Witch communities.

NOTES:

1. See Oz Anderson's essay, "Pagan Rites of Dying" pp. 249-270, in *Witchcraft Today Book Two: Modern Rites of Passage.* Chas Clifton, editor. Llewellyn, 1994
2. "This book may be Reclaiming and Friends, but it is coming out under Reclaiming's name and bears some responsibility to be consistent with Reclaiming's ethical and political stands" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 8/18/95).
3. "I would rather not single out the military and police for special consideration—because I don't believe we can without falling into the 'God is on our side' mode of religions blessing undertakings of violence" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 8/17/95);

   Also:

   "But I do not want to contribute any of my energy to blessing the operations of the military, or to anything that could possibly be construed as condoning or excusing police violence. I know that is not your intent, but that is one way the article as written can be read" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 9/19/95).

4. "Particularaly (sic) as this book is coming out of the Reclaiming community, and so many of us have such strong antiwar feelings, I would not want us, under the guise of inclusiveness, to end up blessing something we are actually very much opposed to" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 8/17/95);

   Also:

   "And I have a name and a professional reputation I've spent 25 years to develop. I cannot lend it to anything I don't wholeheartedly agree with" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 8/18/95).

5. "Particularly because I don't think we would be excluding Pagan police or military by not specifically giving them a special section—they would be included, as would anyone else, in the community through the rituals and prayers we do for everyone" (Starhawk, email correspondence, 8/17/95);

   Also:

   "For the same reason, I don't think we need to create something for someone on death Row specifically—again, the appropriate prayers and chants should be offered to them" (Starhawk, e-mail correspondence, 8/17/95).

6. For example, there is an essay and prayer for one who has died violently, pp. 216-222; and there is a short essay and prayer for one who has died for another ("Death in the Service of Life"), which, in three sentences referring to the military, acknowledges that Reclaiming "can respect and honor the courage of those who die for what they believe is right" (pp. 232-233).

7. Some of the local councils of Covenant of the Goddess now have volunteers who specialize in prison ministry and who have gone into prisons to lead rituals on our holy days. In one instance, the priestess involved, who was against the death penalty, established a pen-pal correspondence with a death row inmate. When he was executed, she went to the prison to be with him in the last days before his death.

8. Informal conversations with police officers indicates that departmental policies vary on counseling. In some police departments, officers are obligated to see a department therapist for several meetings. Other departments offer counseling but do not compel the officer to undergo it. In all cases, the officer must take time off after the shooting incident has occurred. This would be a perfect time to do a ritual, as the officer has more time than normal since he or she doesn't have to be at work during the day.

9. Oz Anderson's essay cited above describes an almost comical situation regarding a Christian burial rite done by the blood-related, 'straight' family of a Witch. It was held for the late Craft Bard Gwidyon Pendderwen, who of course was not in the police force, but it underscores the importance of holding our own rituals for those who have died, since the traditional funeral rites are hardly comforting to surviving Craft members.

10. See "Initiation by Ordeal: Military Service as Passage into Adulthood" in *Witchcraft Today Book Two: Modern Rites of Passage.* Chas. S. Clifton, editor; Llewellyn, 1992.

11 White Eagle, Dierdre and Tuitean, Paul, "War Mask Ritual" *Reclaiming Newsletter* #50, Spring, 1993, pp. 26-28.

12. The ritual in question was published after much heated debate, and it had both a disclaimer before it and a rebuttal after it. But was featured because the *Newsletter* staff knew that Witches and Pagans might be fighting in the Persian Gulf War. Printing the ritual provided a ceremony for those who were going into the conflict, and also opened the issue up for discussion. Thus, the *Newsletter* did an enormous service to members of our greater religious community in the armed forces.

13. *The Fifth Sacred Thing.* by Starhawk, pp. 310-1, 332-3, 455, 1993, Bantam Books. (hardback edition)

*Leah Samul has been a Witch for over 20 years, is a member of Covenant of the Goddess, and is the author of "Wisdom in the Cards," the companion book to the Hudes Tarot deck, forthcoming from US Games in 2000.*

# Effeminate Love

*by John Yohalem*

Recent performances of Handel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* ("Julius Caesar in Egypt") at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and the translated "titles" and staging applied to the opera there, remind one how much the English language, and society, have changed since 1724.

An especially egregious example is the "effeminacy" of Ptolemy ('Tolomeo' in the opera), the villain of the piece. In his first appearance, Tolomeo is taunted by his sister, consort and rival for the throne, Cleopatra, as an "*effeminato amante*", an effeminate lover. Since she goes on to suggest that he devote himself to the joys of women's love rather than to statecraft, she is obviously not suggesting what we nowadays think of as effeminacy. Indeed Tolomeo, if the libretto is to be trusted, seems quite heterosexual. But the staging at the Met takes off from this insult, and perhaps from the fact that this role, composed for a heroic castrato, was sung at the Met by countertenor Brian Asawa—in other modern stagings it has sometimes been given to a bass.

