

## Fritz Muntean Collection

ms150/24/01-08

---

May 1999

# The Pomegranate

No. 08

---

For this and additional works see: <https://vtext.valdosta.edu/xmlui/handle/10428/5112>

**UUID:** 1B7809EC-CDA5-EAAC-4579-8377ABB943F

### **Recommended Citation:**

*Pomegranate* 8 (May 1999). Fritz Muntean Collection. New Age Movements, Occultism, and Spiritualism Research Library. Valdosta State University. Valdosta, GA. <https://hdl.handle.net/10428/5121>

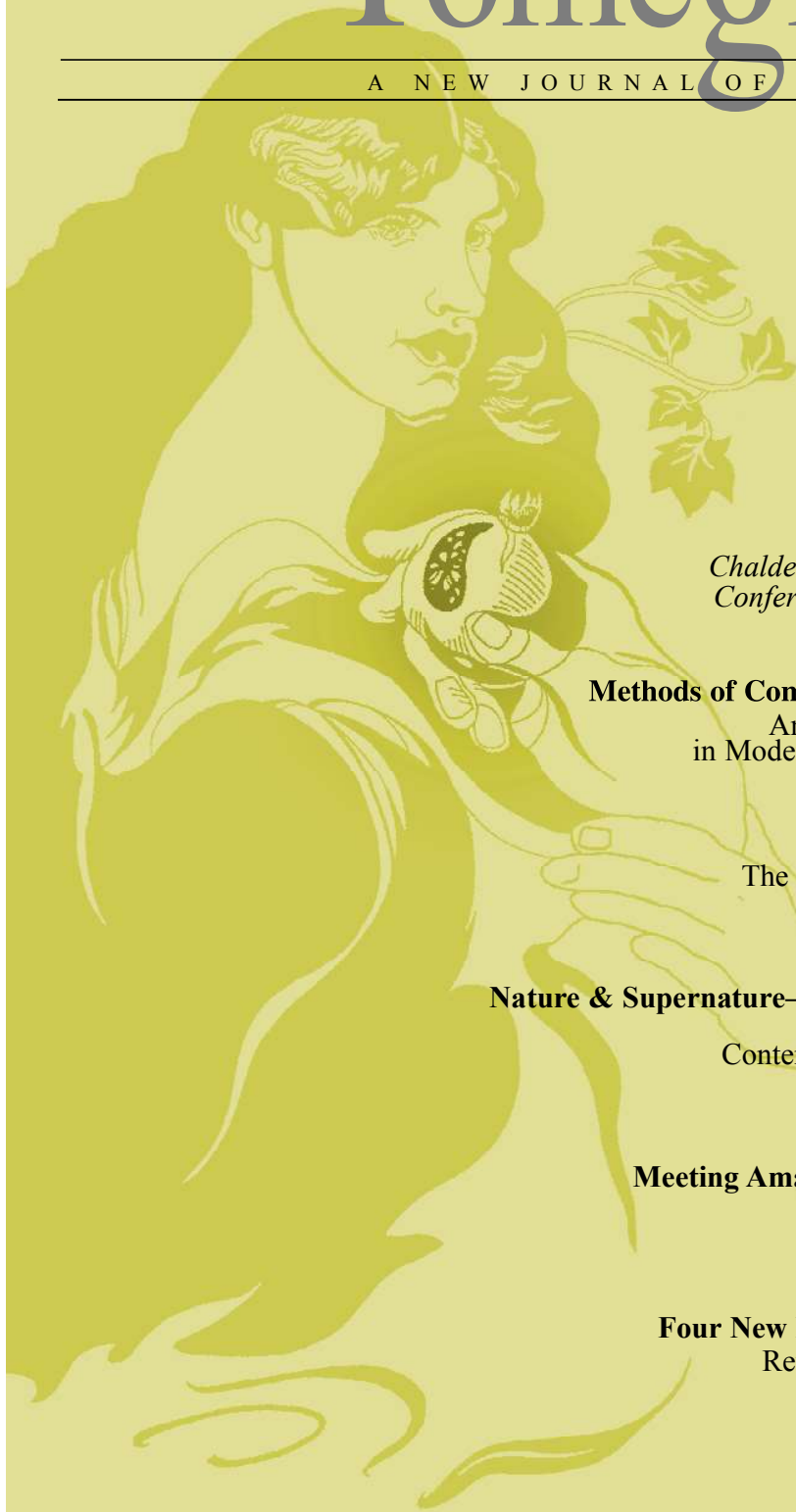
This publishing of this digital asset was granted by Fritz Muntean to the Valdosta State University, Archives and Special Collections to be part of the Fritz Muntean Collection of the New Age Movements, Occultism, and Spiritualism Research Library. If you have any questions or concerns contact [archives@valdosta.edu](mailto:archives@valdosta.edu)

# The Pomegranate

---

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT

---



**Readers' Forum**  
*Chaldean Oracles, Archaeology  
Conference, National Socialism* 2

**Jone Salomonsen**  
**Methods of Compassion or Pretension?**  
Anthropological Fieldwork  
in Modern Magical Communities 4

**Adrian Ivakhiv**  
**Whose 'Nature'?**  
The Transcendental Signified  
of an Emerging Field 14

**Bron Taylor**  
**Nature & Supernature—Harmony & Mastery:**  
Irony and Evolution in  
Contemporary Nature Religion 21

**Workings**  
**Meeting Amatera-Su (and Oya, too)**  
Mira Zussman 28

**Book Reviews**  
**Four New Books about Goddesses**  
Reviews by Asphodel Long  
Daniel Cohen  
Jennifer Gibbons 38

# The Pomegranate

## Copyright

© 1999 *The Pomegranate*. In every case, copyright returns to the authors of articles and letters. Permission to reprint must be granted by these writers, and we will be happy to forward your requests.

*The Pomegranate* is published four times a year at the Cross-Quarters.

## Subscriptions:

4 issues: \$16US — 8 issues: \$30US  
by surface mail anywhere.  
Send US Cash, Money Orders in US funds,  
or Checks drawn on US banks to  
*The Pomegranate*  
501 NE Thompson Mill Rd,  
Corbett, OR 97019  
email: antech@teleport.com

## Deadline:

The Solstice or Equinox preceding each issue.  
Editorial email: fmuntean@unixg.ubc.ca  
See the inside back cover for our Call for Papers. Send to the above address for our Writers' Guidelines, or read it on our website: [www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/](http://www.interchg.ubc.ca/fmuntean/)

## The Cover:

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

## Co-Editors:

Fritz Muntean  
Diana Tracy

Associate Editor:  
Chas S. Clifton

Editorial Board:  
Maggie Carew  
Stephen McManus

Editorial Assistance:  
Melissa Hope  
Siân Reid  
Angeline Kantola

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

## Notes from the Underground

When we changed the typeface and the layout of *The Pom* last issue, we expected that we'd receive compliments or complaints. But we weren't expecting nothing at all—which is what we got. We can either assume that everyone is completely happy with the magazine's new look or that nobody cares. If you do care, or (better yet) if you have suggestions or comments, please let us hear from you.

The first of our feature articles is by Jone Salomonsen, of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo. She addresses the methodological problems facing scholars who do their research within magical communities, in this case San Francisco's Reclaiming Collective. Prof Salomonsen's observations may prove useful (especially in the wake of the controversies surrounding works such as Tanya Luhrmann's *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*) to scholars who are planning research, as well as to the subjects of these studies.

Since 1967, when *Science* magazine published an article by Lynn White suggesting a link between mainstream religion and environmental degradation, there has also been increasing interest in those non-traditional religions which take nature as their sacred or symbolic center. The publication, in 1990, of Catherine Albanese's *Nature Religion in America* has precipitated considerable scholarly discussion of nature religions, including, but by no means limited to, Neopaganism. At last winter's Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, several scholars presented papers in response to Prof

Albanese's book in a session entitled "Nature Religion as a Theoretical Construct: Reflections from an Emerging Field." *The Pom* published one of these papers in our previous issue: Jeffrey Kaplan's biographic sketch of Savitri Devi. In this issue we offer our readers two more, and we hope that both of these articles will spark as much interest and controversy as did Prof Kaplan's article.

## The Pom Sells Out

That's right, at least one of our back issues (#3) has completely sold out, and #4 and 5 are in short supply. Reprinting is expensive and storage space is at a premium, so we're currently favouring the idea of making the entire text of 'sold out' issues available for downloading from our website. Unless we hear objections to this plan, it will most likely be implemented sometime between May and August.

And speaking of selling out, until now *The Pom* has resisted the siren song of the market place by not accepting advertisements. Several of our more experienced colleagues, however, have pointed out that other serious academic journals *do* take ads—from book publishers! So on the last page of this issue you'll see our first ad ever, from Phoenix Publishing, for their landmark new edition of Leland's *Aradia*. Hermes willing, our next issue will include a review of this book by Sabina Magliocco, herself the editor of the recent special issue of *Ethnologies* on Wicca. This magazine, by the way, contains the long-awaited critique by Don Frew of the research of Aidan Kelly and

*continued on page 56*

## The Pomegranate Readers' Forum

Please contribute to our Readers' Forum so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas.

Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended by one or two issues

### Don Frew writes:

Dear Pomegranate,

I was pleased to see Kate Slater's review of Sarah Iles Johnston's *Hekate Soteira* in *The Pom* #7. My own book on Craft origins is looking to the Hermetic and Neoplatonic theurgists of late antiquity, both Roman and Arab, and I have long felt that this area has been strangely ignored by today's Neopagans. As worshippers of the Gods, how can we ignore such striking and inspirational texts as the *Hermetica* and the *Chaldean Oracles*, texts that were believed to be from the Gods' own mouths?

One problem, I think, has been a perception of patriarchal sexism in the texts. Slater alluded to this in her references to the "divine Father" and "transcendent male divinity" in her explanation of the cosmology of the *Chaldean Oracles*. Such language can be very off-putting to modern Neopagans. However, such language is often an artifact of the biases of the translators, rather than of the original authors. For example, in the Brian Copen-

haber translation of the *Hermetica* (Cambridge, 1992), the translator notes that the texts almost exclusively use the Greek word *anthropos* (meaning "all human beings of either gender") to refer to the "Primal Man", while only rarely using the word *aner* (meaning "male persons") (p. 107). At the same time, the texts say of the "Primal Man", "He is androgyne because he comes from an androgyne father..." (p. 3). This would certainly suggest an ambiguity (or inclusivity) regarding the gender of the Divine that is rarely well-communicated in the English translations, which tend to persist in the convention of translating androgynous terms as "man" and "father" and "god". A more enlightened view (to modern sensitivities) is expressed throughout the *Hermetica*, but one has to "dig" a bit to find it. Witness "Asclepius 21" (p. 79):

Do you say that god is of both sexes,  
Trismegistus?  
Not only god, Asclepius, but all things  
ensouled and soulless...

Unfortunately, a tendency on the part of modern translators to favor male nouns and pronouns has made such texts as the *Hermetica* and the *Chaldean Oracles* less accessible to modern Neopagans than they should be.

Slater's explanation of Chaldean cosmology struck me as being a bit jumbled and I couldn't help but wonder if it had been edited somewhat for length. Hermeticism and Neoplatonism are rather exotic to many modern readers and it can be quite difficult to compress a coherent summary down to the length of a book review. Even so, I thought she did an admirable job. I would like to suggest a few places for enthused readers to continue following

this thread.

The first stop would be the *Chaldean Oracles* themselves. An excellent translation by Ruth Majercik is available from E.J. Brill (1989). This edition also includes a very helpful introduction explaining the Chaldean theurgical system and was used by Johnston in writing *Hekate Soteira*. Next, I would recommend *The Goddess Hekate*, edited by Stephen Ronan (Chthonios Books, 1992). This is actually an anthology, reprinting many hard-to-find articles on Hekate (and related entities like Gorgo, Mormo, and Baubo), but the bulk of the book is a long essay by Ronan titled "Chaldean Hekate". Written after the publication of both Johnston's and Majercik's books, it references both and serves as an excellent supplement since Ronan includes fragments of the Oracles that Majercik left out. Ronan also includes new translations of several Hymns to Hekate.

There is a real wealth of amazing material becoming available on the Pagan religions of late antiquity. Johnston's book is a great place to start. Thank you, Kate Slater, for turning folks on to it.

Blessed Be,  
Don Frew  
Berkeley, California

### Ken Lymer writes:

Dear Pomegranate,

I would like to invite you and your readers to attend our conference entitled: *New Approaches to the Archaeology of Art, Religion and Folklore—'A Permeability Of Boundaries?'*

We postgraduates in the Department of Archaeology, Southampton University (UK), are holding a two-day conference on

the 11th and 12th (Sat-Sun) of December 1999. This will provide a forum for post-graduates to present their research to a wider audience. But in the spirit of its title, the conference welcomes papers from other interest groups including established academics, non-academic researchers and followers of different paths. It is our intention to explore the diverse territory between the boundaries of archaeology, art, religion and folklore. In recent years these themes have become more prominent and their boundaries more permeable. Our conference will provide the opportunity for the exploration of these boundaries.

We will explore these themes in four sessions entitled: 1) rock art; 2) archaeology and art theory; 3) images through time; 4) art, religion and magic. We will also have a keynote address by Professor Richard Bradley (noted archaeologist and author of several papers on the cup and ring marks of Britain). The conference will close with an evening debate that will speculate on 'alternative archaeology' and has it truly happened?

Southampton is located in the county of Hampshire. An optional post-conference trip is offered on Monday to the archaeological sites of Hampshire. For those looking to continue on a pilgrimage of 'Merry Olde England', Southampton is not far from Stonehenge, Avebury and King Arthur's round table in Winchester. Southampton is also where the Titanic made its fateful departure from. It is also worth noting,

*continued on page 51*

## Methods of Compassion or Pretension? Conducting Anthropological Fieldwork in Modern Magical Communities.

by Jone Salomonsen

*This article was originally presented as a paper for a round-table discussion at the 97th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Philadelphia December 2-6, 1998.*

Some of the paradoxes of cultural anthropology revolve around whether to take 'indigenous' beliefs seriously or not, and if so, to what extent. I encountered this dilemma during my studies of feminist Witches. On the one hand, there is an ideal that an anthropologist should study her ethnographic field horizontally and from the inside, with an empirical, inductive approach. On the other hand, there is still a fear within the discipline of scholars 'going native', that is, adopting the values, practices and beliefs of those studies to such an extent that one loses the ability to be reflexive about them. Also, to complicate matters, when it comes to religion, the anthropologist should pay homage to the lineage of Feuerbach and deductive, philosophical claims that religion is *only* a human, social construction. Working from and

with several academic and religious traditions simultaneously (anthropology, feminist theology, Witchcraft) I will argue in favor of an alternative *compassionate* methodological approach.

Let me first summarize how I encountered the paradoxes of anthropology through my own studies and fieldwork experiences. In August 1984, I came to Berkeley and the Graduate Theological Union to study pagan goddess spirituality for my Masters Degree. I was a student of theology, enrolled in a Divinity school program at the University of Oslo, but goddess religion was not yet manifesting in Norway. I therefore had to travel to the US.

The community I came to study was the Reclaiming Collective of San Francisco, a well-known feminist Witchcraft community founded in 1979 by Starhawk and her coven-sisters. By 1984 they offered classes, workshops, Witchcamps and public rituals. Many were also active in direct political action, some form of social work and experimental, collective living. However, as a theologian, I had no methodological or theoretical training in studying Witchcraft as a 'lived religion'. I only knew about texts, piled up in libraries and bookstores, waiting to be picked out as precious objects of study. I knew how to study 'this book thing', an object I could hold between my two hands. I did not know how to study people—their various beliefs, ritualizations or claims of personal transformation. Consequently, I was only looking for a consistent narrative, a general belief system that could be represented and

made accessible to some kind of semi-otic analysis. Everything I learned and experienced with the Witches was therefore reduced and converted into 'text', understood as a symbolic system of meaning.

I developed a general narrative of Reclaiming which, I claimed, contained two systems of meaning: feminist *symbols of belief* on one hand and *ritual symbolism* on the other. I perceived these systems to be in ideological conflict. The ritual symbolism and magical practices used by Reclaiming derived more or less from the occult heritage of male secret societies around the turn of the century. Not very feminist, not very progressive. Indeed, I argued, feminist Witches were perpetuating the heavy patriarchal burden of romantic gender essentialism, reducing 'woman' and 'goddess' into feminine counter-images of the essential masculine. My studies were *deductive*: I already had a constructionist, feminist theory at hand and, as I read Reclaiming, I applied theory to the representations made.

In the summer of 1985, I enthusiastically put forth the preliminary results of my research for a group of Reclaiming people. They were eager to hear, some even brought tape recorders so that those absent could also have a part in the sharing. I summarized my deductive research, spelled out the tacit patriarchal notions of European occultism inherent in their symbol system, and stated that Reclaiming Witches were not as radical as they claimed to be. In fact, to a large extent they were only replacing one patriarchal tradition (Judeo-Christian

religion) with another (Western occultism).

