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# The Pomegranate

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# The Pomegranate

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A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT

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# The Pomegranate

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written in language that is  
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*The Pomegranate: The Journal of Pagan Studies* is published for the interdisciplinary study of contemporary and classical Pagan religions, including Wicca, Witchcraft, Druidism, Ásatrú, Odinism, as well as other forms of revived and diaspora Paganism. We welcome articles and essays from historians of religion, environmental historians, social scientists, and independent writers and scholars whose work engages or is informed by current academic research.

## Notes from the Underground

The growth of contemporary Pagan religions has been matched with a surge of serious writing about Paganism (if you prefer, "Paganisms"). Increasing numbers of articles and books are coming out from self-identified Pagan scholars and from a greater variety of others who have moved past the original simplistic characterizations of Paganism as a bizarre and deviant subculture.

Through its history, *The Pomegranate* has sought to offer readers a selection of some of the best new research on Pagan religion, including book excerpts, reprints from other specialized journals, and recent conference papers. In some instances, however, scholars in this field have been hampered by the fact that there was no "peer-reviewed" journal, one in which major articles were reviewed anonymously by qualified outside scholars. This deficiency has also made it harder to present *The Pomegranate* to university librarians and to database compilers, another essential part of making its contents available to future researchers.

Changes beginning in this issue are signaled by a change in *The Pomegranate's* subtitle, from "A Journal of Neopagan Thought" to "The Journal of Pagan Studies." Dropping the "Neo-" prefix signifies two ideas. One is that contemporary Paganism is not as "neo-" as it was; it has gained its third and even fourth generation of adherents. A second reason for dropping "Neo-" is that *The Pomegranate* retains an interest in new interpretations of historic Pagan religions and of their interaction with other world views.

By adding "Pagan Studies" we hope to signal the birth of a scholarly discipline. In an

earlier issue of *The Pomegranate*, Michael York of Bath Spa University College defined "Paganism" as "an affirmation of interactive and polymorphic sacred relationships by individual or community with the tangible, sentient, and nonempirical" (#11, Feb 2000, p. 9), a definition constructed to eschew "any true hierarchy between the temporal and permanent, between the physical and spiritual, or between this world and the otherworld." While other definitions continue to be offered, this one offers editorial room for both historic and contemporary Pagan religions. Furthermore, we regard them primarily as religions rather than as folklore, urban subcultures, or literary creation, concentrating on their links and common elements rather than regarding them merely as precursors to or reactions against the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition. We plan to publish a gradually growing body of work to support that idea that "Pagan Studies" should be approached as a distinct entity and not always parceled out under other headings such as "new religious movements" or "feminist religion."

During the past year, *The Pomegranate* gained the assistance of a new board of editorial consultants from different universities and different nations to help in our transition to being a true "refereed" journal. Their contributions are invaluable, and their presence signals our warm working relationship with the Nature Religions Scholars Network (NRSN), an informal network of researchers in the areas of Pagan studies and other nature-based spirituality. The NRSN meets each year during the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and maintains a Web presence at <[www.uscolo.edu/natre](http://www.uscolo.edu/natre)>. Their assistance is invaluable, and we look forward to making the board of editorial consultants an important component in *The Pomegranate's* growth.

Chas S. Clifton

## The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

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

*As many readers of The Pomegranate are aware, an article appeared in the January 2001 issue of Atlantic Monthly magazine in which many of the popular myths of feminist Witchcraft were called into question. This article may be read on the web at <[www.theatlantic.com/issues/2001/01/allen.htm](http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2001/01/allen.htm)>. Starhawk has written a response to this article which we are pleased to reprint with her permission.*

### STARHAWK WRITES:

I write in regards to Charlotte Allen's article "The Scholars and the Goddess". Although Ms Allen interviewed me and others at great length for this article, she still seems to have missed the core insights and perspective of Goddess spirituality.

Goddess religion is not based on belief, in history, in archaeology, in any Great Goddess past or present. Our spirituality is based on experience, on a direct relationship with the cycles of birth, growth, death and regeneration in nature and in human lives. We see the complex interwoven web of life as sacred, which is to say, real and important, worth protecting, worth taking a stand for. At a time when every major ecosystem on the planet is under assault, calling nature sacred is a radical act because it threatens the overriding value of profit that allows us to despoil the basic life support sys-

tems of the earth. And at a time when women still live with the daily threat of violence and the realities of inequality and abuse, it is an equally radical act to envision deity as female and assert the sacred nature of female (and male) sexuality and bodies.

Any discussion of "the Wiccan narrative" must begin from that framework if it is to make any sense at all. And to truly understand our thealogy (with an 'a'—from 'thea': 'Goddess'), you have to be willing to move outside of Jewish or Christian concepts of deity. Ms Allen, producer of the Catholic page on Beliefnet and author of a book on Christ, seems unable to stretch beyond her own belief system, and her conclusions should be read with that in mind.

To us, Goddesses, Gods, and for that matter, archaeological theories are not something to believe in, nor are they merely metaphors. An image of deity, a symbol on a pot, a cave painting, a liturgy are more like portals to particular states of consciousness and constellations of energies. Meditate on them, contemplate them, and they take you somewhere, generally into some aspect of those cycles of death and regeneration. The heart of my connection to the Goddess has less to do with what I believe happened five thousand years ago or five hundred years ago, and much more to do with what I notice when I step outside my door: that oak leaves fall to the ground, decay and make fertile soil. Calling that process sacred means that I approach this everyday miracle with a sense of awe and wonder and gratitude, and that in very practical terms, I compost my own garbage.

The current discussion within the Goddess tradition about our history and scholarship is part of the healthy development of a vibrant tradition that tends not to attract true believers of any sort. We enjoy the debate, but we are sophisticated enough to know that scholars, too, have their biases and fashions. What is

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declared untrue this year may be true five years from now, and vice versa. Archaeologists may never be able to prove or disprove Marija Gimbutas' theories—but the wealth of ancient images she presents to us are valuable because they work: they function elegantly, right now, as gateways to that deep connected state. We may never truly know whether Neolithic Minoans saw the spiral as a symbol of regeneration—but I know the amazing, orgasmic power that is raised when we dance a spiral with two thousand people at our Halloween ritual every year. I may never know for certain what was in the mind of the maker of the paleolithic, big bellied, heavy breasted female figure that sits atop my computer, but she works as a Goddess for me because my own creativity is awakened by looking at her every day.

Allen makes a big point of asserting that ancient peoples were polytheists, and that this somehow disproves the myth that they worshiped a Great Goddess. She utterly misses the point that we are polytheists, now, today. No one, certainly not Gimbutas, ever postulated a monolithic, monotheistic Goddess religion of the past. But even the terms 'polytheistic' and 'monotheistic' come out of a framework that actually makes no sense to us. It's like asking "Is water one or many?" The only possible answer is "Huh? Hey, it's wonderful, miraculous, life giving, vital stuff that we need to honor and respect and conserve and not pollute, that's the point."

Goddess traditions of today, in all their

forms and nuances: Paganism, women's spirituality, Wicca, Witchcraft, indigenous Goddess worship, are vast, diverse, and constantly evolving. Allen's bias is shown in the extremely narrow selection of Goddess thinkers and writers she chooses to interview or quote from. She quotes at length from the book I wrote over twenty years ago, but doesn't bother to mention the seven other books I've written or co-authored since, which include an economic and sociological analysis of the Witch burnings in *Dreaming the Dark* (Beacon, 1982), and a long discussion of the textual evidence for Goddess worship and the transition to patriarchy in ancient Sumer in *Truth or Dare* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1988). She cites Cynthia Eller, whose own bias is revealed in the very title of her book, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*. 'Matriarchy' is a term that most Goddess scholars set gently aside sometime back in the early eighties, if not before, because none of us envision an ancient society that is the mirror image of patriarchy. Using the term implies that Eller is either not up to date on the very movement she's critiquing, or that she is unwilling to engage with the full range of thought within that movement.

Allen doesn't bother to cite the dozens of other Goddess scholars, philosophers, and journalists from Carol Christ to Margot Adler who might have provided a counterbalance to what she puts forth as the new received historic truth. But her own bias is most clearly revealed in her use of pejorative terms such as 'bunk'

*continued on page 45*

## The Nature of the Divine: Transcendence and Immanence in Contemporary Pagan Theology

### A Symposium

*This article is an edited version of a discussion which took place in mid-2000 on NATREL, the Nature Religions Scholars' email list.*

ANNE-LAURE FERLAT D'APREMONT is a PhD student at Bath Spa University studying the Russian Pagan movements and paganism.

JENNY BLAIN is an anthropologist and writer who teaches in the School of Social Science and Law, Sheffield Hallam University.

CAT CHAPIN-BISHOP is a psychotherapist who teaches pastoral counselling at Cherry Hill Seminary.

CHRISTOPHER CHASE pursues graduate work at Arizona State University.

CHAS CLIFTON teaches nature writing and creative non-fiction at the University of Southern Colorado.

VIVIANNE CROWLEY lectures in Psychology of Religion at Heythrop College, University of London.

BARBARA JANE DAVY studies religion, nature, and ethics at Concordia University, Montreal, and lives in the Ottawa River bioregion.

GUS DIZEREGA teaches in the Department of Politics, Whitman College, Walla Walla WA.

ADRIAN IVAKHIV is an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies and Anthropology, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh.

JANE KING is a Researcher of Occult Literature at Miskatonic University in Arkham MA

FRANCINE NICHOLSON is a writer specializing in Religion and Irish Studies, currently editing an anthology on Pre-Christian Celtic religion.

SYLVIE SHAW is a PhD student at Monash University studying people's connection with nature.

SHERI STANLEY is a Wiccan High Priestess and student of religious studies at Ohio University.

RACHEL WATCHER is a NROOGD Elder living in San Francisco.

MICHAEL YORK is a Research Fellow at the Study of Religions Department, Bath Spa University College.

**RACHEL WATCHER:** I spent twenty years functioning as a priestess and active clergywoman outside of normal Craft parameters and the last ten years as a Wiccan priestess and elder and clergywoman serving the community. When I draw down the Lord and Lady, I feel Deity is immanent within the circle, however, when I release that energy to return to the mundane world, Deity is then transcendent. In looking at the definition of immanence, this would seem to present a conundrum. Does the Pagan community have a different connotation for the word than what is generally accepted?

It would seem that my practice supports the idea of both transcendence and immanence if the definition of immanence is rather strictly restricted or limited. Have I pushed this envelope to the point where it is no longer the same envelope? Another consideration is that the space between the worlds is all there is at that time and place, under which circumstance I would be exactly accurate to use the standard definition of immanence.

My discussions with other Pagans in my area would indicate the general belief (yes, I had two people that agreed unequivocally) is that Deity is generally transcendent and unless 'bothered' will not take an active part in the lives of mortals. As an aside, it was also generally agreed that this is where magic comes in. The idea is that as long as we can

## I PREFER PANENTHEISM BECAUSE I, AND MANY OTHERS, HAVE HAD ... SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES WHICH DRAW UPON QUALITIES THAT DO NOT SEEM IMPLIED IN THE CONCEPT OF MATTER ...

control our own environment, we should get on with it and not bother them. An interesting twist on the "Deity helps those who help themselves" idea.

**SYLVIE SHAW:** I remember reading an article by W.E.H. Stanner in a book of readings on Durkheim where he talks about the idea that transcendence and immanence are useful as far as they go, but we need a new term for the overlap between them. I think that perhaps Gerard Manley Hopkins coined the term "inscendence" to imply both transcendence and immanence. Forgive me if this is not quite correct. The terms used separately seem to me to set up a dualism between spirit and nature—or they are used that way—so maybe a third expression is a way to incorporate the two.

**GUS DIZEREGA:** You have left out panentheism, which is my own perspective and that of many other Pagans I know. Check out the concept as developed in the work of Whitehead and Hartshorne.

**MICHAEL YORK:** I'm dubious about the notion of panentheism. I remember theists at King's College London also not liking the term—arguing that they suspect it collapses into pantheism. From my more pantheistic prospective, on the other hand, I have always been suspicious of panentheism as simply a re-dressing of theism/transcendentalism.

**GUS:** That theists think panentheism collapses into pantheism, and Michael suspects it collapses into theism suggests the term's validity. Both pantheists and theists think it points

to the other because it includes qualities *absent* from their own position, qualities that they believe to be contradictory to their concept. Since the position I've described is not purely theistic, nor is it purely pantheistic, by testimony of both sides, it must be a third possibility, or it must be incoherent. I certainly see nothing incoherent about the concept that the world is alive, aware, valuable, sacred, beautiful, and yet in itself an incomplete expression of the whole.

**VIVIANNE CROWLEY:** Panentheism to me implies that something may pre-exist matter as we know it. Does this have to imply theism? Or merely that there may be other states of being/consciousness/existence beyond those that we currently understand—or that there may not be.

Panentheism seems to leave more room for a "jury's out" unknowable.

**GUS:** The debate is whether there is something in any sense transcendent to what exists (in some sense) in the material/energy world. The distinction at issue (the "en" part of panentheism) is sometimes described as the "soul" of matter. I prefer panentheism because I, and many others, have had what would be termed spiritual experiences that draw upon qualities that do not seem implied in the concept of matter, no matter how it is defined. An example is the quality of unconditional love.

These experiences are extremely widespread in many cultures, Pagan and otherwise. While there is a lot of debate on how to

## WHAT ATTRACTS ME ABOUT POLYTHEISM IS PRECISELY ITS ASSERTION OF AN IRREDUCIBLE PLURALITY—I.E. THAT DEITY/SPIRIT CANNOT BE ADEQUATELY CAPTURED WITHIN ANY SINGLE REPRESENTATION OR ESSENCE.

define these experiences and fine tune the concepts used to describe them, there is pretty strong agreement among those who report this range of experiences that they exceed the power of language to describe. If words cannot describe them, we can be skeptical of too much philosophical analysis as to their character—unless the philosopher has had the experience. Even then, s/he remains connected to the religious and cultural concepts available in his/her time when seeking to describe the experience. Further, this context of perfect love/compassion/care/understanding and valuing embraces and gives meaning to the more obviously material/energetic elements of the world and our experience. It thus “transcends” material experience even as it confirms the world’s value and sacredness.

I have never read those who describe themselves as pantheists describing love/compassion or similar qualities as fundamental to the nature of existence. Certainly most do not. At most, pantheists might term it an “emergent” quality rather than a fundamental one.

So, it appears there are at least three possible basic spiritual positions: a purely transcendental spirituality judging the material world as fallen, unimportant or otherwise inferior compared to a greater good that is fundamentally distinct from it; a purely immanent spirituality saying that the world (whatever it is) is all there is, and is worthy of respect, etc.; and a spirituality affirming both the goodness and sacredness of the world and

its existence within an even more inclusive context. (My provisional way of making sense of it is to argue that material existence is subject to the influence of need, whereas the ultimate context appears to be free from any sense of need.) Since this third is neither traditional Western theism nor pantheism as usually described, panentheism seems as good or better a term than anything else I’ve heard to describe it.

**FRANCINE NICHOLSON:** Gus ... at the risk of sounding naïve, I wonder: where do you put polytheists?

**GUS:** Historically most are panentheists. Certainly the Lakota, Crow, and Navajo today are polytheists. Gardnerian Wicca and other English Traditional Craft lines are most definitely polytheistic. The only pantheistic position that would reject panentheism would argue that in some sense the Gods have always existed as a radical multiplicity. I know of no such tradition, though I have heard that some Norse types make such a claim.

**FRANCINE:** Thanks for explaining. I think this is where most polytheists I know would fall—except those who prefer archetypes in the Neopagan sense.

**JANE KING:** Maybe, but this conversation seems pretty far removed from polytheism. Where is the multiplicity that we all celebrate?

**ADRIAN IVAKHIV:** What attracts me about polytheism (as an idea) is precisely its assertion of an irreducible plurality—i.e. that

deity/spirit cannot be adequately captured within any single representation or essence. That doesn’t necessarily mean that things aren’t ultimately connected at some level, it just means that they are also plural, and that it is a bad practice, dangerous even, to subsume that plurality within a single humanly-perceivable personal entity (God). I’m persuaded by those, like James Hillman and the archetypal wing of post-Jungian psychologists, who claim that monotheism tends towards exclusivist and authoritarian beliefs (and social practices) whereas radical polytheism is open-ended, pluralistic, polymorphous and therefore more appropriate for a “post-modern” world in which we need to make sense of difference. At this historical juncture, in other words, it’s more important for us humans to develop ways of living with and conceiving difference—and therefore to experience divinity as plural—than to try to articulate a single capital-B Being who created or is responsible for all existence.

Yikes ... I’ve strayed far too deeply into theology/advocacy and away from scholarly neutrality.

**CHAS CLIFTON:** While I too tend to identify “psychological polytheism” with people like Hillman or Ginette Paris, it is finding an echo in the thought of some more experimentally oriented psychologists who suggest that the mind is a sort of committee or board of directors with a chairman. So a number of things start to converge: the Buddhist idea of no-Self, a polytheistic view of divinity, a “polytheistic” view of the self (small s). Consequently, the idea that seeking one’s True Self or the One God are both illusionary, at least at the rational level.

Some of the people endorsing psychological polytheism also struggle with the dualism that seems inherent in the typical descriptions of shamanism: the spirit (better?) leaves the body (lesser?) and goes on journeys. One crit-

icism made of neoshamanism that I’ve heard is that its practitioners unthinkingly buy into this implied hierarchy, the old “soma sema” things, and hence are *not* moving towards Adrian’s “appropriately radical polytheism.” **ADRIAN:** For what it is worth, this line of thinking also converges (or intertwines) with some of the more interesting work going on in cognitive science (especially the well respected, if not quite mainstream, work of the Buddhist Francesco Varela and his colleagues in the autopoietic school of cognitive biology), and even in poststructuralist theory (e.g. the psychological/political theorizing of Deleuze and Guattari whose work, despite the strangeness of their language, I find quite useful for a non-dualist and eco-friendly conception of mind/spirit/the whole works).

**SYLVIE:** Chas, I was interested in your comments linking dualism and shamanism. For the English narrels, this might be old news, but yesterday I found Gordon MacLellan’s primer on shamanism (Piatrus Press, 1999)—no “neo-” here, you are either a shaman or you are not, he says.

I had read his marvellous article in Graham Harvey and Charlotte Hardman’s book and wished I could do “work” with him. Gordon uses the expression “patterner” to explain his connection. It is not a separate dualistic perception coming out of Greek philosophy or from the Enlightenment project, but is part of the interconnecting web of life. The dualism stems from—in my opinion—people who perceive shamans entranced, rather than those who are shamans, or who take up shamanic practice. In a trance, shamans are in “this” world and in “that” world at the same time. It is the very idea of a split between “enhanced” or “entranced” reality and “normal waking” reality that reinforces the dualistic view.

