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The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



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The Pomegranate

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

Notes from the Underground

Welcome to the Underworld!

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

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

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

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

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

Persephone (and her minions)

ARADIA and the Revival of Modern Witchcraft

by Chas S. Clifton

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Misreading Aradia

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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an avatar of the
Hindu god Vishnu?*

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

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

Leland anticipated by a generation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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building erected.*

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

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

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

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

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

What did any of us know about even our own black servants in their homes? And the class which corresponds to the Voodoo acts in Tuscany, in opposition — unlike the American — to a powerful national religion [Roman Catholicism] which till of late ruled by the strong hand, and it fears everybody."²²

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aradia and the Modern Craft

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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mused on how odd it
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among folklorists at
the time*

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

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

This may be so; I also think that the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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The GOLDEN ASS of Lucius Apuleius

by Maggie Carew

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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PAGAN DEISM: Three Views

by Margarian Bridger

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft

James R. Lewis, editor

State University of New York Press (SUNY), 1996

Reviewed by Kate Slater

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

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

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

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

So, what insights can we glean from these papers?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*We are a religion shaped by
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scholars our dreams: the way
we wish it could be.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft
James R. Lewis, ed.
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*Our two-bits worth concerning Aidan Kelly:

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

The Pom Editors

We Weren't Going to Publish Interviews, But

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

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

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

P: It looks pretty grand.

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

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

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

P: Which one do you follow?

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

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

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

P: Were you a pagan before you began publishing?

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

P: So you started a magazine.

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

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

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

P: And you flew. Or glided.

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

P: Where did you get the name?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



P: But you kept the name.

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

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

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

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

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

P: What Gods should editors pray to?

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