When I finished, there was complete silence. Nobody shared my enthusiasm. They were just staring at me, confused and sad. Finally, one male member began to talk. He said that my analysis sounded great, logical and convincing, except that it made him completely depressed. A woman agreed with him and asked: How could it be that feminist Witchcraft was only a reproduction of patriarchal trends in Western esotericism and spirituality when in fact this religious path had changed her life and given a completely new meaning to what it meant to be religious and what it meant to be a woman and have 'a life'? I was struck by her question, because the truth was that Witchcraft had effected not only her life, but mine as well. I was in the process of being religiously recycled.

What was the revitalizing power of feminist Witchcraft that I was not able to catch with my symbolic, textual analysis? It had something to do with the transformative potentials of ritual and the way in which the self was respected and integrated in the community. To focus my study upon the reinvention of feminine and magical symbols was missing the point, although 'goddess' and 'magic' were the headlines through which feminist Witchcraft often drew new people.

To this day, I claim that feminist Witchcraft, in terms of its favorite symbols, is burdened with heavy biological essentialism. But this observation only holds a partial truth. If we are concerned with understanding the

**... American anthropologist Katherine Ewing claims that anthropology participates in an “atheist hegemonic discourse.” This theoretical position prevents the anthropologist from effectively utilizing an inductive analytical approach when confronting magical religion.**  
**... Anthropology has an archaeological interest in magic, but, as a normative discipline it represents modern secular thought. Sociologist Peter Berger asserts that this stream of thought has sought to invalidate the reality of any magico-religious view of the world ...**

*modus operandi* of this religion and why it continues to appeal and ‘change people’s lives’, we must enter its study from a somewhat different angle. A feminist theologian and theoretician must become an anthropologist (and vice versa) and be willing to study this phenomenon from the inside—not from the inside of books but from the inside of lived reality. I had, of course, already touched upon this profound aspect of Witchcraft, but had not used it to elicit knowledge and deep understanding.

This was my pledge when I, in 1988, was admitted to the PhD program at the University of Oslo. I wanted to learn the skills of an anthropologist and return to Reclaiming for a new period, with the intent of conducting fieldwork. I also wanted to conform to the empirical aim in anthropology of interpreting a phenomenon horizontally, in solidarity

with the indigenous points of view and conceptual frameworks, and not from *à priori* theoretical assumptions or philosophies. In other words, I wanted to use an *inductive* methodological strategy, consistent with a hermeneutical approach to reading. This approach moves from text to theory and back to text, assuming that careful reading and listening will eventually disclose from the text its implicit theory about itself: how it is ‘asked’ to be read to make sense. Also, having ‘indulged’ in ethnographic material it becomes less interesting to ‘apply’ external theoretical models—models established on the basis of having read ‘another text’—to explain textual meaning in ‘our text’. It becomes more interesting to ‘extract’ implicit ‘theory’ and ‘models’ from the data itself.

It was then that I confronted the para-

doxical strictures of anthropology. First, a serious student of anthropology must subscribe to the empirical aim of interpreting ethnographic phenomena horizontally, from the inside out. Second, she must agree with the prohibition against indulging the inside too much and promise not to ‘go native’. Third, she must recognize that, in terms of religion, the *à priori* theoretical assumption of her field is that religion is a human projection onto the supernatural of originally social and perfectly natural phenomena. Religion is not also a symbolization of ‘spiritual phenomena’ but always of something else. Religious beliefs are therefore inferior, cognitive representations which, in the era of modernity, both can and should be substituted for superior ones. By subscribing to this thesis, American anthropologist Katherine P. Ewing claims that anthropology participates in an “atheist hegemonic discourse” (Ewing 1994). This theoretical position prevents the anthropologist from effectively utilizing an inductive analytical approach when confronting magical religion.

Thus, anthropologists are permitted to ‘go native’ behaviorally (‘participant observation’), even emotionally (‘empathy’), but not cognitively. This prohibition cannot be explained merely by reference to the necessity for analytical distance from the object studied. The prohibition itself has a normative foundation because the anthropologist is already a native: she has been socialized into the dominant values and cognitive worldviews of Western, scientific culture. As a *descriptive* discipline, anthropology has an archaeological

interest in magic, but, as a *normative* discipline it represents the modern secular thought. Sociologist Peter Berger asserts that this stream of thought has sought to invalidate the reality of any magico-religious view of the world, including that of Witches (Berger 1980:x). A scholar who takes belief seriously and acknowledges that the people studied may know something about the human condition that might be personally valid also for the anthropologist, runs the risk of going native, and thereby the risk of abandonment by the scientific community.

More and more sociologists and anthropologists are opposing this insider-outsider dualism and various other rituals of scholarly detachment, arguing that their only function is to reinforce the dishonest illusion of objectivity. Instead, it is said, we must acknowledge the unavoidability of subjectivity, narrative and emotion when studying ‘other’ human fellows (Rosaldo 1980, Lewis 1980, Daniel 1984, Jackson 1989, Csordas 1994, Foltz & Griffin 1996, Ramsey 1998). I will not object to these more or less post-modernist statements, but point out that we are, again, dealing with the general, with the *à priori*, which only has transformed the scope of the general 180 degrees. For the post-modernist argument is not raised primarily out of *empirical* concerns, from an urge to improve the research process, but rather on the philosophical and epistemological premises that scientific objectivity is a fallacy.

Coming from a field where the presumption is that all scholars are also ‘natives’, which is the case with theology, the question was if I should take

Wiccan beliefs seriously or not in a cognitive, personal sense. It was taken for granted that I would, just as it was expected that I would close my inquiry with some kind of evaluation of their contribution or non-contribution to contemporary, modern theology. In theology, it is not regarded as a fundamental methodological problem to gain personal insights from the phenomenon studied. An insider position does not necessarily blur the objectivity of the descriptions. The situation is rather the opposite; first hand experience may open the possibility to deep insight and the best description possible. Questioning the positivist and conflictual ideology of observer-observed is an inherent part of the discipline of theology. The art or craft of theology is to evolve and deepen religious understanding and compassion in the student, at the same time as she learns the skills of critical analysis and acquires the ability to criticize exactly the same phenomenon that triggers her interest. Thus, if Wiccan beliefs and practices had not triggered any personal interest in me, I would never have chosen them as subject for my studies. From a theological perspective, such a choice would have been a waste of time—unless I wanted to become a religious studies scholar instead, changing my scope and field.

So, when I decided to change my methods from textual to ethnographic studies, and redefine my angle of approach from deductive to inductive, my motivation was not meta-theoretical or post-modernist. I was not motivated by a desire to persuade the academic community of the epistemological errors of the

insider-outsider conflict. No, the methodological calling came from my data, not from my soul or my theoretical positioning. I approached anthropology precisely because I had experienced the inadequacies of my earlier methods: they did not do justice to the material. As a theologian, I had taken Wiccan beliefs seriously in a cognitive sense all along, but not yet in an emotional or experiential sense. It was in order to do so that I embarked upon anthropology and the methods implied by 'participant observation' and 'fieldwork'. As it turned out, however, in order to really gain access to feminist Witchcraft as a lived religion, I also needed to revise the anthropological methods available to me.

Reclaiming Witches identify as modern mystics. Mysticism can be approached textually but, according to Witches, this is not enough. In order to really grasp their beliefs, they insist that the scholar engage in ritual, magic, and trance work as well. The problem is that the notion of 'participant observation' in anthropology does not specify accurately the kind of participation required. The 'social interaction' of this method is often conditioned, and its requested 'direct observation' may easily resemble 'pretension'. Such an attitude obviously belongs to the outsider, to one who enters in order to gather data, but whose first article of belief is a commitment to not 'going native'.

Yet, the main reason it is not enough to conduct fieldwork from

## **In theology, it is not regarded as a fundamental methodological problem to gain personal insights from the phenomenon studied. ... I therefore had to put myself in the position of an apprentice, taking my own experiences seriously, observing the development of my own 'insight', presumably determined by my willingness to put myself under the discipline of magical training ...**

such a normatively chosen 'outside' position is that, in Witches' rituals, covens and classes, there is no 'outside' where an observer can literally put herself. In the practice of modern mystery religions, you are either in, or you are not there at all. In my doctoral studies of feminist Witches, I therefore had to put myself in the position of an apprentice, taking my own experiences seriously, observing the development of my own 'insight', presumably determined by my willingness to put myself under the discipline of magical training and by my abilities for religious imagination, theologizing and engagement in general. Along with, and in parallel to, my redefined studies of Witches, I also became my own informant.

The obvious demands for involvement and subjective experience required from a student of Witchcraft have led to my deliberate choice of the label 'method of compassion' in order to designate this approach. 'Compassion' in this context does not refer to a wholesale positive embracement,

nor to passionate criticisms and arguing, but to something in between: to honesty. It designates an attitude of *embodiment*, in contrast to *disengagement*, and of 'taking belief seriously', both existentially and emotionally. This means leaving behind the anthropological 'method of pretension', which is mainly used in order to gain 'access', be it to rituals, secret knowledge or initiations, and instead take on the attitude that "the subjects of one's research might actually know something... that is personally valid for the anthropologist", as suggested by Katherine P. Ewing (1994:571). On the other hand, when something is taken seriously in a cognitive sense, it may also turn out that the informants do not know something which can be personally valid. A method of compassion is necessarily 'critical', in the sense of being reflexive, since it cannot be effective without continual assessments and evaluations.

The implicit demand for subjective experience and embodied, critical thought in the 'method of compassion', ideally requires a contin-

**To accept those symbols as 'sacred' that to my taste were vulgar, to play with pagan names as if they were 'real names' for divine reality, to let go of criticism and be open to the 'ecstasy' of ritual, to meditate on certain symbols 'until they revealed their esoteric knowledge,' and to grant exception to the belief that this really was impossible— when taken altogether, these are what have been difficult, challenging and rewarding.**

uous going in and out; being merged and being distant, being joined and being separate or, in cultural anthropologist and ritual scholar Ronald L. Grimes' terminology, "a movement between reverence and iconoclasm" (Grimes 1990:137). The 'method of compassion' also means respect for the integrity of the people studied and for myself as well. Anthropologists may, for example, be eager to gain access to esoteric traditions and learn the knowledge of the initiates. But, if religious initiation is accepted entirely against one's own beliefs or solely in order to publish secret knowledge, the acts are incompatible with the ethical agenda of 'integrity'.

My suggested 'method of compassion' for the study of contemporary mystery religions demands that we enter its mystical path as apprentices, experiencing it as real *but without ever forgetting that we are scholars*. By this last point I mean two things. First, we must abandon the luxury of

engaging in only those aspects of the religion which are immediately attractive or intelligible to us. We must dive as deeply into the religion as possible and relinquish the desire to choose from its well only what may suit our own biases. Second, we as scholars are indeed permitted spiritual and personal development from our work, but we may not end up as scholarly converts and proselytizers. Proselytizing and sound academic analysis are two different genres.

The benefits and challenges of becoming my own informant, of simultaneously exercising engagement (vivid participation) and holding a general view (distant observation), applies in particular to the study of ritual. In terms of magical rituals, engagement is important to *understand*, while distance is important to *record* (observe details and remember). Since one of the goals of ritual is to alter the consciousness of *all* the participants through trance work, engagement and distance

are counterproductive. To the extent that I have managed to be involved all through the ritual, I will also come out with an altered consciousness. Engagement is more than participation, and something other than pretending. To allow oneself to become engaged is to take the intent of ritual seriously. It is to be willing to let the trance induction take you into trance, to be willing to be emotionally moved as is intended by certain ritual elements, and go with what then happens. Distance, on the other hand, means observation, remembering the lyrics and symbols used in trance induction, remembering the ritual proceedings step by step, seeing what happens to the other participants, noticing the social interaction, the symbolism, the artifacts, and the movements.

A scholar who wants to be her own informant must be a master of both positions. In practice, this can be attained through repeated participation in the same type of ritual. Through repetition, the skills and competence to participate and be distant at one and the same time are acquired. Ronald L. Grimes argues that it is crucial for any serious student of ritual, not only for students of modern mystery religions, to learn this method. However, this very subjective element marks a limit as to how deeply into a religion of this kind one can get. There is also the uncertainty about where a scholarly project like this will lead, because an innate part of becoming a member of a mystery religion is to make a contract with yourself to change.

The necessity of studying mysticism from a position within is not only part of feminist or theological rhetoric. It was,

for example, argued by a professor in Asian studies at UC Berkeley, Frits Staal, in his book *Exploring Mysticism* (1975). Considering the superficial knowledge one gets from studying yoga when not entering the experience of actually learning yoga, Staal suggests that the academic student of yoga learn it from a guru, but without going native. The way to keep the awareness of being a scholar throughout the period of learning, is—according to Staal—to remember that we have entered the path of yoga to leave it when our learning is completed. We cannot enter it to stay. After leaving the path, Staal designs one of the scholars' tasks to be the development of a language to describe mystical yoga.

I agree that we, as scholars, must enter the path of mysticism in order to develop a descriptive terminology. Nevertheless, Staal's scientific belief in the possibilities of learning to be a mystic by the same will and mental equipment one uses to learn to ski is put forward by an outsider. He does not consider what compassion and the contract to be willing to change—which both are required conditions to actually be able to learn—will actually do to him and his study. Neither does he contemplate how the entrance onto the path of mysticism challenges the ideology of observer-observed and highlights the ethical dilemmas and co-responsibilities of any researcher in regard to actual happenings and processes among the people being studied.

My own experience, when studying the mystery religion of feminist Witchcraft, cannot report on the problems proposed by Frits Staal, namely the



supposed dilemma of moving back and forth between inside and outside and the temptation to 'go native'. To move back and forth between compassion and analysis is not at all the difficult part. But to stay in touch with 'the native's affirmative compassion' is indeed difficult. To accept those symbols as 'sacred' that to my taste were vulgar, to play with pagan names as if they were 'real names' for divine reality, to let go of criticism and be open to the 'ecstasy' of ritual, to meditate on certain symbols 'until they revealed their esoteric knowledge', and to grant exception to the belief that this really was impossible—when taken altogether, these are what have been difficult, challenging and rewarding.

No academic discipline has yet developed an adequate methodology for the study of modern mystery religions because such a task requires a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach. In my case, anthropology has contributed the basic qualitative tools: the tradition of doing field work; participant observation; and the skills of actively listening to 'the other'—including that which we do not like to hear. Theology has contributed with the training of being in two mindsets simultaneously, which means being able to engage in the phenomenon studied, as well as being critical and analytic.

As merely a sociologist or anthropologist, I would never have been admitted to Reclaiming's inner circles. But as a theologian and feminist, I was regarded as a religious being with a personally motivated interest in the subject of my study and, therefore, possessing the necessary qualifications both to understand

and to learn Witchcraft. Without being a co-participant guided by empathy and compassion I would not have been able to conduct my doctoral studies. It is, therefore, my opinion that both theology and anthropology are being challenged by new religious phenomena to radically develop, each in its own terms, as interdisciplinary disciplines.

#### Works cited:

- Berger, Peter. 1980. *The Heretical Imperative*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Csordas T. J. 1994. *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. Cambridge UP.
- Daniel, E. Valiente. 1984. *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*. Berkeley: UC Press.
- Ewing, Katherine P. 1994. "Dreams From a Saint: Anthropological Atheism and the Temptation to Believe." *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 96 (3).
- Foltz, Tanice G. & Wendy Griffin. 1996. "She Changes Everything She Touches": Ethnographic Journeys of Self-Discovery." *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner (eds.), Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.
- Grimes, Ronald L. 1990. *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Jackson, Michael. 1989. *Paths Toward a Clearing*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- Lewis, Gilbert. 1980. *Day of Shining Red*. Cambridge UP.
- Ramsey, Nancy. 1998. "Remembering Who You are and Whom You Represent: Researching Wicca as a Scholar and a Witch." *Circle Network News*. Summer 98, Issue 68.
- Rosaldo, Michelle Z. 1980. *Knowledge and Passion*. Cambridge UP.
- Staal, Fritz. 1975. *Exploring Mysticism*. Berkeley: UC Press.

#### Author's Comments:

Regarding the conflict between symbols of belief and ritual symbolism, between the feminist symbols of belief on one hand and ritual symbolism on the

other, which I mention briefly at the beginning of this paper: it is not resolved, not in Reclaiming, not in any other Neopagan traditions. I believe that it is part of the contradictions embedded in the enterprise of mixing modern and premodern, mixing the consciousness of human rights and its gospel of social constructionism with the belief in a classical model of the nature of magic (for example, as put forth in the pre-Hellenistic, Ionian philosophy of Empedokles and copied by pagan writers and practitioners) that magical powers reveal themselves for real, are real, and determine the nature of reality.

These kinds of conflicts are common to all religions. In my dissertation, I both discuss and disregard these conflicts by emphasizing something else, namely 'the self' in the context of ritual, community, coven(ant) and friendship. Love, affirmation and the ritualized possibilities for creativity, meditation and growth is what changes people's lives—not necessarily the symbols of Goddess and God, nor traditional magical practices, nor worship of the original pagan notions of the nature of reality: the so-called 'nature' of the natural world.

