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Barking at the Moon: an editorial essay
Fritz Muntean
Apr 13, 2011

Scholarly Praise for Hutton and his Works

I first saw a copy of Evans and Green's *Ten Years of Triumph of the Moon* in November 2009 at a reception for the Contemporary Pagans Studies Group at the American Academy of Religion's annual meeting in Montreal. This anthology was more than a celebration of Ronald Hutton's groundbreaking work. With writings exploring avenues of enquiry left open, broadening the territory covered, and disputing Hutton on several key issues, contributors were paying homage to *Triumph of the Moon* in the time-honoured traditions of competitive and collegial scholarship.

Hutton's friendship and support had figured in the careers of many of those present, and not only those whose graduate and post-graduate work he'd actually supervised. Hutton was generally acknowledged as a dear and valued friend of many Pagan scholars and scholars of Paganism, both inside and outside the academy.

The Pomegranate depended from its earliest days on the active support of Chas Clifton and other heavy-lifters in the broader Pagan Studies community, as well as a number of independent scholars and enthusiasts here in the Pacific Northwest and the Canadian West. But it was Hutton's willingness to let us to reprint articles and reviews he'd already written for established journals, and later to offer us excerpts from his upcoming books, that lent our fledgling journal a great deal of much-appreciated cachet and prestige.

Thoughtful and progressive members of the Wiccan community, scholars and students alike, are grateful to Prof Hutton for convincingly demonstrating that the actual roots of modern Witchcraft are found, not in the ceremonies of savage societies, nor in the magical technologies of pastoral village life, but in the rich and fertile interface between the philosophers and scientists of the Enlightenment and the poets and dreamers of 19th century Romanticism. This has allowed us to see ourselves in a new light, the children of Western Europe's cultural and spiritual high-water mark.

Ignoring the Complains

During the 10 years since *Triumph* was first published, there's been a certain amount of grumbling from those who've invested in the literal historicity of some of our early enthusiasms, particularly belief in 'Pagan Survivals', the 'Prehistoric Paradise of the Goddess', the 'Burning Times', and the 'Unbroken Chain of Initiations Back to the Paleolithic', articles of faith that were firmly, if gently, put to rest by Hutton's work, not only in *Triumph*, but also in *The Pagan Religions of the Early British Isles* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), *Stations of the Sun* (Oxford UP, 1997), and the more recent *Shamanism: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination* (Hambledon & London, 2002) and *Druids: A History* (Hambledon, 2008).

I've generally recommended that these complaints simply be ignored. I continued to counsel silent dismissal even more recently in the face of Ben Whitmore's self-published *Trials of the Moon*, which in the past year has become a bit of a rallying point for those for whom Hutton's work has proved a disappointment.

My Critique of Whitmore's *Trials*

From a scholar's point of view, Whitmore's criticism of Hutton's *Triumph of the Moon* must appear to be little more than an exercise in trolling, which a recent NYTimes article defined as 'the act of posting inflammatory, derogatory or provocative messages in public forums' (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/opinion/30zhuo.html>).

A great deal of Whitmore's appeal is based on his willingness to simply fold his arms and call names. Hutton is 'provocative', a 'maverick historian' who is 'far more conservative than most' and guilty of a typically English 'insularism', and much of Hutton's work is 'one-sided, misleading, or plain wrong' (p.2). Hutton has done nothing more than create a 'new myth to replace an old one' (p.4). Hutton's discussions with other writers are 'polemics' (p.9). Hutton relies on 'a number of theories' that are 'quite dated' (p.6f15), as well as 'bizarre notion[s]' (p.62).

Whitmore consistently accuses Hutton of 'misrepresenting' his sources (p.17), particularly of 'misrepresenting' the works of Margaret Murray (p.80). Hutton 'mischaracterizes most wildly' the works of Carlo Ginzburg (p.35f135), and engages in 'a series of pedantic attacks' on the scholarship of Leland (p.36).

According to Whitmore, Hutton is guilty of 'graceless admission of error ... made even more surreal by [*watch this:*] the fact that, having been accused of discrediting an author through misrepresentation, Hutton has proceeded to discredit the very author of his accusation, by blatantly misrepresenting him' (p.80).

Whitmore's frequent accusations of misrepresentation should be familiar to readers of Don Frew's responses to his own critics. In fact, Frew, whom Whitmore credits with being a 'Wiccan scholar' (p.45) and a 'Pagan historian' (p.37f135), seems to be Whitmore's major source of inspiration. Frew's name appears 32 times in Whitmore's text, including 23 times in the footnotes. And many of these latter references are to a work written by Frew before *Triumph* was published. As Whitmore warms to his argument, Frew's name appears more often — twice on p.45, 6 times on p.64, and 15 times on p.80.