At the Met, Asawa performed the role with dapper charm and an impressively developed bare chest. Effeminacy, however, was imposed on him by the addition of two "super catamites", non-singing muscle-boys and, by implication, male concubines, who crouched at his feet like tame leopards, posing provocatively, whenever Tolomeo appeared. Too, the lines Tolomeo sings aside, to no one, were confided here to a be-skirted chamberlain, also non-singing, who had no other function. The suggestion was clear: Tolomeo is unworthy to reign because he is gay.

This is certainly not what Handel, and his librettist Nicola Haym, meant by the word "*effeminato*", and the transformation of this concept shows us how far, and along what sort of road, we have come. In renouncing the aristocratic ideals of male behavior that were still in favor, if only as ideals, in Handel's day, we have lost the traditional sense of what properly constitutes manhood, and the behavior proper to a man.

THE PUBLIC FOR WHOM Handel wrote his operas—mostly English and at least somewhat classically educated—had expectations when it came to opera that were very different from ours. Those expectations were aristocratic.

This is not to say that he composed his operas merely for an audience of aristocrats—though it was a group of wealthy aristocrats who created the company for which Handel wrote them. *Opera seria* was an art originally devised for the ruling classes, and its moral compass exalts them. The characters are legendary and formal to an extent Euripides and Shakespeare might have found risible—they are hard to take today, as human beings of any dimension.

In renouncing the aristocratic ideals of male behavior that were still in favor, if only as ideals, in Handel's day, we have lost the traditional sense of what properly constitutes manhood …

To understand the form as Handel knew it, to feel the force of its drama, we must see the characters as archetypes, individuated (if at all) by the skill of the composer, necessarily enhanced by that of the singer/actor. If the singer lacks such skill, or if the composer is a mediocrity, *opera seria* becomes not merely dull but ridiculous.

Handel, among the greatest composers of his day, did not see fit to challenge the assumptions of the form, to lead it towards a new style, as Gluck and Mozart were to do half a century later. He was content with the structures as he found them, and within their bounds discovered the freedom to express character and drama.

HANDEL'S OPERATIC characters, virtuous or villainous, are stick figures—only the emotional variety created by his music makes them human.

In *Giulio Cesare,* for example, Caesar is not a man of flesh and blood, still less the middle-aged egotist who ruled Rome, but an archetypal "king" and hero.

Cornelia, Pompey's widow, is the archetypal Roman matron as Handel's contemporaries knew her from childhoods spent translating the Roman classics: "beautiful and cold" (as Shakespeare describes Octavia in *Antony and Cleopatra*).

Sesto (Sextus), her son, is an adolescent—not, like Mozart's Cherubino in *Figaro,* overwhelmed by the dawning sex urge, but in the sense of becoming an adult, a warrior, a Roman of the upper classes. When Sesto puts aside his "childish" terrors to take martial action—ultimately slaying the villain who is about to rape Sesto's mother—it is a sign that his father, Pompey, lives again in a "noble Roman" son. The piquancy of this transformation is due to the fact that Sesto, when first seen, is a boy, unsure of his manhood. (The role, sung at the Met by a countertenor, was composed for a woman.)

All these things were understood by Handel's audience, who had been raised on Livy, Plutarch and Vergil, in ways with which the modern opera audience has completely lost touch.

In contrast to these noble, if boring, Romans, we have the Egyptians, or rather (as everyone knew in Handel's day), Egyptianized Greeks: Tolomeo, Cleopatra, Achilla. They boast none of the "Roman" virtues. Ptolemy is lecherous, treacherous, spoiled and violent—the tyrant, self-evidently unfit to rule. Achilla is a traitor, rightly betrayed by the man he trusted—he exists to demonstrate, in dying, just how evil his master is.

Cleopatra is the archetypal sexpot, irresistible, ingenious and corrupt. The libretto rescues her from decadence by making her passion for Caesar genuine and heartfelt instead of political and calculating, as it could easily seem. Tolomeo's viciousness and Cleopatra's true love for Caesar—and her willingness to aid the oppressed Cornelia—condemn the brother and redeem the sister, proving her worthy of the happy ending inevitable in *opera seria.*

> ... you would never guess Tolomeo had committed any of the deeds that are regarded as "effeminate" in the 1990s. He lusts for power, he disposes of political opponents and untrustworthy friends, he pursues women insatiably ...

WHEN, IN THEIR first appearance, in a scene that introduces the Egyptian characters (as the previous scene introduced the Romans) and indicate to the audience what traits to expect of them, Cleopatra calls Tolomeo "*effeminato amante*", she follows the accusation with a mocking aria suggesting that Tolomeo renounce politics for the love of beautiful women. Too, the modern construction of "*effeminato*" is contradicted by Tolomeo's pursuit of Cornelia.

Homosexuality would have been, in any case, entirely unmentionable on the public stage in the eighteenth century, and never was mentioned there, except for very vague references in a few topical comedies. There were no polite words for it, for one thing. The "serious" stage was reserved for refined subjects dealt with in a more exalted manner.