*Jone Salomonsen obtained her PhD in Theology and Cultural Anthropology in 1996 from the University in Oslo, where she teaches in the Faculty of Theology. She holds a three year post doctorate grant from the Norwegian Research Council to research confirmation and initiation rituals for young people. Presently she is a research fellow both at Yale Divinity School and*

*the Center for the Humanities at Wesleyan University. Salomonsen writes and publishes in the areas of feminist spirituality, contemporary Witchcraft and Paganism, ritual studies, Christian theology and feminist theory.*

*She has published in Norwegian on feminist Witchcraft, Neoshamanism and men's mythopoesis, as well as a forthcoming book on rites of passage in the combined contexts of Pagan reinvention, Nordic mythology and liberal Norwegian Lutheranism.*

*Watch for Salomonsen's first book in English, to be published in the Spring of 2000 by Routledge as part of their new 'Gender and Religion' series. A version of her PhD dissertation,*

*Enchanted Feminism: Gender, Identity and Ritual in a Community of Witches (working title) is a combined anthropological and theological study of San Francisco's Reclaiming Community.*

## WHOSE 'NATURE'? Reflections on the Transcendental Signified of an Emerging Field

by Adrian Ivakhiv  
York University

*Invited comments for a panel on "‘Nature Religion’ as a Theoretical Construct,” American Academy of Religion Annual Conference, Orlando, Florida, November 1998*

### ABSTRACT

*Practitioners of ‘nature religion(s)’ and ‘earth spirituality’ often assume that their beliefs and practices bring them into closer alignment with nature and with the rhythms, seasons, forces and/or divinities of the earth. But what exactly is the ‘nature’ that acts as a ‘transcendental signified’ (in Jacques Derrida’s terms) for these forms of religiosity? Recent debates within environmental thought and social/cultural theory, in the broader environmental activist movement, and even in scientific ecology, have shown that the idea of ‘nature’ is a much more diffuse, fractured, and contested site than has previously been assumed. If our concepts of nature are social constructs, as many argue—constructs which have always been defined within and shaped by relations of power among contending social groups, classes, genders, and so on—then to what does the ‘nature’ in ‘nature religion’ (or the ‘earth’ in ‘earth spirituality’) refer?*

The category ‘nature religion,’ defined rather loosely, refers to forms of religious practice which are based on a celebration or worship of ‘nature’ and/or those which are aimed at bringing their practitioners in closer alignment with ‘nature’ and with the rhythms, seasons, forces and/or divinities of the ‘earth.’ As such, ‘nature religion’ is frequently presumed, at least by its practitioners, to be a more ecologically and environmentally benign form of religious practice, and therefore a natural ally of the popular environmental movement.

But environmental thought and scholarship has recently been grappling with a series of questions opened up by poststructuralist, feminist, and postcolonial forms of scholarship; by the emergence of Third World environmentalism and ‘environmental justice’ movements; and by recent developments in ecological science, developments which have questioned earlier concepts of ‘nature’ as balanced and harmonious in favour of a new view that sees nature as dynamic and unpredictable. I will look at the issues raised by each of these developments.

In a sense, the question I intend to raise—in the hope that our consideration of it will enrich our thinking about the category of ‘nature religion’—is, *whose ‘nature’ is being referred to in the term ‘nature religion’?*

### ‘Nature’ in general

In his historical overview of the meanings of ‘nature,’ Raymond Williams calls it “perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language” (1976:219). He traces out three general “areas of meaning” of the word: nature as “(i) the essential quality

**... environmental thought and scholarship have recently been grappling with a series of questions opened up by poststructuralist, feminist, and postcolonial forms of scholarship; by the emergence of Third World environmentalism and ‘environmental justice’ movements; and by recent developments in ecological science, developments which have questioned earlier concepts of ‘nature’ as balanced and harmonious in favour of a new view that sees nature as dynamic and unpredictable.**

and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings” (1976:219). Each of these meanings, or at least the first two, convey the sense that ‘nature’ is a kind of organizing category, referring to something *essential* or *foundational*; and this alone makes its continued currency, in our skeptical and anti-foundational times, something that should interest social scientists. As Neil Evernden argues in *The Social Creation of Nature* (1992:20-21), once we have articulated a concept of ‘nature’ as distinct from ‘all things’ or ‘the world as a whole,’ it becomes possible to speak of some things as *belonging to* nature or being *natural*, and of other things as being *unnatural* (or *supernatural*). ‘Nature’ has therefore come to function as a boundary term demarcating a *primary* realm (which can consequently be elevated

or downgraded) from a *secondary* realm of the ‘human,’ ‘cultural’ or ‘unnatural.’

A genealogy of western concepts of ‘nature’<sup>1</sup> would have to include reference to several distinct models or metaphors that have functioned as images or stand-ins for this idea. Nature has been conceived as a divinely ordained system of norms and rules, rights and obligations; a book to be read, divined, and studied; a motherly female, nurturing and providing for the needs of her children; a body-like organism, whose features mirror those of the human body; a clock-like object or machine, to be studied dispassionately, taken apart, and manipulated for human benefit; a ruthless and harsh kingdom, ‘red in tooth and claw,’ from which humans should distance ourselves through the ‘social contract’ of civilization; a flourishing web of life; a store-house of resources; an Edenic Garden that should be set aside in protected areas, to be visited periodi-

cally for the replenishment of one's soul; a museum or theme park for curiosity seekers, or an open-air gymnasium for trials of masculinity; a cybernetic system or data-bank of circulating information; a spirit or divinity, or a locus for the residence of many spirits; and an avenging angel, capriciously and unpredictably meting out its inhuman justice to a humanity that has transgressed its natural order.

Each of these images carries its own assumptions and histories of social interests and uses. And each leads to divergent understandings of what kinds of action are considered appropriate in relation to nature—ranging from subjugation and domination, classification, measurement, prediction, and management, through to aesthetic appreciation and contemplation, segregation and protection, public 'consciousness raising' and active resistance to or interference with inappropriate activities, and 'letting nature be.'

All of this leads us to ask *which* of these 'natures' is being invoked in the term 'nature religion'—either as it is used by practitioners of or by scholars describing (and, in the process, legitimizing) the said phenomenon? Is it, for instance, the European Romantics' idea of nature as a source of healing, wholeness, purity—the same (more or less) idea that spawned the original nature preservation movement of John Muir? Close scrutiny of the conservation and preservation movements' usage of terms such as 'nature,' 'wilderness,' 'pristine,' 'primeval,' 'virgin' and 'ancient forests,' and the like, has shown that these have all been implicated within social and political agendas, enmeshed within relations of power/knowledge.<sup>2</sup> If 'nature' is motherly and feminine, for instance, does

this not presuppose certain ideas of what women are or should be like? If natural wilderness is to be preserved as a remnant of an 'Edenic garden' from which we have 'fallen,' who is to have access to that wilderness? Are all social groups positioned equally in relation to it? Or are there clear differences, as Giovanna di Chiro (1995:311) suggests, with indigenous peoples and Third World natives (and women) identified as *closer* to it—and therefore expected to behave that way—while 'poor communities of color living in contaminated and blighted inner cities or in the surrounding rural wastelands' are classified as people who are 'anti-nature, impure, and even toxic'?

Apart from such clearly cultural uses of nature imagery, popular environmentalism has drawn on the science of ecology to articulate its ideas of nature. Specifically, since at least the 1960s, environmentalists have made good use of the ecological idea that nature, when left to its own devices, tends towards exhibiting a dynamic balance or equilibrium among species, ideally manifesting in 'climax ecosystems' of maximum diversity (for a given climate), harmony, and stability. From this it has been easy to presume that humans, in an ideal, primordial or 'primal' state, lived in a way that conformed to the lawful regularities of a given ecosystem. Unfortunately, this image of nature has been all but rejected within the ecological science of the last twenty-five years: instead of a 'balance of nature,' the natural world is now seen as a profoundly unstable and nonlinear one, characterized by a ceaseless movement of individual organisms, species and communities, whose overall trajectory is directionless and, in fundamental ways,

unpredictable and 'chaotic.' Even tropical ecosystems—the paragons of nature's flourishing and harmonious 'balance'—have been shown to have undergone extensive climatic and ecological change and to have been influenced for millennia by human beings through hunting and fire.<sup>3</sup> If nature, as ecologists like Daniel Botkin (1990) point out, is always changing and always being re-made by human activities, then how can it function as a 'transcendental signified'—a source of values, direction, and religious inspiration or guidance?

#### 'Nature' in its specificity

The risks of speaking of 'nature' in such generalized abstractions can be minimized if we consider it not as some overarching category, but as the more-than-human life that lives and expresses itself locally, in specific places, in ways we can come to know in our everyday lives. We don't, after all, need an airtight definition of 'nature' to know that certain things (plants, trees, wolves, blood) are more natural than others (cars, cell phones, the Weather Channel). Or that certain ecosystems (such as the Carolinian forest in southern Ontario or the mangrove forests, everglades, and other

subtropical forests and wetlands of Florida) are more 'natural' than skyscrapers, bank towers, and Walt Disney World; that native plants are preferable over 'foreign invaders' like purple loosestrife or Norway maple; and biodiverse wetlands or permaculture farms are better than monocultural crop plantations and endless lawns of Kentucky bluegrass.

The difficulties start to pile up, of course, when we include people among the animals and plants that might constitute our ideas of local, bioregional 'nature.' One of the dilemmas for neopagans and 'nature religionists' has been the question of whether to look to their own (generally European) traditions for guidance on how to practice nature religion in North America, or to look to Native Americans—a solution fraught with its own highly charged cultural politics. In a recent article in *Gnosis* magazine, Chas Clifton proposes a laudable solution to this dilemma—one that has often been suggested by environmental philosophers and deep ecology advocates—which is that of coming to know the ecological features of our own bioregions and watersheds, and making

**If 'nature' is motherly and feminine ... does this not presuppose certain ideas of what women are or should be like? ... Are all social groups positioned equally in relation to it? Or are there clear differences ... with indigenous peoples and Third World natives (and women) identified as closer to it—and therefore expected to behave that way ...**

**The line between uprooting [foreign or exotic] species and uprooting peoples is, of course, one that few would suggest crossing (except racists on the far right), but it is a line made thin both by certain environmentalist arguments which would extend human rights or responsibilities to the nonhuman world, and by the rather different social-constructionist arguments of those who question 'nature's' self-evident 'reality.'**

these central to the practice of nature spirituality.

But even this solution is more complicated than it at first appears. To the extent that contemporary North Americans can, as Clifton advises, come to “feel” the “tides” and learn “the flow of water, the songs of birds, and the needs of grasses” of our ecological communities, such a bioregional solution is eminently practical. But when it comes to making actual decisions about what to do, how to shape and design a landscape, we would have to grapple with the dilemmas regularly faced by ecological restorationists in their attempts to ‘restore’ ‘damaged’ ecosystems back to a semblance of their ‘original’ character. The question is: *which original* are they restoring them to? That of a hundred years ago, or two hundred (often quite different)? The time of the arrival of Europeans? A thousand years ago? The peak of the last glacial era? Which foreign and exotic species should be uprooted, and which left in place? Should we even try to ‘restore,’ or should we ‘let it grow wild’ (in which case

the results will be entirely different from how they looked when Europeans arrived)? The line between uprooting species and uprooting peoples is, of course, one that few would suggest crossing (except racists on the far right), but it is a line made thin both by certain environmentalist arguments which would extend human rights or responsibilities to the nonhuman world, and by the rather different social-constructionist arguments of those who question ‘nature’s’ self-evident ‘reality.’

A common way of thinking about North American wilderness—and what sets the Americas apart from much of the rest of the world in this sense—is the historical line demarcated by Columbus’s arrival. ‘Wilderness’ areas are supposedly those areas which most closely resemble pre-Columbian environments—purified, alas, of their Native American inhabitants. But even those pre-Columbian environments have been shown to have been managed and shaped, sometimes extensively, by cultural traditions involving the use of fire, hunting of certain animals (occasionally to

the point of extinction), and so on. And furthermore, Native groups rarely have clearcut claims to being the *only* pre-Columbian representatives of a given place or bioregion—social groups, after all, moved around, came into contact with each other, and changed. So even a local concept of ‘nature,’ through all this questioning, becomes a somewhat amorphous and problematic category: we know what we mean by it, up to a degree, but things start to get messy when we begin asking who it is that ‘we’ are, what the history of ‘our’ relationship to a given place may be, and—if not ours, then *whose history* and *whose ‘nature’* should we be invoking?

Concluding thoughts and un/natural hesitations

In a recent overview of the debate on the ‘social construction of nature,’ Kate Soper eloquently argues that the ‘nature-endorsing’ views of environmentalists and the ‘nature-skeptical’ views of critical social theorists and cultural activists need not be mutually exclusive, but that they can inform each other in a rich and rewarding dialectic. Our ideas of ‘nature’ are social constructions, in other words, and we need to be careful in deploying them, but that does not mean we cannot come to *some* general agreement about what sort of thing we mean when we say ‘nature’—and what we want to protect when we fight to save a rainforest from clear-cutting, or lobby for restrictions on the production of greenhouse gases.

For scholars of ‘nature religion,’ I assume that our concern is not with *nature itself*, but with those expressions of religiosity that focus on or derive their primary values from *someone’s particular*

idea of ‘nature.’ We may need to ask whether we should rely on our own judgments or on those of our subjects in determining whether something qualifies as ‘nature religion.’ One argument *against* the use of the term ‘nature religion’ is that there may be certain streams of religiosity falling within our purview which share family traits, but which diverge on their respective concepts of ‘nature.’ Where, for instance, does ‘techno-’ or ‘cyber-paganism’ fall within the broader spectrum of neopagan nature religions? In this case it would seem awkward to impose the label of ‘nature religion’ on the latter but not on the former, or to separate the two for analytical purposes when their boundary may be more fluid in reality.

The place of ‘techno-paganism’ within (neo-)paganism more generally can be compared to the place of Donna Haraway’s famous (or infamous) ‘cyborg theory’ within the broader discourse of ecofeminist theory. Haraway’s work has crucially contributed to the broadening of ecofeminist discourse beyond its earlier identification with ‘spiritual feminism’ or ‘women’s spirituality’ to questions of citizenship, technological embodiment, and related issues. In a similar way, techno-paganism may be contributing a distinctly ‘nature-skeptical’ voice—one that is open, for instance, to the idea of seeing computer networks as ‘natural’ and even ‘sacred’—to the broad spectrum of contemporary pagan and nature spiritualities. Recent work in chaos and complexity theory has also been taken up in some quarters (including among techno-pagans) to blur the distinction between natural, social, and technological systems. So the category of ‘nature religion’ may be a risky one to

introduce in an era when definitions of 'nature' are being revised, extended, blurred, and even discarded.

In conclusion, then, the usefulness of 'nature religion' as an analytical category may ultimately be limited by the stability of the term 'nature.' Nature religion scholars will need to ask whose definition of 'nature' is being used to provide the 'transcendental signified' of this emerging field. If it is not a 'transcendental signified,' *ie*, an ahistorical category underlying all forms of 'nature religion,' then it will be important to continually ask: when should we apply the term, and when should we resist it? If, on the other hand, there *is* a 'nature' we wish to invoke through our use of this term, we may be doing environmental politics rather than scholarship. That may not be a bad idea, but the difference should be kept clear.

#### Notes:

1. I have traced such a genealogy in an earlier paper entitled 'Nature-Culture As Relational Animalia: Between Natural Priorities and Cultural Overcomings' (unpublished, originally presented at the Fourth Bath Quinquennial Science Studies Workshop, University of Bath, England, July 27-31, 1995). On the history of changing conceptions of nature, see C. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1967); N. Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992); K. Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-human* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995); R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1960); D. Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (2nd. ed., Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996); R. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (3rd ed., New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1982); and C. Merchant, *The Death of*

*Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

2. A taste of this debate can be gleaned from William Cronon's anthology *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: Norton, 1995, and see the preface to the 1996 paperback edition) and the fallout that occurred after its publication. See, for instance, the critical debate in *Environmental History* 1:1 (1996), the essays in M. Soule and G. Lease, eds., *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1995), and the writings of George Sessions in *The Trumpeter* (issues 1:3, 12:4, and 13:1) and of Dave Foreman in *Wild Earth* (editorials in 6:4 and 8:3). Cronon's anthology simply gave a focused voice to what many, if not most, social scientists and humanistic scholars take for granted these days—that our ideas of 'nature' are socially, culturally, and historically shaped.
3. See, for instance, D. Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990).
4. See Botkin's (1990:58ff.) discussion of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in Minnesota and Ontario.

*Adrian Ivakhiv holds a PhD in Environmental Studies from York University (Toronto), where he currently teaches. His research interests include the cultural politics of nature, environmental ethics, pilgrimage and sacred space, and Slavic paganism. His articles have appeared in Social Compass, Gnosis, Ethnic Forum, The Trumpeter, and Musicworks, and he is currently completing a book entitled Places of Power: Charismatic Landscapes, Gaia's Pilgrims, and the Politics of Place.*

## Nature & Supernature— Harmony & Mastery: Irony and Evolution in Contemporary Nature Religion

by Bron Taylor

*A response to  
Catherine Albanese's landmark book,  
Nature Religion in America.*

Imagine a square made up of nine dots arranged in three rows and columns. Remember the childhood riddle: Draw four straight lines, without lifting your pencil, through each of the dots in the square. Most of us struggled with it, confined by our imaginations to think exclusively within the structure of the square. The riddle's answer, that we draw the lines outside of the perimeter of the given square, taught an important epistemological lesson: Keep your cognitive flexibility; remain open to broadening your perspective beyond the current, given, conventions.