Whitmore is protective of Frew's reputation. Hutton's response (Hutton 2000) to Frew's *Ethnologies* article (Frew 1998) is 'extremely bitter' (p.80). Frew's condemnation of Hutton 'is hardly a personal attack' because he credits one of the authors he criticizes 'with having written an "otherwise fascinating book"', and Hutton should not complain about Frew's "'negative process" of fault-finding' because Hutton has found critical things to say about the works of others, including 'Frew himself' (p.80f288).

The NYTimes article I quoted above mainly addresses the perils inherent in the anonymity of the Internet. Of course Whitmore isn't completely anonymous. We have his name, and a rough idea of where he lives ('rural Auckland, New Zealand'). Beyond that, we're offered virtually nothing in the way of bona fides or qualifications. Other than Don Frew, Whitmore cites Max Dashu and Asphodel Long as sharing his concerns (p.79).

Ignoring the Complaints 2

I was further encouraged in my determination not to respond to these criticisms by the comments of Karen Armstrong in her book *The Bible: A Biography* (D & M, 2007) concerning the role of William Jennings Bryan and his efforts to push anti-Darwinism to the top of the fundamentalist agenda. Bryan championed this cause from 1920 up until the notorious disaster of his public defense of this doctrine at the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925. Subsequently, the press ‘gleefully denounced the fundamentalists as hopeless anachronisms, who could take no part in the modern world’ (p.208).

According to Armstrong, however, the long-term effect of this encounter was less than ideal — and could be instructive to us today:

‘When fundamentalist movements are attacked they usually become more extreme. Before [the Scopes trial], the conservatives were wary of evolution, but very few had espoused “creation science”, which maintained that the first chapter of Genesis was factually true in every detail. After Scopes, however, they became more vehemently literal in their interpretation of scripture, and creation science became the flagship of their movement. Before Scopes, fundamentalists had been willing to work for social reform with people on the left; after Scopes, they swung to the right of the political spectrum, where they have remained’ (pp.210-11).

So rather than inviting, as some waggish friends & colleagues have suggested, Whitmore, or the 2 or 3 living writers whom he identifies as supporting his anti-Hutton views, at least two of whom live in California, to show up in person at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the AAR, which is being held in San Francisco, and debate Hutton’s work in an open forum — a kind of latter-day Scopes trial — maybe the most sober plan would be simply to ignore them.

My ‘15 Year Cycle’ Theory

Earlier in *The Bible*, Armstrong quotes a literary source from 1888 in which a clergyman’s wife expresses the opinion that: ‘If the Gospels are not true as fact, as history, I cannot see that they are true at all, or of any value’. This reaction was echoed by a Lutheran minister, who asked, in a letter to

the NYTimes in 1897: 'If Jonah did not spend three days in the whale's belly, did Jesus rise from the tomb?' (pp.197-201).

This reluctance to appreciate the role and value of compelling mythological narrative, as opposed to a verifiable historical or empirical fact, is a sentiment that is apparently shared by many Pagans today, including the 'bright young High Priest and High Priestess who,' according to Whitmore, in the introduction to his *Trials*, 'were abandoning the Craft because *Triumph* has convinced them they were living a lie' (p.3).

I have a theory that might help shed some light on this apparent intellectual shortfall. Please bear with me as I try to explain.

It may be possible to look back on the 45-odd years of Contemporary Paganism, at least as I've experienced it here on the West Coast of North America, as having now passed through 3 distinctive 15-year periods.

1965-1980: Most of those who rallied around the ribbon-bedecked May Pole of modern Pagan Witchcraft in the early 1960s were well-educated young people, mainly from the urban counterculture, with politically progressive and socially liberal worldviews. We shared a great love of physical and spiritual health, and a reverence for the natural beauty around and within us. The great majority of us, I believe, were enthusiastic pleasure-seekers, sybarites keen to fuel the fires of a spiritual path that claimed 'all acts of love and pleasure' as its sacraments.

We'd heard about the 'Burning Times' and the 'Prehistoric Matriarchy', but we thought of them as interesting mythological narratives, certainly not as stable historical facts. The '9 Million Women' seemed absurd by any understanding of European demographics. Mediterranean archaeology had shut down on the eve of WWI, but if there were any gaps into which the 'Paradise of the Goddess' could have been slotted, these were quickly and thoroughly filled in once digging recommenced in the early 1950s

During this period, most everyone who self-identified as a Pagan was a founder or an early adopter. We were all leaders of one sort or another, or preparing ourselves to lead, and there was very little in the way of a laity.