What, then, did "*effeminato amante*" mean, to Handel and his intended audience? What is Cleopatra implying?

TOLOMEO'S BEHAVIOR is not "manly", as the conventions of *opera seria* understood manliness. "*Effeminato*", applied to a man, must obviously be a derogation of manhood in some sense, since (before the advent of modern psychology), male and female were seen as, in some sense, divinely ordained opposites—for one to possess the character of the other in any fashion was in some sense "unnatural", although women, real or legendary, who took on the "masculine" character of ruler or hunter were admired for reasons that would require another article.

Of what, then, was this archetypal manliness supposed to consist? As Caesar is the epitome of manliness in this opera, we can understand it by observing him: Manhood is expressed by making war or by hunting; in sport and exercise intended to prepare a man for the other two activities; and in taking care of business generally. Kingly behavior is manly behavior elevated to a higher plane: a King does not fight duels, but he invades countries; he does not go out shooting, but leads vast posses on the chase; he does not keep accounts, he presides as a judge.

Tolomeo's behavior conflicts with this on every level: He does not make war; instead, he fawns on a conqueror, Caesar, by assassinating a guest, Pompey, who is Caesar's rival. He makes no reference to the chase or manly exercise. He is faithless to his friends and brutal to women. Too, he is understood to spend much of his time in the harem—that is, making love to women. This is what Cleopatra tells him to run along and do, while she rules the country. This is what she means by "effeminate" behavior.

A "real man", in the Roman warrior sense, while not immune to sexuality, keeps it in its proper place and does not allow himself to be distracted. When Caesar's tryst with "Lydia" (Cleopatra in disguise) is interrupted, he draws his sword and rushes off to battle without hesitation. Ptolemy, evidently, is not even present at the battle, though he manages to have his victorious general, Achilla, assassinated during the hostilities.

In short, making love to women (or, at any rate, spending too much of one's time among them) is, in this warrior culture, to be "effeminate".

EVEN IN HANDEL'S TIME, these conventions were more than rusty, as the immediate success of the lampoon, *The Beggars' Opera,* whose popularity drove Handel's company into bankruptcy, makes clear. In that work, rival kings are replaced by rival

corrupt officials, virtuous queens by sluttish barmaids, and the whole crowd may expect to be "whipped, hanged or transported" to the penal colonies. The joke was total and delicious; Handel didn't stand a chance. But the matter was old: knights errant had been figures of fun since Don Quixote, a best-seller throughout Europe over a century before.

But the serious operas of Handel's era continued to make their effect because, however one might titter at the virtues they extolled, the general worth, the admirability of these things was accepted by the entire audience. They expected heroes to conform to archetype: Kings should be just, Queens virtuous, warriors brave and honorable, children devoted to their parents, witches wicked and wizards wise. This was gratifying to monarchs, the original audience for whom operatic entertainments were devised, but as opera became a public craze, and as monarchs' personal lives became more generally known through the rise of news media, the contrast between operatic ideal and reality was subtly derogatory to royal prestige. Everyone in Handel's London knew that George I and George II did not resemble Giulio Cesare—George I had divorced his wife for adultery and locked her up for life; George II hated his father and his son, and was a constant adulterer.

SO NOW WE KNOW: Tolomeo is effeminate because he spends his time seeking "pleasure", which includes making love to women. Tolomeo must die; therefore, he must be seen to commit offenses to noble and kingly conduct such as will justify regicide—in an aristocratic art form, the most atrocious of crimes. Tolomeo has not only betrayed a guest, deposed a sister, and murdered a friend, he assaults a noble Roman matron, the very archetype of virtue. He is slain while attempting to rape Cornelia, and by her son, Sesto, who thus attains "manhood", in his eyes and ours.

From the libretto you would never guess Tolomeo had committed any of the deeds that are regarded as "effeminate" in the 1990s. He lusts for power, he disposes of political opponents and untrustworthy friends, he pursues women insatiably—just the sort of behavior the modern action film, rap music, and the popular myth of the noble Mafia "don" regard as satisfyingly masculine. In the opera, only his alto voice category (often been transposed to bass in twentieth century revivals) and Cleopatra's slighting recitative would hint of "effeminacy"—by modern definition.

It is the definition of effeminacy that has changed—and the dilemma faced by males in this society in seeking male role models. Indeed, it was changing before the end of Handel's century. The passing of *opera seria,* which pretty much occurred during Mozart's short lifetime, in part indicates the change. The aristocracy was losing its place as the most powerful group in society to a bourgeoisie with very different ideals.

The behavior one might expect of a nobleman on the stage had changed by the time Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte wrote their three celebrated collaborations. The behavior of real kings and real nobles was too well known in a world full of inexpensive publications and a broad literacy, the age of Voltaire and de Sade, and the real power was no longer in the hands of those who could punish sly digs at noble authority.