This is what Catherine Albanese asks us to do in *Nature Religion in America*. If we look across the American landscape with an understanding of religion broader than conventionally understood—specifically, if we examine belief/value/action systems that take nature as their "symbolic center[s]" (p. 7)—we will discover culturally important, but largely ignored, aspects of our religious history (p. 8).

Albanese illuminates the many "links and connections" among such phenomena,

past and present. She convincingly demonstrates that certain patterns and ironies persist in contemporary manifestations of nature religion (pp. 7-8).

A key irony that Albanese perceived is that the quest for harmony with nature coexists with an impulse to master it. Nature religion devotees, for example, often seek harmony with nature through preservation of the natural world, but they simultaneously attempt to bend nature to their will, whether through physical, mental, or magical technique. Albanese also shows how the mastery impulse supports repressive ideologies, spotlighting how notions of "natural law" and "rights" deployed nature as a *religious* symbol serving racist nationalism and notions such as manifest destiny.

Albanese concludes the volume by noting the persistence of such ironies in contemporary nature religion. She also argues, however, that some 20th century nature religions, especially those influenced by quantum theory, are breaking down the division between matter and spirit, viewing energy and matter as manifestations of the same "universal life-force energy" (p. 188). This, she seems to suggest, unveils the possibility of a new form of nature religion that escapes dualistic assumptions, perhaps including those that precipitate the tension between harmony and mastery as two poles of an ironic religious ethic. Moreover, Albanese raises the possibility of a non-supernaturalistic nature religion, although I think she sees this more as a new direction than an achievement.

Today's panel points to the value and provocative nature of such analysis. Each panelist has been exploring ethnographi-

**Nature religion devotees ... seek harmony with nature through preservation of the natural world, but they simultaneously attempt to bend nature to their will, whether through physical, mental, or magical technique. Albanese shows how the mastery impulse supports repressive ideologies, spotlighting how notions of "natural law" and "rights" deployed nature as a religious symbol serving racist nationalism and ... manifest destiny.**

cally one or another manifestation of contemporary nature religion, bushwhacking deeper into the religious landscape where Albanese broke trail. This labor provides perspective that can advance the inquiry Albanese set before us.

Today I wish to focus my comments first on Albanese's "nature religion" construction. Then I will discuss post-supernaturalistic nature religion and the possible diminution of the mastery impulse in contemporary nature religion.

**Nature religion as construct**

First, I wish to defend Albanese's claim for the utility of her "nature religion" construction. Certainly, her concept of nature religion is broader and than many definitions of religion that insist, ostrich-like, that super-human beings or super-natural realities are an essential feature of religion.<sup>1</sup> Some of Albanese's case studies demonstrate that nature can be a central religious symbol even among people who disavow anything supposedly "supernatural."

I think, however, that her construction could be clearer. She believes religion has to do with both ordinary powers (related to human society) and extraordinary powers (related to forces outside the boundaries of human community)<sup>2</sup> (p. 6). She also says that what people believe and do religiously is related to symbolic centers perceived to reside beyond ordinary experience, in the realm "that Eliade has called the sacred" (p. 7). Two paragraphs later she then defines "*nature religion* as my own name for a symbolic center and the cluster of beliefs, behaviors and values that encircles it" (p. 7).

These reflections left me unsure whether the "nature religion" rubric requires only that nature be a *central symbolic resource*, or whether she thinks that nature must also be considered *sacred* in some way. I am also uncertain because, in some of her examples, although nature is symbolically important to the overall religious orientation, nature itself is not considered sacred.<sup>3</sup> I surmise, therefore, that in Albanese's construction,

nature need not be sacred in "nature religion."

It seems to me, however, that for both for practical and common sense reasons, the sacredness of nature (however conceived, contested, and expressed by devotees) should be considered essential to a scholarly definition of nature religion. Indeed, as the term has become increasingly popular among scholars, it is usually assumed that such religion must involve a notion of the sacrality of nature.<sup>4</sup>

There is a stronger case for such a choice, however, particularly if religion is "that dimension of human experience engaged with sacred norms," as David Chidester asserts.<sup>5</sup> It seems problematic, therefore, to apply the term "nature religion" to cases in which nature is an important symbol but is not considered sacred.

Albanese helpfully recognizes that nature may be an important but not central "religious horizon for thought and act." She believes that, in such cases, it is better "to speak of the natural *dimension* of religion than to speak of nature religion" (p. 13). Perhaps we should use her "natural dimension of religion" phrase, or speak of "nature-influenced religion," when discussing religion in which nature is influential but not sacred.

This suggestion may cohere with Albanese's original intent, although repeatedly making such a distinction could be tedious and awkward. Perhaps this is why she chose to leave obscure the line between nature-influenced religion and nature-as-sacred religion. Nevertheless, it would be useful to have a clearer, shorthand way to describe the difference between nature religion (for which nature is sacred) and nature-influenced religion.

Non-supernaturalistic nature religion: beyond the mastery impulse?

Now I wish to highlight cases that Albanese suggests point toward the emergence of post-supernaturalistic nature religion. Insightfully, she traced this apparent development to a syncretic process in which nature-oriented religions increasingly appropriate worldview elements derived from quantum theory. In Starhawk's Wicca and in several contemporary physical religions such as Reiki and Macrobiotics, Albanese discerns that such theory erodes the distinctions between nature real and nature ideal, and between energy/spirit and matter, dualisms that have typically permeated American nature religion. She concludes that, "with the dawn of twentieth century, the mysterious half-lives of the quantum resolved the conceptual conflict between nature real and nature ideal. At least in the subatomic world, the crack looked like it had been healed" (p. 200).

In a related and tantalizing passage, Albanese notes that Starhawk believes "matter and energy are different but continuous modes of being." Albanese suggests that this quantum-influenced notion may explain why Starhawk can "negotiate" more gracefully "the divide between [nature] ideal and real" (p. 185). By overturning "Neoplatonic idealism," Albanese implies, Starhawk is closing the gap between harmony and mastery impulses.<sup>6</sup>

Despite such developments, Albanese does not think the cracks between nature ideal and real, and the concomitant and contradictory impulses to harmony and mastery, have been healed. "Dominance" remains, Albanese seems to conclude,

although it may now be framed as “an entirely harmonious enterprise”<sup>7</sup> (p. 200).

If, however, the new science has theoretically “resolved the conceptual conflict between nature real and nature ideal,” there is no logical impulse toward mastery. I am wondering, therefore, if Albanese wishes to suggest the possibility that, with further development, some nature religion might fully escape the dualisms of supernature/nature, idea/real, and harmony/mastery?

### Summary & Conclusions

Albanese’s *Nature Religion in America* at least *implies* the possibility of nature religions evolving such that

(1) nature itself would be considered sacred, unambiguously and without supernatural deities or forces; and

(2) ethics would evolve promoting care for and preservation of all life forms and the natural processes that have produced them, purged of mastery aims.

Such religious ethics could express a desire to live harmoniously amidst nature in a way that does not reduce its complexity or fecundity.

If this were possible, then contemporary nature religion could do more than bring, as suggested in Albanese’s words, “harmony and mastery into easier, more graceful religious partnerships than at any time before” (p. 13). Perhaps such religion could even subvert mastery narratives themselves. Reading a bit between the lines, it seems to me that this is the kind of religious evolution that Albanese would welcome.

Indeed and ironically, it may even be that by identifying and (subtly) criticizing

the mastery impulse in nature religion, Albanese may contribute to its subversion. Given the innovative and eclectic bricolage that is nature religion today, the work of even the most careful and dispassionate religious studies scholar could be dropped into the religious stew.<sup>8</sup>

I cannot here provide detail, but there are some nature religionists who self-consciously subvert both supernaturalism and reject related mastery narratives. In 1998, for example, two organizations formed, grounding their religious sensibilities in the awe and mystery of the cosmological story, especially as it is known scientifically. One was formed in the United States and called itself “The Epic of Evolution Society.” It is inspired more by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme than by other figures, but a rapidly growing and prominent group of scientists, philosophers, and religious figures have enthusiastically enlisted in the endeavor. They seek to provide resources and create rituals that can evoke in people a sense of awe and reverence for scientifically sound cosmogonies. Put differently, they consecrate scientific narratives, and seek to foster a corresponding environmental ethic of reverence for all evolutionary processes.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, from his computer in the United Kingdom, Paul Harrison founded and serves as President of the World Pantheist Movement, a new religious movement promoting “Scientific Pantheism.”<sup>10</sup> The clearest distinction between the two groups is that the World Pantheist Movement is explicitly religious and hopes to make “Scientific Pantheism” a world religion, while the Epic of Evolution Society is remains open to those who do not consider themselves reli-

gious.<sup>11</sup> Despite this difference, the two groups soon “found each other” and expect to “cross-fertilize” and cooperate on many fronts.

Both movements recognize that ecology, environmental philosophy, and environmentalism are all driven by the awe and mystery people often feel when observing nature, including scientifically. So with a remarkable degree of self-consciousness, both movements seek to provide a spiritual home for people who might not otherwise have a place for their non-supernaturalistic, but nevertheless religious, self-expression.<sup>12</sup>

These and a growing number of other groups reject the idea of humans as masters of nature. Their emergence suggests that the persistence of the mastery narrative in nature religion may be in doubt. Whether they will escape these or other mastery narratives, however, remains to be seen.

I propose, in conclusion, that we revise the nature religion construction to refer to religions that consider nature to be sacred. Phrases such as “the natural dimension of religion” and “nature-influenced religions” could be reserved for cases where nature is not considered sacred but remains an

important religious symbol or conceptual and action resource. Meanwhile, I hope scholars of nature religions and the natural dimension of religion would focus some of their attention on the dynamics Albanese so insightfully identified and that I have also labored to spotlight. Specifically: What is the possibility and what are the characteristics of nature religion devoid of supernature and rebelling against visions of mastery? Where is such religion to be found? How will it shape human lifeways?

### Notes:

1. A good recent example in *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* ed. J.Z. Smith (New York, 1995), defines religion as “a system of beliefs and practices that are relative to superhuman beings” (p. 893). Such a restrictive definition is needed, the author claimed, because it “moves away from defining religion as some special kind of experience or worldview” and excludes “quasi-religious religious movements” (pp. 893-84). This is unduly restrictive, in my view. For a more comprehensive discussion, see Bron Taylor, “Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality: From Radical Environmentalism to Scientific Paganism,” a paper presented to the “Consultation on Spirituality,” funded by the Henry Luce Foundation of New York and sponsored by the Religious Studies Department at

**These reflections [of Albanese] left me unsure whether the “nature religion” rubric requires only that nature be a central symbolic resource, or whether she thinks that nature must also be considered sacred. I am also uncertain because, in her examples, nature is symbolically important to the overall religious orientation, but nature itself is not considered sacred.**



**In Starhawk's Wicca and in contemporary physical religions such as Reiki and Macrobiotics, Albanese discerns that theory erodes the distinctions between nature real and nature ideal, and between energy/spirit and matter, dualisms that have typically permeated American nature religion. ... Starhawk believes "matter and energy are different but continuous modes of being." ... this quantum-influenced notion may explain why Starhawk can "negotiate" more gracefully "the divide between [nature] ideal and real." By overturning "Neoplatonic idealism," Albanese implies, Starhawk is closing the gap between harmony and mastery impulses.**

- University of California, Santa Barbara, March 1998.
2. For this distinction she credits Charles Long (p. xvi).
  3. Nature is important but not sacred, for example, in many of the cases in the "Republican Nature" chapter.
  4. This may be because few have read carefully the book in which Albanese coined the term.
  5. David Chidester, *Patterns of Action: Religion and Ethics in a Comparative Perspective* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1987), p. 4.
  6. The most pertinent passage is where Albanese writes that, for Starhawk, "Mind, clearly, rules. But mind comes with a concreteness, a focused sense of body energy, that veers strikingly away from the Transcendentalist dilemma. The Neoplatonic idealism that drained Transcendentalist forces, leaving so wide a gap between harmony and mastery, finds no echo in Starhawk's magic caverns" (p. 185). If there is no echo, however, would not Starhawk's

- religion have escaped the mastery impulse?
7. According to Albanese "The impulse to dominate was ... everywhere in nature religion" (p. 12). Perhaps this is one reason Albanese does not think it likely that the impulse can be dissolved, even under the subatomic microscope.
  8. Many involved in the contemporary nature religion read widely in anthropology and religious studies, borrowing freely ideas from such literature for their religious production.
  9. I am grateful to Connie Barlow her ongoing assistance in keeping me abreast of developments in the Epic of Evolution movement; see her book, *Green Space, Green Time: the Way of Science* (New York & London: Springer-Verlag, 1997) for excellent background. See also the book by Barlow's husband, Tyler Volk, *Gaia's Body: Toward a Physiology of Earth* (New York & London: Springer-Verlag, 1998) for another example of scientific nature religion.
- The rapid influence of the Epic of Evolution as a modern myth promoting harmonious

- lifeways on earth can be seen in the "Earth Charter," a proposed resolution winding its way, possibly toward approval, by the United Nations General Assembly. See "Earth Charter," a special issue of *Earth Ethics* 8 (2 & 3): pp. 1-24, 1997.
10. The movement's credo was created over the internet and adopted in 1997. The movement was incorporated in Colorado in 1998. According to November 3 1995 email from Paul Harrison, "The WPM is international in outlook, and predominantly American in its present makeup. It was formed on the Internet and is 75% American in membership, plus others from 36 countries. 75% of the directors are American." The scientific paganism mailing list had 450 members in October 1998.
- See the revealing interview conducted by EPIC board member Ursulla Goodenough with Paul Harrison, in the *Epic of Evolution Society* newsletter (Fall 1998 issue, forthcoming). In one representative passage, Harrison explains the central idea in Scientific Pantheism: "The universe's overwhelming power and fundamental mystery establish it as the only real divinity."
- The following passage, also written by Harrison and posted in a section entitled "The Unity of Religion and Science" on the Scientific Pantheism web site [October 23, 1998] shows the affinity of this approach with quantum-influenced, non-supernaturalistic nature religion similar to that Albanese found in some nature religion. "Scientific pantheism believes that everything that exists is matter or energy in one form or another. Nothing can exist, be perceived, or act on other things if it is not matter or energy. That does not mean that spiritual phenomena or forces cannot exist. It means that, if they do, they must in fact be material." See <<http://members.aol.com/Heraklit1/basicpri.htm>> for this quote and the basic principles of Scientific Pantheism.
- Goodenough is a molecular biologist and author of *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (Oxford University Press, 1998), a terrific example in itself of scientific nature religion.
11. As Harrison explained in the above-cited interview: "Our intention is to make this scientific/naturalistic form of pantheism into a full-blown religion, complete with basic shared beliefs, systems of meditation, local circles, people able to facilitate pantheist funerals and weddings, suggested celebra-

tions for solstices and equinoxes, and an ethic that is earth-centered and humane."

12. Indeed, the Harrison-Goodenough interview shows that some contemporary nature religion explicitly rejects supernaturalistic metaphysics. Harrison explained as follows his pragmatic decision to create two pantheism-related internet groups, one materialist, the other spiritual: "The Scientific Pantheism listserv is the core [of our approach], which I established in July 1996. I set up the Spiritweb listserv later, because some schools of pantheists still believe that the universe has a soul, a mind, a purpose, an intelligence, and so on. We got quite a few people applying who believed in such things, but we wanted the Scientific Pantheist list to focus on developing our own non-dualist approach. At the same time these 'spiritualist' pantheists were decent folk and deserved their own place ... They have fewer members, most of whom have joined by browsing around Spiritweb, which is a vast collection of New Age stuff. Obviously there is dialogue between the two main positions in pantheism, but the New Age dualistic/supernaturalistic strand will never be an integral part of Scientific Pantheism."

*Bron Taylor is Director of Environmental Studies and Oshkosh Foundation Professor of Religion at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. He earned a PhD in Religion (Social Ethics) from the University of Southern California and has published two books and over three dozen articles exploring the religious, moral, and political dimensions of grassroots environmentalism, including Ecological Resistance Movements: the Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism (State University of New York Press, 1995). He hopes to soon finish On Sacred Ground: Earth First! and Environmental Ethics and recently began work on The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, which he is editing with Jeffrey Kaplan. His email address is <[taylor@uwosh.edu](mailto:taylor@uwosh.edu)>.*



## On Meeting Amatera-Su (and Oya, too):

### The Warrior Path for the Non-Practitioner

by Mira Zussman  
San Jose State University

The Samurai Game is a role-playing game, invented by George Leonard, a fourth degree black belt and Aikido sensei in Northern California, and author of numerous books on transformative practice. The game takes you into 17th century samurai consciousness and is intended to allow players the opportunity to face their own death—and thereby, the pattern of their life. I studied with Leonard, and his partner Michael Murphy (co-founder of the Esalen Institute) for three years in an experiment in what they called 'Integral Transformative Practice.' This was in addition to my own practice, the Japanese martial art of Aikido. The Samurai Game was a special treat that Leonard used periodically to help us test out our way in the world. The first Game I played (at the end of our first year) I was killed out within seconds of the opening scene, while the banners were still being metaphorically unfurled and the troops being trained—*ie*, before even the first battle began. In that Game, I lay dead for a solid week before being allowed to resurrect into the world again.