According to MacLellan, the shaman’s or “pathfinder’s” trails through life are therefore

routes across the Web, lines of connections for the community to follow that brings them safely through the maze with as little disturbance and as much harmony as possible. Often the deepest commitment a shaman can express is his commitment to the Web.” (23)

A couple of pages later he says: “It is easier for the shaman if he separates his meetings with the spirits from his everyday life. So shamans speak of the ‘spirit world’, the Otherworld, a land where shamans and others walk with and talk to the spirits around us. In reality, the Otherworld is all around you, beside you all the time.” (25)

Thanks, Chas, for raising the issue. I had never seen them as dualistic, but had Aboriginal mentors who showed me the Dreamtime is not some ancient time in the past or some mythological place. So I was really pleased to see Gordon’s book. It made my day.

VIVIANNE: I don’t think English Traditional Craft is “definitely polytheistic”, as Gus claims. There are too many different approaches within these traditions, and, not being theologians, people live with the complexities and ambiguities without worrying too much about it.

GUS: Sorry, I’ve never heard of an English Traditional line that did not recognize and honor both the Lord and the Lady, or some other way of expressing a divine two-some, which seems “poly” to me.

MICHAEL: *Poly* means ‘many’. This sounds more “duo” to me.

GUS: “Duotheism”, perhaps? Maybe then some Wiccans could be linked logically and theologically with Manicheism where there are two fundamental forces: good and evil. Perhaps someone can come up with an interesting reason to separate duotheism from polytheism, but I can’t imagine what it might be. As an ultimate theoretical concept, I think duotheism sheds no light anywhere unless it is to put more weight on sexual or gender dual-

ity than I think it can bear. And that is a really ironic position for those who are critical of so-called patriarchal dualism.

ADRIAN: If we need personal deities, let’s keep them diverse (and preferably more than two – duotheism has a tendency to build on, and further ingrain, conceptions of gender difference); but if we need interconnectness, let’s not reduce it to a personal (anthropomorphic) being.

JANE: Manicheism wasn’t the only theology or philosophy that was dualistic. And I don’t see why dualism necessarily has to have anything to do with a “duotheism”. Why do they have to be connected?

VIVIANNE: We’re getting into the realms of definitions that practitioners wouldn’t stop to think about, but inherent in some Wiccan ritual and “liturgy” is the idea that deities (however many in number) emanate from a single source. Hindus and African Traditional Religionists might argue that this is pantheism or panentheism, monism, or qualified monotheism rather than “true” polytheism in the sense understood by many, say, in the Northern Tradition.

GUS: Given the nature of traditional Wicca, I would hold that it is panentheism because the Dryghton is completely non-polytheistic in the Northern Tradition sense and is non-pantheistic and non-monotheistic as well. So, in the usually encountered sense of the word, traditional Wicca is polytheistic, regardless of whether Female and Male divinities are all aspects of one Goddess and one God, or are genuinely multiple. (Setting aside the spiritual status of Lords of the Watchtowers, Kings of the Elements, etc.)

I would suggest that, like the person who suddenly discovered he had been speaking prose all along, traditional Wiccans are pantheists but, when lacking the word for it, often simply say polytheists. If “mono” and “poly” are the choices, “poly” it is!

## SOME OF THE PEOPLE ENDORSING PSYCHOLOGICAL POLYTHEISM ALSO STRUGGLE WITH THE DUALISM THAT SEEMS INHERENT IN THE TYPICAL DESCRIPTIONS OF SHAMANISM: THE SPIRIT (BETTER?) LEAVES THE BODY (LESSER?) AND GOES ON JOURNEYS.

JANE: Perhaps, but I think many people are looking for another word. In the past “polytheism” has been used for religions that were not monotheistic—without distinction. Many Wiccans who do not consider themselves polytheists recognize that the belief in deities as aspects of two “basic” deities is different from those who believe in many distinct beings.

GUS: Point taken. They are different—although I cannot help but wonder if most or all of the difference rests on uncertainties as to the real meaning of terms such as “aspect”.

JANE: Maybe, but not always. I recall discussing one goddess with someone who was into the aspects thing. He kept saying, “But when she’s this goddess and that goddess and...” It took me a while to get through to him that to me, these were all different beings, though they might have common concerns or characteristics.

GUS: I am not convinced by your example – this sounds like an unanswerable argument. But I am also agnostic as to whether Goddesses are all aspects of one Goddess, or whether they are separate—in part because I am uncertain as to what “aspect” means. From a pantheistic position (or at least from my own), the question is not really very crucial.

I have no problem with people being agnostic about whether there is a dimension that transcends the Gods. In my opinion, a

person’s personal experience is the best guide in matters spiritual, insofar as that person is pursuing a practice. My disagreement is with those who *deny* there is a transcendent realm, or who argue that believing in such a realm is ultimately world denying.

As to what we might term “true polytheism”, which would presumably argue that there are no ultimately unifying spiritual forces, I think the Northern Tradition has a lot to wonder about and explain. I think the concept of “true polytheism” is in need of a pretty good defence to be taken seriously.

*At this point, Jennny Blain offered us an argument for radical polytheism:*

JENNY BLAIN: The Western 19th and 20th century construction of “indigenous religions” has tended to privilege “gods” over other beings, deny specificity, and seek for “universals”. This has moved through travellers’ tales into academia and popular discourse and appears today in neo-shamanists’ and others’ abstraction of local “spirits” into something they call “Spirit”. At least some of us in Heathenism are endeavouring to deconstruct this and return to specificity and multiplicity. Not everything has the same agenda as people.

CHAS: We might as well assign blame where it is due: Dion Fortune, with her “all the gods are one god and all the goddesses are one goddess and there is one initiator” teaching, had, I think, an enormous affect on Neopagan the-

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ology, as loose/inchoate as that might be.

**CHRIS CHASE:** This raises a question for me—Chas, do you think Dion Fortune is a (or the) modern inspiration for what we might call (for lack of a better term) “collapsing polytheism” [CP]? I think Helena Blavatsky was even more in that role and think she had a large influence on Neopagan theology (and New Age versions of CP as well).

**CAT CHAPIN-BISHOP:** Helena Blavatsky needs to be recognized as a contributor to this concept, but don't forget James Frazer, while we're at it. His influence went places Helena's never could...

**FRANCINE:** An idea doesn't take root and flourish unless it has both persuasive spokespersons *and* a receptive audience. My sense is that wherever it originated—and it almost seems to have done so simultaneously—it's an approach to deity that speaks persuasively to our times.

**GUS:** I am not denying specificity to Gods, or to other spiritual beings either. I use Spirit as an all inclusive term for the Spiritual dimension, but that hardly denies specificity within that dimension.

As to worshipping one Goddess and one God, through different aspects, or worshipping different Gods and Goddesses—well, I suspect that we will never know as human beings which is more accurate. My guess is that spiritual reality is extraordinarily plastic, and that our senses of individuality in deities is radically incomplete. It may well be that

our own sense of individuality is radically incomplete as well.

**FRANCINE:** I agree our understanding of the nature of “the gods” is probably quite limited. On the other hand, ancient Celtic belief is built on the premise that there are many, often quite localized beings, not just two.

**GUS:** Here is where it all gets tricky. What is a god as distinct from a daimone or a hero or a power of nature, etc.? Thales said all things are full of gods. In West Africa, there are orixas for virtually everything of which you can conceive. But are they deities in the sense of the Goddess, or Isis, or Kali? Some equate orixas with gods, others with forces of nature as distinct from gods, and so it goes. And then there are spirits that are seemingly more like astral fauna than anything possessing even human intelligence. And there are animal spirits, elementals, and so on.

Many Pagans can argue that all goddesses are aspects of one, ditto for gods, and still believe in these other spiritual or astral entities. Certainly they invoke powers and elementals and guardians while casting a circle. Are they duotheists or polytheists? I suspect it comes down to how one defines a god and how one defines an individual.

**SHERI STANLEY:** I decided long ago that my title for myself was “practical polytheist”. I have this overwhelming pantheistic worldview, but I do so much aspect-specific work that I might as well be a polytheist. Is there really any difference in practice? So I decided to stop worrying about it and just responded

to the Gods as I felt led to respond.

**GUS:** As a practical matter, I think Sheri's point is true and important. But I want to return to the issue of so-called “true” polytheism. I am skeptical as to the depth of its insight. For it to make sense I would imagine its advocates would have to argue that, at bottom, there is a spiritual plurality that is radically divided and separate. So far I have seen no very strong argument in its favor, and I can think of many reasons why it is not to be taken seriously. For example, it cannot account for the widespread existence of mystical experiences throughout an enormous variety of cultures, all of which indicate an ultimate spiritual unity.

**FRANCINE:** To me, this says more about human capacity: we are essentially the same beings, so the total number of possible experiences may be limited by our biology. But if, for example, you look at cross-cultural studies like Karlis Osis did on near- and at-death visions, you see that there are both similarities and differences in the experiences.

**GUS:** This same observation is true of mystical experiences (see John Hick's *An Interpretation of Religion*). There does seem to be an irreducible cultural element. But these reports all point towards experiences which appear to be quite similar in important respects: there is an ultimate unity, this unity is Good, Loving, etc., and it provides the ultimate context in which everything occurs and is ultimately redeemed / healed.

True polytheism also cannot account for the fact that in other Pagan communities, the relationships with deities are fluid. I certainly have never experienced the gods and goddesses as sectarian.

**FRANCINE:** While many communities experience deities in non-sectarian ways, most non-Wiccan Pagan communities who are trying to use traditional customs focus on a few deities of Celtic origin—by choice.

**GUS:** Your observation doesn't imply any distinctions or realities not contained in panentheism. For example, Plotinus would hold that everything is ultimately an emanation from the One. He hardly denied the existence of individuals, only that they were ultimately and irreducibly individual. And individuals have preferences and boundaries.

**MICHAEL:** But as I tried to explain in my *Pomegranate* article on “Defining Paganism”, Plotinus is nominally pagan, but not generically pagan. He may have tried to attack the Gnostics, but he still presents a transcendental understanding. I have nothing against transcendental realities, and I even think that is one of the directions towards which we are heading, but I become more uneasy over the notions of transcendental origins. And it is precisely on this point that panentheism remains unclear. Paganism differs from Judaeo-Christianity on the notion that the cosmos is not understood as created by some outside/external force or Mind or transcendental deity. Mind/consciousness is a consequence rather than an *a priori* independent condition.

As Hesiod understood it, Gaia is the mother of the cosmos which includes the gods and humanity. There may have been an original single unity, but this was the tangible. The unity of the Good or Love which Gus posits is, I think, the goal of Paganism, not the source of the cosmos. It is not something to which we want to get back to, but onto or towards. It is the fruit of the tree rather than its root. God (she, he, it or even they) is the ongoing culmination.

That is the beauty of process theology. There is nothing static about deity. Nor is there anything predetermined. If the all exists within god as something less than god, then how can it be the all? Rather, pantheism can refer to the all as both matter and spirit, even if god may have been originally the material



which gives birth to, or from which evolves, spirit.

The difference between my pantheism and Gus' pantheism may, at the end of the day, be only semantic, but my resistance to Gus' preferred term is that I see it as essentially a creation of theists to by-pass or defeat pantheism, to have their cake and eat it too. In other words, it is an attempt at another theistic con job—all the more ironic, then, when someone like Colin Gunter thinks that pantheism 'collapses' into pantheism. If it does in fact, so much the better.

**GUS:** Perhaps we are in the realm of what term is least likely to lead one astray, since either can be used accurately and either can be misunderstood. Many people calling themselves pantheists seem to leave little room for Spirit. When they do, I agree with them. When they don't, I don't. I think pantheism is valuable in part because it automatically distinguishes between pantheism in the form that denies Spirit from theism in the form that sees only Spirit.

**MICHAEL:** With what Gus finds tricky, namely the distinction between gods, daemons, heroes, spirits, elements and powers of nature, pantheism has no difficulty. All is divine, and yet all can be different.

**GUS:** I find it tricky only in the sense of trying to come up with clear classificatory schemes. In other words, it is only tricky when trying to do philosophy and get a clear understanding of how entities relate to one another. In terms of practice, or my own understanding of ultimate reality, it is often delightful, sometimes surprising, and something to think about after the ritual is over.

**MICHAEL:** I think, personally, that pantheism more aptly applies to what most pagans believe or are. It is a term which embraces or allows both the duotheism of Goddess and God as well as the polytheism of more traditional paganism. Polytheism itself can be

nominal or radical. Radical polytheism simply takes that bold step that there are several 'ultimate' forces or deities and makes no attempt to reduce them to one or another.

**GUS:** I think I did not make my argument clear. The unity of the Good, or Love, is from my perspective not primarily an origin from which we have fallen nor a goal towards which we are going. Rather, it is the abiding context that always exists. It may be that we are all tending towards greater and greater realms of wisdom. Certainly in the course of a well lived life, one tends to grow wiser and kinder.

**MICHAEL:** But, Gus, is this still not Plotinus' and Ken Wilber's position? The holding to an abiding context that always exists is a gnostic stance.

**GUS:** I think you are right. What is at issue is whether that position is in any sense necessarily world denying. I grant that in Plotinus' writings, and in much of Wilber's, this *is* the case. But it need not be. Setting aside my own personal experience, there are many Pagan traditions which appear to hold the same position. I have a great deal of company. I think we are entering into a very arbitrary and even disrespectful space when we argue that traditional peoples who have such an outlook are not "really" Pagan because we are now appropriating a word that had long been applied to them!

My own approach here is rather to seek to define Paganism in a way that can encompass *all* societies traditionally called Pagan *plus* the modern Neopagan revival. Michael's narrowly Pagan definition is my Nature Religion definition and his broadly Pagan definition is my Pagan definition—with the one exception of whether what he would term gnostic Paganism as necessarily world denying. So we see the same distinction, but attach different explanations for it.

If Michael is correct, it seems to me that

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we will find world denying strains dominant in other Pagan traditions that have a gnostic dimension. Using the Crow, Lakota, Navajo, and some West African/Caribbean traditions as examples, I simply do not see it. And it is certainly not present in English Traditional Craft.

**MICHAEL:** The real beauty of polytheism, as I see it, is that we end up with a godhead by committee. Polytheism allows for a true divine democracy more compatible with both humanity's own thrust and a cosmos for which freedom is a living and vital aspect. Why cannot mysticism rest equally on divine consensus without denying "ultimate polytheism"? If Thor pops up in Umbanda ceremonies, or if many deities are interchangeable, "ultimate radical spiritual diversity" is still not precluded. The proto-Indo-European heptateion portrays a godhead that divides and multiplies as soon as and whenever it is reduced to whatever momentary basic hypostasis. This last comes close, perhaps, to what Gus refers to as the "extraordinary plasticity of spiritual reality."

**GUS:** Yes! That is exactly what I meant. The argument I am making in no way criticizes or undermines polytheistic practice any more than pantheism as I have described it suggests that you and I are not individuals and need not be treated as such.

**MICHAEL:** Maybe the burden of argument rests on we radical polytheists. But whether

one believes in the Christian God, or in the Hindu Krishna, or in a collection of Santerian orishas, this is choice and/or conditioning—not something that anyone can prove. I think possibly the Nordic pagan position on radical polytheism might claim that this is a fundamental and distinguishing feature that can be distilled from within the pagan tradition in general and is what properly or at least partially separates paganism 'ultimately' from the Abrahamic, Dharmic and atheistic rival theologies. We can still have organic cosmogonies as reflective metaphors whilst affirming more than two irreducible fundamental cosmological realities.

**GUS:** Michael makes the point that all spiritual experience is culturally mediated. I am not certain this is the case in terms of raw experience, but I agree with him as soon as we try either to describe or to interpret that experience. What impresses me is the widespread universality of a particular kind of experience, one that is reasonably termed transcendental, in a wide variety of cultures and times. A theology which denies the existence of such a spiritual dimension because its advocates have not experienced it themselves is akin to one that denies the existence of the Goddess because they have not experienced Her—with the difference that a deeper philosophical point is at stake when we discuss the existence or non-existence of the purely transcendental.

To return to the question of radical poly-

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theism. If I remember Norse mythology correctly, the Gods ultimately die, the world is destroyed, and a new world comes into being, one can ask whether there is in fact a deeper unity, and if that unity is aware and underlies all things, then voilà, a form of panentheism! FRANCINE: The cosmic destruction and re-creation at the end of an age seems to be pan-Indo-European. But, forgive me, I don't follow your point.

GUS: My point is that the gods can not be the ultimate components of reality within this mythology because after they are destroyed, they rise again. And, if there is an orderly destruction and creation, whatever is the source of that order is superior to the gods. If it is also in some sense aware, you are approaching, if not actually describing a pantheistic perspective, since if the world is destroyed, what survives must, by definition, be transcendent to it. So polytheism is not an ultimate spiritual foundation within the Norse or any other Indo-European framework.

MICHAEL: This confuses the historical, local and mythological gods/goddesses of personality with the ground of being itself—whether theistic, pantheistic, panentheistic, and so forth. The gods are metaphors if not something more as well, but they are primarily access routes or points to the divine. They partake of the divine but need not be all of the divine. Gus would call this panentheism, but

the very theistic heritage behind the notion of panentheism and against which I am objecting is the one which fosters such concepts as 'superiority.' There is no need to consider ultimate components of reality pantheistically and not pantheistically, and there is no need to entertain that any components of reality are necessarily 'ultimate.'

ANNE-LAURE D'APREMONT: I also think there are several readings of the myth of the world ending and re-starting. If Wyrð affects people and other beings, it is because all is linked in the 'multiverse.' And if gods and goddesses disappear, die, it is allegory. It describes an internal process, an alchemical one in some cases, where people in their lives know different deaths. It means also that at the end of Ragnarok, you are totally free. Balder, the most perfect god, can come back because we overcame our human limits, our ego, we could say.

GUS: Regarding Michael's comment, we need to get clear as to what "superior" means. If the Ultimate is characterized by perfect and unconditional love and creativity, in what sense is it superior to that which manifests from it? Not in any sense that demands subordination, abnegation, judgement, or power hierarchy. All these kinds of 'superiority' violate the quality of unconditional love. Nor need it imply that we should seek to return to It. If we are Its manifestations, why is It cre-

ative except to flower with beauty and variety and abundance? I think Michael is applying ultimately political concepts of superiority into a context where they are inappropriate—but his worry is historically well taken. Institutionalized spiritual hierarchies have always done this, and then used this distortion to justify their own power and privilege. I think they always will do this, which is why I don't want 'em.

My argument is with the claim that there are no unifying spiritual principles or realities from which local and individual powers, and you and I, and everything else, takes their/our ultimate existence. Spirit is not irreducibly plural. Even the yin-yang symbol is careful to include its opposite at the point where one side or the other is most dominant—within the unity of a circle.

But this is a philosophical position that could be wrong. It is a very human attempt to make some sense of the super-human. For me, the ultimate basis for it is the mystical experience as widely reported. That I had such an experience is important for me, but need not impress anyone else. That many people from many cultures and with many beliefs have also had what seems to be quite similar experiences *is* an important datum, however, and any theology of value needs to be able to account for them. 'Pure polytheism' cannot do so.