Accordingly, in *Le nozze de Figaro* (1786), we have in Count Almaviva a tyrant constantly outwitted and frustrated, obliged to crave pardon without having committed the adultery that must be forgiven. He is a nobleman who no longer fulfills his ancient function—he does not take his diplomatic career or judicial responsibilities with the seriousness and energy he brings to seductions and intrigues. He is a nobleman who becomes "effeminate" by avoiding business. And he reaps the just reward of this "effeminacy"—chasing girls has made him unworthy to win them. His own servant, the common barber Figaro, not only wins the girl, he becomes the heroic everyman figure of the opera, perhaps all opera.

IF A NOBLE IS NO LONGER a warrior or a huntsman, he is no longer eligible to be the archetypal king as war-leader or hunter as provider. If he does not fulfil these ancient types of maleness, how does he establish that he is male?

As life became more orderly, as individual energy was reined in or put to the service of the state, males were left without an obvious outlet for this adolescent impulse. With duels banned and hunting turned from a frequent necessity into a rare recreation, traditional maleness was deprived of its ancient function and its ancient *proof*—for if the male sexual act cannot be performed publicly, then its symbolic appearance become all the more important, even necessary. Men needing to prove themselves male—for their own satisfaction and to achieve a place among other males more than to impress women—fell back upon their distinction as the predator sex. The very behavior that Handel's contemporaries had seen as unworthy of disciplined aristocratic and heroic men became the only behavior that would demonstrate masculinity to themselves. From being abstemious warriors and hunters, they became skirt-chasers. "Effeminacy", in consequence, was turned on its head, narrowed in definition to refer to the pursuit of one's own sex—and, presumably, in the passive role, with its ancient aura (however unrealistic) of assuming, of envying, femininity.

We can see this transformation in action as early as Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787). The title character is a gentleman, an aristocrat, trained to all the responsibilities of his position. Yet, from the first moments of the opera, we see him abusing his privileges, putting his skills to evil use, and corrupting the society that has distinguished him. When Don Giovanni places a peasant wedding party under his "protection", and invites them to his home for refreshment, he is a nobleman, behaving as one should toward social inferiors. When, two minutes later, he attempts to seduce the bride, he is conspicuously violating the ancient social contract—and showing how hollow it had, by that time, become, for the stage does not foretell but only mimics reality.

Don Giovanni gets his comeuppance, to be sure. For one thing, on this one day, his last, every planned seduction goes awry. His attempted conquests are all frustrated. Indeed, we never see him in any "human" relationship except cynical flirtation or the abusive patronage of his servant, Leporello. For a man who claims to love women, he

As "effeminate" has come to mean "queer" (another fine old word impoverished in its usage by the neurotic sexualization of our society), so "manly" has come to mean merely adolescent, horny and unrestrained.

has very little to say to them aside from the clichés of courtship.

Don Giovanni is the nobleman who has irresponsibly renounced every archetypal quality of his rank—pillar of the state, fount of honor, protector of the weak. Yet he never strikes us as "effeminate". Why? Because he has managed to transform this sensual weakness into the appearance of strength, the manly threat to the enemy becoming a threat to those he is expected to defend. This may seem not as dishonor in Tolomeo's style but as a rather courageous challenge the authority of society—which is just how certain nineteenth century liberals saw Don Giovanni.

If it is society that has channeled maleness into the ideal of "gentlemanly" behavior, for its own purposes of order and self-perpetuation, Don Giovanni, a nobleman in a time when the nobility were losing their historic function, discards what remains of the trappings of traditional maleness, the euphemistic categories of warrior and huntsman, for the naked reality of the sex urge run amok. Unable to be knights errant or lordly providers in a world of citizen armies and bourgeois factories, the nobleman has no way to demonstrate his masculinity but sexual violence. In the nineteenth century, when the hero who defies society was exalted, Don Giovanni was a rare survivor from the past on the operatic stage precisely because its hero seemed outrageous in a way that much of his audience could respond to.

Sexual restraint had ceased to be manly; it had come to seem (as Donna Anna's fiancé, Don Ottavio, can seem) "effeminate". Because we have no other outlet for vital energy, Don Giovanni's brutal sexuality has become the traditional image of maleness—to the point, indeed, where even homosexual men who take the "receptive" role are nowadays expected (and expect themselves) to adopt the trappings of exaggerated "macho".

WHAT DOES THIS EVOLUTION of words say about us? The words we use, the way we use them, guide the processes of our thought. The debasement of "manliness" to frenetic sexual activity and "effeminacy" to any other sort of behavior (sexual and otherwise) says a great deal about the way we think now, and the way we behave now, and the way our society is going.

At the dawn of a new millennium, we have been deprived of what it was that usefully defined manhood from the dawn of recorded history: We no longer fight, we no longer hunt, we no longer "protect the weak". Manhood no longer stands for principles of self-control and maturity. But instead of beating our swords into plowshares, of becoming stalwart men of peace and balanced behavior, we have turned these adolescent energies into worship of the frivolous: of youth and sexual excess. As "effeminate" has come to mean "queer" (another fine old word impoverished in its usage by the neurotic sexualization of our society), so "manly" has come to mean merely adolescent, horny and unrestrained.