The Samurai Game has an uncanny way of hitting players in some incredibly vulnerable spot (no matter how many times they play). In the game I describe here, instead of facing my death, I stood face to

face with something more terrifying to this devout atheist: she was the Shinto Deity—Amatera-su Omi-Kami—and I found her, from then on, inhabiting the landscape of my life.

The particular Samurai Game I'm here to talk about was fought about a year after my first Game. I was determined not to get killed out so fast, so I began training myself for war. I went down to Japantown and found every book I could on the "warrior spirit." Books on medieval Japanese warfare. Tactical guides. Novels based on the life of Musashi. Books on swords. The making of swords. The drawing of swords. The testing of swords (turned out they were ranked in terms of how many human bodies they could slice through in one strike). The path of swords. The spirit of swords. Even the Hindus had a tradition associating Kali, the Goddess of Death, with the sword, so I started looking into the Hindu tradition as well. Then I discovered that to the Aztecs, the blade represented the embodiment of the Goddess.

Then, even the guy who cuts my hair got into the act. He's from Brazil. Candomblé practitioner. Told me that according to Ife tradition, the goddess who watches over me is Oya, the Yoruba warrior goddess. He said he could tell by the condition of my hair that I was preparing for battle. Haircut divination! Before I knew it, I was being taught how to prepare an altar to Oya. By the time I found out that there was a path of the sword in my own tradition, Kabbalah, as well, I was no longer even surprised. My whole life came to be seen in terms of sword metaphors. Why swords? I'm not sure. It must have something to do with their precision. The sword is unforgiving—but very, very beautiful.

**... even the guy who cuts my hair got into the act. He's from Brazil. Candomblé practitioner. Told me that according to Ife tradition, the goddess who watches over me is Oya, the Yoruba warrior goddess. He said he could tell by the condition of my hair that I was preparing for battle. Haircut divination!**

I burned incense. Samurai, apparently, used to go into battle with incense in their hair so that they would smell good even in death, even in the early stages of decomposition. I bought a summer kimono. Silk. Samurai warriors dressed aesthetically. I listened to tapes of Shinto purification chants during my three hour commute each day—unearthly sounds, powerfully intoned syllables definitely not designed for the highway. Rather,

tools to mobilize *ki*, the living energy of the universe. At home, I would ring my butsurin for more focused meditations, an hour in the morning, an hour at night. The bowl is about 150 years old and has some fine reverberations. My breathing slowed significantly. My posture began to change. My voice was clear and my eyes were bright. Every moment felt purposeful. The Samurai Game was still six months away.

"You should become a warrior," I told my psychoanalyst husband one evening, thinking it would do him a world of good.

"A warrior?" he said. "I already *am* a warrior."

I started reading reams of Japanese poetry. You know, of course, that Samurai about to commit seppuku wrote exquisite haiku before disembowel-

ing themselves. With sweeping calligraphic brush strokes, they captured the essence of life in that moment before death. I prepared myself. I wanted to die this way. With poetry written in the moment. For that moment.

Confucian literature talks about the death of the ancient sages. How you die reflects how you lived. It would be embarrassing, I thought, to have a lousy death. I want to die a very beautiful, aesthetic death. Lying on North African silks the color of Saharan sands. Deep reds and browns and ochre. Raw silk glimmering on a moonless starbright night. I want to die in North Africa, south of Ghardaia, Agzd or Amazrou. I see myself falling slowly into the fine red sand, like deSaint Exupery's Little Prince, another lover of the Sahara. In the Samurai Game, I want to die one exquisite death. And I wanted an aesthetic War. So what does that say about me?

The Japantown bookstore was filled with samurai death haiku, all too flowery for me. All about breezes, and cricket sounds, lily pads, and running water. I could not feel these things. Took them for granted, even if they weren't part of my own experience. Lily pads. When do I ever see lily pads long enough to miss them? The delicate flutter of butterfly wings. I was having trouble

relating to such pretty reminiscences of nature, no matter that they represented the final moments of a fallen warrior. I was still not living as if I were about to die, so I was still not even remotely a warrior.

Finally, I found samurai death poetry that worked for me. Morihei Ueshiba's *Budo: Poetry of the Path*, it was called. When I found these lines, I felt I was ready for war:

*At the instant  
a warrior faces  
an enemy  
all things serve  
to make the teachings more focused ...*

When I read *Budo*, I knew that I was training myself not just to be a samurai, but to be Daimyo, a Samurai Warlord. It wasn't that I 'wanted' to be Daimyo in the upcoming Game. It had nothing to do with desire. It was non-negotiable: with or without the game, I already was a Warlord.

For two weeks before the upcoming Samurai Game, all I could think about, even at work, was the War. My husband's diagnosis had shifted often over the previous months. In a generous mood, he called what I was doing 'preoccupation.' Until he ventured into the park one day and saw all the T'ai Chi, Chi Gung, Aikido and sword-work, he had thought I was the only person in the city immersed in such practice. The Samurai Game was not what this was about. I think I was using it as an excuse to immerse more deeply in my practice. I saw martial arts as a key to understanding the nature of conflict. A key to the ability to transcend conflict. And shouldn't a psychoanalyst be interested in the resolution of conflict?

I kept thinking about the War Gods in the Samurai Game. Something, something

was missing and it took a long time to figure it out. The Game had no religion! No priests, ritual, or prayer. No explicit sacrifice. No pilgrimages. No ability to appeal to—and attempt to sway—the Gods. Every war has it, but there was no spiritual dimension built into the Samurai Game. Having found the fatal flaw of the Game, I had to be Daimyo to introduce this element. My preparations a turn. I had to be more than just another Samurai Warlord. I had to be a Daimyo-Priestess. Had to test the integrity of the War Gods, themselves. Would they accept prayer and ritual into the Game? Could we transcend conflict?

I prepared headbands for the warriors. White cranes to ensure long life of my samurai. Even filmy shrouds to cover our dead. I packed my butsurin chime bowl to lead my Army in purifying breath exercises. I wanted my army to be as ritually prepared for war as possible. I wanted my warriors to die well.

Amaterasu-no-Omikami. I invoke the spirit of the Shinto Sun Goddess. Aid me in the battles to come. Set me on the proper path. Keep my Army safe. No, not safe. May my Army be filled with integrity. May we die well. And may our descendants keep well our shrines.

Where on earth did *that* come from? Unbidden, this invocation slipped from my lips, and and it took itself very seriously. Something is happening that I don't understand. All I've been doing is researching Samurai mentality so that I can play the Game without getting killed out so fast. Right?

One night during this pre-War period I dreamed my own death. My real death. It was no game, no pretend war. It didn't even feel like a dream. That night I died for real.

While trying to drive both my husband's car and my own, my car revolted, and of its own volition committed seppulku, drove us over an embankment into the middle of a reservoir, and sank, airtight, into the deep with me in its womb. I did not struggle and made no attempt to escape. Accepted it, with a simple, "I forfeit." I've always trusted the instincts of my car.

Was it that simple? Could you just forfeit your life? What exactly does that mean, anyway? Yes, okay, we all know death is a symbol of transformation. Jung tells us that and folks like Joseph Campbell and George Lucas make sure we don't forget it. But all I felt was dead. Numb. Gone. Not part of this world. I went into a very calm place. Very still. My children felt it. They didn't fight.

A week before the Game, Michael Murphy, co-leader of our Integral Transformative Practice experiment, led us in a *perusha* meditation—a form of sitting witness meditation with the aim of letting go of all attachment. The last time he had taken us through this particular meditation, I had, as usual, felt nothing. I thought Michael over-rated *perusha* meditation as a

necessary purification. I went into this meditation with a bad attitude—bursting only with the desire for action—but willing, this time, to try to give it a shot. Like my car and my invocation to Amatera-su, the meditation had a volition of its own. I found myself relinquishing all that I possessed. Tears streaming down my face. My exquisite house went first, along with all the possessions that I seemed to need to surround myself with. The promotion I expected at work: relinquished. My nose started running. The tears would not stop. Without attachment, I witnessed my attachments vanish, watched from a distance as all my "stuff" up and disappeared. I simply watched: poof! psychoanalyst husband, gone! There was serenity in my own unquiet soul. And I'm not the kind of person who uses words like 'serenity' with a straight face. Or 'peace.' Or 'calm.' They're not part of my tradition. Murphy stopped the meditation just before my children disappeared. I sat there for what seemed ages, unable to move, feeling clean, inside and out. Clean and empty.

I spent the rest of the week feeling fully dead from my death dream, and emptied,

**My breathing slowed significantly. My posture began to change. My voice was clear and my eyes were bright. Every moment felt purposeful. The Samurai Game was still six months away.**

**"You should become a warrior," I told my psychoanalyst husband one evening, thinking it would do him a world of good.**

**I found myself relinquishing all that I possessed. Tears streaming down my face. My exquisite house went first, along with all the possessions that I seemed to need to surround myself with. The promotion I expected at work: relinquished. ... I simply watched: poof! psychoanalyst husband, gone! ... Murphy stopped the meditation just before my children disappeared. I sat there for what seemed ages, unable to move, feeling clean, inside and out. Clean and empty.**

purified from the perusha meditation. What remained was the will to be Daimyo, and it stood out in high relief.

The day the War would begin arrived. Leonard—creator, facilitator, and War God Supreme—was becoming increasingly dictatorial. He had been preparing himself, once more, to play God. His lanky frame grew, if that's possible. He was larger than himself. Transcendent.

The first night, Leonard put us through our paces. Basic training, with a pop quiz at the end to test our mettle. How appropriate that the test of the War Gods involved the one thing that had possessed me over the previous six months: swords. Going Under the Sword, and slowly stepping off line just in the nick of time, is something I would be happy to do for the rest of my life. What satisfaction could be greater than to watch your attacker's sword sweep down to split you in half, only for him to find you (serenely) already poised at the back of his throat? Mmmmmm, delicious. I love being up close enough ready to take

out a War God's throat. It's probably the closest to God that I'll ever get.

But the next task was much more difficult. We had to declare ourselves, samurai-style, in front of the assembled multitude. Stating our name and place of birth, after a military march up to the front of the hall.

Does not declaring oneself imply a certain degree of self-knowledge? Who am I? I don't really know. My name has changed more times than I'd like to remember. "Mira" is the name given me in Jerusalem, the year I cradled an Uzi in my arms. This person, "Mira," was the survivor of a brief, but devastating war that changed the subsequent borders and history of the Middle East. While I've had many names, what I wanted to say was "MIRA OF ARAGON, 1492." This was who I really was. In my family, the Inquisition was always now. It happened to us. We, not just our ancestors, were the ones expelled from Spain. But George Leonard wouldn't understand. He'd have thought I was messing with his Game. And a wrathful War God would kill me out

again just as he had done the last time. For it turned out that he had come over and killed me that first time because I was the only person to have been face to face with the reality of warfare.

What I proclaim, with conviction, is simply "MIRA." Delete the extraneous patronyms altogether. And in that brief declaration, I could hear the voice of the 16th century Hindu poetess, Mirabai, my namesake. Feel the power of Marie Laveau, priestess of my patroness, Oya. I did indeed embody my ancestors: I was Mira of Aragon, survivor of the expulsion from Spain. And the Daimyo-Priestess stood firm. "MIRAI" in Japanese is the inevitability of the future. They were all there with me, just a few layers below the surface, and I could see from their faces that the assembled masses preparing for War could hear and see them as well.

The next morning. "What is all that you're carrying?" Leonard says to me, looking suspiciously at the Genji shopping bag from Japantown that I'm hauling to the site of the battlefield. "Just some preparations for the War."

"YOU CAN'T BRING ANYTHING IN!" proclaims the War God.

Oh shit. I hadn't even had time to incense my hair, nor the hair of my warriors. Last War, our Daimyo was filled with props, and used them to great effect. Our Army slaughtered the enemy. It was beautiful. Or I imagine it so—I didn't get a chance to see it, having been dead and entombed in my bloody cold sepulchre for the duration. In not allowing "props," the War God just changed all the rules on us. Typical.

Leonard is briefing us. There are so

many picky, meaningless, frivolous rules—most of which have changed since the last War—yet for some reason, I can remember them all. It's completely out of character. Normally, I have no auditory memory at all. Have to write everything down. But I have no pen nor paper. Disallowed. Last year, my Daimyo took copious notes. This year, I simply know what to do.

But George seems an angry War God in the making. Without looking at me, he's berating those who would turn the Game into a costume party: "NO PROPS ALLOWED," he booms. "YOU MAY HAVE NOTHING BUT YOUR OWN WITS ABOUT YOU." I feel publicly humiliated, even though he does not single me out: Quite a number of us have had to leave our "props" as George calls them, outside the door. There will be no white cranes for long life, no incense for our rotting corpses, no shrouds, no *budo* poetry—and suddenly, I don't want to be Daimyo anymore.

I can't make the war aesthetic or spiritual. I am defeated even earlier than in the previous Game. I come from a Mediterranean culture: an honor and shame culture. Not too different from 17th century Japan. And right now I feel hot with shame. The War God has killed me, humiliated me, before I even belong to an Army. Before nightfall. Before daybreak on the battlefield. I have lost.

I don't want to be here. I've no courage, no heart. I am nothing without the props of my life. I realize how much I depend on outer images—"stuff"—to project who I am. I surround myself with what George calls "props." Grew up in a family devoted to material culture. We use objects to

express emotions. Approval. Disapproval. We give. We take. I don't think I can function stripped of such tools. Can't wage war without ritual objects to confer power and identity. More than this, I create whole worlds with my "stuff" which engulfs anyone who enters into my sphere. I take over: My husband can't even drive without my telling him which way to turn. Oh fuck. Oh fuck. The dream: *you can't drive your own car and your husband's too*. Let go, my car tells me. *You have to let go*. And now, Murphy's perusha meditation kicks in again: LET GO! it echos, and I comply:

Let somebody else be Daimyo for a change.

I'm sick of being a control freak. Don't want to order anybody around ever again. Don't want to send anyone out to die. If I have to tell just one more person what to do, I think I'll scream. All I want is my blade. Just want to be a good soldier, do my duty and die.

I relinquish. I forfeit. I am inside my death dream. There is nothing that I need anymore.

"I'm not gonna do it," I whisper to Daniel, who's sitting on the floor next to me as we listen to the War God's innumerable instructions. Daniel knows just what I'm talking about: for this War, he's made plans of his own.

"You have to do it," he whispers back. "Give up your control thing right *after* the Game. Let this be the last time." He makes me feel like crying, but my mind is set. I'm very very clear. I will not, I repeat NOT, try for Daimyo, Warlord of the North or South. Not this time. Not in real life. Not ever, ever again.

Nightfall. The Random Walk begins which will determine the composition of

our Armies. I couldn't care less where I end up, and wander aimlessly, without thought or premeditation. I relinquish control. I forfeit. I am a lost soul, forty years in the desert. But I have no goal. There is no Promised Land. There is no place to go. We walk through our intended battlefield, and suddenly mitosis occurs and two Armies emerge out of the division.

My Army looks pretty good. I'm pleased. We'll do well. I am ready to die for the honor of my Army. The first task is the choosing of the Daimyo. I hear my name being called out around me. There is no debate. No struggle. No challenge. No contention. Only consensus and acclaim. Without batting an eyelash I move into action. It's as if the above torment and struggle never took place. Evaporated without a trace. I'm on automatic pilot. But it doesn't feel like control freak mode. It's something different: I know precisely what to do. I form my troops in a circle around me, knowing we will win this War. I take from each a binding allegiance and watch the determination in each face. My main concern is to respect the abilities and limitations of my troops. I want to choose them carefully for battles they can feel good about fighting. But I know that's not always possible. I can see in their faces that they are ready for War. Together, we have no internal strife, no contention, no debate. Only stillness and calm. Within moments, we are ready.

Dawn. I open my eyes to the most magnificent sight: The battlefield appears in a blush of morning hues bursting out of the inky night—golds and orange and brilliant reds stretching as far as the eye can see. And two Armies of Samurai, each with its own Warlord, all in 17th century

Japanese battle garb ready for war. I think I must be hallucinating, knowing full well that we're indoors—inside a large barn on a farm in Northern California. But that rising sun over the battlefield is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. George had said we would enter an era that has vanished. And here I am.

I know what must be done and it comes effortlessly. With no magical tools. No Shinto chants. No budo death poetry. No incense. No white cranes. No thought-out plans. No challenge from my warriors. My samurai have entrusted me with their lives. I vow silently to preserve the purity of their souls.

Not until a week later do I think, who the hell was I to worry about the purity of anybody's "soul"? I don't even believe in souls! Don't know anything about them, except words. Yes, I know, I teach comparative religion, but what do I really know from souls? Yet throughout the duration of the War, I was very very sure. And I knew

Amatera-su would protect the souls of these brave, self-sacrificing warriors.

And so, inevitably, Mirabai, Daimyo of the Army of the South won a very bitter, wrenching War, for the War God took what he considered his: the toll of human life, and the manner of their loss, was devastating. Only my Sentry—and the fallen, humbled Daimyo of the North—are left alive to share the final moments, witness the holocaust, and take note of the victory. We had used nothing more than our wit, and will and solidarity. As Daimyo, I did not exploit, dazzle, intimidate or coerce the troops. Did not bully them, as I've seen done. And yet they followed—and they led as well. We ruled co-jointly. Call it consensual, collaborative warfare.