MICHAEL: Gus, it seems to me that you are conflating ideas about deity (-theism of whatever form) with ideas about transpersonal principles or 'realities' of an impersonal sort. Yin and yang refer to 'forces' of a kind, but not to gods. It may be fine for many pagans to blur the distinction between personal gods or spirits and impersonal forces or principles, but why should we (as scholars) impose that practice on people for whom there is a distinct difference? GUS: But I think the blurring is unavoidable. We have no settled definition of a god, a force of nature, and the like. Even within ongoing

and strong Pagan traditions there are differences among practitioners. Some in Afro-Brazilian traditions treat the orixas rather like the Greco-Roman deities. Others refer to them as natural forces. We try to define the spiritual using words which themselves have very blurry boundaries. I have no problem with this so long as we recognize what we are doing, and so know that it can be difficult (not impossible) for us to be very sure we are talking about the same thing even when we use the same words in the same context. That's one reason I am so glad that what unifies Pagans is more practice than dogma! At least the Christians usually agree over the text they want to fight about. We'd have trouble even there!

My argument is not meant to imply that I think we should ignore the Gods and seek to encounter the One. Far from it. If we experience the immanent world as sacred and beautiful—as I do—then it seems quite enough to seek to live more lovingly and harmoniously within it rather than seeking to reject it to join/rejoin the godhead. Gardnerians do not focus on the Dryghton, we focus on the Goddess and the God, but we do acknowledge that It is the source of all.

MICHAEL: Theism, pantheism, polytheism, panentheism ... I hope we all realize this is simply an academic/theological question. Regardless of our own preferred terminologies, God is God is God. But that is only, that is, if the GBWII is not simply a creation/projection of we humans in the first place. But this much being said, I think terminologies are important because they sharpen debate and interchange, and paganism has been too long excluded from the theological roundtable of discussion. If we are to regain a bona fide recognition, theological nuance becomes important. What have we to offer that is not already out there? I think the answer is 'lots', and part of that answer rests with how we understand deity that is different from the Abrahamic, Dharmic, and atheistic

traditions.

**BARB DAVY:** I've recently changed my position on transcendence, mostly due to reading Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*. I used to associate transcendent views exclusively with world denying or world rejecting philosophies/beliefs. For Levinas, the idea of infinity is transcendence: the idea that there is more to the other than the categories the self might apply to it. This is transcendence that is found only in the particular, in actual lived reality. For Levinas, a person only finds God in relating with other people in this metaphysical relation of perceiving the infinite in the other. There's nothing world denying about this. In my own work, I discuss this sort of relation between humans and other than human persons, developing it into an environmental ethic.

In my view, neither reality nor nature can be transcended in actual physical terms. This is all there is, but reality/nature is far more complex than human ideas of it. Transcendence is in recognizing that there is more to know about the world, not in escaping the world.

**VIVIANNE:** As an aside, I'd never heard of panentheism until around ten years ago when the recently retired Canon of Durham Cathedral, who came around to thinking we were OK people, told me that this is what Wiccans are. I thought being theologically defined by a Christian theologian had its amusing/ironic side.

**ADRIAN:** I find it amusing/ironic as well, but also find it useful as a way of delineating a potential common ground between some pagans' views and some Christians' (and other monotheists') views. At the same time, I'm not convinced of that attribution for Wicca. The term 'pan-en-theism' suggests a kind of all-in-one-God-ism, where God is seen as both immanent and transcendent, but where there is no questioning of the oneness (monology) or personal nature of God. Most forms of (at least

British Traditional) Wicca, to me, do seem duotheistic—a term I find quite satisfactory. Duotheism can take a Manichean dualist form according to which one of the two deities is valorized over the other (because they are seen as locked in opposition), or a complementarian form (that of 'partnership', to use Riane Eisler's term), and the latter, I would say, describes Wicca rather well.

**GUS:** Several people here apparently consider English Traditional Wicca as duotheistic... but this argument ignores the Dryghton. And that is a central tenet of English Traditional practice as I have experienced it both within Gardnerian and King Stone contexts.

If we take the entire Gardnerian liturgy seriously we can say something like this: From the Dryghton all things come, including the God and Goddess. From them come all aspects of Gods and Goddesses. But just as we do not try contacting the Dryghton as a means of contacting all deities, so often we do not try and contact The Goddess, but rather focus in good polytheistic fashion on Bridget, Hekate, and so on. Other times we do the generic invocation. At the level of practice, it sure seems polytheistic to me.

The Dryghton is *not* personal. It is the Source. It is acknowledged, regarded as important, honored, and then the work focuses on the Goddess and the God, either as a duo or polytheistically.

*This discussion took place on an email list maintained by the Nature Religions Scholars' Network, whose members study religious traditions that regard nature as a source of spiritual authority. The group meets and hears research presentations each year during the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. For more information, visit <http://www.uscolo.edu/natrel>*

## If Witches No Longer Fly: Today's Pagans and the Solanaceous Plants

by Chas S. Clifton  
University of Southern Colorado

On the summer solstice of 1966, Robert Cochrane (magical name of Roy Bowers), an important figure in the British Witchcraft revival, died from a self-inflicted combination of sleeping pills, whisky, and *Atropa belladonna* or deadly nightshade. Although a subsequent inquest returned a verdict of "suicide while the balance of the mind was disturbed," some of Cochrane's friends and coveners believed his act had been one of ritual communion with the gods, while others leaned towards a deliberate self-sacrifice on the model of the Divine King.<sup>1</sup> The people who knew him most closely, however, viewed his death as suicide resulting from a marital break-up and a failed love affair.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the motivation for Cochrane's death, his influence has persisted. His correspondence during the years just before his death with a young American Air Force enlisted man heavily influenced, through a typically tortuous chain of transmission, several American Witchcraft traditions, including "1734," the Roebuck, and the Mohsian tradition, and he is remembered by one of his former coveners, the English writer Doreen Valiente, as "perhaps the most powerful and gifted personality to have appeared in modern witchcraft."<sup>3</sup>

In one sense, Cochrane carried on an

unfortunate tradition of misadventure attached to modern users of solanaceous entheogens. As well as the edible tomato, potato, chile and sweet peppers, and tomatillo, the botanical family of Solanaceae includes that global drug of choice, tobacco. In addition, the Solanaceae include several plants with extensive associations with magic and shamanism, associations that spread from Asia to the Americas. Notable among these are the several species of *Datura* ("thorn apple" or "jimson weed"), *Atropa* ("deadly nightshade"), *Mandragora* ("mandrake"), and *Hyoscyamus* ("henbane").<sup>4</sup> None of these plants is an illegal "narcotic" in America; in fact, some are grown as ornamental garden plants as well as for pharmaceutical use and genetic research.

The term *entheogen*, meaning "becoming divine within", was developed by three leading writers in the field: the late R. Gordon Wasson, Carl A.P. Ruck, and Jonathan Ott. Ott, for instance, writes that he uses entheogen as "etymologically and culturally appropriate [and] non-prejudicial," compared to such terms as "narcotic" and "psychedelic."<sup>5</sup>

Cochrane's death, while intentional, also reflected just one of a series of experiments with solanaceous entheogens that historically have been associated with European witchcraft, according to records left by prosecutors and witnesses of the witch trials from the 15th to 17th centuries.<sup>6</sup> According to his contemporaries, he had earlier conducted less-lethal experiments using old "flying ointment" recipes. Although I would claim that the "flying ointments" (and other herbal preparations) represent a significant, verifiable link to an ancient European shamanic practice—perhaps the nearest

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thing to Margaret Murray's "Old Religion,"—my research suggests that North American and British Neopagans today largely avoid them. The exceptions, however, tend to insist—along with some historians of religion such as Huston Smith—that the ritual use of these substances is to some degree essential, placing the users in touch with the "sacred wildness" at the heart of these modern nature-based traditions. Sharon Devlin, a California Witch, told writer Margot Adler in the 1970s, "Flying ointments were used in ancient times. Our ancestors definitely used drugs. Frankly, most Pagans and Witches are stumbling around in the dark ... I want people to start getting off. Drugs ... are an essential part of magical rites."<sup>7</sup>

As Devlin rightly noted, solanaceous entheogens are ancient as well as geographically widespread. Commenting on portrayals of *Datura* in the art of pharaonic Egypt, the ethnobotanist William A. Emboden, Jr., writes: "Its psychoactive properties are extraordinary, and one of the usual modalities in the *Datura* experience is that of mystical flight, an out-of-the-body sensation."<sup>8</sup> Emboden's mention of flight leads to the famous employment of the Solanaceae in the "flying ointments" of the witch-trial period. During the 16th century, several skeptical physicians conducted experiments with ointments seized from

accused witches. These men, such as the often-quoted physician Andres de Laguna, offered an essentially materialist counter-argument against the theological arguments of both secular and religious courts. Against the belief that the "witchcraft" being prosecuted involved actual gatherings of devil-worshippers, the skeptics pointed out that the flying ointments merely produced a stupor from which the "deluded" user awoke, claiming to have experienced nocturnal flight, orgies of food and sex, and so forth. Therefore, prosecuting them for "witchcraft" was a waste of time.

What Andres de Laguna and other "rationalist" critics of the witch-trial process apparently failed—or did not wish—to do was to see the theological content of entheogen use. Given these preparations' risky nature, the person seeking recreational "highs" would have more likely turned to alcohol. As the Dutch botanist Peter A. G. M. de Smet wrote by analogy, "The essence of the Catholic mass for the churchgoer is certainly missed by saying that mass wine is prepared from *Vitis vinifera* L. (Vitaceae) and that it contains about 13 percent of the inebriating substance ethyl alcohol before it is diluted by the priest."<sup>9</sup>

Various fragmentary recipes for flying ointments survive: in the 1970s, the Danish botanical writer Harold A. Hansen announced that only sixteen

recipes were "comparatively reliable."<sup>10</sup> Reliability does not imply safety; among the historians and occultists who themselves tested these recipes, at least one other besides Cochrane, Karl Kiesewetter, died from an overdose. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, I would argue that the danger of these recipes, combined with the centuries-long tradition of their use, is the best argument for any "Old Religion" surviving from pre-Christian times. Without some sort of oral tradition of preparation and dosage, similar to that of the *ayahuasca* shamans of South America, the risks would be too great. Medical journals contain occasional descriptions of emergency-room visits and occasional deaths from the casual use of *Datura* and other solanaceous plants.

Neopaganism's growth period commenced with the "Psychedelic Sixties" (and Seventies) when fascination with entheogens zoomed upwards, following a period during the 1950s when mescaline, LSD, and other substances were restricted to a few adventurous psychotherapists and selected patients, plus certain medical researchers and intelligence agencies.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, partly due to the popularity of the books of Carlos Castaneda (which in turn followed Allen Ginsburg's and William Burroughs's writings about ayahuasca), some would-be "psychonauts" developed an interest in "natural highs," leading to an observation made in the mid-Seventies by a North Carolina emergency-room doctor: "The return to nature advocated by the counter culture has been characterized by a lack of oral discrimination. Besides drugs, glue, and a number of non-medical organic compounds [i.e., LSD and other synthetic entheogens], nutmeg, catnip,

cherry bark, and a host of seeds and weeds have been used, often with disastrous results, by a new generation of experimentalists."<sup>12</sup>

Further discussion of contemporary entheogen use has been complicated by the "war on drugs" waged at various levels in Western countries, which has complicated both academic and practitioner-based discussion of any entheogen. That attitude may now be changing, for as Dr. Albert Hofmann, the nonagenarian Swiss discoverer of LSD, remarked in a recent interview, "After years of silence, there have recently been some investigations [of scientific research on "psychedelic" drugs] in Switzerland and Germany and also in the United States."<sup>13</sup>

Given contemporary Pagans' extensive mining of earlier Pagan cultures, complete with study of dead or marginal languages (for example, Old Norse or Irish), archaeological sites and artifacts, texts, and imaginative reconstructions of the past, the omission of ancient ritual entheogens from this looking backwards seems noteworthy. Gerald Gardner, who published the first significant book on revived Witchcraft, *Witchcraft Today*, in 1954, begins his second chapter, "There Have Been Witches in All Ages," with a description of the Craft as, in effect, the Oldest Religion, rooted firmly in Paleolithic times. Yet neither there nor subsequently did Gardner assert that entheogens played any significant part in the religion.

Gardner could not overlook the "flying ointments," well-attested in the historical record, and consequently asserted in *Witchcraft Today* that medieval witches knew "certain incenses" that aided clairvoyance and spiritual vision. "In medaeval times many ingredients came from the

Near East, but originally the most potent herbs seem to have been local ones, and among these some were poisonous... . To use [poisons] to gain a trance state harms no one except yourself.”<sup>14</sup>

Within Gardner’s initiatory lineage, still active today, ritualentheogens play little part. One of the senior members, born in Wales and now living in Canada, said, “one of the distinguishing marks of Gardnerian Craft is that there is a *lack* of herbal knowledge ... What little is being done nowadays is more in the nature of general experimentation ... Bowers [Robert Cochrane] was the one who did the ground-breaking experiments in this area.”<sup>15</sup> The University of Bristol historian Ronald Hutton, author of *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*,<sup>16</sup> has said that the only evidence of Gardner and his associates using mushrooms or any otherentheogens came from Louis Wilkinson’s claims about Gardner’s New Forest coven, reported by Francis King in *Ritual Magic in England*. Against that claim, Hutton said, “I must set the personal hostility to drug-taking as a path to the centre expressed by Gardner in 1950s recensions of the Book of Shadows—the ‘Eight Paths’ section. It might, of course, reflect disillusion rather than lifelong opposition, but it stands with the dislike of drink which he records in his ghosted autobiography, *Gerald Gardner: Witch*, having seen its effects in the colonies. Cochrane and ‘Taliesin’ were much wilder characters.”<sup>17</sup>

As revealed by his letters and the memories of those who knew him, Robert Cochrane’s view of the Craft was less dogmatic than Gerald Gardner’s. As Cochrane himself said, he taught by “poetic inference,” and proclaimed him-

self heir to gypsies, horse-whisperers, and lineages of rural English magic workers. His rituals were performed in caves and on hilltops, and his letters contain oblique references to *Amanita muscaria* and “nightshade wine.” According to those who knew him, his death left the remaining coveners less than enthusiastic about carrying on research on traditionalentheogens, turning instead to physical methods of trance-induction through ritual, dance, and masking.<sup>18</sup>

North American Pagans tend to shy away from the traditional Eurasianentheogens (including *Amanita muscaria*). Pagans dispute whether this disapproval is based on the overall societal disapproval of “illicit drugs” (even though the plant-basedentheogens are mostly legal), or whether it comes from seeing other people suffer the consequences of untutored use.<sup>19</sup> The Pagan writers (here I would include Asatrú and Heathen as well as Craft) discussing traditionalentheogens tend to borrow language (“plant allies”) and concepts from anthropologists such as Carlos Castaneda or Peter Furst rather than from the medieval-to-early modern users of flying ointments, wanting no doubt to reject the Christian imagery of the last. As one contributor to the “Pagan Leaders” email list wrote, “Working with a plant ally is probably more dangerous than just taking the drug experimentally. Regardless, I don’t think that the prejudices against drugs [within the Pagan community] are based strictly on a misunderstanding ... It seems more likely to me to be a manifestation of the ‘tribal consciousness’ and that sense of interconnectedness, realizing that if connected, there is a responsibility to all, and that a person taking drugs affects the rest.”<sup>20</sup>

## GIVEN CONTEMPORARY PAGANS’ EXTENSIVE MINING OF EARLIER PAGAN CULTURES ... THE OMISSION OF ANCIENT RITUAL ENTHEOGENS FROM THIS LOOKING BACKWARDS SEEMS NOTEWORTHY.

More simply, however, contemporary Pagans’ avoidance of the traditionalentheogens reflects a modern split between medical-culinary herbalism and shamanic herbalism, a split displayed in the works of literate herbalists since the Renaissance. Modern herbals follow a tradition established by the 16th century English herbalist John Gerard, who crusaded against the nightshades and urged his readers, “Banish therefore these pernicious plants out of your gardens, and all places neere to your houses, where children or women with child do resort, which do often times long and lust after things most vile and filthie; & more after a berries of a bright shining black colour, and of such great beautie, as it were able to allure any such to eate thereof.”<sup>21</sup> In the words of “Jack Prairiewolf,” a contemporary Witch from Indiana who claims a special affinity for the spirits of nightshade and mandrake, “Not everyone knows about plants in general or poisonous plants in particular, given the (perhaps lamentable) urbanization of Pagans today. Those folks who go out of their way to learn about plants usually focus on the herbs, flowers, edible plants, trees, etc, instead of the poisonous power plants.”<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, works on so-called “magical herbalism” by such popular Wiccan writers as Scott Cunningham and Paul Beyerl tend to recommend *against* plant-based

entheogens.<sup>23</sup> A long-time Berkeley, California, practitioner who attended a class on making flying ointments reported to me that while solanaceous plants were discussed, the main recipe given out was based on essential herb and flower oils with henbane optional. Another recipe circulated contained no solanaceous plants at all, but did contain mugwort, a traditional herbal aid to dreaming, as well as the sedatives skullcap and wild lettuce.<sup>24</sup>

Interest in traditionalentheogens is highest among that minority, both within the revived Norse and Witchcraft groups, who consider themselves to be “shamanic.” According to Asatrú follower Susan Granquist of Seattle,entheogen discussions are not infrequent on her tradition’s email list, ASATRU-L. But this group is a minority both within “Heathen” and Craft communities, where, in Jack Prairiewolf’s words,

[T]he type of power we’re discussing here really does not appeal to most of the contemporary Neopagan movement. A majority of the Neo crowd ... well, they don’t like the Wild or else they’re afraid of it, and the same can be said of anything ‘dark’ at all.... You get to talking about the magical application of poisonous plants, and the Bambi Wiccans & Co. are going to squick in very short order. They prefer to deal with a sweetness & light world and its attendant powers. Show them a glimpse of the Ancient Wild and they freak out. They will howl that working with any poten-

tially poisonous plant is inherently evil (never mind that *most* medicinals are poisonous if improperly used). I think that part of that is cultural upbringing, and part of it is wariness of anything unfamiliar, and much is fear of anything so mighty and awesome. I mean, these plants have been around for millions of years, some of them; their collective history quite outstrips the entire human race .... Some of the Neopagans just can't get comfortable with that.<sup>25</sup>

Yet another reason why plant entheogens are little used among North American Pagans is that a higher-than-average number, in my informal perception, claim to be unusually sensitive to all inebriants, as well as displaying a high frequency of environmental sensitivity to perfumes, tobacco smoke, and the like. "Hypoallergenic" ritual gatherings, where participants pass an alcohol-free chalice, are not uncommon.