*John "Brightshadow" Yohalem is the editor and publisher of* Enchanté: The Journal for the Urbane Pagan, *which appears to be in a state of suspended animation. He is working on a collection of essays about the shamanic roots of operatic drama which, as someone once said of Wagner's music, will be much better than it sounds.*

# Book Review:
## A VOICE IN THE FOREST: CONVERSATIONS WITH ALEX SANDERS

by 'Jimahl'
Trident Publications, P.O. Box 990591, Boston, Mass. 02199. 1999. 200 pages. $15.

Although it is written for a narrowly defined audience, *A Voice in the Forest* should interest anyone concerned with issues of mediumship and the establishment of what are sometimes called magical "contacts" within revived Witchcraft. Modern practitioners do frequently refer to the presence of ancestral spirits and deceased Witches who take an interest in their religious descendants' activities: these persons are often referred to as The Mighty Dead or as The Hidden Company, for example. Yet, paradoxically, modern Witches seem almost embarrassed by their traditions' founders and elders. Some are too quickly forgotten, such as the science-fiction writer Margaret St. Clair (see *The Pomegranate* #2). Others find themselves on the trash pile of history because their eccentricities seem less charming than obsolete: Gerald Gardner's alleged sexual kinks are better remembered than his genuine religious creativity.

In this case, the embarrassing elder is Alex Sanders, who blazed a streak through the British news media in the 1960s. According to Patricia Crowther, he boasted "that he could make the front page of the *Manchester Evening Chronicle & News* any time he liked." Furthermore, he attempted briefly to make money by performing magical rituals in theatres and on nightclub stages. Profiled in June Johns' *King of the Witches* (1969) and in Stewart Farrar's *What Witches Do* (1971), Sanders and his wife Maxine were probably the most-photographed British witches of the 1960s and 1970s, appearing also in the 1970 *Man, Myth and Magic* series and elsewhere. He died in 1988 of lung cancer, having mellowed considerably and having taught the Craft to many students who regarded him with emotions ranging from embarrassment to tolerance to genuine fondness. Stewart and Janet Farrar and others were content to focus on what they believed was his genuine gift for healing.

Morwen, who is Jimahl's high priestess and who once edited a Pagan journal called *Harvest,* describes Sanders in her introduction to *A Voice in the Forest* as the "arrogant showman" of the Craft: "His goal was to make [the Craft] more accessible, which he certainly did, but detractors were horrified by his pandering to the press and his giving away of the Craft secrets."

As a literary work, *A Voice in the Forest* is not fully formed. Jimahl's writing style is sometimes gushy and overloaded with modifiers: fires are "vigorous," hands "strong," and November landscapes "distinctly" uninviting. Events and persons are only sketchily contextualized. And like many devotional religious books, it is written only for insiders—not merely for Wiccans, but for those who know who Alex Sanders was. I suspect that today that would mean fewer than half of North American practitioners of the Craft.

But the book has its strengths as well. The narrative pace is quick and the description of the coven's necromantic ritual on Hallowe'en 1998—and its unintended consequences for one member—is reminiscent of Dion Fortune's *The Secrets of Dr Taverner,* albeit more compressed. Most importantly, it raises a question that many if not most Wiccan groups gloss over: the importance of magical "contacts."

As Alan Richardson, author of two books on Dion Fortune and her associates in ceremonial magic, *Dancers to the Gods* and *Priestess,* defines them, contacts are "discarnate sources of power and intelligence—in short, the so-called Secret Chiefs … entities of high status who have what is essentially an evolutionary interest in humankind." The entities favored by ceremonial magicians may be legendary figures like Melchizedek, "Lord of the Flame and also of Mind," whom Richardson identifies as one of the guides of what was to become Fortune's Society (later Fraternity) of the Inner Light, or historical figures, such as John Scott, Lord Eldon, chancellor under George III and IV. However, to lose one's contacts means psychic sterility for the magician: in Richardson's phrase, he or she "would be like a light bulb in which the electricity has suddenly been shut off," the filament slowly going to black.

Alex Sanders, and by extension the "Alexandrian" tradition of Wicca which sprang from him, have often been described as more ceremonially oriented than the Gardnerian tradition to which they owed a great deal. (Sanders hounded Gardnerian leaders for initiation, despite the story that he fed to June Johns about being initiated by his grandmother as a boy—the eponymous "grandmother story" of modern Witchcraft.) By contrast, the late Doreen Valiente, who did a great deal to shape the modern Craft in the 1950s, first working with Gerald Gardner's coven and then with Robert Cochrane's, actively purged much of the ceremonial magical tone from the Gardnerian rituals as "not really suitable for the Old Craft of the Wise." Likewise, the Farrars, trained by Alex and Maxine Sanders, sometimes used Cabalistic magic but felt that it was "out of context" in many Wiccan rites.