It haunts me still: no props. Is it possible that we don't need all the crap we Americans surround ourselves with? For me, it's the exotic clothing and jewelry. Mamluk Revival brass and Tuareg amulets. How insecure I must be to display such

**For the duration of my second Samurai Game, for the germinating weeks which preceding it, and for every moment ever since, I have felt the presence of something beyond myself. Something that straightens my back when I slouch. Something that raises my head when it slumps. Still I ponder who or what it could be, and find myself in conversation with Amatera-su, Lady of Light, or Dark Oya, Mistress of Radical Transformation. Or is this whatever-it-is simply a part of myself I have not known?**

egotism on every surface of my skin and walls. Can I make it in the world stripped of all these things? Crap, crap, crap... Can I be strong without stuff? Apparently so. Or is this victorious moment a fluke or accident? Some random act? And how can I know, for certain, what all this means, if anything at all?

Thanks be to you, Amatera-su, for your fierce, motherly protection. Thank you, Oya, for your gifts of vision and strength.

Oh shit. Oh, shit. I, of all people, roll my eyes over the weirdness of a Jewish-Kabbalist-atheist who invokes Japanese and Yoruba deities. I can't believe I'm even committing this to written word.

I swear I'm not a practitioner. I don't do workings. I don't pray. Never pray. Where do these prayers come from? Worse yet—they will not go away! Did the Shinto Sun Goddess indeed look down upon me with her guidance? Did she join hands with her dark West African sister? Or was I alone with my warriors and my imagination? And why, tell me, have these ladies of Light and Dark taken up residence inside my consciousness? Was there some 'vacancy' sign lit up inside my being? I am now inhabited—but all I did was want to play the Game and not get killed out so fast.

For the duration of my second Samurai Game, for the germinating weeks which preceded it, and for every moment ever since, I have felt the presence of something beyond myself. Something that straightens my back when I slouch. Something that raises my head when it slumps. Still I ponder who or what it could be, and find myself in conversation with Amatera-su, Lady of Light, or Dark Oya, Mistress of Radical Transformation. Or is this what-

ever-it-is simply a part of myself I have not known? Sweet swordmistresses, tell me: whatever it is, does it reside in my body? Or my mind? Or ... my soul?

With wonderful timing, so that I am saved from pursuing this line of thought, the War God calls me to him across the bloodied battlefield. I take note the setting sun: Amatera-su withdraws. "I HAVE WON," the God of War affirms as I step over the fallen victims of feudal war, "BUT DO I WISH TO DO SINGLE BATTLE WITH THE DAIMYO OF THE NORTH?" Winner take all. If I lose, I lose my victory not only for myself but for all of my warriors. It is the last possible battle. Do I accept the Challenge? If I lose, my Sentry will live to tell the tale, he adds. Obviously it would be dishonorable to send my Sentry out to battle the opposing Daimyo.

There is no question what the honorable response must be.

We face each other, kneeling in *seiza* position—on our knees before the War God. We bow first to him and then to each other. No other battles have been from this position. It is a mind battle. Deceptively simple. There is no question of the outcome, and the Daimyo of the North falls dead at my feet. The War is over.

When I look around at the fallen and entombed, seeing only my Sentry standing guard loyally against no one at all, I know how empty my victory is. There are no enemies. There never were. I win nothing. My slain warriors win nothing at all. I feel no cock's crow fill my throat to herald my own victory and the enemy's defeat. Just numbness and sorrow for the scars of real-life war. How primitive is the battlefield. How little it resolves. How arrogant the

Warlords of the world. How sick to death I am of the "good" fight. It all appears so very futile and devolved. This is no way to determine right from wrong! No way to determine global boundaries. My land from yours. Holy land. Promised land. Tribal land. Warfare is no way to apportion world resources. No one wins. How could they?

I find that I have just spoken these final thoughts aloud to the assembled not quite resurrected troops. They shiver and their eyes are lifeless still. Their pallor grim, but dwindling. They have gathered for the closing ritual which ends the Samurai Game. Their silence overwhelms me. I am surrounded by the undeserving Dead. It becomes very clear to me: No one can win the Samurai Game. Not even the Gods.

It's summer. The guy who cuts my hair is Brazilian. Candomblé practitioner. "You have just won a battle, but not the War" he says, running his fingers through my hair. "And now," he proclaims with authority, "your copper is boiling: It is time for you to get to know Oya."

*Mira Zussman has a PhD in anthropology from UC Berkeley. She is currently professor of comparative religious studies at San Jose State University and coordinator of Middle East Studies there.*

*She is President of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness and is on the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association and the Association for Transpersonal Psychology.*

*In addition, she teaches Kaballah privately at Beit Malkhut in San Francisco. As a result of clearly doing*

*way too much, she has recently gone back to North Africa to begin a new collaborative project on Berber women's body arts and the Tamazgha liberation movement. Her most recent publication is a special edition of the Anthropology of Consciousness Journal (AOC) on Women, Sensuality and Consciousness, (Vol 9 No 4) including her article entitled, "Shifts of Consciousness in Consensual S/M, Bondage, and Fetish Play." Copies of this journal can be ordered through <lmertz@cecomet.net>.*

*Mira Zussman has two fabulous kids and a delicious girlfriend.*

## Four New Books about Goddesses

*The first three of these reviews originally appeared in Wood and Water, a feminist-influenced Goddess-centered pagan magazine from England which has been appearing for over twenty years. The review of Concept of the Goddess first appeared in the Spring 1997 issue, that of The Faces of the Goddess in the Spring 1998 issue, and of Ancient Goddesses in the Winter Solstice 1998 issue.*

*Sample copies of Wood and Water are \$3US, subscriptions (four issues) are 10 dollars surface mail, 15 dollars air mail. Payment in cash or in checks (or money orders) made out to Daniel Cohen (NOT Wood and Water), 77 Parliament Hill, London NW3 2TH, England.*

---

### ***The Concept of the Goddess.*** **Sandra Billington and Miranda Green** **(eds.). Routledge 1996.**

---

*This book has been reissued in paperback in 1999 at a more reasonable price. While the original, with its high price, was clearly intended for an academic audience, this version is directed at a general audience. Indeed, the quotations on the back cover are all from pagan magazines, including one from this review.*

What do goddesses from Japan and Ireland have in common? This question, which may very well have irritated some of the contributors, is posed on the dust cover of this beautifully produced and immensely readable scholarly study of god-

desses from a wide variety of cultures. The book is based on contributions to a meeting of the Folklore Society in Glasgow in 1994. It is presented as a tribute to Hilda Ellis Davidson, past President and now Honorary Member of the Society and distinguished author, over a period of more than fifty years, of many influential works on the folklore of northern Europe.

I would like to give this book an enormous welcome. It comes at a time when an adversarial position, which might be seen to be entirely a matter of misunderstandings, has sprung up between academics concerned to protect from misuse factual evidence derived from scholarly disciplines, and goddess followers who feel that the criticisms are designed to rubbish women's new understanding of their relationship to the divine, and to re-establish a patriarchal template. There is a further dimension: modern thought categorically questions the concept of universal themes dominating culture and society. Each area must be viewed separately and within its own circumstances. As Miranda Green, co-editor of the book and noted Celtic authority, writes in the introduction to *The Concept of the Goddess*: "In a book which explores the veneration of the goddesses belonging to many different times and cultures, it is essential not to fall into the trap of using evidence from one area and period to account for the phenomena observed in another. If comparisons between beliefs and perceptions of differing peoples are made they must be based on genuine evidence for similarities rather than on generalizing theory" (p. 1).

Miranda Green also says: "The varied approaches that have been adopted embrace the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, mythic literature and folklore. Despite this

diversity, two important general points emerge: first, the enormous powers and wide-ranging responsibilities of the goddesses; and second, the inadvisability of making inferences from the status of female divinities about the position of women in society." (ibid).

Miranda Green writes on the Celtic Goddesses as healers, examines their links with sacred water sites, and discusses the sanctity of water itself. She describes in some depths little known goddesses such as Ancamna and Damona, both she says "distinctive in their apparent polyandry" (p. 30), Gaulish spring goddesses, and Sequana, Sirona, and Sulis. She devotes special attention to the last named, connecting her with the cult of the sun and rather surprisingly, naming her as "healer and avenger". If this title is surprising, it is based on material found at the shrine at Bath. These are lead or pewter curses, known as defixiones, addressed to Sulis, where she is certainly perceived as a righter of wrongs.

Catharina Raudvere writes about female shape shifters in Scandinavian tradition. She discusses the *mara*, described as the "night riding hag", not a goddess or a mythological being but a "temporarily transformed human being—more a witch than a demon" (p. 42). Raudvere sees the perception of the *mara* as a method of understanding mishaps, illness and pain. At the same time, she concedes there is a link with earlier mythological material on shape-shifting which is part of Icelandic culture. She gives a number of examples of Norse shape-shifting and also discusses how the "gods of the pagans became the demons of the church" (p. 52).

Contributions on Scandinavian Goddesses Freya and Frigg come from two authors—Britt-Mari Nasstrom and Stephen Grundy. Nasstrom looks at the many names of Freya

and suggests that these represent her multifarious concerns; Grundy enquires whether Freya and Frigg are variants of the same goddess or distinct entities, but sees them very much in their relationship to the god Odinn. Samuel Pyeatt Menefee provides a stimulating account of Long Meg and her Daughters who turn out to be not only the well known megalithic site in Cumbria but also Long Meg of Westminster "heroine of several ballads and chapbooks dating from the 16th century" (p. 80).

Hilda Ellis Davidson writes about the connections between milk and the goddess, citing first the ancient world where, for example, Hathor appears as a cow goddess; and then surveys in depth the variety of evidence from northern Europe. She makes the point that the dairy was always the women's responsibility and she suggests that there may have been, in Romano-British culture, an indigenous dairy goddess. This is a wide-ranging and fascinating survey that will also provide new researchers with a wealth of material for further enquiry.

Coventina, described as a purely British goddess, is the subject of Lindsay Allason-Jones' study. The well situated at Carrawburgh on Hadrian's Wall proclaims Coventina as a water deity, but Allason-Jones, citing numerous texts, artefacts and pictures, concludes that she was not a typical Celtic healing deity but was concerned with all aspects of her worshippers' lives.

Two authors deal with classical goddesses. Glenys Lloyd-Morgan with Nemesis and Bellona—whom she names as "two neglected goddesses", and Sandra Billington with Fors Fortuna in ancient Rome. Lloyd-Morgan indicates widespread acceptance of both her subjects in the Roman empire, acknowledging their earliest origins and

**I would like to give this book an enormous welcome. It comes at a time when an adversarial position has sprung up between academics concerned to protect from misuse factual evidence derived from scholarly disciplines, and goddess followers who feel that the criticisms are designed to rubbish women's new understanding of their relationship to the divine, and to re-establish a patriarchal template.**

continuing their veneration down to the rise of Christianity. Nemesis, first known by the Greeks as born of the night later became the “daughter of justice” and “keeper of the scales” and associated with Themis goddess of law and justice. Bellona, a later deity, is oriented towards the concerns of the military—goddess of war and patroness of success in battle.

The Banshee in Ireland as an aspect of the earth goddess is discussed by Patricia Lysaght. She is the supernatural death messenger. Many accounts are quoted of her foreboding and lamenting deaths of rulers and common folk, but she is never, says Lysaght, considered as an agent of death. Her connections with sovereignty and the land are discussed as well as those with the Badb and the Morrigan. We are reminded that folk belief in the Banshee carries with it a survival of the ancestral goddess both in her benign and caring and her sovereignty and war-function aspects.

Two contributors range further afield. Anna Chaudri discusses traces of the hunting goddess in Ossetic folklore

concerning the Caucasian hunting divinity, male and female; Carmen Blacker writes on Yamanokami, the Mistress of Animals in Japan. There is much of powerful interest in both: the Caucasian hunt is sacred and is an aspect of the humans interaction with divine nature. Female and male divinity cannot, says the author, be considered separately. However, there are particular traditions for each and often the female divinity appears to be guardian of the game, and also may be Sovereign of the Forest. The Goddess Yamanokami as Mistress of Animals and ruler of wild nature is presented most sympathetically by Carmen Blacker, who also points out that a similar figure has been discovered in a number of other cultures.

We have been presented with a huge treasure of precious information. Presented as it is, within a scholarly paradigm, it still resonates in many dimensions, where the spirit as well as the mind is refreshed and renewed. It is one of those cases where the whole is more than the sum of its parts. The sheer impact of a volume of such precise and loving studies of the various individual goddesses

urges an inner reflection, illuminating our path of discovery of our heritage both historical and spiritual. It provides an input into theology where the academic connects with the personal.

At the same time, such a volume helps us address goddess questions that are currently so keenly argued. It properly sets its face against a generalising theory; but it provides evidence of similarities within diverse cultures that need to be explained. Why for example, as Carmen Blacker tells us describing Yamanokami of Japan, has “the Goddess in her guise as Mistress of the Animals as a ruler of wild nature in which animals, birds, trees and plants are her subjects ... (also) been discovered in Scandinavia, in Siberia, in the Caucasus among the North American Indians and among the ancient Celts?” (p. 178) And in another connection, we have referred to Sulis as avenger as well as healer: the book provides us with a number of goddesses who are much more holistic figures than those the Goddess Movement often portrays as solely tender nurturing and maternal. Many questions arise and it is exciting that we have such helpful material to work with.

The opening chapter, which provides the book's title, discusses its philosophy. Juliette Wood overviews the “upsurge in the study of the feminine aspects of the sacred” (p. 8), discusses the work of Robert Graves, Marija Gimbutas and other proponents of the universality of the Goddess. First against a background of New Age and of feminist thought and then in the light of modern scholarship, she warns that “modern Goddess studies resemble influential nineteenth century models of culture in their use of archaeology, anthropology, in the assumptions they draw about early society, in their definition of myth, and in their conception of the relationship of

the past to the present” (p. 9). She also makes a distinction between those who view the Goddess as an historical entity and those who perceive her as a metaphor or poetic image. She challenges what she sees as inaccurate historical assumptions used to substantiate the construction of a modern divine female principle. It is important also that “negative” as well as “positive” qualities are recognised in goddesses.

Wood concedes that the Goddess as metaphor is powerful and often productive. “If we look at the Goddess-paradigm as an exercise in creative history then we are looking at a view of the past, which however it may fail academic criteria presents a powerful image of feminine cultural identity. In the case of the Goddess, the fact of survival, followed by suppression and transformation, is extended to the gender she represents” (p. 22).

Here we are back home on my own ground of survival repression and transformation: and also of pursuing academic material in as scholarly a manner as I can. At the same time I follow Carol Christ's warning concerning the ethos of objectivity when she writes: “feminist analysis reveals that scholarship that has been presented to us as ‘objective’, ‘rational’, ‘analytical’, ‘dispassionate’, ‘disinterested’ and ‘true’, is in fact rooted in irrational and distorted assumptions ... while presented under the guise of ‘objective fact’ patriarchal thinking employs a number of ... unnamed and unexamined assumptions.” I am also much influenced by Margaret Conkey and Ruth Tringham, feminist archaeologists, who when discussing the work of Gimbutas (“Archaeology and the Goddess” in *Feminisms in the Academy*, Stanton and Stewart (eds.), University of Michigan Press 1995) affirm that although in many respects they profoundly disagree with her methods and

conclusions, she has caused a paradigm shift in the way archaeologists view their own discipline. I feel that Juliette Wood has not addressed such issues, nor has she taken into account the highly regarded work of biblical archaeological scholars (Ruth Hestrin, Judith Hadley, John Day, for example) which while researching goddesses of the period brings to the fore the possibility that anti-goddess polemic is the basis of much Western religious tradition. The fall-out from this kind of scholarship cannot be swept away from gender politics.

Some women grasp and convert goddess material into a religion of their own, others attempt a popular synthesis, and much of this must bear criticisms such as those by Juliette Wood. Until recently goddess research has not been an academic subject that found its way to the public. It is books like *The Concept of the Goddess* with its brilliant material that will help remedy this situation.

#### Asphodel

*Asphodel (Pauline) Long received a degree in Theology at London University in 1983 at the age of 62. In 1996 she was the first Sophia Fellow at the University College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth. She is a founder member of the European Society of Women in Theological Research. She is the author of In a Chariot Drawn by Lions: The Search for the Female in Deity (The Women's Press, London, 1992). Asphodel has been called a grandmother of the Goddess Movement in Great Britain.*

#### ***Ancient Goddesses: The Myth and the Evidence.* Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris (eds.). British Museum Press 1998.**

“The idea of an original Mother Goddess in prehistory is surrounded by an intense controversy, but one in which neither side speaks to the other. In entering the debate on the nature of female divinity in ancient European and Mediterranean societies, this book is intended to bridge the gap between the two camps, shedding light on areas of prejudice and showing that in this fascinating area of study we still have more questions than answers.” (p. 6)

This opening paragraph of the introduction sets the scene for ten archaeologists and historians to provide specialist material and insights into their areas of Goddess study, which gives us a most valuable and interesting book. But its own premise of a Goddess Movement that sees the “nature of female divinity” as a single “original Mother Goddess” which the scholars can and largely do disprove is irritating and detracts from our enjoyment. We propose that for Goddess people generally the term ‘the Goddess’ describes all aspects of female divinity, Goddesses singular and plural: academic determination to impose a monotheism on us is misplaced and counter-productive.