A division can be made between those Witches and other Pagans who speak of plant "allies," "spirits," or "faeries" and those for whom, as one herbalist put it, "the plant spirit issue isn't much considered; much more commonly there is a formulaic attitude towards the plants. For example, 'Mandrake is good for x, y, and z'; 'Myrrh is a purifier'; 'Mugwort is for visions,' and so on and so forth."<sup>26</sup> Both this writer (Robert Brown) and "Jack Prairiewolf" suggest that urban Pagan herbalists are more likely not to encounter the plants that they use as living beings throughout their life cycles, and consequently more likely to regard them as processed products "used for \_\_\_\_\_," the very attitude taken by Cunningham and Beyerl, mentioned above.

Based on these and other interviews, I suggest that contemporary Pagan entheogen users prefer a "shamanic"

model to a "clerical" model for their place in the community, and, as Robert Brown comments, describe themselves as more oriented to "wildness" rather than to human society.<sup>27</sup> This group is perhaps more likely to read ethnographic and anthropological literature than the fantasy novels and historic reconstructions that seem to inform much of North American Neopaganism.

These contemporary Pagans using traditional entheogens are cautious about discussing them. Too many of these substances have been publicized as "legal highs", and in a society which is accustomed to seeing "drugs" as neat little pills and capsules, the dangerous and "edgy" use of traditional entheogens with their occasionally messy side effects may not appeal even to self-described Witches. Thus, for all the claims made of connections with the victims of the "Burning Times," the majority of contemporary Witches and other Pagans have chosen to turn their backs on what may indeed be the one connection with an earlier era of shamanic practice—traditional Eurasian entheogens.

#### NOTES:

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2. Ann Finnin, *The History of the Roebuck* (Los Angeles: Ancient Keltic Church, 1991), 4.
3. Valiente 136.
4. Charles B. Heiser, Jr, *Nightshades: The Paradoxical Plants* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1969), Chapter 7 *passim*.
5. Jonathan Ott, *Pharmacotheon: Entheogenic drugs, their plant sources and history*. (Kennewick, Washington: Natural Products, 1996), 104.
6. Michael J. Harner, "The Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft,"

in *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, ed. Michael J. Harner (London: Oxford University Press, 1973). See also Hedwig Schleiffer, ed., *Narcotic Plants of the Old World* (Monticello, NY: Lubrecht & Cramer, 1979).

7. Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981 [1979]), 139. In the same interview, Devlin acknowledged that one of her own experiments with belladonna could have proven fatal.
8. William A. Emboden, Jr, "Art and Artifact as Ethnobotanical Tools in the Ancient Near East with Emphasis on Psychoactive Plants," in *Ethnobotany: Evolution of a Discipline*, ed. Richard Evans Schultes and Siri von Reis (Portland, Oregon: Dioscorides Press, 1995), 105.
9. Peter A.G.M. de Smet, "Considerations in the Multidisciplinary Approach to the Study of Ritual Hallucinogenic Plants," in *Ethnobotany: Evolution of a Discipline*, eds. Richard Evans Schultes and Siri von Reis (Portland, Oregon: Dioscorides Press, 1995), 370.
10. Harold A. Hansen, *The Witch's Garden*, trans. Muriel Crofts (Santa Cruz: Unity Press, 1978 [*Hexens Urtegård*, 1976]), 90.
11. Martin Lee, *Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD, and the Sixties Rebellion* (New York: Grove Press, 1985).
12. Don W. Moore, MD, "The Autumnal High: Jimsonweed in North Carolina," *North Carolina Medical Journal* 37:9 (September 1976), 492.
13. Charles Grob, MD, "A Conversation with Albert Hofmann," MAPS (Bulletin of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies) 8:3 (1998), 30.
14. Gerald B. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1973 [1954]), 118.
15. Gwyneth Cathyl-Harrow, "GBG & entheogens," email, 29 June 1998. Emphasis in the original.
16. Oxford University Press, 1999.
17. Ronald Hutton, "GBG & entheogens," email, 1 July 1998. "Taliesin" was the pen-name of another active figure in 1960s British Witchcraft.
18. Evan John Jones with Chas S. Clifton, *Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance* (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1997), in particular the final chapter, "Robert Cochrane: Magician or Tregetour?"
19. I recall how the word went around camp at one of the "Enchanted Mountain" Pagan festivals in New Mexico's Jemez Mountains, in about 1987, that several attendees had attempted ritual use of *Datura* root and become quite ill.
20. Susan Granquist, "Plant Helpers," Pagan Leaders list, 11 August 1998.
21. John Gerarde, *The Herball or General Historie of Plantes* (London, 1597) quoted in Hedwig Schleiffer, (ed.), *Narcotic Plants of the Old World* (Monticello, New York: Lubrecht & Cramer, 1979), 147.
22. Jack Prairiewolf (pseudonym), "Solanaceous plants," email, 16 October 1998.
23. For example: Paul Beyerl, *A Compendium of Herbal Magic* (Custer, Washington: Phoenix Publishing, 1998); Scott Cunningham, *Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1985).
24. Anna Korn, "Datura," email, 27 October 1998.
25. Jack Prairiewolf, "Solanaceous Plants," email, 17 October 1998.
26. Robert Brown, "Solanaceous plants & magic," email, 26 October 1998.
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## Frey, God of the World

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Open any standard work on Norse mythology, and you will find Frey described as a “fertility god” (e.g., Simek 91; Ellis Davison, *Myths and Symbols* 119). Early scholars sought fertility gods in every pantheon, but I believe that the limited “fertility god” concept now contributes to a distorted view of Frey. Consider the names and adjectives applied to Frey in primary sources. A few are appropriate to a “fertility god,” but other titles seem equally apt: War-god. Priest-god. Bright god. High god.

In this paper, I seek a more complex understanding of Frey in which his gift of fertility is simply one among many. An extended quotation from Snorri Sturluson’s “Ynglinga Saga” will serve to introduce the major themes to be developed. In the early part of the saga, the gods appear but are treated as earthly kings that a credulous populace honored as gods. The first such “king” is Óðhin; he is succeeded by Njörðh, who is followed in turn by his son Frey. The passage below describes Frey’s reign (7-8):

So Frey took the rule after Niord; he was called *Drott* (or Sovereign) of the Swedes and took scot [= tax] from them; he had many friends and brought good seasons like his father. Frey built near Upsala a great temple, and set there his chief seat [...] In his days began the peace of Frode; then there was also a good season over all the land. The Swedes gave Frey credit for it, and he therefore was much more worshipped than the other gods, as the land folk in his days became richer on account of peace and good seasons than ever before [...] Frey then fell sick, and as he

neared death, his men took counsel, and let few men come to him; and they built a great howe [= mound] with a door and three holes in it. And when Frey was dead they bore him in loneliness to the howe, and told the Swedes that he was still alive; they watched him then for three years, and all the scot they hid down in the howe [...] The good seasons and peace continued [...] When all the Swedes marked that Frey was dead, but that good seasons and peace still continued, they believed that it would be so, so long as Frey was in Sweden; therefore, they would not burn him, but called him god of the earth, and ever after sacrificed to him, most of all for good seasons and peace.

Snorri’s account has several interesting features. First, there is the emphasis on “good seasons and peace.” The word *dr*, which Mosen translates as “good seasons,” appears six times in the Old Norse text of this brief chapter; *fridh* (Mosen’s “peace”) occurs five times. The same terms—*ár* and *fridh*—recur in other chapters of “Ynglinga saga,” where they are repeatedly used to describe the reigns of successful kings. This relates to the next key point about Snorri’s account—Frey is the founder of the Yngling dynasty that ruled Sweden for generations. The blessings brought by Frey are associated both with living kings and with ancestral kings in the grave-mound. Frey himself is said by Snorri (*Heimskringla* xxxv) to have introduced the custom of mound-burial, which replaced the earlier practice of cremation. Archaeological evidence shows that burial and cremation were in fact practiced contemporaneously (Ellis), so Snorri’s account records a myth rather than a historical fact, but this does not lessen the significance of the association of Frey with mound-burial. Ellis also discusses additional literary evidence for sacrifice to kings’ burial mounds in heathen Scandinavia. Her data confirm that the “dead” king/god in the mound was seen as an active presence—he

## EARLY SCHOLARS SOUGHT FERTILITY GODS IN EVERY PANTHEON, BUT I BELIEVE THAT THE LIMITED “FERTILITY GOD” CONCEPT NOW CONTRIBUTES TO A DISTORTED VIEW OF FREY.

received sacrifice, and cared for his people in return.

In this paper, each of these ideas—divine kingship, *ár*, and *fridh*—will be examined in detail. An additional section will tackle the difficult question of Frey and sexuality—difficult, because sex had a peculiar horror for the Christian clerics who recorded most of the evidence, so the sources are few and hard to interpret. Finally, I will bring these ideas together and present my conclusions about Frey.

### SACRED KING, DIVINE ANCESTOR

The connection between Frey and kingship is clearest in Sweden, where Frey was considered the ancestral deity of the royal house. The “good kings” in Snorri’s “Ynglinga saga,” like Frey himself, rule a land where the people prosper. The vital importance of the king is illustrated by the story of King Domaldi. In his day there was “famine and need” (10). The first year, the people sacrificed oxen, but the famine continued. The second year, they sacrificed men, but the crops failed again. The third year, they sacrificed Domaldi himself. The ill-fated king was succeeded by his son Domar, and once again “there were good seasons and peace” (11).

In Denmark, the blessings associated with Frey are connected to “King Fródhi.” The traditions surrounding this king, or rather kings, are difficult to sort out. Several historical and semi-historical characters

bore the name. Saxo Grammaticus describes a number of them, and Ellis Davidson (Saxo 114) notes that Saxo has conflated the stories of Fridh-Fródhi (“Peace-Fródhi”) and Fródhi *inn fraknae* (“Fródhi the Bold”). The former is important here—Snorri says that, during Frey’s reign in Uppsala, “the peace of Frode” [*Fródhافرíd*] held sway (“Ynglinga saga” 7). Another connection between the king and the god is the name “Fródhi” itself. In “Skírnismál” in the *Poetic Edda*, Frey is called *inn fródhi* (“the wise”). Among humans, the phrase “inn fródhi” is applied exclusively to men of exceptional learning (Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed.).

Saxo’s account (157-8) of King Fródhi’s death bears a striking resemblance to Snorri’s description, quoted above, of the death of Frey:

[The] nobles kept [Fródhi] embalmed for three years, since they feared the provinces would revolt if their sovereign’s end became known. They particularly wanted to keep his death concealed from outsiders, so that they could [...] with the support of their leader’s old power draw the customary tribute from their subjects. For this reason, they would draw his lifeless body about, not, so it seemed, in a hearse, but a royal carriage.

Saxo also gives his version of a poem originally written by the skald Hjarni. The verse repeats the information that Fródhi’s dead body was carried through the land and adds that he is “now buried under turf” (Saxo 162). Just as in Frey’s case, the nobles

## THE SAGA-WRITER WAS AN UNSYMPATHETIC CHRISTIAN WHO WANTED TO RIDICULE THE HEATHEN SWEDES, AND HE DESCRIBES HOW FREY IS REPLACED BY ONE GUNNAR, WHO CONVINCES THE DULL-WITTED POPULACE THAT HE IS THE GOD.

conceal the death of Fródhi for three years, during which they continue to collect scot (tax) or tribute. It is also noteworthy that Fródhi, like Frey, is buried rather than burned.

The procession of Fródhi's body around the countryside provides another connection between the mythical king and the god Frey. First, according to Snorri, Frey himself drives a chariot drawn by his boar (Prose *Edda* 50). Second, a ritual procession involving a chariot is specifically attested for two of the Vanir. The 1st century Roman author Tacitus describes a procession of the Germanic goddess Nerthus (134-5). Nerthus is the female form of the name Njörðh (Simek 230); in later Scandinavian mythology, Njörðh is one of the Vanir and Frey's father. The visit of the goddess in her chariot was a time of peace and rejoicing. Over a thousand years later, a medieval saga-writer described a similar procession for Frey himself in "The Tale of Ögmund Bash." The story tells of an idol of Frey that is worshipped by the Swedes and served by a "young and beautiful woman" (141) who is considered the god's wife. The saga-writer was an unsympathetic Christian who wanted to ridicule the heathen Swedes, and he describes how Frey is replaced by one Gunnar, who convinces the dull-witted populace that he is the god. Omitting the text that describes this replacement, however,

leaves an illuminating account of heathen belief (142-3):

Now it came to the time that they set out from home, and Frey and his wife were to sit in a cart while their retainers walked in front [...] They went round to feasts throughout the winter [...] But when some time had passed, it became clear that Frey's wife was pregnant. That was taken to be excellent, and the Swedes were now delighted with this god of theirs; the weather too was mild and all the crops so promising that nobody could remember the like.

This connection of Frey with wagons occurs again in the Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem in the verse describing the rune *Ing*. "Ing" is Frey—in the Norse sources, the god is called Yngvi-Frey, Ingunar Frey, and the like, and the dynasty he founds is named the Ynglings. The Rune Poem reads (my translation):

Ing was first among the East-Danes  
Sent by men; until he afterwards east  
Departed over the wave; the wain ran after  
Thus the hardy ones named the hero.

Two points in this verse are of particular interest. First, the cryptic half-line "the wain ran after" can be interpreted to refer to the Vanic processions described above. Second, the god-king appears and disappears rather mysteriously and goes back "over the wave." The word translated "departed" [*gewát*, from *gewitan*] in the Rune Poem has the same dual sense as does "departed" in modern English; "gewitan" means "go, with-

draw, go away," but also "die, pass away" (Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*). This description applies well to another mythical king, Scyld Scefing, whose story is told in the first 4-52 lines of *Beowulf*. Scyld is found abandoned in a boat as a child. The boy becomes a king in Denmark and has a long and prosperous reign. After his death, his people lay his body in a ship heaped with treasure and send it out across the ocean. Scyld's reign, like Frey's and Fródhi's, is remembered as a blessed time for his people. Both Scyld and Frey are the founders of royal dynasties; in *Beowulf*, Scyld's great-grandson Hrothgar rules a people called synonymously the *Scyldinga* (after Scyld) and the *Inguina*, "friends of Ing."

In Norse lore, the arrival of Njörðh, Frey, and Freyja in Ásgardh echoes the mysterious arrivals of Ing and Scyld. The deities come from Vanaheim, an enigmatic place—we are told almost nothing about it in the surviving sources. After Ragnarök, Njörðh (and perhaps Freyja) will return to Vanaheim, which is not destroyed in the final conflagration. Thus, Vanaheim is a special place set apart from the other worlds.

Both Frey and Njörðh are also associated with ships. Frey's magic ship Skíðbladhnrir is one of the treasures of the gods. In the *Poetic Edda*, "Grímnismál" calls Skíðbladhnrir "best of ships" and says that Njörðh's home is Nóatún, "Harbor." In Germanic culture, ships are connected with death, the journey into ultimate mystery. In 1942, Ellis summarized the archaeological evidence for ship-burial. At the time she wrote, literally hundreds of ship-burials dating from 500 CE onwards were known in Scandinavia, and new examples continue to be discovered. The literary sources also speak of ship-funerals: Snorri's *Edda* relates that the god Baldur was sent on his journey

to Hel's realm on a flaming ship sent out over the water (49-50). On a more human scale, of the three prominent saga-age Icelanders noted for their devotion to Frey, two—Ingimund in *Varnsdalers' Saga* (68) and Thorgrím in the *Saga of Gísli* (25)—were given ship-burial, and the third (Hrafnkel) had renounced all gods before his death ("Saga of Hrafnkel" 455).

To summarize: Frey, and kings whose stories suggest that they are identified with or assimilated to the god, are associated with reigns noted for their prosperity and blessedness. Frey is the divine ancestor whose blessings are brought forth again and again by his worthy successors; he is the benevolent god of the grave-mound who receives sacrifice and grants abundance in return. However, his ultimate origins are wrapped in mystery, and we will return to this numinous quality when we consider his association with the sacred in the third section.

**ÁR—PROSPERITY AND ABUNDANCE**  
One of the blessings brought by Frey and by all the "good kings" whose reigns echo the god's is ár. This word means both a calendrical year and, more often, a "good year"; it is often translated "good seasons." The Old Norwegian Rune Poem indicates that ár is the gift of Frey/Fródhi (my translation):

Ár is good for men;  
I guess Fródhi was open-handed.

The Old Icelandic Rune Poem begins the same way but gives a fuller description of ár itself (my translation):

Ár is good for men,  
and a good summer,  
and a thriving field.

In ancient Scandinavia, the year was divided into two seasons, summer and winter. The major work of raising and harvesting crops as well as fattening the live-



stock for winter all occurred during the summer season, and a “good summer” was thus a productive one.

An additional piece of evidence links Frey specifically with agricultural production: “Lokasenna” in the *Poetic Edda* gives the names of Frey’s servants as “Byggvir” and “Beyla.” *Bygg* simply means “barley,” and Loki sneers at Byggvir for “twittering under the grindstone” (92). Beyla’s name has been the subject of considerable debate, but Simek (36) reports that the most widely-accepted theory relates “Beyla” to *baula*, cow. In “Lokasenna,” Loki calls Beyla *deigja*, “dairymaid” (Cleasby and Vigfusson), and also describes her as *dritin*, “shitty”—a probable result of working in the cow-barn! Ellis Davidson (“Milk” 92) has pointed out the critical importance of milk as a food in the Scandinavian countries and has also noted that dairy-work was the province of women. Together, Byggvir and Beyla represent two of the most important food sources in Northern Europe—grain and milk.

Another important food was meat. It was less common than grain or dairy products but was therefore more highly valued. A discussion of its significance leads beyond simple agricultural production and “fertility.” In this context, two food animals associated with Frey—cattle and swine—are relevant.

In Norse culture, cattle were frequent beasts of sacrifice, and *Viga-Glums Saga* (72-3) specifically mentions the sacrifice of an ox to Frey. Cattle also represented worldly wealth; the Norse word *fé* means both “cattle, livestock” (also “sheep” in Iceland) and “money, wealth.” Frey and his father Njörðh are strongly connected with the cattle/wealth concept denoted by *fé*. Snorri’s *Edda* describes both Frey and Njörðh as *féggjafa*, “wealth-giving” (75). The Viking poet

Egil Skalagrimmson wrote that Frey and Njörðh gave Arinbjorn “wealth’s force” [*féar afli*] and that Arinbjorn is blessed with “endless wealth [*audhs*]” (“Egil’s Saga” 163). Here, Egil uses a second word for wealth, *audh*, in addition to *fé*. *Audh* lacks a specific association with livestock, but like *fé*, it is often used in connection with the Vanir. In the case of Njörðh, this connection was proverbial: in the *Vatnsdalers’ Saga*, a man is described as “rich as Njord” [*audhigur sem Njörðhur*] (127), and Snorri’s “Ynglinga saga” names the god Njörðh *hinn audhga*, “the Wealthy” (2).