But communicating with dead elders is not unknown in modern Witchcraft. Valiente, having broken with Gardner and connected with Robert Cochrane's group, recounted having received "a series of communications from what purported to be the discarnate spirit of a traditional [which is to say pre-Gardnerian] witch, who gave his name as John Brakespeare." What began as a vision on the edge of sleep of a group of dark-clad people grouped around a stang (staff) stuck in the ground evolved into a series of impressions, pictures, and conversations recorded during meditative states, leading to a portrait of a group of witches in (possibly) early nineteenth-century Surrey, which Valiente describes in the chapter "A Voice in the Past?" in her 1989 book *The Rebirth of Witchcraft.* Furthermore, she quotes Brakespeare as saying, "We were used to speaking with spirits of the dead, so the Christians could not frighten us with tales of hell-fire, burning pits, devils with pitchforks, and all the bugbears they used to terrify poor yokels." And she gives two examples of necromantic rituals performed by his coven. Elsewhere, Valiente describes contact with the dead as a hallmark of "traditional" Craft.

Similarly, Patricia Crowther, quoted above, mentions in her recent autobiography, *One Witch's World,* that Gerald Gardner "has often communicated with us from the World of Spirit."

At this point, it is tempting to regard communication with the dead as yet another of the rough edges that has been smoothed off modern Wicca. You will not find it in Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance,* for example, nor in the popular introductory works of the late Scott Cunningham. So it takes an author like Jimahl and a tiny publisher like Trident to remind us that communication with discarnate spiritual ancestors remains important to some modern Witches, even as in Afro-Brazilian religion and many other traditions worldwide. Here is an opportunity for further scholarly investigation that has been little taken up.

*Reviewed by Chas S. Clifton*

READERS' FORUM
*continued from page 3*

> at that time offered greater possibilities for influence than Harran … (I. Hadot, "The Life and Work of Simplicius in Greek and Arabic Sources" in Sorabji, Richard, ed., *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence,* London: Gerald Duckwoth & Co, 1990, p. 284).

However, a difference between intellectual, philosophical Pagans and "uneducated vulgar" idol-worshippers may address Dr Kassis' second point:

> … once he had referred to himself and his community as a Sabaean, and the identification was accepted by the Muslims, neither he nor his community could be described as 'Pagans', unless one wants to suggest that Ibn Qurrah was not telling the truth.

Far from it; I just suggest that the original intent of the word 'Sabian' in the Qur'an may well have been to refer to Neoplatonic/Hermetic 'pagans' as opposed to a popular 'paganism' perceived as mired in superstition and idolatry. The people of Harran, identified as Sabians and as pagans, had paid the poll tax as 'people of the book' for many years prior to the arrival of al-Mamun. Tamara Green notes that "the jurist Abu Hanifa (*d.* 767CE) and two of his disciples had discussed the legal status of the Sabians of Harran in the century before al-Ma'mun's visit [*c.* 830CE] … it is indisputable that the Harranians were the representatives of the ancient pagan religion." (Green, Tamara, *The City of the Moon God: The Religious Traditions of Harran.* Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1992, p. 112) In other words, the Sabians of Harran were recognized as both 'pagans' AND 'people of the book'. The surviving textual evidence supports the conclusion that Muslim scholars of the time (as opposed to today) distinguished between the Sabians of Harran (*ie,* philosophical, Hermetic/Neoplatonic 'pagans' who believed in the One and possessed a revealed text—the *Hermetica*—given by a prophet recognized by Islam) and 'idolaters' (*ie,* followers of popular 'paganism' as understood at the time).

Such a distinction seems to be supported by the contemporary Muslim author al-Masudi, who visited Harran in 943CE, Ilsetraut Hadot (again, summarizing Michel Tardieu), notes that:

> The 'Sabians of Harran' who explained to al-Masudi the Syriac inscription engraved on the knocker of their front door ['Who knows his own essence becomes divine.'] and who considered themselves to be 'Greek Sabians', are nothing other than 'Platonists' in the strict sense, or rather Neoplatonists. … al-Masudi grouped the Harranians into two categories: the philosophers … 'of a low and vulgar level', partisans of the pagan religions of the city and the 'sages in the strict sense', the heirs of the Greek philosophers. … al-Masudi distinguishes the cult sites or 'temples' of the popular religion perfectly from the magma [meeting place for intellectuals] where the 'Greek philosophers' met. As regards the former, he recognizes [at the time of his visit] … 'that there remained only one' … The second centre, still thriving, of Harranian paganism was the institution of the 'Greek Sabians', that is, the Platonists. … al-Masudi therefore distinguishes perfectly between the ordinary pagans of Harran and the Harranian philosophers' (Hadot, *op cit,* pp. 282-83).