Joan Goodnick Westenholz, in an illuminating and fascinating account of goddesses of the ancient near east prefaces her discussion with the assumption that modern writers “bent on ‘recovering’ a postulated Goddess-centred religion have assumed there is just one archetypal Goddess ...” (p. 63); she suggests that such writers have

**... valuable as has been the work of Gimbutas, it is time to incorporate it and to move on: feminist archaeology is changing the old ‘certainties’ and Gimbutas has played her part in breaking them down. Today’s researchers proceed with less certainty than Gimbutas herself: everything is ambiguous and must be tested: there are no “proven facts”**

tried to force all ancient goddesses into this preconceived mould. Her excellent account is set in this context, which appears to me unfortunate.

Elizabeth Shee Twohig provides a splendid survey of megalithic tombs in North-west Europe but contextualises it into disproving a “Mother Goddess” element. She admits that there are evidences of representation of females in, for example, Northern France in the later neolithic period (p. 168). But it does not appear necessary for her to re-iterate so forcefully that, whether or not these figures were worshipped as goddesses, they do not represent a single Mother Goddess.

On the other hand some writers go straight into their discussions without bias, notably Mary E. Vouyatzis, whose “From Athena to Zeus” provides “an A-Z guide to the origins of Greek goddesses”, and Miranda J. Green whose paper on “Some Gallo-British Goddesses” maintains this author’s usual highly lucid and accessible scholarship. Miranda Green makes the point that, since there is lively archaeological debate about the validity of using the word ‘Celtic’ to describe the culture of the European Iron Age (p. 180) she has decided to stay with purely geographical

nomenclature. Her arguments, descriptions, and illustrations are all satisfying and stimulating and provide us with a wealth of information.

A survey by Karel van der Toorn of female divinities in early Israelite religion brings forward the goddesses Anat and Asherah, either or both seen as the consort of Jahweh in the period referred to. That the early Hebrew religion was not monotheistic but worshipped a divine couple, male and female, has now gained pretty standard acceptance among scholars, although with reluctance from those with a religious background. The author discusses the mystery of the many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of female figurines found on territory that comprised the land of Israel, and while not opting for them all to be goddesses he proposes that they may be “cult images used for devotional or prophylactic purposes” (p. 94).

Crete, Egypt, and Malta are discussed in some depth by the editors, by Fekri A. Hassan, and by Caroline Malone respectively. Once again, much interesting information and excellent illustrations are provided.

It is impossible here to give sufficient time and attention to the first two papers of this book, which discuss the matter of goddesses



from a political perspective. Ruth Tringham and Margaret Conkey focus their attention on the work of Marija Gimbutas, while Lynn Meskell discusses the implications of the discoveries—both in the sixties and currently—at Catal Huyuk. Both discussions assert that the work of Gimbutas and of Mellaart (at Catal Huyuk) have been pivotal to the Goddess Movement, creating a set of assumptions as its framework. Over-simplification and essentialisation of this structure form the basis of the critique by Tringham and Conkey: they argue that Gimbutas tends to treat the whole of European prehistory as a homogeneous unit from the point of view of religious and social organisation (p. 23), whereas in fact new studies in archaeology based in a gendered framework show wide variations of “roles, relations, ideologies and identities” (p. 22). These must be set against Gimbutas’s view of the society of Old Europe where “the roles and symbolic place of men and women are set and fixed” (ibid). They call for openness to accept that, valuable as has been the work of Gimbutas, it is time to incorporate it and to move on: feminist archaeology is changing the old ‘certainties’ and Gimbutas has played her part in breaking them down. Today’s researchers proceed with less certainty than Gimbutas herself: everything is ambiguous and must be tested: there are no “proven facts”.

Lynn Meskell takes a similar view, providing, on the way, a thoroughly informed and sympathetic account of goddess ideas associated with the site of Catal Huyuk, and giving some account of alternative explanations. She is concerned to discount emphasis on a “Mother Goddess” and believes that “invoking the ‘Goddess’ as an empowering modern construction is positive for many people whereas claiming archaeological validity for

ancient gynocracy, social utopia and a single ‘Mother Goddess’ at Catal Huyuk may be seen as problematic and dangerous” (p. 55). We should not rest our desires for the future on an imagined golden age of the past, but rather our aims for social change should be based on “fundamental humanity by which we have learned the lessons of our own recent history and reached realisations about our future” (ibid).

As a ‘Goddess person’ over a period now touching three decades, I welcome this new feminist archaeology. Gimbutas and Mellaart were of their time; they broke down enormous barriers, and they helped put the idea of female divinities on the map of today’s consciousness. We are enormously grateful to them as we struggle on. Many of us—perhaps the majority—never felt that the story had to be of the single mother-goddess. Rather there was, and still is, work to do to show that the idea of divinity has not always been totally male, and that females have been and are divine too. This book provides us with marvellous accounts of such divinities and a treasury of illustrations. Thought-provoking and controversial in its analyses, its actual material is outstanding. I just do hope that sooner or later the scholars will stop transposing onto us their own (mistaken) views as to what Goddess people actually believe, and start asking us instead.

**Asphodel**

**Daniel Cohen comments:**

I would like to add to Asphodel’s review by conjecturing why the archaeologists misinterpret the Goddess movement.

In the first place it seems that they perceive ‘the goddess’ and ‘goddesses’ as being opposing notions. They do not see the dance that

occurs, with the same person referring to ‘the goddess’ in one sentence and ‘goddesses’ in the next. Textual scholars are more flexible in this. For instance, Hilda Ellis Davidson, in *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, has no problem using both phrases in adjacent paragraphs, and neither does David Kinsley in his book *Hindu Goddesses*. And (even if the titles were chosen by publishers, the authors accepted this) *The Book of the Goddess* (edited by Olson), *The Concept of the Goddess* (edited by Billington and Green) and *The Faces of the Goddess* by Motz all have titles mentioning ‘the Goddess’ with text devoted to many goddesses.

It is always useful to have material centred on the particularity of individual goddesses, and in many cases it may well be that the deities of an ancient pantheon were only considered separately, not as a unity. But that need not prevent us from also seeing them as facets of one (though we are not required to). Long before the current Goddess movement, Dion Fortune, a follower of the Western Mystery Tradition, said “All the gods are one God, and all the goddesses one Goddess.” Indeed, much the same idea occurs in the great speech of Isis in Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* nearly two thousand years earlier.

I also find the archaeologists frequently referring to ‘the Great Mother’ or ‘the Mother Goddess’, much more often than people in the Goddess movement. So where do these ideas of one universal goddess who is the Great Mother come from?

I suggest that these notions are most often found in the writings of archaeologists of an earlier generation, from (approximately) the 1930s to the 1960s. Modern archaeologists are entitled to object if people follow these earlier views without taking into account current views. But it seems to me that, to a large extent, they are projecting their disagreements

with their earlier colleagues onto a movement whose understanding of goddesses is much subtler and less rigid than they make it out to be.

**Daniel Cohen**

*Daniel Cohen recently took early retirement from his post as a professor of Pure Mathematics at London University. He has been a pagan for over twenty years, and has been co-editor of Wood and Water for over fifteen years. He is particularly interested in developing positive responses by men to feminism. His published work includes a series of stories based on classical (and other) myths, rewritten to show male heroes acting in the service of the Goddess.*

*The Faces of the Goddess.*  
Lotte Motz. Oxford University Press  
(New York) 1997.

Rarely have I read a book which combines good scholarship and bad to the extent that this one does. The author argues that the terms 'Great Mother' and 'Mother Goddess' owe more to modern notions of what a goddess ought to be like, including Jungian archetypal theory, than to the understanding of the goddesses in the times when they were worshipped. In particular, such notions obscure the particularity of the goddesses themselves. She discusses various goddesses in detail, some with a mother aspect and some without.

She also suggests that 'mother' should frequently be regarded as a term of respect which may mean 'lady', 'goddess', or 'queen', rather than a descriptive term. This is an interesting idea, but it is not explored in sufficient detail. It would be valuable to see how the word is used for human women (as, for instance, such women as 'Mother Ship-ton' or 'Old Mother Hubbard'). It would also be useful to see how it is applied to Hindu goddesses, whom she does not discuss, where it seems to me it carries both interpretations (see, for instance, Katherine Erndl's "Victory to the Mother").

So far, so good. Such arguments can form part of a feminist approach to our understanding of goddesses (it is precisely for such reasons that I rarely use the words 'Great Mother' or 'Mother Goddess'; I prefer to say 'Great Goddess'). But the author is no feminist. Indeed feminism and other movements for change appear to have escaped her notice. I am not sure which of two of her remarks most surprised and offended me—a throw-

away comment that the relations of Zeus with nymphs and goddesses simply reflect the fact that "men rape women" or the reference to "ritual perversion such as transvestism or homosexuality". And her understanding of motherhood seems very limited. She seems to regard 'mother' as synonymous with 'birth-giver'—to such an extent that she remarks more than once that the Mountain Mother Cybele never brought forth a mountain from her womb. She does not seem to see that the use of the word 'mother' to mean 'nurturer' is as common as the more specific meaning, and in one of the few passages where she mentions nurturing she simply remarks that the Corn Mother and Water Mother do not nurture corn or water.

She argues against what she refers to as "the creed of the goddess religion", especially in its interpretations of history and prehistory. It is here that the flaws in her scholarship are most obvious. All books have mistakes, but some of hers affect her main arguments, and are not side issues. Can one take seriously someone who writes: "In the late 1960s the Women's Spirituality Movement came into existence, also known as Wicca ..." (p. 37)?

In one chapter she discusses Inanna, who she claims cannot be separated from Ishtar, and who she sometimes refers to as Inanna-Ishtar. This seems to me somewhat of an exaggeration, though it is allowable as some scholars do consider that the very close connection between the two amounts to identity. But she is not entitled without warning readers to refer in a single paragraph on characteristics and behaviour of Inanna to texts which do name Inanna and to other texts a thousand years later which are about Ishtar. She also claims that the standard popular account of Inanna is an example of how "a goddess may lose in depth by the ide-

alisation of a Goddess worshipper". She consistently gives the author of this book as Diane Wolkstein, whereas it is actually by Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer (as she knows, since it is referenced correctly in the bibliography). This is not just a matter of shorthand convenience. The first author is a folklorist and storyteller, whose portrayal of Inanna could quite possibly have lost in depth through the need to tell a good story. But the second author is a leading expert on Sumer and Sumerian, who is the original translator of many of the texts about Inanna. The fact that he is happy to be listed as joint author is enough to convince an unbiased reader that the portrayal is accurate. It is difficult to regard these errors as merely the kind of accident or carelessness that all scholars sometimes fall into.

There are other errors. The suggestion that "divine women are absent from the Hebrew texts" shows that Dr. Motz is unfamiliar with biblical scholarship of the past ten or more years. Her claim that "no female imagery is to be seen in the Paleolithic cave [paintings]" would not be accepted by many scholars of rock art. And she chooses not to mention those Celtic goddesses who Miranda Green, a leading scholar of that field,

specifically refers to as "mother-goddesses" (in such books as *Celtic Goddesses*).

In short, the flaws and failures of scholarship prevent one from taking her critique of goddess religion seriously, and even cast doubt on her more specific discussion of the goddesses. Readers interested in how and why several feminist archaeologists criticise some of the views of people involved in goddess religion would do better to consult the articles by Lynn Meskell (*Antiquity*, March 1996) and by Meg Conkey and Ruth Tringham (in Stanton and Stewart's *Feminisms in the Academy*), or the new book *Ancient Goddesses* (edited by Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris). Nonetheless, the chapters on the individual goddesses are worth reading, covering as they do both well-known goddesses such as Cybele and Demeter and also goddesses from the Eurasian shamanistic tradition and Saule, the Latvian Mother Sun.

Daniel Cohen

**The suggestion that "divine women are absent from the Hebrew texts" shows that Dr Motz is unfamiliar with biblical scholarship of the past ten or more years. Her claim that "no female imagery is to be seen in the Paleolithic cave [paintings]" would not be accepted by many scholars of rock art.**

***The Goddess Unmasked: The Rise of Neopagan Feminist-Spirituality*: Philip G. Davis Spence Publishing 1988.**

*The Goddess Unmasked* suffers from a bad case of false advertising. The dust-jacket proclaims that it is “the first critical evaluation by a qualified scholar of the theological, anthropological, and historical claims of the ‘Goddess’ movement”. None of this is accurate. It is not scholarly. It is not a review of the evidence on ancient cultures—in fact, only one 30-page chapter addresses this subject. Most ironically, it doesn’t even have much to do with the Goddess movement! By my count, only one quarter of the book discusses feminist spirituality at all.

What *The Goddess Unmasked* is, is a partisan attack on feminism, Neopaganism, and the New Age movement. Davis, a professor of Religious Studies in the University of Prince Edward Island, is a conservative Christian who believes that Goddess-worship is “self-evidently outlandish” and a “potent and disturbing malignancy”. His publisher, Spence Publishing ([www.spencepublishing.com](http://www.spencepublishing.com)) is a small press that caters to the Religious Right. Throughout his book, Davis continually expresses his contempt for feminist spirituality, which he says “masks a set of ideas and values which lend themselves all too easily to the destruction of the careers, families, and personal lives of a great many people.” *The Goddess Unmasked* is slightly more impartial than *Wicca: Satan’s Little White Lie*. But not much. And in chapter one, when Davis was fretting that nurse-witches perform secret, occult rituals over their helpless patients, I did

start to wonder which of the two books I’d picked up.

The most ironic aspect of *The Goddess Unmasked* is that very little of it has anything to do with feminist spirituality. Most of the text is a superficial, erratic review of a host of different things Davis doesn’t like, such as Gnosticism, the witch hunts, Theosophy, the Masons, French Utopian feminism, modernism, ceremonial magic, and the New Age movement. Davis argues that these are all ‘sources’ that feminist spirituality draws upon and he attempts to summarize them—all of them—in a meager 300 pages. The end result is a survey of stunning shallowness. The influence and failings of Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, for instance, merit a mere two and a half paragraphs. Worse, Davis thinks that feminist spirituality and Wicca are identical. His inability to distinguish between these two related faiths leads to patently ridiculous statements, such as his insistence that Margaret Murray’s Witch-Cult hypothesis had only a “token” impact on Wicca!

Only one brief chapter actually attempts to address the evidence for and against Goddess-oriented cultures in the ancient world. And the attempt fails, for many reasons. He focuses exclusively on popular texts and ignores more rigorous scholarship. For example, Davis repeatedly quotes Marija Gimbutas’ *Language of the Goddess* and *Civilization of the Goddess*. He does not refer to any of her academic publications, and he only mentions *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* once. Second, Davis never explores any issues in detail. In most cases, he briefly mentions that a mainstream scholar disagrees with a “Goddess scholar” and expects that somehow that proves that the “Goddess scholar” is wrong. When he does mention evidence, it’s in such an abbreviated

**The authors he cites may not be the cream of Pagan scholarship, but they’re certainly some of our more popular writers: Z Budapest; Monica Sjoo; Barbara Mor; Gerald Gardner. From their books Davis culls innumerable examples of reverse-sexism, ethnic stereotyping, and abysmal ‘research.’**

form that it’s almost a parody of the original research. Third, in some sections Davis’ information is criminally outdated. For instance, all but one of his sources on historical witchcraft are twenty or more years old. This leads to an amusing bit of irony: his own account of historical witchcraft is as inaccurate as the theories he criticizes. Finally, Davis’ methodological assumptions are ridiculous. Over and over again, Davis assumes that “no proof” equals “proof not”: if we cannot prove that Venus figurines represent a goddess, then this proves that they do not. And he espouses a painful double standard: “Goddess” scholarship must meet impossible levels of proof, whereas mainstream scholarship need meet none.

Davis’ discussion of Marija Gimbutas aptly summarizes the biases and weaknesses of his book. Gimbutas’ seminal theories, her decades of academic publication, earn her a meager three pages of *The Goddess Unmasked*. Her coverage begins with an insult. Davis complains that modern academics are vastly inferior to their predecessors. The troubles began in the Baby Boom, where universities were forced to accept inferior professors to cope with the flood of new students. Thanks to affirmative action, Davis claims, these “recent graduates or dropouts of

doctoral programs” were retained and became “tenured radicals” who continue to poison America’s higher education. This is important because “some key individuals in the early promotion of Goddess spirituality were professors, many of them from the boomer generation.” As examples, he lists Carol Christ, Mary Daly, Marija Gimbutas, and Naomi Goldenberg. Though Davis never actually states that any of these women are college dropouts, that is certainly the implication of his passage. It’s a slander of breath-taking proportions, especially in the case of Gimbutas, a woman with impeccable academic credentials. Davis’ analysis of Gimbutas’ Old Europe theory is little better. He notes two academics who disagree with Gimbutas, Brian Hayden and Mary Lefkowitz. He summarizes their critiques in one sentence apiece, offering absolutely no evidence to back up either side. Then the remainder of Gimbutas’ three-page coverage is devoted to speculation that she came to believe in the Goddess in her later days. Which, Davis assumes, “proves” that her theories are wrong.