Wealth is also a striking feature of the reign of the ubiquitous Fróðhi. In his *Edda*, Snorri states that “Fróðhi’s meal” is a kenning for “gold.” He describes a myth in which King Fróðhi sets two giantesses to work an enchanted mill and grind out “gold and peace [fridh] and blessedness” (107). In “Gróttasöngur”, the giantesses sing (*Poetic Edda* 260):

Wealth [*audh*] let’s grind for Frodi,  
grind out happiness,  
Grind many possessions [*féar*]  
on the wonderful stone!

The myth of Fróðhi’s mill illustrates how the blessings of cattle/wealth are bound together with the idea of divine kingship represented by Fróðhi/Frey.

The second animal associated with Frey is the boar. According to Snorri, Frey’s own boar Gullinbursti (“Golden-Bristled”) was one of the treasures made for the gods by the dwarves (*Edda* 97). The saga of King Heidhrek the Wise (*Saga Heidhreks konungs ins vitra*) describes the sacrifice of a great boar to Frey at Yule. Before it was offered, the beast was led around the hall, and men laid their hands on its bristles to swear oaths. The practice of swearing oaths on a boar at Yule is also mentioned in the prose text accompanying “Helgakvíða Hjör-

## FREY, AND KINGS WHOSE STORIES SUGGEST THAT THEY ARE IDENTIFIED WITH OR ASSIMILATED TO THE GOD, ARE ASSOCIATED WITH REIGNS NOTED FOR THEIR PROSPERITY AND BLESSEDNESS.

vardhssonar” in the *Poetic Edda* (129).

The boar of Northern Europe, whether wild or (more-or-less) domesticated, was intelligent, prolific, and tough. Boars were associated with warriors and battle (Ellis Davidson, *Myths and Symbols* 49-50) as well as with virility. A story from *Landnámabók* illustrates how boars were viewed. Ingimund the Old was one of Iceland’s original settlers. He built a great *hof* (temple) to Frey on his land and was a successful and wealthy man. At one point, “Ingimund lost ten pigs, and when they were found the following autumn they numbered a hundred and twenty” (85). When the settlers set out to catch the pigs, the herd-boar leapt into the water and swam so hard that his hoofs came off and he died of exhaustion. Ingimund, an exceptional Freysman, had a boar who was equally exceptional in both fecundity and fighting-spirit.

Though boars were noted for their fertility, their ferocity and their role in the swearing of sacred oaths are hardly connected to the concept of wealth and abundance denoted by *ár*. Boars, like Frey himself, cannot be interpreted simply in terms of fertility, or even general prosperity. Instead, the linked ideas of strength and holiness lead us to the next section, where we take up the subject of fridh.

### FRIDH—INVIOLEABLE PEACE

Fridh is usually translated “peace,” but fridh

is more than the absence of conflict, and its meanings include “inviolability” and “sacredness” (Cleasby and Vigfusson). The “peace of Fróðhi” [Fróðhafridh] was a legendary time when entire nations achieved the holy state of fridh. According to Snorri, it began during Frey’s reign, and “the Swedes gave Frey credit for it” (“Ynglinga saga” 7). Other sources provide further information about this mythical, golden age of fridh. In “Gróttasöngur,” the giantesses grind out fridh for King Fróðhi (*Poetic Edda* 61):

Here no one shall bring harm to another,  
nor plot evil, nor conspire against someone’s life,  
nor shall he strike with a sharp sword,  
though he should find, trussed up,  
his brother’s slayer.

This would have seemed a remarkable state of affairs to the poet’s audience. Among the Vikings, blood-vengeance was a duty, and violence was commonplace. Saxo Grammaticus writes that, in establishing the Fróðhafridh, Fróðhi set up gold rings at crossroads, but “Frothi’s royal authority was so influential that the gold, to be had for the taking, was preserved as if behind steel bars” (156). Saxo brings out a key point here: to maintain widespread peace in an age of bloodshed requires a king/god of extraordinary strength.

A more personal story about Frey reveals a similar theme. “Skírnismál” in the *Poetic Edda* tells of Frey’s love for the giant-woman Gerðh. To persuade his servant Skírnir to

## TO REJECT FREY IS TO BE DEPRIVED OF GOOD FOOD, GOOD DRINK, GOOD SEX, AND GOOD COMPANY—ALL THE PLEASURES THAT FREY PROVIDES.

act as emissary to her, Frey gives Skírnir his sword and his horse. A famous weapon and mighty stallion were *de rigueur* for the ideal Viking warrior, and to surrender them voluntarily was an extraordinary act by the standards of the day. Yet, the loss of these tokens of masculinity impairs neither Frey's sexual potency nor his martial prowess. The prose *Edda* records that, for lack of a sword, Frey kills the giant Beli with a stag's antler, but Snorri adds, "It did not matter much [...] Freyr could have killed him with his fist" (32). In other words, Frey's willingness to give up sword and steed can be seen as a proof of his strength; he has no need of the trappings that others require.

Frey's unusual status as a warrior without sword or stallion connects him to holy places and the priests who serve them. First, Frey himself is described as a sacrifice priest [*blótgodhi*] and temple-priest [*hofgodhi*] of the gods in *Sörla iháttur* and "Ynglinga saga," respectively. Second, certain heathen priests did not carry weapons or ride stallions. The Venerable Bede writes that, for Coifi, the pagan "chief priest" of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria, "It had not been lawful [...] to carry arms or to ride anything but a mare" (130). On converting to Christianity, Coifi arms himself with sword and spear, mounts a stallion, and desecrates the heathen temple. The Christian King Ólaf Trygvason also rides a stallion when he destroys the hof at Trondheim (Ellis Davidson, *Lost Beliefs* 104).

The stallion desecrated by Ólaf had been

intended as an offering to Frey. The *Saga of Hrafnkel Frey's Godi* tells of another horse dedicated to Frey. Hrafnkel owns a splendid stallion named Freyfaxi. The hero dedicates half of Freyfaxi to Frey and swears to kill anyone who rides the horse. A farmhand named Einar rides Freyfaxi, and Hrafnkel must fulfill his oath and kill Einar: "Why did you ride the horse [...] ? I would have forgiven you this one time if I had not sworn such a serious oath" (442). The tradition of sacred, inviolate horses is an ancient one in Teutonic culture. Tacitus writes that the Germanic tribes had "horses kept at the public expense in the sacred woods and groves [are] undefiled by any toil in the service of man" (109). In addition, horse-meat was a sacred food among the Vikings. When Iceland converted to Christianity, eating the flesh of horses was one of the few heathen customs that was specifically permitted to continue. King Hakon the Good, a Christian, was compelled by the heathen people of Norway to consume horseflesh as part of his sacral duties as their king (Snorri, *Heimskringla* 89-90). Thus, certain horses were held sacred in Germanic culture, and consuming their flesh was essential to heathen religious practice.

The oath that compels Hrafnkel to slay Einar is also significant. In the saga, it is clear that Hrafnkel likes and respects Einar. Nonetheless, the priest of Frey must fulfill his vow, for Frey is a god of oaths. As described in Section II, Yule-oaths were sworn on a boar that was sacrificed to Frey.

According to Simek (9), an oath-swearing formula recorded in *Landnámabók* and *Ólaf's saga Tryggvasonar* invokes Frey, Njörðh, and the "all-powerful god."

Frey is associated, not only with sacred animals and with oath-swearing, but also with the inviolable fridh of sacred places. Hof's, assembly-places, and other holy sites were set apart from ordinary life. Violence was forbidden in such places, especially in those dedicated to Frey. The peace of such a fridh-stead could not be broken even by the gods: when Baldur is slain on holy ground, "no one could take vengeance, it was a place of such sanctuary" (Snorri, *Edda* 49). *Vatnsdalers' Saga* tells of a hof to Frey where it was forbidden even to carry weapons; this recalls Tacitus' description of the procession of Nerthus, when "every iron object is locked away" (135). However, an entry in *Landnámabók* hints that the ban on violence did not extend to ritual sacrifice: a *godhi* named Thorhadd takes land in Iceland and "declared the whole fjord sacred [...], forbidding people to take any life there except domestic cattle" (117). *Víga-Glúms Saga* tells of another prohibition associated with hofs: the hero Glúm harbors an outlaw, but he must do it secretly: "Outlawed men were not supposed to be there, because Frey, to whom the temple there was dedicated, did not allow it" (100). Outlaws were by definition outside of the community and therefore outside the common fridh; the Old Norse expression "forfeit fé and fridh" means "be outlawed" (Cleasby and Vigfusson). In general, then, the fridh of a hof represents a local, limited version of the Fródhafridh, which extended to whole nations.

Thus, the establishment and maintenance of fridh is Frey's special concern, and two stories illustrate the implacability of the god when his fridh is violated. The first

comes from Saxo Grammaticus (29-30). On a whim, the hero Hading kills a sea-creature while swimming. A woman then appears to him and tells him that the killing has offended the gods and that the earth and all the elements will be against him until he atones for his crime. Her words are fulfilled: Hading's ships are destroyed by storms, and the house where he takes shelter collapses. His terrible luck continues until he institutes an annual, national sacrifice to Frey.

The second example is more subtle. In *Víga-Glúms Saga*, the eponymous hero enjoys supernatural protection symbolized by a spear and cloak. While thus warded, Glúm transgresses against Frey in three ways. First, he slays his neighbor Sigmund in a field called *Vitadhsgrjafi* ("Sure-Giver"). This field is adjacent to a hof of Frey and, it is implied, forms part of the holy fridh-stead where violence is forbidden. Second, Glúm secretly harbors an outlaw, which again violates Frey's laws. Finally, the hero swears a deceptive oath on a sacred ring in Frey's hof itself.

While Glúm is repeatedly offending Frey in this way, Sigmund's kinsman Thorkel offers an ox to Frey and asks the god to drive Glúm away from the area (72-3). Víga-Glúm nonetheless prospers and seems to have escaped the consequences of his acts. Then, he makes the fatal mistake of giving away his spear and cloak and with them the special protection that he has enjoyed. It seems that this frees Frey to act: almost immediately, Glúm has this dream (121):

[H]e dreamed that large numbers of people had come to Thvera to meet Frey, and that he saw a large crowd of people on the gravel banks beside the river, while Frey sat on his throne. He dreamed that he asked who had come there. They replied: "These are your bygone kinsmen, and now we're asking Frey that you may not be driven off the land at Thvera, but it's no use, for Frey answers

shortly and angrily and remembers now  
Thorkel the Tall's gift of an ox."

Shortly afterwards, Glúm loses his farm and is forced to move repeatedly. He never again achieves success or prosperity. In other words, neither ár nor fridh ever come to him again.

#### SEX AND SENSUALITY

The word fridh implies sacredness and inviolability, but it also has erotic connotations and can be translated as "love." It is related to the words *fridhla*, "mistress" (in the sexual sense), and *fridhgin*, "lovers" (Cleasby and Vigfusson). These associations hint that Frey may be connected to human sexuality. This idea is confirmed by the 11th century cleric Adam of Bremen, who describes the idols at Uppsala as follows (qtd. in Page 220-1; "Fricco" = Frey):

In that temple, which is all fitted out with gold, the people honour the statues of three gods [...] 'Thor,' they say, 'has dominion over the atmosphere.' He is the one who governs thunder and lightning, winds and pouring rain, fine weather and fertility. The next is Wodan, which is to say 'Fury.' He wages war and gives a man courage in the face of the enemy. The third is Fricco, distributing peace and sensual delight to mortals. His image they portray with a huge erect penis. [...] If a plague or famine is nigh, the sacrifice is to the idol Thor; if war, to Odin; if a marriage is to be solemnized, to Fricco.

Interestingly, Adam identifies Thor as the primary god of fertility; Frey's province is specifically "sensual delight." Another hint of Frey's sexual nature is the association of the Vanir with incest. Snorri's "Ynglinga saga" (3) and the poem "Lokasenna" (*Poetic Edda* 91) both record that Frey is the son of Njörðh and Njörðh's sister, and Loki also accuses Freyja of lying with her brother Frey (*Poetic Edda* 90).

The greatest source of information about this aspect of Frey's nature is "Skírnismál" in

the *Poetic Edda*. This poem contains the only major myth about Frey that has survived, and it tells of the god's desperate, consuming desire for the giant-maiden, Gerdh. Sick with love for her, Frey sends his servant Skírnir to court the lady. Gerdh agrees to wed Frey in nine nights' time, and the poem ends with the anguished cry of the ardent lover (Bellows' translation):

Long is one night, longer are two;  
How then shall I bear three?  
Often to me a month has seemed less  
Than now half a night of desire.

This poem has one aspect that is disturbing to modern readers: to compel her agreement, Skírnir threatens Gerdh first with violence (a threat she scornfully defies), then with an elaborate and terrible curse. The nature of this curse is revealing, however. Gerdh is to be deprived of all sensual pleasures—food, drink, sex. She is to have no mate at all, or else to be coupled with a giant—a repulsive and hateful fate. As Skírnir's curse reaches its height, he says (*Poetic Edda* 67):

"Giant" I carve on you and three runes:  
lewdness and frenzy  
and unbearable desire[.]

In the original, the word *thurs* specifically means an especially brutish and hostile kind of giant. "Thurs" is also the name of a rune described as *kvenna kvöl*, "torment of women," in the Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian Rune Poems, and the three "runes" listed in the poem represent sexual frustration to the point of madness. This story has an odd parallel in that of King Fróðhi (again!). Saxo Grammaticus describes two weddings of the king with reluctant maidens. In the first episode, the king sends emissaries to the princess Hanuda, but she "disdained Frothi" (120). Gørvara, wife of one of Fróðhi's counsellors, gives the maiden a "love-potion [that] turned the

## IN A WORLD WHERE KINGS HAVE BECOME AN ANACHRONISM, FREY IS STILL THE VERALDRGODH, THE GOD OF THE WORLD, WHOSE POWER AND PASSION SHINE THROUGH IT.

girl's inflexibility to desire, destroyed her prejudice and substituted erotic passion" (120). Love-potion notwithstanding, the marriage ends badly, and Fróðhi sends a new group of emissaries to court a second wife for him. A woman in the party gives the latest prospect "a drink mixed with something which channeled the girl's desires into love for Frothi" (139).

What is going on here? For Frey, and for the earthly King Fróðhi whose story parallels Frey's in so many ways, a reluctant woman is won over by magic that arouses lust so strong it is "unbearable." I suggest that the "magic" of the runes and potions represents Frey's power to awaken sexual desire. In pagan Scandinavia, marriages were viewed as family alliances. Noblewomen scorned suitors who were not high-ranking or accomplished enough, and love was viewed as a socially-disruptive force. In such a culture, romantic passion would indeed seem a form of madness, and "magic" would both explain and excuse it. In Hanuda's case, at least, some excuse would have been necessary. Hanuda initially rejects Fróðhi because he has not yet earned "worldly reputation" and suffers from "want of renown" (Saxo 120); in other words, he was a thoroughly unsuitable match by the standards of the day.

Gerdh's situation is more subtle and more complex; she is not simply drugged into a state where Frey seems irresistible. However, there are hints in "Skírnismál"

that her union with Frey was in some way socially forbidden. Early in the poem, Frey laments, "None of the gods and elves wishes that we should be together" (*Poetic Edda* 62). After she has agreed to wed Frey, Gerdh says wonderingly, "I had never thought that I should ever love one of the Vanir well" (67). And, when Skírnir first arrives, Gerdh has an odd foreboding: "I am afraid that out here may be my brother's slayer" (64). Does she mean Frey? Has he killed her brother, and has that created enmity between their families? There is also a subtle implication in "Skírnismál" that Gerdh does in fact desire Frey; after she agrees to the wedding, she names the time and place and says "there to the son of Niord Gerdh will grant love" (67). The word translated by Larrington as "love" is *gaman*, which means "game" or "amusement" as well as "love." In other words, Gerdh is promising Frey love-play, which seems a light and affectionate choice of expression; it hardly suggests that she is feeling coerced.

But what of the curse? It is never fulfilled; the threat alone is sufficient excuse for Gerdh to agree to the wedding. But, the nature of the threatened curse is nonetheless revealing: it promises both to excite "unbearable desire" and to deny its satisfaction. To reject Frey is to be deprived of good food, good drink, good sex, and good company—all the pleasures that Frey provides.

## THE "GOD OF THE WORLD" IN A WORLD WITHOUT KINGS

So far, this paper has considered how Frey was worshipped and understood by heathens in the past. A key to that understanding is the concept of divine kingship. However, I am a practicing heathen in the 21st century, and I have no desire to live in a monarchical state, divine or otherwise. So, I have a personal interest in the final question I will address in this work: what is Frey's role in a post-modern world? The answer I propose draws on scholarship, but it also reflects what I have learned in my own experiences with Frey as a real and complex being.

The case of Iceland provides a first approach to the question. Many of the Freysmen and hofs to Frey already mentioned were Icelandic, and early Iceland was a republic, not a kingdom. So, what was the nature of Frey-worship in Iceland, and how did it resemble what we know about Frey as the god of Sweden's royal dynasty?

Some answers are suggested by the Icelandic examples already cited: Frey was a guardian of fridh and the protector of holy places and sacred horses. He accepted sacrifices and favored those who offered them. In Iceland, Frey continued to be associated with ancestors and with burial mounds, but the howes were now the graves of his followers rather than those of the kings. In the *Saga of Gísli*, Thorgrím Thorsteinsson was an Icelander devoted to Frey. After his death, people wondered at "something [...] that seemed to have a strange meaning, that snow never stayed on the south-west side of Thorgrím's mound, and it did not freeze there; [men said] he must have been so favoured by Frey for his sacrifices that the god was unwilling to have frost come between them" (25).

The case of Ingimund the Old provides

further insight into Frey's role in Iceland. The story is told in *Landnámabók* and more fully in the *Vatnsdalers' Saga*. Ingimund's tale begins in Norway. A Lappish seeress predicts that Ingimund will make his home in Iceland, and "as a proof she said that something had vanished from his purse and wouldn't be found till he started digging for his high-seat pillars in the new country" (*Landnámabók* 83). The "something" is a silver image of Frey.

Ingimund repeatedly declares his intention never to settle in Iceland, but the seeress' words prey on his mind, and at last he consults King Harald of Norway (*Vatnsdalers' Saga* 44):

Then Ingimund said to the king: "I am well content [...] yet it does stick in my throat how the Lapland woman prophesied I should change my way of life. For I have determined never to leave the home of my fathers."

The king answered: "I am not sure but what happened may be to some end, and that Frey let the amulet come to rest where he wants his seat of honour set up."

Ingimund takes the king's advice and travels to Iceland. He builds a great hof to Frey and, as foretold, finds his lost image of Frey when they excavate the site for his high-seat pillars. Once he finds the amulet, Ingimund no longer resists his fate and says, "We'll settle here with a good heart" (50). He soon becomes famous for his wealth and prosperity.