This distinction comes up again in Mr. Walker's criticism of the translation of *hanputho* as 'Pagan' in one of my quoted passages. Walker states:

> … the word Frew's source gives as 'Pagan' is actually *hanputho.* My medieval Arabic is pretty rusty, but this is surely a close relative of *hanith,* the term used in Islam to refer to those who were already on the right path prior to, or without having been formally exposed to, orthodox Prophecy. The primary element of this path, of course, was belief in

the One True God: Abraham is usually given as the classical example of hanith. No polytheistic Pagans could possibly be referred to thus."

I must assume that Mr Walker means *hanif*, as there is no Arabic word '*hanith*'. If so, he is incorrect regarding the use of this word. *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (edited on behalf of the Royal Netherlands Academy by H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, E.J. Brill, 1995) discusses...

> ... the use of the word [*hanif*] by some authors as the designation not of the pure primitive religion but of the ancient paganism, which preceded the later separate religions. Thus Ya'kubi calls the Philistines, who fought against Saul and David, *hunafa* and adds that they worshipped the stars; and particularly Mas'udi in his Tanbih uses the word as identical with *sabi'un* of the people of Persia and the Roman empire, before they adopted Mazdaism and Christianity respectively, and distinguishes this step in religious development as the first *hanifiya* from the pure *hanif* religion. At the same time he says that the word is an arabicised form of the Syriac *hanifu*, in which connection it should be remembered that the Syriac *hanfe* [related to *hanputho*] is actually used particularly of the Sabians (e.g. Barhebraeus, *Chronic.* p. 176). (Gibb & Kramers, 1995, p.133)

At any rate, I clearly stated in the article that the word *hanputho* is Syriac, not Arabic. Therefore, its meaning and use in Syriac is all that matters. The translation of *hanputho* as 'Pagan' was not mine. The passage in question is a text by Thabit ibn Qurra preserved in Bar Hebraeus' *Chronography*. The translation was made by Walter Scott, editor and translator of what was the standard English edition of the *Hermetica* from 1924 until 1992. Tamara M. Green, Professor of Classical and Oriental Studies at Hunter College (City University of New York) and one of the world's leading authorities on Harranian religion, also reproduces this passage, but she leaves *hanputho* untranslated. After the quoted passage, Green notes:

> 'We are the heirs and transmitters of *hanputho*,' Thabit declared, and although this Syriac word, like its Arabic cognate, *hanif*, is often translated as 'pagan' when applied to preislamic religions, it may also have here the same meaning as *hanif* seems to be given in the Qu'ran: 'a possessor of the pure religion.' ... it is not improbable that Thabit, familiar with Muslim doctrine, could have used this word purposefully because of its Qu'ranic associations with Abraham, in order to provide the link between the first hanif and Sabian 'heirs and transmitters' at Harran. (Green, *op cit*, p.114)

Green continues with a lengthy discussion of the Arabic word *hanif* and the cognate Syriac *hanputho*, noting that al-Biruni (*d.* 1050CE) reports in his *Chronology of Nations* that before the Harranians were known as Sabians "they were called *hanifs*, idolators and Harranians." (Green, *op cit*, p.116) While *hanputho* and *hanif* had somewhat different meanings, the words were indeed related, used interchangeably with 'Sabian', and applied to pagans.

Mr Walker takes me to task for capitalizing the words "'Pagan' and 'Paganism' ... in accord with the current standard", but I did not do so. The words are capitalized in the Scott text. This should have been obvious, but Mr. Walker states that he has not read the text in question, saying that "Unfortunately, none of the university libraries to which I have access seem to carry this book." A quick check of MELVYL, the online catalogue of the University of California, turned up the library catalogue listing for the Scott *Hermetica* in the UC Santa Cruz main library. Its call number is PA3998.H5 1985.

Mr Walker takes issue with the edition of the Scott *Hermetica* I cited "having been published in Boulder, Colorado, and being no longer in print." I fail to see the relevance of a publisher's geographic location. Also, the book IS currently in print, in editions from Shambhala Publications (Lightning editions), Kessinger Publishing Co., and others. Without having examined the text in question, Mr Walker goes on to say that he suspects "that Frew may be relying on a non-standard, possibly sensational, New Age source for information that requires more careful handling." Brian Copenhaver, translator of the *Hermetica* for Cambridge University Press (the current definitive English translation), has this to say about the Scott edition of the *Hermetica*:

> ... Scott's volumes remain indispensable, and some of his textual insights were brilliantly right, others brilliantly wrong. His commentary is copious and learned, and his collection of testimonies an invaluable resource. ... Scott's four volumes are still in print, but his translation [of the *Hermetica*] is unreliable because it reflects his idiosyncratic texts [i.e. before better source texts were available] ... Anyone who intends to spend a long time with the Hermetica should certainly get to know both the Bude and Scott. (Copenhaver, Brian P. trans. and ed., *Hermetica*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. liii & lix-lx)

(Note: The quote from Thabit ibn Qurra is not in a part of the Scott edition with which Copenhaver takes issue, rather it is part of Scott's "copious and learned" commentary.)