In summary, if you are searching for a scholarly discussion of the evidence for and against ancient matriarchies, look elsewhere. *The Goddess Unmasked* will not illuminate

you. Nor will it assist you if you want an in-depth discussion of the roots of Neopaganism. If, however, you weren't aware that tarot cards are used for divination, you might be unlearned enough to find his survey of the Western Occult Tradition useful.

Nevertheless there is one area where *The Goddess Unmasked* succeeds brilliantly, despite its biases—or perhaps because of them: it offers a very damning critique of the excesses of Neopagan “historical research”. Yes, this book is a partisan, bigoted assault. But it left me wondering who I was angrier with: Davis, for launching this attack, or the writers who painted the bull's eye he was aiming at.

The authors he cites may not be the cream of Pagan scholarship, but they're certainly some of our more popular writers: Z Budapest; Monica Sjoo; Barbara Mor; Gerald Gardner. From their books Davis culls innumerable examples of reverse-sexism, ethnic stereotyping, and abysmal ‘research’. He cites Elizabeth Gould Davis (*The First Sex*) opining that men are “mutants, freaks produced by some damage to the genes” and that “only masculine ego stands in the way of a decent society.” Alongside this is Merlin Stone's (*When God Was a Woman*) painful attempts to prove that Judaism is not a Semitic religion and her claim that “Hitler” meant “Hittite teacher”. Davis notes the belief, stated time and again in radical Pagan texts, that women are superior to men, that our “holistic” way of thinking is infinitely better than male logic, and the assumption that a matriarchy would be an egalitarian utopia, rather than patriarchy in drag.

To serious scholars, ‘research’ of this sort appears ludicrous, yet many of today's Pagans believe it. Check the readers' reviews of *When God Was a Woman* on Amazon.com

and you'll find that Stone is praised, over and over again, for the “splendid” depth and quality of her research. So I understood why Davis said, “it is perplexing that claims so easily disproved are nevertheless in wide and increasing circulation.”

If Davis admitted he was critiquing the fringe of Neopaganism, his book would be far more tolerable. Unfortunately he returns bias for bias. At several points he acknowledges that he focuses on extremists, and that it is their extremism alone which makes them easy targets. Yet most of the time Davis pretends that these radicals accurately represent all Pagans and New Agers. Unfortunately, Davis' own book sheds no light on the problem. There is nothing in it—no evidence, no logic—that will convince fans of Stone & Co. that they are wrong. And Davis' own biases are so blatant that many Pagans will no doubt dismiss his statements as prejudice, pure and simple. Had he done what he promised—provided a detailed, scholarly, and impartial analysis of this subject—*The Goddess Unmasked* would be a jewel. However, Davis' interests seem to lie, not in describing or exploring Neopaganism, but rather in trying to use our worst writers to make us all look like fools.

**Jennifer Gibbons**

## READERS' FORUM

*continued from page 3*

for those with archaeological inclinations, that the ‘Permeability of Boundaries’ is planned close to the Theoretical Archaeology Group conference in Cardiff, Wales (14-16 Dec 99). TAG is the largest forum in the UK for archaeological students and researchers to present papers of diverse themes.

For further details about our conference please contact Robert Wallis, Ken Lymer or Simon Crook at the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton, Highfield, Southampton, United Kingdom SO17 1BJ. Email: <rjw2@soton.ac.uk> or <kjl31@soton.ac.uk>.

You can also visit our webpage at <[www.soton.ac.uk/~kjl31/confer.htm](http://www.soton.ac.uk/~kjl31/confer.htm)>.

Blessings and salutations,  
Ken Lymer

### **Devyn Christopher Gillette writes:**

To the editor:

While naturalism certainly may have influenced the ideologues who contributed to the National Socialist worldview (Jeffrey Kaplan, “Savitri Devi and the National Socialist Religion of Nature,” issue 7), it may be an overemphasis to suggest that naturalist spirituality (rather than anti-Semitism and nationalistic romanticism) was a prime actor in the development of the National Socialist ideology. National Socialism was perceived to be “in accord with the laws of nature” among its proponents not because, foremost, nature was perceived as divine, but because the ideological hegemony itself was perceived as utterly empirical.

I'll contend that the NSDAP essentially sought to embrace any image, any symbolism, any social group, conflicting principles

notwithstanding, which would perceptively give them an edge toward achieving total political power and hegemonic domination. Applying socialist images, it allied with the industrial capitalists. Existing as a counter to communism, its leadership made pacts with the Soviet Union planning for a post-war order. Embracing some pagan images such as runes, it also absorbed and made use of the Christian church, including the drafting of sanctioned prayers for (and to, in a saintly fashion) Adolf Hitler. Among academics, it applied arguments to bolster already entrenched ideologies (eg, ‘German physics’), and effectively dismissed any academic counterpoint as being seditious.

Case in point: archaeological disciplines were the springboard for the invasion of Danzig, as the German press was saturated with reports of an ancient Teutonic site allegedly located near the Polish border. Under the Lebensraum policy, this warranted a ‘liberation’ of the region as being part of the greater Germanic homeland, resulting in the placement of the Wehr-macht in a prime location for the planned invasion of Poland.

The NSDAP emerged following the tide of pan-Germanism that had already swept Europe before the turn of the century, and became attached to naturalist movements (such as the Wandervogel) who argued against industrialized society. Such movements included hiking, camping, hostel development, singing folk songs, nudism, and sporting activities to illustrate ‘wholeness’ of self between humanity and nature. It is because these movements were popular and already existent that the emerging NSDAP would also fashion itself as a ‘movement’ (Bewegung), rather than simply a political party. The NSDAP's

absorption of the Wandervogel movement would later become militarized into the Hitler Youth.

Kaplan argues that it is “inevitable” that nature spirituality will close a link between itself and social phenomena such as National Socialism. I will argue that mysticism applied to counter industrial consciousness need not necessarily connect itself with the far right, as Goodrick-Clarke (quoted by Kaplan) suggests. Indeed, the fusion between such mysticism and the women’s movement (eg, Eisler) may illustrate that connections with the social left are perhaps equally, if not more, likely. Kaplan stresses the apparent “passionate concern for place and mastery in society” as a rationale for “the shadow side of nature religiosity.” I suggest that this demonstrates a greater emphasis on the desired attainment of “mastery,” rather than spiritual connectedness, as the priority, and it may be argued that such desire for mastery is not as much a concern as cooperative, spiritual balance with that natural world for the bulk of nature spiritual people. Kaplan’s argument seems to place the militarist cart before the primal horse.

It seems to me that Social Darwinist and neo-Nazi tendencies among (comparatively few) right-wing Pagan groups owe more of their perspective to race arguments than eco-spiritual ones, or at least from what I can tell, simply apply the eco-spiritual framework to further bolster the already entrenched racial ideology. It is the anti-Semitism, militarism, and later white supremacism of such ideologies that drive the wedge between what many non-neo-Nazi contemporary Paganfolk regard as offensive and marginal, and what is not. There would never have been an NSDAP without anti-Semitism, and thus I will contend that neo-Nazi-esque Pagan groups end

up having more philosophically in common with Christian ‘Identity’ churches than those of us who prefer to exchange backrubs, swim nekkid, praise the moon, and jump the fire. Members of hate groups may, sadly, be present in all manners of other social or spiritual groups, but this need not mean that any one of those other groups are necessarily predisposed to its ilk.

**Devyn Christopher Gillette**  
Rutgers University

**Dana Kramer-Rolls writes:**

Jeffrey Kaplan, in his study of Savitri Devi stated that 1) she had a deep appreciation for nature, and 2) she was taken with the German National Socialist party, and therefore 3) deep appreciation of nature has a ‘dark side.’ This is a classic case of an undistributed middle.

To conceptualize her position, we must note that nature romanticism was not confined to the National Socialists. Rousseau’s noble savage, the English romantic movements in everything from poetry to garden design, and the German Goethe-inspired mythopoetics and Beethoven-inspired orchestral music had already swept the European consciousness. The ‘invention’ of folklore, through the linguistic work of the Grimms and later in the Finnish tradition spearheaded by Krohn and Aarne, had demonstrated the links between the Vedic and Germanic mythos. The discovery of Indo-European proto-language and cultural roots were exciting and heady stuff, and still are. The English armchair anthropologists such as Frazer (who, despite his current fall from grace was a significant intellectual contributor in his day) proposed the first paradigms of comparative mythology. Even the Soviets put their oar in with the structural

**Kaplan argues that it is “inevitable” that nature spirituality will close a link between itself and social phenomena such as National Socialism. I will argue that mysticism applied to counter industrial consciousness need not necessarily connect itself with the far right, as Goodrick-Clarke (quoted by Kaplan) suggests. Indeed, the fusion between such mysticism and the women’s movement (eg, Eisler) may illustrate that connections with the social left are perhaps equally, if not more, likely.**

formalism of Vladimir Propp and his Goethe-inspired surface narrative structure of the heroic fairy tale.

In science, evolutionary theory had alerted the world to the diversity and fragility of life. Without modern molecular genetics and shaped by a basically white, male, hierarchical culture, evolution was seen as determinate. Things didn’t just change; they got better. That same sort of determinism was also evident in anthropology where crypto-evolutionary schemes proclaimed the superiority of monotheism over polytheism or animism, monogamy over other types of breeding structure, cities over villages, kings over consensual leaders. That was the mind set into which Devi was born.

Regarding Devi’s anti-Semitism, in Europe Jews had been scapegoats for a millenium. Medieval tales about evil Jews and urban legends about Jewish cultic practice were as common as corn flakes. Neither Hitler nor Devi invented anti-Semitism. I would venture that a surprising number of Oxford dons and Paris professors held Jews in as much contempt, but were too civilized

to say anything about it. That is not to say that the Nazi policy of ethnic cleansing wasn’t reprehensible, but not so different than the subtle discrimination of the civilized world. Anti-Semitism did not cause Devi’s nature theology, nor was her anti-Semitism caused by her love of animals. Kaplan has not demonstrated any logical line of transmission.

The Nazis were masters at spin and display. I was told by a friend (and fellow Jew) who spent her Dutch childhood in hiding that she and her young friends used to sneak peeks at the Nazi magazines because they were so glamorous. The degree to which the slickness of the bread and circus presentations drew a crowd simply cannot be assessed from this historical distance. Devi was not the only one to be drawn into the illusion. So now we have Devi, a classical product of Indo-European scholarship, disillusioned with a religion that has serious flaws, taken against a holistic ecological or cosmological background, who is enchanted by political movement which exudes glamour. And that is all. She is a

**Devi liked animals more than people. There is much to be said for this, especially in the face of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, the slavery of women in Afghanistan, the mutilations and murders in Sierra Leon and half of the rest of Africa, and the wonton murder of endangered animals such as tigers for trophies or aphrodisiacs. The list goes on and it doesn't speak well for humanity. Deep ecology and nature religions which do not deify Homo Sapiens may be the only way we will all get out of the next millenium alive.**

product of her own history, a woman who probably meant well and was unable to shift her position after the war because of shame, or loyalty, or lack of flexibility, or some other purely personal reason. And that is the basis on which a Fulbright Bicentennial Professor of American Studies is pitching a warning against nature religion!

The fact that Hitler liked animals (and vegetables) is good. That doesn't make Hitler's actions in WW II good. Devi liked animals more than people. There is much to be said for this, especially in the face of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, the slavery of women in Afghanistan, the mutilations and murders in Sierra Leon and half of the rest of Africa, and the wonton murder of endangered animals such as tigers for trophies or aphrodisiacs. The list goes on and it doesn't speak well for humanity.

Deep ecology and nature religions which do not deify *Homo Sapiens* may be the only way we will all get out of the next

millenium alive. If hopes for a better human race and a better world were warped into a doctrine of mass murder, that is no reason to attack "sentimental love of animals" and concern for nature. Yes, there are liberal 'Nazis' as well as conservative 'Nazis.' There are those who have squandered political sensitivity to absurd levels of political correctness, and whose frustration and youth have led them to high profile proactive stances. That is not the point here. What is the point is Kaplan's lack of critical thinking and his bias couched as academic research. If Kaplan is afraid of nature or pagans, that is his problem, but to use his academic clout to demean the attempts by many others who are still fighting an uphill battle against Christian elitism is not just poor scholarship but poor judgement. I was hopeful when the AAR established the New Religious Movements Group but if it is going to be another excuse for pagan bashing or snobbish sneering at Hindu or Buddhist par-

adigms, we are not being well served.

Regarding "Odinism," while there are neo-Nazis who are attracted to Norse religion because of the National Socialist interest in it, there are also a great number of contemporary scholars and pagan/heathen practitioners who by faith or intellectual interest find a relatively intact non-Christian but European pagan religion to be of some personal value (see Jenny Blain, "Seithr and Seithrworkers: Recovering shamanic practice in contemporary Heathenism," *The Pomegranate* 6 (1998):6-19).

Dana Kramer-Rolls  
PhD candidate  
Graduate Theological Union  
Berkeley, California

**Cara Hoglund writes:**

I'm a practicing Norse Wiccan/Asatru and my most recent undergrad and grad fieldwork experience has been on Norse Wiccan, Asatru, and Odinists groups. I must say that Jeffery Kaplan's books about Asatru and Odinism have proved extremely helpful and informative. I have not been able to find anything similar to Kaplan's thorough and in-

depth history of Asatru and the other Nordic groups of the movement before or since. In addition to putting the movement into perspective along with the growth of the Wiccan movements, it also made it easier for me to differentiate between the two movements. I think that finally being given the "roots" has been the most rewarding part of his writings, for me at least.

On the negative side, I did feel that his fieldwork and writing leaned a bit too far into the "gossipy" and sensational parts of that history, focusing in-depth on the careers of a few individuals and analyzing and displaying those individuals in a manner that he would not have been able to get away with in analyzing, say, a Christian folk church. On the whole, though, his writings are interesting to read and fill in a lot of connections between groups while providing further food for thought.

Cara Hoglund  
Graduate in Folk Studies  
Western Kentucky University

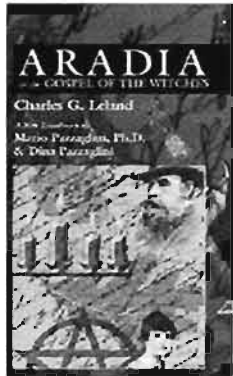


## The Pomegranate

Announces the establishment of an awards program intended to encourage Neopagan Scholarship.

The recipient of this \$200 grant will be a full-time University undergraduate student in the last 2 years of a 4 year program leading to a Baccalaureate Degree in a related field: Anthropology, Archaeology, Religious Studies, Theology, etc.

Please apply in writing with transcript before July 1, 1999 to: The Pomegranate, 501 Thompson Mill Rd, Corbett, OR 97019



**NEW!**

Phoenix Publishing

Softcover, 5-1/2 x 8-1/2, 480  
pages \$21.50

To order please send check or  
money order for \$24.50  
(includes \$3 postage) to  
Phoenix Publishing, Box  
3829, Blaine, Wa 98231  
[www.phoenixpublishing.com](http://www.phoenixpublishing.com)

# Aradia

or The Gospel of the Witches

Expanded Edition

This special edition features contributions by several eminent writers:

Mario Pazzaglini, PhD, whose family origins on both sides are deeply rooted in the area where *Aradia* originated, has spent 25 years working on a new translation. He gives a line-by-line transcription showing where Leland made his original errors as a result of his lack of comprehension of the dialect of the area. The new translation is then presented in the same format as the original edition (which is also included here). Mario's research notes are included as well.

Robert Mathiesen, PhD, has been a member of the faculty of Brown University for over 30 years. During the last decade most of his research has been on the historical development of magical theories and practices in Europe and the Americas from the Middle Ages to the present. He writes on the origins of *Aradia*, including the culture and religion of the area, as well as the difficulties involved in translating the book.

Chas Clifton has been studying witchcraft and the occult for over 25 years and has a long list of published books to his name including *Modern Rites of Passage, Witchcraft and Shamanism, and Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance*. He writes on the significance of *Aradia* on the revival of modern witchcraft.

The foreword by Stewart Farrar includes a short biography of Leland.

## NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

*continued from page 1*

others. Copies of this issue are available for \$20US from Ethnologies, CELAT, Pavilion Charles DeKoninck, Université Laval, Quebec, Canada, G1K 7P4.

We would also like to direct your attention to page 55, where we announce the first phase of *The Pomegranate's* newly inaugurated Neopagan scholarship program. If you qualify, or are interested in more details, please write.

In our 5th issue, Jenny Gibbons deplored the fact that scholarly books like

Levack's *Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* are notable in their absence from Pagan bookstores, while popular (and 'deeply flawed') books like Barstow's *Witch-craze* are readily available. I'm happy to report that at least one store, Shambala, in Berkeley, not only carries Levack but also offers a wide selection of other excellent books including related titles by Ankarloo, Bengt & Henningsen, Robin Briggs, Norman Cohn, Diane Purkiss, and James Sharpe. Mention *The Pom* when you call or visit.

*Persephone's hard-working minions.*