As for Frey himself, King Harald's words suggest that the god wanted to go to Iceland and be honored in the new land. In Iceland, no king was needed to mediate the blessings of ár and fridh—they flowed directly from the god. Frey himself granted prosperity to his followers and punished those who desecrated his holy places with bloodshed or false oaths. He remained associated with burial mounds and ancestors, but they were now the howes of his followers and the

family ancestors of the settlers of Iceland.

The god of Swedish kings and Icelandic farmers is the same god honored by heathens today. He protects holy places and sacred oaths and punishes those who defile them. He is the god of the honored dead who continue to care for the living. Finally, Frey is the vigorous god who brings wholeness, abundance, and pleasure. The Norse word *nenna* is applied to Frey in "Skfrnismál." It means "active, striving, energetic," and I believe this word comes close to expressing Frey's essential nature. Flourishing crops and strong livestock; two lovers taking delight in one another; a healthy, wealthy, thriving society—these are the blessings of Frey. In a world where kings have become an anachronism, Frey is still the *veraldrgodh*, the god of the world, whose power and passion shine through it.

Freyr is the best of all the bold riders in the courts of the Aesir; he makes no girl cry nor any man's wife, and looses each man from captivity. "Lokasenna" (*Poetic Edda* 91)

*A note on orthography:* Case-endings for Old Norse words have been omitted except where a source is quoted exactly. Hence, "Frey" rather than "Freyr," "Ódhin" rather than "Ódhinn," etc. Throughout, the character "edh" is represented by "dh" and "thorn" by "th".

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## BOOK REVIEWS:

### *WITCHCRAFT AND MAGIC IN EUROPE: ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME*

by Bengt Ankarloo & Stuart Clark, eds.  
Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1999

Reviewed by Dana Kramer-Rolls, PhD

The University of Pennsylvania Press has taken a place alongside Pennsylvania State University Press, noted for the *History of Magic* Series, with its own *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe* series, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark. The thrust of the series of compiled essays by leading scholars is to integrate the accumulated knowledge about the practices of witchcraft and magic, and to contextualize them both in society at large and in the landscape of religious belief and practice. As with any monumental task, credit must be given for the work done, rather than the work left undone. One of the great difficulties in approaching wide-ranging historical research is that each period and place calls to itself scholars who form a cohesive community, each of which develops somewhat idiosyncratic methodologies, thus establishing places of intraneic conflict, academic life and death concerns somewhat incomprehensible to any out-group. Perhaps the greatest contribution of this series is the opportunity for the student of witchcraft and magic to examine the field globally, drawing from the work of folklorists, classicists, Medievalists and Early Modernists in an attempt to integrate and define patterns of practice and public perception.

With the first volume on *Biblical and Pagan Societies* still forthcoming, the series begins with *Ancient Greece and Rome*. In "Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls," the first contributor, Daniel Ogden, University of Wales, Swansea, reviews the over 1,600 clay, wood and lead tablet and "voodoo dolls" (an unfortunate term left over from a less enlightened age) which were made to curse, petition and protect. Found at gravesites, crossroads and deposited in rivers and sacred wells at least from the 4th century BCE to the 1st century CE, these items describe, often quite colorfully, the intent of the supplicant, and appeal to a wide range of names and unnamed deities, including a range of chthonic gods (Hermes, Hecate, Kore, Demeter), their Latin equivalents, Egyptian gods of the underworld, Hebraic Adoni, Iao (= Yahweh), the Babylonian Erischigal, local deities (Bath's Sulis), angels, and a variety of syncretic hybrids (44ff.). These objects were used to guarantee legal decisions in favor of the supplicants, find lost property or curse the thief, obtain satisfaction in erotic and romantic exploits, and generally bind another to the supplicants purpose sympathetically though the treatment of the tablet or doll (twisting, smashing, use of particular materials such as lead) and by petition to the addressed deity.

While the issue of professional vs amateur manufacture of these tablets is still open to academic debate, we know manuals of magical instruction existed, indicating at least some standard or guide for the production of spell objects. The pre-Christian world was not immune to book burning, and much has been lost by these periodic frenzies of suppression, such as the 2,000 magical manuscripts reputed to have been burned by order of Augustus in 13 BCE (56).

Ogden suggests that these tablets and dolls may be useful in cracking open the hidden world of the marginalized, particularly women and slaves. Except of the fragments of Sappho's works and a few letters by Roman women to soldier

sons or merchant husbands, the unfiltered voice of women is virtually absent from the historical record except in many of these tablets (60-67). A particularly poignant one is a petition by a prostitute not to be relegated to a workhouse, the human equivalent of the glue factory (67-68). Likewise trade and judicial petitions often come from the working poor. This is a dense and well-constructed survey, although I would have appreciated the inclusion of curse bowls as well, which like the poppets (a much better term than Voodoo dolls) have polyvalent utility, holding the words of a spell, but also being used ritually in the spell.

The second essay by George Luck, Johns Hopkins University, titled "Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature" is a compellation of antique witches, sorcerers and magicians. Something of an abstract of his *Arcana Mundi* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) the major question asked, although not definitively answered, is that of the differences between "religion" and "magic", and between "philosophy" and "magic". The antiquity of magic as a technology, the question of folk vs academic practice and belief, the introduction of Mystery religions, and the competition between variant schools of philosophy makes this question almost unanswerable. Theurgists, mediums and healers were variously categorized as practicing religion, philosophy, licit science, although natural magic used by the rural population could be considered superstition, witchcraft or healing magic. Luck notes that what was a state religion for the Persians might well be considered theurgy or even an illicit cultic practice in the Hellenic or Roman world. Apollonius of Tyana was called a magician by his enemies and a scientist/philosopher by his supporters. The degree of the confusion can be seen in the case of Anaxagoras, whose defense that he was a scientist rather than a magician fell on deaf ears, as both were judged atheists.

Nor were invented or new practices of magic and religion unknown. One Alexander of Abon-

tuteichos, as satirized by Lucian based on an historical reality, founded the cult of Glycon, the sacred snake, anointed himself chief priest, and managed to con the local inhabitants into building him a temple. To Alexander's credit, he not only played on the naiveté of his flock, but he offered them the promise of salvation and supported their need for religious comfort. But we must note that the winners write history, and although Alexander's memory is linked with the sobriquet "False Prophet", we don't know how sincere or wise he might have been.

Here, too, gender issues complicate the matter. Early Greek sources claim "witchcraft" not to be religion as it takes place at night, is unlawful, and has no established temples (97). Many of the female magic workers Luck cites are called witches, such as Medea and Circe, whom he identifies as demoted goddesses. By including Moses as magician (remembering the healing serpent staff and the magical competition leading up to the Exodus), Jesus, and the Peter vs Simon Magnus literature (more about which below), Luck reintegrates the classical pagan world with the Judeo-Christian one, thus drawing the Middle and Near Eastern magical world closer to the Hellenic and post-Hellenic one. While this essay lacks the extensive passages from primary sources, which the book length study affords, it provides a useful compilation of historical and mythological sorcerers and sorceries. Of particular utility is the glossary of magical terms (98-101).

Perhaps the most important of the essays in this volume is Richard Gordon's "Imaging Greek and Roman Magic." In a methodology reminiscent of the Annales school search for *mentalités* in medieval studies, Gordon proposes to disclose contemporary Graeco-Roman attitudes toward magic and witchcraft. Because of the loss of period documents the author rejects historical narrative as a methodology, thus avoiding the critique of the post-modernists regarding the relativistic meaning generated by the reader/text

conversation. By applying a more systematic approach, Gordon is able to describe a political-social landscape in which the problem of magic can be placed in a contextualized foreground.

Conflicting factors were simultaneously at work throughout the late Classical through the Late Antique periods. For one, both in the Greek states and in Rome, civic religion took precedent over theological debate, and moral-political issues over salvific promises. That is to say, the line between what was legitimate intercourse with the Otherworld and what was suspect or downright illegal was fuzzy, crooked and often moving.

He identifies four categories of magic workers: wise men and women, who practiced various rustic arts such as herbalism or smithcraft, with or without charms or blessings; root-cutters, who had a more extensive knowledge of poisons and probably some astrological and philosophical knowledge as well (the equivalent of the British nineteenth century cunning folk); learned ritual magicians; and finally priests or priestesses of cults other than those prevalent in the local society. All of these could work for good or ill. All of these delved into the Marvelous, had some intercourse with the Otherworld, including the dead and ghosts, and all of these faced a sliding scale of licitness or illicitness at any time and place. Over time in the Greek societies, the gods themselves were made more moral in order that they might serve with greater utility in a stable and rational civic religion. As this happened, the line between “good” and “bad” magical practitioners shifted to the right. The *daemones* which served the more highly educated magic workers were now subject to legal scrutiny themselves.

The licitness of any magical activity, therefore, depended on both its social and political location. Love magic, for example, was just fine, if it gave a man some extramarital success, but if it led to a wife’s infidelity or a subsequent abortion or poisoning of a husband, the state took notice. And throughout the classical world, poison and spells were far more available to a woman who wished

to redress a wrong than was a civil trial against some wrongdoer.

What separated Greek from Roman attitudes toward magic was the difference in their respective legal systems. Hellenistic Greeks fancied themselves historians, and magic based on the occult sciences of other cultures was cut some slack. Also, the code of law was far more situationally structured than that of Roman law. The guilt or innocence of a Socrates or a local witch depended on how well his or her accusers could be convinced of the benign or efficacious nature of the magical act or notion. Without doubt, the fate of an accused under Roman law depended to a large extent on the skill of a hired orator to sway a jury, and the rich were acquitted of greater crimes than those which brought on the summary execution of some poor prostitute or slave, however codified a legal system was in place.

It is important to note that the “witch craze” was not unique to Christian Early Modern Europe. In the years 184, 180-79, and 153 BCE Roman magistrates ordered the execution of thousands of magic workers accused of *veneficia* or malign magic. In one case 2,000 were killed and in another 3,000 (254). The critical point of law was the malign nature of the magic, and the critical question, “Was some innocent injured by another by magical means?” Local magistrates held most of the trials and many of the accused were brought to trial by the denouncement of their neighbors, often magical practitioners themselves. Confession and supporting testimony was secured through the use of torture and intimidation. The parallels to the Reformation trials are more than clear.

The final essay in the collection is Valerie Flint’s “The Demonization of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinition of Pagan Religions”. Taken on face, this essay appears to merely acknowledge the demotion of *daemones* to evil spirits in league with magicians, and the proper use of magic in the hands of the

Christians (to promote proper fear and to demonstrate their superiority, and therefore the superiority of their god). It is only in comparison to the book *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) that this essay furthers the matter of magic across the bridge from the Pagan to the Christian West. Her thesis at that time, and to some extent in her essay, was that magic was a tool used by the early Church to maintain a sense of wonder, a potent tool against the logic of the philosophers and an emotional substrate upon which to accomplish wide-scale and lasting conversion. She argues for a symbiosis among the notions of folk magic, the logical or natural magic of such arts as astrology and medicine, and the miraculous acts of the godly.

Miracle *vs* marvelous is the key. In the tales of Peter and Simon the Magician, Peter’s acts are miracle, while the defeated Simon’s parallel acts are merely marvels, for which read something between stage tricks and the action of those evil demons. The line between licit and illicit magic again is socially and politically determined, in this case by a clerical body rather than a civic one. The flaw I find in the essay is the top-down methodology. Popular religion no longer seems to exist here. She depends heavily on the writings of the Early Church patriarchs, which expose more of the internal squabbles of the hierarchy of the Early Church than they do the practices of magic of either the un- or semi-converted or the popular notions of the clerical community itself. There is much more in the legendary literature, over and above the Peter-Simon corpus, which might flesh out and test her thesis. Moreover, to take an anthropological or sociological stance, are we to assume that country *stregae* ceased their herb collecting, or that literate Roman Empire Christians rejected astrological charts for their newborn children? Perhaps the days of civic auguries over a dead chicken were over. However, it seems unlikely that the notions of the Church fathers shut down traditional magic, especially in the light of their sympathy toward it as a public relations tool and its rapid “re-emer-

gence” in the form of folk magic and clerical magic alike.

Taken as a whole, the series of essays provides the modern scholar of magic with a sense of the continuity of the magical arts, not perhaps the Holy Grail of “survivals” but as a method by the marginalized and literate alike to deal with the unknown. The names of the gods may change, but spells and rituals went on. The state religion may periodically change, but in times of social stress a flash point of persecution may be sparked by the accusations of soured milk or unchurned butter, the appearance of a comet or a dangerous notion.

These essays are valuable not only to the scholar of magic and witchcraft, but also to the practicing modern witchcraft and pagan communities. In the classical period, as in the modern one, what one was called rather depended on who was doing the name-calling. The Greeks were just as able to call Persian and Egyptian practitioners “primitive” and “superstitious” as were the Protestants apt to apply those same names to Catholics in the Early Modern period. Rather than the textbook notion of *The World’s Great Religions* (and Sanctioned Philosophers), new religions rose and fell. In point of fact, all religions were at one time “new”, as witnessed by Christianity, Islam, and Wicca, not to mention Scientology, Bahai and a host of others. The dividing line between “religion” and “cult” is still fuzzy, and the point at which service yields to exploitation is still a matter of ethical dilemma, as witnessed by the phenomenon of televangelists. Finally, the collection points out that the popular sport of witch burning was not a post-Christian invention, but rather a human activity based on greed, fear, local authoritarian excess, and a tendency to prey on one’s neighbors.

In a future review, I will look at the two volumes which cover the 18th and 19th centuries and the 20th century, and I look forward to the publication of the three volumes to come, which will include the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.

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Two Reviews of *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld*.  
By Susan Greenwood. Berg: Oxford University Press, 2000.  
ISBN 1 85973 450 2, Pbk.

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Reviewed by Daniel Cohen  
Wood and Water magazine

Anthropologists usually study cultures from the outside, claiming that this gives them a distance essential for scientific work. Against this it can be argued that one cannot understand cultural meanings if one is not fully participating. Tanya Luhrmann, in *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*, followed the traditional approach in her study of magic and the occult in Great Britain. Susan Greenwood takes the braver course of maintaining a creative tension between studying from the outside and participating from the inside. Her account includes reports of her own experiences and feelings as a student of high magic and of Wicca and feminist witchcraft, her later reflections on these, as well as accounts of her discussion with other practitioners.

The book has its origins in a PhD thesis, and in parts is hard reading when it is addressed to anthropologists and uses their technical language. Even here, it is fascinating to observe her challenge to the profession with her claim that "[T]his deliberately participatory approach is essential to an understanding of contemporary Western magicians' otherworlds, and as such is a valuable tool of research and should not be contrasted with 'scientific truth' or seen to threaten the anthropologist's objectivity." She uses the word

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Reviewed by Douglas Ezzy  
University of Tasmania

This is one of the most stimulating and rewarding ethnographies of contemporary Witchcraft I've read. Greenwood has worked hard, and it shows in the quality of her findings and analysis. Her writing is clear, insightful, and draws on a sophisticated theoretical framework. She describes herself as a communicator between the worlds of academia and magical counter-culture. She is clearly widely read both in the academic literature and the magical texts, more than competent in both worlds, and skilled at revealing one to the other.

The book was originally a PhD thesis in anthropology at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Covering High Magic, Wicca, and Feminist Witchcraft, Greenwood draws on extensive fieldwork and participant observation. It appears she was initiated into each of these traditions and her discussions covers each of the traditions equally. After an introduction to her research there are two chapters that introduce High Magic and Witchcraft respectively. The following three chapters examine more general themes that run through the practice of magic and the experience of the otherworld. She discusses: healing and identity, the role of power in magical identity, sexual identity and politics, and understandings of good and evil.

A smattering of her conclusions provides a sense of the value and sometimes provocative nature of her work: "I suggest that magical

*continued next page*

*Cohen review continued:*

'magician' to denote any practitioner of magic; this usage is deliberately chosen, but will jar with many pagans. However, most of the book is of value to pagans, with its outsider-insider's account of the otherworld. She describes the otherworld as both inner and outer, as associated with spiritual beings, as involving a shift of consciousness, and as a time and space distinct from, but also very closely connected to, everyday reality. She gives detailed descriptive accounts, both from her own training and that of others.

Her outsider status enables her to criticise magicians in useful ways; some of her criticism would apply to mainstream religions, but we may think we have solved these problems. For instance, she remarks that witchcraft's emphasis on Nature owes more to 18th century Romantic interpretations of Nature than to an engagement with the natural world. She argues that relying on the otherworld as a source of morality and ethics can, on the one hand, lead to a group consensus that is unspoken and so cannot be challenged by members, and on the other hand can bypass all connections with the wider society. She remarks that "Women are venerated in most magical practices (especially witchcraft), but it does not necessarily follow that high evaluation in the otherworld translates into equal status for women in the ordinary world. The religious aspect of worship does not equate with the changing the social world; indeed it frequently reinforces it, giving gender stereotypes romantic or even divine legitimation." All in all, a valuable but inexpensive book which is highly recommended.

*Ezzy review continued:*

identities are structured through a psycho-spiritual interaction with the otherworld, rather than constructed from social discourses of the ordinary world" (p. 118). "I suggest that most people become involved with magic because it is associated with the acquisition of power" (p. 135). "Only feminist witchcraft offers a practical political model for women's empowerment in the socio-economic world" (p. 177). Each of these statements, somewhat baldly stated here, are supported drawing on extensive extracts from interviews, notes from participant observation, rituals, and notes from Greenwood's own magical work. While I do not agree with all the conclusions, the book made me think about the issues in much sharper focus.

I was fascinated and thrilled to read an academic monograph that takes spiritual experience and the otherworld seriously. Young and Goulet's collection, *Being Changed*, opened up this intellectual space for me some time ago, and Greenwood begins to map it out. Rejecting a Western rationalist view of magic, Greenwood argues that spiritual experience should not be explained away, but accepted as a source of knowledge. She provides a thoughtful critique of previous ethnographies that have failed to respect the beliefs and experiences of the otherworld (such as Luhrmann's *Persuasion of the Witch's Craft*).

Greenwood's approach is truly groundbreaking and I applaud her courage and insight in presenting the argument that spiritual experience should be taken seriously. Like other recent innovations in research methods, I know I will have trouble convincing my colleagues to take this seriously. The hold of rationalist Enlightenment method is still strong in academe. However, as the number of studies like Greenwood's grows the distanced pseudo-objectivity generated by the rationalist tradition will increasingly be seen as a methodology that systematically misunderstands spiritual

experience. Her work gives me hope and courage!

Greenwood has a short discussion of the theory of hermeneutics and the social construction of 'reality' (pp. 42-44). However, she seems not to have worked this fully through her analysis. To take the 'otherworld' seriously, as a genuine site of knowledge, does not require an uncritical acceptance of magician's talk about the otherworld as some of her earlier statements seem to suggest. Although, in fairness, her analysis is not uncritical. Rather, she privileges the magicians' understanding of the otherworld. However, it almost seems that the influence of social processes comes as a surprise that not only contradicts the claims of the magicians, but also surprises Greenwood. She argues that despite magicians' claims, the power and experiences derived from the otherworld are shaped by this worldly concerns with status, power, and identity claims. This signals a tension at the heart of the book between the desire to respect the otherworld, as an experience that cannot be explained away by social processes, but at the same time her findings that the magicians who participate in the otherworld are profoundly shaped by social and political processes.