Thanks in part to the many positive responses to my article, a survey expedition to the Harranian temple complex of Sumatar Harabesi is now being planned for the 2001 season. I appreciate and encourage those who have offered financial support for archaeological work relating to Harran. This long-ignored center of pagan survival may be revealed yet.

Don Frew
Berkeley, CA

Dear *Pomegranate* Readers,

The article and response by Joan Marler and Brian Hayden in the most recent issue of *The Pomegranate* [#10] was most interesting. Ms Marler is perhaps being a bit disengenuous in her assertion that those who criticize the Gimbutas paradigm as 'fundamentalist' are simply using the word as a generic term of disapprobation for any strongly held theory or opinion. But although Dr Hayden's response, that fundamentalism is a methodology weighted in favour of pre-existing belief systems, is true as far as it goes, there is more to be said, particularly in regard to the current controversies surrounding Gimbutas and her followers.

Christian fundamentalism is a movement that began in the early years of the 20th century in reaction against the various schools of Biblical criticism that developed during the 19th century, as well as the evolutionary theories of that time. The term itself derives from a series of tracts by eminent evangelical leaders titled *The Fundamentals* which appeared beginning in 1909 and called for the strict adherence to (especially Protestant) orthodoxy in the matter of Biblical interpretation. Modern critics of fundamentalism now use the term to enveigh against those who behave as if the root myths of their religion are scientifically demonstratable facts, and all evidence to the contrary is generated by hostile, heretical, or even demonic agencies.

Many believe that the God of the Israelites created the world in six calendar days, that Jesus of Nazareth was borne of a woman who had never had sexual congress, or that a pan-European, ecumenical Goddess ruled over an Edenic pre-historic civilization that knew neither war, nor poverty, nor crime. But if these beliefs are considered to be empirical facts, then fundamentalism is being practiced. Christian fundamentalists are now setting up special colleges and universities so that believers can study 'creation science' and obtain more-or-less convincing degrees without being exposed to any contradictory evidence. The programs in 'archaeomythology' being offered at schools like CIIS are depressingly similar.

Those Goddess enthusiasts who doubt this assertion should avail themselves of the opportunity to read the many 'creationism' texts now available. The same sort of ad hominem arguments (which Hayden points out in Marler's writing), as well as the 'puffing' of the credentials of synchophanic writers (which your editor cites in the introduction to Dr O'Hara's article), are found in abundance. Overly confident leaps of logic (eg, that fossil remains of sea creatures found high in the mountains are proof of the Flood) will be more than familiar to careful readers of Gimbutas.

I was interested to note that Donna Reed (*Burning Times*, the movie), in an impromptu speech at the American Academy of Religion's annual meeting in San Francisco two years ago, referred to Marija Gimbutas as Goddess spirituality's 'first martyred saint'. Gimbutas had been 'martyred', it seems, in spite of living to a ripe old age and dying in her own bed at the height of considerable fame and fortune, by an archaeological establishment which insisted on regularly overturning her theories. Apparently these theories are to be treated as sacred and immutable—but immutability is not a characterisic of scientific theory: to believe otherwise is to practice fundamentalism.

Ms Reed is now engaged, along with her collegue Starhawk, in raising what are reported to be considerable sums of money in order to make a movie about the life of Marija Gimbutas. Considering the level of scholarship apparent in Reed's previous work, it will be no surprise if the purpose of this project is the sanctification of the person of Gimbutas and the canonization of her writings, thereby simultaneously discrediting and demonizing her detractors.

Enthusiasts of the new Paganism might be wise to better understand the failings of the older religions, lest they succeed in replicating them.

Fr Joseph Lawrence
Miami, FL

## NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

*Continued from page 1*

broader Pagan community. Many, however, have noticed that the tolerance which accompanies the acceptance of a wide range of beliefs and practices as valid and legitimate is often strained, sometimes past the breaking point. In *Pom* #1, Margerian Bridger ("Pagan Deism") pointed out that even within the intimacy of a Circle or Grove, peace is often purchased by the expedient of neither discussing nor asking specific questions about one another's actual beliefs. In this issue, Michael York proposes what may be a partial solution to this problem by offering a tentative working definition of 'Paganism'. Sîân Reid follows with an article about 'Witch wars' (which some of us believe might be better characterized as 'Witch spats'), and Leah Samul cites an instance in which one element of the community has intentionally decided, for ideological and political reasons, not to address the needs of another.

My own article, "Complex and Unpredictable Consequences", on the hazards of intentionally constructed myth, was originally written some years ago as the term paper for a graduate course called "Jewish Responses to Catastrophe". It was only upon my involvement in the current discussions about the historicity of the 'Burning Times' that I realized how many of the issues discussed in the paper were germain to this debate. I'm eager to assure our readers that the more astounding and disturbing observations cited herein represent the opinions of prominent and distinguished Jewish scholars, and have not been pulled 'out of thin air' in order to address a current issue.

We trust that these articles, along with the other shorter pieces in this issue, will engender considerable discussion among our readership.

Fritz Muntean