I'd argue that all worlds, mundane and alternate, are socially and culturally constructed. As I see it, the ethnographic move (sociological, anthropological, or hermeneutic) is to understand reality as always and already constructed. The problem with Western rationalism is not simply that it has tried to explain away other realities, but that it has ignored its own mythological character, setting up a false dichotomy between objective truth uninfluenced by social factors and subjective experience that is socially constructed. Greenwood takes the first step, arguing that alternate realities should not be explained away. Given the simplistic and culturally insensitive approaches of past ethnographers, this is a

huge and immensely important step. However, I'd argue we need to go further and reject the false dichotomy. Rather than trying to present the otherworld as an unproblematic reality, and then problematize it, I'd begin with the expectation that practices, knowledge, and experiences of the otherworld will be shaped by the social background of the magician, by politics, power games, and identity processes. The key question is how the otherworld and the social world interact.

I felt a little uncomfortable with what she describes as a fundamentalist flavour in some of the magical schools. I was not sure if she was really talking about fundamentalism in the sense of a closed mind, high symbolic boundaries, and a narrow social group, or whether she was using the term to describe her experienced difficulty with the requirement to believe in order to participate. It is nearly impossible to participate in any social group without participating in their symbolic world. Even more so when participation requires such intense personal reflection and work with symbolic worlds. The suspension of disbelief is quite different from fundamentalism. Maybe magical groups do have fundamentalist tendencies, but I think the term needs to be used with care, even though it is only a relatively minor aside in the book.

The book contains a wealth of suggestions and ideas for new directions for research. It sets a high standard and has initiated some searching questions that deserve careful discussion. I hope to see many more like it. If I should meet Susan Greenwood I'd ask her: Did you enjoy your fieldwork? Do you think the academic study of mystery religions is a good idea for those who want to practice them? What sorts of responses have you had from your academic colleagues? I'm sure there would be a lot to talk about ...

## *THE GODDESS AND THE ALPHABET: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN WORD AND IMAGE*

by Leonard Shlain  
Princeton UP, 1983. xii + 154. pp.  
Two Appendices. Index. Selected  
Bibliography. ISBN 0-691-03131-2.

*Reviewed by Ken McCormick*

Scribes transferred the authority previously vested in the shaman's charged spells, to the written word.

*The Goddess and the Alphabet* is a delightful read for Neopagans that builds a case for a unique philosophy of history proposing that literacy and patriarchy walk hand-in-hand.

In this revealing book, Leonard Shlain leads us through the muddy waters of prehistory, starting with the linguistic developments of hunter-gatherers, then works through cuneiform, hieroglyphs, into the historic development of the alphabet. He thoughtfully proposes: To understand the process of history, you must understand the process by which 'history' is written, and to do so, you must analyze the process of writing and reading itself.

Shlain's philosophy of history reflects the synthesis of two popular theoretical premises:

1. The right brain/left brain cognitive theories proposed by recent research in neurophysiology, and
2. The communications theories of Marshal McLuhan, suggesting that: 'The Medium is the Message'.

Combined together, this synthesis of ideas offer us a unique perspective on the development of literacy and its impact on the evolution

of patriarchal systems.

Goddess worship, feminine values and women's power depend on the ubiquity of the image. God worship, masculine values and men's domination of women are bound to the written word ... Whenever a culture elevates the written word at the expense of the image, patriarchy dominates.

While much of this ideology borrows heavily from modern feminist thought, I've not seen it stretched so tightly onto one frame of reference. *The Goddess and the Alphabet* has a single-mindedness of purpose that doesn't allow for much straying off the path.

Shlain shares with us the literary lives and written culture of the Hebrews, Greeks, Indians, Chinese, Romans ... right through to the early Christian church, Augustine, Islam, and the seminal invention by Gutenberg with its impact on the development of Protestantism.

The dique that controls the flow of information in any given culture inevitably gains mastery over the other classes. History would subsequently provide repeated examples of the quill's superiority over the blade.

Leonard marches us through the ages at an engaging stride, century-by-century through what we know of history. It is, however, a pleasant journey. His words beckon with compelling interest, faltering only once or twice in pulling you forward through time. Literate folks will enjoy its breezy and polished style.

But don't expect a spiritual analysis. Shlain shapes his message for a popular audience, not towards one either oriented to Neopaganism or one spiritually attuned to the divine nature of the Goddess Herself.

It's hard to dispute the sheer volume of research that Shlain packs into 464 pages. While many of the historical periods he covers lie outside of my own studies, the historical eras of which I have some awareness seem to be handled in a relatively fair, if somewhat selective fashion. And although later chapters in the book cross some historical boundaries rather



awkwardly, I have some forgiveness of detail over the sheer weight of the material Shlain brings forward.

I also find it interesting that this book was written by a man, because it offers a unique male analysis of patriarchy. And I would be very interested to hear comments on his theory from a feminist perspective.

The written word issues from linearity, sequence, reductionism, abstraction, control, central vision and the dominant hand—all hunter/killer attributes. Writing represented a shift of tectonic proportions that fissured the integrated nature of gatherer/hunter communication and brain cooperation. Writing made the left brain, flanked by the incisive cones of the eye and the aggressive right hand, dominant over the right. The triumphant march of literacy that began five thousand years ago conquered right-brain values, and with them, the Goddess. Patriarchy and misogyny have been the inevitable result.

My major disappointment with *The Goddess and the Alphabet* is structural in nature. While the title suggest that this book provides an analysis of Goddess-inspired imagery, Shlain only delivers a study of the written word. The book carefully develops the impact of alphabetic literacy upon culture, yet contains a surprising absence of any discussion on the development of visual literacy. Shlain has not persuaded me that the loss of visual literacy is the direct consequence of the increase in alphabetic literacy.

With such a large body of work on the subject to draw from, you would expect *The Goddess and the Alphabet* to provide better analysis of well-dated visual imagery relating to the Goddess. Aside from his dismissal of the work of Marija Gimbutas and a short reference to Egyptian visual hieroglyphics, Shlain appears strangely silent on the issue of Goddess imagery. The structural analysis of historic visual artifact has been well developed in the academic fields of art history, communications theory and anthropology. There is an extensive body of academic work dedicated to 'visual lit-

eracy' and the conventions of form, mass, line, texture and symbol developed over millennium in multiple cultures, as well as the 'cinematic literacy' that western culture has developed to adapt non-linear imagery along linear paths.

The entire field of oral history is also left out of Shlain's analysis, an important omission because words meant to be spoken, recited or sung offer us an experience and historic point of view far different than that of the word written specifically to be read.

Songs are history too, and not always written down at their creative initiation. In many indigenous, pre-literate traditions, a song is owned by the family who created it and can offer outside cultures insights into the deeply sacred as well as historic nuances of cultures with strong ties to earth-based and Goddess-centered spirituality. Much of this 'soft history' falls directly on the altars of The Goddess.

I also think Shlain missed an opportunity to offer us more perspective on the key shifts in human consciousness provided by spoken language itself. I would have liked more of his speculations on the development of spoken language by the hunter on his hunting technique—and the gatherer on her gathering knowledge.

For literate Neopagans, however, this is a book that offers an interesting intellectual challenge. For as we rely on "history" to conduct our research on the Old Religion, we bump into the dilemmas and prejudices of the written word itself.

Our studies bring us into contact with the unwritten initiation ceremonies of indigenous people, the nature of "sacred sight", "truths" that are flexible over time, and all the academic examination of the interrelationship between art and religion among preliterate peoples.

The Biblical scholarship in *The Goddess and the Alphabet* certainly gives us much to contemplate, and will add a powerful voice in the contemporary discussions Neopagans have with

religious fundamentalists—Christian, Judaic and Islamic. For this item alone, Shlain's book will prove valuable for the Neopagan community.

How did a landless, powerless, nomadic people, wandering in a dusty, rock-strew environment, come to two such ideas (monotheism and a code of morality that stands above human intercourse) by themselves? The key is that Yahweh expected all His chosen people to read what He had written. To mandate this new approach to religion, He forbade anyone from visualizing any feature of His person or from trying to imagine all forms of another god. From Sinai forward, He proscribed the making of all images— He sanctioned only written words. It is not mere coincidence that the first book written in an alphabet is the Old Testament. There is none earlier.

While Shlain's scholarship is comprehensive and revealing, I propose that the link between literacy and patriarchy is still a theory-in-progress. I believe that the other half of Shlain's equation—the visual half—hasn't been written yet, so we can't say that the corollary of his thesis is true.

Let us also note that, although Shlain's title suggests a connection to Goddess scholarship, it does not make any steps forward in the unveiling of the Goddess and the myriad of ways by which She reveals Herself to us. It does, however, do a pretty fair job of proposing how patriarchy works. And why.

While the social history of the world may not pirouette so gracefully around literacy as Leonard Shlain suggests, much of the official written accounts of history do. And for those of us who employ words in the service of our trade, I believe we are made better managers of our own words by understanding the deeply inherent biases of the written word itself.

As you contemplate the history of literacy outlined in *The Goddess and the Alphabet*, you may also come to realize that there's very little magic in much of the Western literary tradition.

Literacy is, alas, only words.

READERS' FORUM  
*continued from page 3*

and 'hokum'. This is not the language of either objective scholarship or dispassionate journalism. I doubt that Ms Eller would write an article on new biblical scholarship and then dismiss Jewish theology or Christian mythology as "bunk". I doubt that the *Atlantic Monthly* would publish her if she did. In today's world, people of good will of every religion are striving for tolerance, understanding, and sensitivity to other traditions. By resorting to religious attacks under the guise of scholarly critique, Ms Allen demeans herself and your magazine.

*Starhawk*

*Author of The Spiral Dance*

MICHAEL YORK RESPONDS:

Having read Charlotte Allen's "The Scholars and the Goddess" and then Starhawk's response letter, I found the latter cogent and carefully worded. But then, having re-read Allen's *Atlantic Monthly* article, I am no longer convinced that it merits the attack it has received. I believe a careful reading of Allen reveals an argument that is balanced and, rather than hostile, is surprisingly favourable to Wicca. While Starhawk argues that Goddess spirituality is "based on experience, on a direct relationship with the cycles of birth, growth, death and regeneration in nature and human lives," Allen ends her article with a lengthy quotation from 'Diotima Mantinea': "It doesn't matter to me how old Wicca is, because when I connect with Deity as Lady and Lord, I know that I am connecting with something much larger and vaster than I can fully comprehend. ... This personal connection with Deity is what is meaningful. For me, Wicca works to facilitate that connection, and that is what really matters." If Allen intends to produce a "religious

**STARHAWK ... ASSUMES THAT IF ONE CRITICISES ANY ASPECTS OF A RELIGION, THIS AUTOMATICALLY AMOUNTS TO A RELIGIOUS ATTACK. BUT ALLEN IS CAREFUL TO DIRECT HER ATTENTION TO "THE WICCAN NARRATIVE" AND NOT THE PRACTICE, EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF THE RELIGION.**

attack," why end with this citation?

It increasingly seems to me that Starhawk wants to have her cake and eat it too. She assumes that if one criticises any aspects of a religion, this automatically amounts to a religious attack. But Allen is careful to direct her attention to "the Wiccan narrative" and *not* the practice, experience and meaning of the religion. Her critique centres on (1) the foundational story concerning a pre-patriarchal egalitarian culture, (2) the assumption that witches have "a history of persecution exceeding even that of the Jews," and (3) the question of polytheism. She delineates an emerging scholarly consensus (Hutton, Davis, Eller, Meskell, Hodder, Lefkowitz) that casts archaeological and historical doubt on all these elements of the narrative. But Starhawk seems to infer that because Allen produces the Catholic page on Beliefnet and has written a book on Christ, she and her conclusions must be suspect. Nevertheless, Allen acknowledges that "Wiccans appear to be accommodating themselves to much of the emerging evidence concerning their antecedents ... [and] are coming to view their ancient provenance as inspiring legend rather than hard-and-fast history." It seems to me that Starhawk, in her own words, says the same.

But Starhawk's argument against Allen

rests nevertheless on some dubious points. She objects to having been quoted "at length from the [highly significant and influential] book I wrote over twenty years ago." But this is the name of the game. Often our words—especially when written—come back to haunt us many years later. It is a risk we all take when we commit anything to writing, and the critical feedback that continues to spring at us is something we must be willing to accept and engage with candidly. Moreover, Allen includes complaints made by Starhawk "[in] her introduction to a new edition of *The Spiral Dance*." Nevertheless, for Starhawk, Allen's "use of perjorative terms such as 'bunk' and 'hokum'" reveal her own bias and are "not the language of either objective scholarship or dispassionate journalism." But what Allen actually says is this: "... despite all the things about it that look like [not "is"] hokum: it gives its practitioners a sense of connection to the natural world and of access to the sacred and beautiful within their own bodies." And the concluding words of 'Diotima Mantinea' are simply prefaced by how "[she] summed up her feelings on the debunking of the official Wiccan narrative ..." Starhawk's shift here is disingenuous and not commensurate with her own status. [The use of the term 'bunk' in the article's subtitle is obviously the pub-

lisher's ploy and not the author's.]

The real heart of the disagreement between Starhawk and Allen probably concerns Marija Gimbutas, and Starhawk's financial commitment to a film about Gimbutas may only complicate matters. My own connection with Gimbutas stems from a shared interest in Indo-European origins and a shared Lithuanian ancestry. I was in fact literally writing a letter to her that began by deploring the bleak outlook for our ancestral country when the news came over the radio that Lithuania had just gained independence from the Soviet Union. This dramatic timing has always given me a feeling of unique connection with the remarkable lady. And, certainly, there is a virtual unanimous agreement among scholars concerning the excellence of Gimbutas' earlier archaeological work. Her concluding works, by contrast, are a different, more questionable and more contentious matter. Starhawk resolves the matter by saying that Gimbutas' theories and the ancient images she presents are "valuable" and thereby skirts over the question of whether they are true or not. Truth and value, however, are two different and often separate things, and each, since the days of the Sophists, Socrates and Plato, may be prioritised by different peoples differently. Allen is talking about the one; Starhawk, the other.

Personally, and as a part of a beleaguered polytheistic minority that tends to feel that Wicca and Goddess spirituality have largely appropriated the term 'pagan', I liked Allen's brief paragraph on polytheism best of all. But for Starhawk, "She utterly misses the point that we are polytheists, now, today," but there is no further explanation on how this is so, and then two sentences later proclaims that the term 'polytheistic' comes "out of a framework that actually makes no sense to us." In response to Starhawk's water

analogy (is it one or many?), I will argue that the Nile is not Niagra nor Lake Michigan the Mediterranean unless one wishes to throw out locality and difference altogether. At the world's theological roundtable, the pagan position of polytheism has been too long absent, and I do not feel that the muting influence of currently popular bitheistic understandings are completely helpful. The development of the notion of a Great Goddess has for me been best articulated by Hutton, but, like all scholars, he too can make mistakes. He tells Allen, for instance, that "The equinoxes seem to have no pagan festivals behind them ..." This is untrue—as any close examination of the March celebrations in the ancient Roman festival calendar will reveal.

To conclude, I want simply to say that I feel that Starhawk in her own way has probably done more singlehandedly to promote the expansion of understanding deity as a direct relationship embodied in the natural cycles than anyone else in contemporary times. I applaud and totally agree with her that divine images are portals to the otherworld and its dynamics of death and regeneration. And I would certainly walk with her in approaching everyday miracles both practically and with a sense of awe, wonder and gratitude. But she is not God (double entendre intended) and can make mistakes. Shooting too quickly from the hip—especially without truly sizing up and assessing the target—does not help the cause.

*Michael York  
Bath Spa University College*

**MAGLIOCCO REPLIES TO GRIMASSI**

Thank you for allowing me to respond to Raven Grimassi's rejoinder to my article on witchcraft, folk magic and healing in Italy in *The Pomegranate* 13. It is a rare privilege for an anthropologist to engage in this kind of

... STREGHERIA AS DESCRIBED BY RAVEN GRIMASSI IS LARGELY A MODERN ITALIAN-AMERICAN CONSTRUCTION BASED ON A PARTICULAR INTERPRETATION OF THE PAST, RATHER THAN AN ARCHAIC RELIGION SURVIVING AS AN ORGANIZED CULT FROM ANCIENT TIMES.

open discussion of her work with members of her field community, and I am deeply appreciative of this opportunity.

I had the pleasure of meeting with Raven Grimassi during the summer of 2000, unfortunately after the final draft of my article had already been submitted to *The Pom*. He was very gracious and helpful to me. From information he revealed during our interview, I can say with reasonable certainty that I believe him to have been initiated into a domestic tradition of folk magic and healing such as I describe in my article. In addition, his mother, whom I have not yet had the pleasure of interviewing, seems to be an active bearer of Italian folktales, some of which involve the personification of astronomical phenomena. Similar folktales have been documented by Italian folklorists in archives dating back to the beginning of the 19th century. These tales, and the folk healing traditions in his mother's family, are undoubtedly of some antiquity, although dating them precisely is difficult if not impossible. But the Stregheria of Mr Grimassi's books differs markedly from the family traditions he described in our interview. Mr Grimassi, as an active bearer of his tradition, has introduced many new elements and interpretations to adapt the traditional material to a more contemporary context, ensuring its survival, at least in some form. In

this aspect, he is working as an innovator within his folk magical tradition. Innovation and re-interpretation are important parts of the process of tradition without which folklore would never be able to adapt to new cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that Stregheria as described by Raven Grimassi is largely a modern Italian-American construction based on a particular interpretation of the past, rather than an archaic religion surviving as an organized cult from ancient times.

Instead of arguing Mr Grimassi's points specifically, I would like to explain to readers why he and I have such different interpretations of the same data. My analysis is based on a contemporary academic approach known as 'social constructionism,' in which categories that people tend to take for granted as existing in some 'natural' way, such as race, nation, ethnicity, or even tradition, can be regarded as 'inventions,' in the sense of "widely shared, though intensely debated, collective fictions that are continually reinvented" (Werner Sollors, ed, *The Invention of Ethnicity* 1989: xi). Social constructionism does not deny the existence of real differences between social and cultural groups; instead, it sees social differentiation as emerging from very particular sets of cultural, historical and political conditions. History is never just a matter of facts; it is always

constructed based on current social, political and cultural interests. Whenever I hear essentialist claims such as those made by some contemporary Witches and Pagans (e.g. "Our traditions stretch back in an unbroken line to the ancient Druids/ Etruscans/ Vikings/ etc"), I start looking at how that historical link is being constructed, and I ask why this particular construction is being applied now, under this particular set of cultural conditions.

I apply the same set of questions when I look at historical sources. Compare, for instance, Mr Grimassi's interpretation of Francesco Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608) with my own. In Guazzo's descriptions of an organized witch cult, Mr Grimassi sees evidence of the existence of such a cult in Italy in the early 1600's. When I look at the same data I see the cultural construction by members of the Italian elite (the Catholic clergy and its supporters among the upper classes) of a classic 'subversion myth,' in which members of a real or imagined social group are accused of performing unspeakable acts and blamed for the existence of societal problems. Using Guazzo as evidence of the historical reality of the witch cult seems to me akin to using Jack Chick comics as evidence that contemporary Witches are part of a vast Satanic conspiracy. Anthropologists, folklorists and historians tend to take into account the particular bias of the narrator when evaluating historical sources, which is why we look with skepticism at the survivalist claims of Charles Godfrey Leland, J.B. Andrews, and Lady Vere de Vere. These individuals were wedded to a survivalist paradigm which saw in European folklore the remnants of ancient, 'primitive' practices. Survivalism ultimately worked to keep the elites in power by disenfranchising the beliefs and practices of the peasant and working classes, even as it appeared to romanticize them.

It is exactly this survivalist attitude which

many Italians encountered upon emigrating to North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their rich folk traditions were interpreted as savage survivals by the American Catholic clergy, as well as by social workers, teachers and others of the dominant class, who saw it as part of their duty to 'civilize' these 'uncouth' immigrants. Under the influence of this social stigma, many Italian folk magical traditions were lost. Raven Grimassi's Stregheria represents, I believe, 'folklore reclamation': an attempt to reclaim, albeit in new cultural circumstances, aspects of a folk tradition previously interrupted. Folklore reclamation generally signals a break with tradition and the deep-seated need to erase that break from collective memory, or at least make it more palatable. It is in this context that Grimassi's elaborations on Italian folk magic must be understood. Moreover, this reclamation is taking place as the status of Italian-Americans is changing in North American culture. Once reviled as the newest wave of unacculturated immigrants, many have now become part of the middle classes, and are the targets of hostility from newer immigrant groups who see them as white oppressors. On the other hand, the projection of historical categories into contemporary nationalisms has allowed other European ethnics to vilify Italian-Americans as the descendants of imperial Romans, responsible for the destruction of Celtic and Germanic cultures. The discourse of Witchcraft allows Italian-Americans and other European-American ethnics to create identity in part by aligning themselves against the dominant cultural and religious paradigms and with oppressed minorities. This is a vitally important phenomenon deserving of scholarly attention and cultural recognition.

Sabina Magliocco  
California State University, Northridge

## GRIMASSI REPLIES TO MAGLIOCCO

First, I would like to thank Sabina Magliocco for what I regard as several personal compliments in her letter of reply. Although we have different views on the subject of Witchcraft, I respect her academic approach and admire her character. Prof Magliocco suggests that my writings on witchcraft belong to the “sacred” rather than the academic/historical arena. Admittedly, I do not confine my research to the terms of the accepted methodology employed by modern scholars. However, I would not agree that the background material I extract from the literature on witchcraft is of no historical value. I also see value in the material gathered by such folklorists as J.B. Andrews, Lade Vere, Roma Lister and Charles Leland. These folklorists independently investigated Italian witchcraft in Naples, Florence and Rome and discovered essentially the same beliefs and practices despite the regional differences of custom and dialect. To me this seems significant and requires careful consideration.

As Prof Magliocco noted, we had the opportunity to meet and discuss the Italian tradition I learned over the years from my mother and my Italian relatives. Much of what I discussed with Sabina Magliocco is different from my published material, which Prof Magliocco acknowledges in her letter. The chief reason I do not present this material in my books is due to the fact that my family tradition is intensely personal to me. Therefore I have been unable to bring myself to subject it to the dispassionate critical analysis of scholarly examination. Likewise, I am extremely reluctant to allow it to become fodder for the mean-spiritedness that has become the earmark of many Internet Pagan and Wiccan chat rooms/lists. As I pointed out in the introduction to my book *Italian Witchcraft / Ways of the Strega*, the material I present in public is a modern system based upon an old tradition

mixed with some Wiccan elements. Therefore I have little disagreement with Prof Magliocco regarding her assessment of my published material.

Sabina Magliocco has pointed out that we interpret the same data differently and I would agree that often this is the case. The writings of Francesco Guazzo are one example. Prof Magliocco views such works as the *Compendium Maleficarum* as a “subversion myth” orchestrated by the “Italian elite” to explain the social ills of the time. I agree and then take it one step further, seeing the willful denigration of an existing subculture consisting of herbal healers, enchanters, and diviners. To clarify my position, I certainly do not believe that accounts such as Guazzo’s are in whole an indication of what witchcraft was actually like during this era of history. But as it has been said that the best lies are based upon the truth, I view the contemporary lore regarding witches mentioned by Guazzo as being the available foundation upon which was built the creative misinformation generated by Church and State concerning witchcraft as a whole. Therefore I believe that references to such things as the use of beech wood wands, for example, are likely remnants of actual folk magic practices of the times. It seems doubtful at best that the Church would manufacture fake trivia of this sort when the political goal was something much greater. Reasonably the best way for the Church and State to proceed was to incorporate the available folklore/witch lore and folk magic of the times into the fabric of the greater cloth of deception. Therefore, I would be reluctant to regard such works as the *Compendium Maleficarum* as being of no value to us regarding magical and ritual concepts of the era. If indeed a witch cult existed during Guazzo’s era, it is likely to have incorporated some of the folk magic and folk practices of the day. It is for this reason that I examine the minutia contained in all literary sources deal-

## SCHOLARS POINT TO MODERN WITCHCRAFT AS SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FROM ANCIENT WITCHCRAFT. THIS IS TRUE, AND THE DISSIMILARITY HERE IS DUE TO EVOLUTION, WHICH IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM FABRICATION OR RE-INVENTION.

ing with witchcraft.

For a cult that supposedly never existed there remains an extraordinary consistency of theme in the literature on witchcraft that spans over 2500 years from the era of Hesiod and Homer to modern times. One of the allegations made by scholars is that one cannot equate ancient witchcraft with modern witchcraft because modern Witches present themselves as “good” and historically witches have always been portrayed as evil. This has always stuck me as similar to saying that modern humans can have no connection to “cave men” because contemporary humans are civilized by comparison. Scholars point to modern Witchcraft as something entirely different from ancient witchcraft. This is true, and the dissimilarity here is due to evolution, which is something different from fabrication or re-invention. To many scholars a lack of evidence equates to non-existence, and many use this to maintain what, at best, might be described as their personal doubts. In closing, it is interesting to note historian Peter Kingsley’s comment in *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*: “Academically, doubt is a virtue. It is wise to be cautious, virtuous to allow for different points of view. The problem arises when this attitude hardens: then doubting becomes a certainty in itself, and we forget the importance of doubting our doubt.”

Raven Grimassi  
San Diego CA

## DIZEREGA ON STAUDENMAIER

Peter Staudenmaier’s “Fascist Ecology” serves a useful purpose by alerting many Pagans and environmentalists to the shadow side of environmental thinking. Much as we may love Nature, our love does not automatically give us moral superiority over others. Unfortunately, this pretty much sums up the article’s positive contributions. In my opinion, the author’s analysis contains logical, philosophical, and historical errors, and advances an agenda that appears hostile to certain spiritual values.

What Staudenmaier terms “ecofascism” is in fact “eco-Nazism.” Fascism today has lost most of its original meaning, serving mostly as an epithet, and Staudenmaier begins by criticizing the popular misuse of this term. During the period under discussion in this article, Fascism referred to a specific ideology, rooted mostly in Italian thought. Fascism itself was *not* environmentally oriented, nor did it consider race a biological category. Many Italian Jews were members of the Fascist Party. Nazis, by contrast, were deeply committed to a biological conception of race. Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, and others were forever excluded from membership in the German *Volk*. No such thing as “ecofascism” ever existed.

If one were to eliminate all references to race, German, or *Volk*, from Staudenmaier’s description of German environmental

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thought, we would read views with which we could often agree. But racism and anti-Semitism existed independently of environmental thought, as well as of any mystical conceptions of Nature. Staudenmaier admits as much in his descriptions of Goebbels and Goring as anti-environmental. They were certainly Nazis.

If Staudenmaier used the term eco-Nazism, readers would have been alerted to the fact that the worst crimes of the Nazi regime had nothing to do with environmentalism and everything to do with racism. Its complete inapplicability to contemporary environmentalism would be obvious. But this would detract from Staudenmaier's reasons for writing this piece. In my opinion, Staudenmaier's real target is *contemporary* environmentalism, particularly its Deep Ecological and Neopagan dimensions. He emphasizes the "irrational," "neo pagan," and "mystical" elements of German environmentalism as the central reasons why many Germans embraced Nazi ideology. As he writes: "the displacement of any social analysis of environmental destruction in favor of mystical ecology served as an integral component in the preparation of the final solution." (18) He contends that "the substitution of ecomysticism for clear-sighted social-ecological inquiry has catastrophic political repercussions." (19)

Only at the most superficial level is this

true. In fact, the Weimar Republic faced a uniquely hostile environment, one in which many millions of Germans disliked both it and the liberal democratic values for which it stood. Even so, a Nazi triumph was never foreordained. A tragic record of stupidity and wishful thinking played a decisive role in Hitler's rise to power.

But there is a deeper error in Staudenmaier's analysis. He emphasizes that the Nazi environmentalists disliked science and cities, suggesting this animus towards modernity helped lead them to Nazism. Absent is any reference to the other totalitarian movement of the time: Marxism-Leninism, which explicitly *endorsed* modernity, cities, factories, science and all the rest. Marxism-Leninism also emphasized the evils of capitalism and the necessity of "correct" social analysis. It also led to mass murder and other equally catastrophic political repercussions.

Obviously, anti-modern romanticism is not uniquely prone to totalitarianism, for it also appealed to people who would have endorsed everything Staudenmaier writes that is critical of German environmentalists. Perhaps what is missing here is a discussion of democratic liberalism, an ideology emphasizing democracy, peaceful politics, individual rights, and toleration. Totalitarian horrors do not arise in a liberal culture. Where a culture is not liberal, it is prone to such excesses, whether in the name of

modernity and science or Nature and the countryside. Nazism, Fascism, and Marxism-Leninism all attacked liberalism for its various alleged failings.

Today's Western environmentalists are overwhelmingly in favor of the expression of liberal democratic culture and values. In almost every case they endorse individual rights, political freedom, and tolerance of a diversity of views. Nor are they racists, biological or otherwise. Even if we worship the Goddess.

Staudenmaier, and Janet Biehl, his co-author, are advocates of "social-ecology," a variety of left-wing thought rooted in the work of Murray Bookchin. Bookchin has frequently employed the "eco-fascist" epithet to Deep Ecologists and Biehl has attacked eco-feminism for the "irrationality" of Goddess worship. Staudenmaier's is simply another, albeit more temperate, attack on deep ecology and Nature religion. I have extensively criticized Bookchin's so-called "social ecology" in the name of both liberalism and Deep Ecology, and I am posting this article on my web site <[www.dizerega.com](http://www.dizerega.com)>. Check it out in the Ecology section. My essay "Deep Ecology and Liberalism" is also worth a look in this regard, as is "Nature Religion in the Modern World" in the Spirit section.

*Gus diZerega  
Whitman College*

#### GALLAGER ON STAUDENMAIER

The Staudenmaier article printed in Issue 15 of *The Pomegranate* may have raised some hackles in our nature-revering Pagan community, but it does raise some valuable and legitimate points in relation to current strands in the environmental movement. The article makes it clear from the outset that it refers to strains within the political culture of environmentalists as 'marginal'. I

agree with Staudenmaier that this demands our attention—provided that we keep within a proper perspective.

My own research on racism in the movement in Britain has taken me into some odd places, and it is true to say that the emphasis on Blood and Soil into early antecedents of environmentalism is still alive and well, and classing itself as Green. Moreover, environmentalists not necessarily classing themselves as Right Wing or even vaguely conservative are sometimes found making strange avowals about the relationship between human and non-human nature that link directly to the historical strands of the movement described in Staudenmaier's article. I have heard population control proposals from Greens that are so frankly racist that it makes my palms itch.

Luckily, I practice, as far as I am able to, non-violence, apart from a sharp tongue, and those making the proposals have lived to blush another day. More worryingly, I have experienced alarming correlations made between Blood and Soil ideologies and Paganism—by people professing themselves to be Pagan.

Staudenmaier's references to the notions of 'nature law' and 'natural order' are particularly relevant to the main concerns of the article—and to issues that should, hopefully, concern those of us keen to distance ourselves from the type of chauvinism and bigotry this framework so often supports. The application of 'natural law' to the way that humans relate to each other in society is often found to be applied as the basis of analysis and the solution to social ills by those who fail to see that humans' perception of nature is, itself, profoundly socially constructed. Therefore, this reference to what happens 'in nature' can be used to justify the use of 'might is right', the separation of the so-called 'races' (though no biological

THE APPLICATION OF 'NATURAL LAW' TO THE WAY THAT HUMANS RELATE TO EACH OTHER IN SOCIETY IS OFTEN [PROPOSED AS] THE SOLUTION TO SOCIAL ILLS BY THOSE WHO FAIL TO SEE THAT HUMANS' PERCEPTION OF NATURE IS, ITSELF, PROFOUNDLY SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED.

basis for difference of 'race' exists), and supports the notion of the 'survival of the fittest'. It is this last, distorted interpretation of animal survival and evolution, that has helped to fund ideologies that enable the mistreatment and eradication of peoples deemed not to be fit enough for society. In the past, this has included gays, blacks, Asians, Gypsies, political dissidents and Jews. Another tendency supported by the legacy of environmentalism's history is that of some 'Deep' ecologists, whose tendency towards the 'oneness' of human and non-human nature has led them to conveniently overlook the differences of privilege, access to basic resources and abilities between humans.

What Pagans might quite rightly take exception to in Staudenmaier's stand against ecofascism is his implication (and I stress implication rather than outright statement) that any form of mysticism associated with nature is automatically about 'Oneness' in the sense that he describes as 'fatal'. In this, he is perhaps no more culpable than many others in the business of theorizing around environmentalism. Ecofeminists, in particular, have become used to being 'written off' as poor, benighted and puddle-brained New Agers without a political bone between us. We have, in the past, been cast as actually *anti-feminist* and damaging to the cause of

environmentalism by those who generally don't stop to ask what we actually believe in, either spiritually or politically. The stable that Peter Staudenmaier comes from is replete with these sorts of assumptions. Explicit, punctilious and specific in every other way, and exhorting us all to do the same, environmental theorists are sadly lacking in these qualities if the issue of spirituality arises.

However, this should not prevent us from taking the more important points that Staudenmaier's study offers; it behoves us all to consider the implications of some of our pronouncements on Paganism's relationship with nature, in the light of the historical alliance between environmentalism and fascism.

Incidentally, the Thule Seminar is still going, and recruiting over the internet.

*Ann-Marie Gallagher  
University of Central Lancashire*

#### KANTOLA ON CHAOS MAGICK,

I read Dave Green's article in the February 2001 issue with great interest. Comments were solicited from practitioners of chaos magick, but perhaps you'd be willing to hear from adherents to the other religion discussed in his paper: the cult of science.

Mr Green and I are in complete agree-

ment that science and religion can and should peacefully coexist. It is no surprise that science, as a human endeavor, can function as a gateway to numinous experience. The complicated interrelationships and orderly underpinnings of natural phenomena, explicated in detail through careful observation, can certainly serve to underscore the miracle and wonder of the universe within, throughout, and around us. Indeed, in my case, it was my doctoral work in the hard sciences which led me to nature religion and subsequently to neopaganism.

From this perspective, then, it was troubling to see that this article was rooted in and promoted many misconceptions about the practice and observations of science. Perhaps this is not surprising, since the reference list is heavily tilted toward popular works which enliven science through imaginative treatment. Such writings are a joy to read and, at best, are an enticement to delve more deeply into their intriguing topics, but to base scholarship upon them is dicey—akin, perhaps, to Arthurian scholarship which uses *The Mists of Avalon* as a primary text.

For example, Mr Green joins a crowd of writers who invoke the wonderful field of quantum mechanics as something of a metaphysical "free pass", a logical loophole which renders anything and everything possible, a scientifically credible-sounding excuse for bypassing intellectual obstacles. Surely the author appreciates the irony that the truly ultimate "reductionist science" (single particles! single photons! regarding matter and energy solely in mathematical terms!) is used in an attempt to discredit other "reductionist" scientific disciplines.

One of the tenets of quantum mechanics which somehow escapes metaphysical attention is that as the system under study reaches macroscopic dimensions, the behavior converges to the classical (*ie*, Newtonian, "mechanistic") result. "Macroscopic" here means several orders of magnitude smaller than the smallest subcellular structure in your smallest brain cell. Recalling a phrase from Dave Lee quoted in the article, it would make more sense to predict a similarity between the behavior of milkshakes and that of brains, because both are composed of water, fats, sugars and protein, than to predict that your central nervous system is going to manifest any of that groovy behavior described by the math in quantum mechanics.

I could (and would!) quibble all day about details ("science ... justifies ... its most loathesome features, such as the technological features of warfare"). Instead, I'll proudly state that I place my faith, to use Mr. Green's operative word, in the worldview that made possible the computer on which I write, the agriculture that produced my breakfast, the medical technology which saved my daughter's life. Engage in language games however you may; in my view, "Epistemological, ... postmodern and late modern critiques" have "dented the intellectual credibility of science" about as much as a text by Foucault would dent the hull of a 747.

Seekers are invited and encouraged to revel in the Scientific Mysteries. Initiation is available, at moderate cost, at your local college or university. *Modern Physics* by Tipler (Paul A., NOT Frank J.) or *Quantum Chemistry* by McQuarrie are great undergraduate texts and are strongly recommended. Should upper-

MR GREEN JOINS A CROWD OF WRITERS WHO INVOKE THE WONDERFUL FIELD OF QUANTUM MECHANICS AS SOMETHING OF A METAPHYSICAL "FREE PASS", A LOGICAL LOOPHOLE WHICH RENDERS ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING POSSIBLE ...

division chemistry and physics courses which explore quantum mechanics not appear in the curriculum, it's probably not (as the Templum Nigri Solis postulates) because the administrators fear to challenge the orthodox view of the universe, but rather that enrollment is too low for classes with so many hard science prerequisites.

*Angeline Kantola  
University of Washington*

PEARSON ON MURRAY:

For anyone who's interested, I mentioned in my article in *The Pom* #14 that Sylvia Townsend Warner may have read Murray's *Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921). Further research has revealed not only that she had read it, but that she also 'took tea' with Murray just after the publication of *Lolly Willows* and said 'I wish I could be in her (Murray's) coven—perhaps I shall be!' Obviously, that's not evidence that Murray was in, or had, a coven! When Townsend Warner later met up with Virginia Woolf, Woolf asked her how she came to know so much about witches and she replied, 'because I am one!' Proves nothing, but fun nonetheless!

*Jo Pearson*

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