1980-1995: This period was marked by the rise of a less-well-educated laity. When the '70s ended, the social and political climate in which Paganism had developed underwent a dramatic shift to the right. Thatcher was elected in '79, Reagan in '80. Suddenly Paganism had a whole lot of brand new adherents — many of whom had never heard of Gardner or Valiente or Sanders. And just like that an impressive number of enthusiastic writers appeared, eager to step into this educational vacuum. Soon we were getting a noticeable increase in hostility toward scholarship in general and the social sciences in particular.

The new laity seemed eager to embrace fabricated religious history, concocted anthropology, and revised pantheons of politically corrected deities. This era was distinguished by political efforts that emphasized adventurism over analysis, by the rise of denominationalism with alternate or rival Paganisms splitting off from the original Wiccan rootstock, and by the advent of Witch Wars.

Paganism became encumbered with a millennialist mythos, a triumphalist social agenda, and an assortment of popular images that included salacious depictions of naked priestesses, an emphasis on atavistic costumes and tools, and rituals that seem designed only to increase a person's sense of self-worth and entitlement. Early adherents, especially those with decent education and more-than-moderate intelligence, began leaving the Craft in droves.

1995-2010: The good news is that both of these periods — the early 'everyone a founder' and the 'rise of the laity' — were phases, and by 1995 we seemed to have passed through them. The writings of many scholar-practitioners served to legitimize the study of Paganism, and effectively rescued the field from those marginal writers who'd dominated from 1980 on.

During this time, post-secondary-education-based Paganism established itself amongst Liberal Arts students in virtually every college and university in the English-speaking world. From the mid-90s onward, one no longer had to be ignorant or dismissive of the academic study of history, archaeology, anthropology, psychology, theology, art history, sociology, etc, in order to be a Pagan.

Although the writings of this 3rd period were mainly produced by Pagan academics, many lay writers contributed as well. Most notable were works by long-time practitioners who were also experienced members of the helping professions. The 1980s had been marked by the predominance of large organizations, Wiccan 'churches' and Witchcraft 'collectives'. At the same time, the proliferation of popular 'how-to' books served to convince many beginners that solitary practice was the norm rather than the exception. Judy Harrow's book *Wicca Covens* (Citadel, 1999) did much to help reverse this drift and reestablish small group practice as the primary organizational model of modern Witchcraft.

These writings, by both Pagan scholars and experienced Pagan professionals, were being read, and their ideas were being absorbed, by 'literate' Pagans, those capable of sorting the wheat from the chaff, of separating the Capricorns from the Aries. Although this cohort has never been a majority, its influence has been widespread, and it has made a serious and important contribution to the rate at which the broader Pagan population has absorbed Pagan scholarship.

Unfortunately, that third phase appears to be drawing to a close. It's had its 15 years of fame, and the pendulum now seems ready to swing in the other direction. Once again, as in the early 1980s, anti-intellectual and anti-academic sentiments are beginning to stir.

Disappointment at PantheaCon

I recently spent a week in California, attending PantheaCon, the enormous Pagan festival/conference held yearly over the Presidents' Day Weekend in February since 19--, and I came away somewhat disheartened by much of what I'd heard before, during, and after the event. There were excellent and inspiring lectures, workshops, panel discussions, etc., not to mention the usual opportunities for seriously degenerate dressing-up and shaking the collective Pagan bootie. But there were significant low points as well, including some of the most outlandish claims of highly unlikely ancient lineages I'd ever heard,

and tacky hucksters in hooded polyester robes promoting pessimistic and profoundly ahistoric paranoia.

But worst of all, wherever I went, and even among Pagans for whom I had serious respect, I heard strong sentiments expressed against Pagan academic scholarship in general and against Hutton's writings in particular.

Silence may be an unhelpful response to this sort of thing. But what possible comeback can one make to casual but confident references to 'the covens that trained Gardner' without experiencing the intense embarrassment of not knowing where to begin and what to say?

In these circumstances, especially at PantheaCon or on open email lists where this sort of misinformation is currently flourishing, calling bullshit is counterproductive. It seems to be inherent in the mentality of the disingenuous that they're more prone than anyone else to take, or pretend to take, *really* serious offense when the inherent inaccuracy of their claims is pointed out. This places the defender of scholarship in a nearly impossible position, as righteous indignation still takes precedence over measured discourse in public forums.

Is Skepticism Worth the Effort?

Apparently I wasn't the only one who was upset by some of the goings on at PantheaCon. The pseudo-historical claims, the blatantly false histories, the presumptions contradicted by all the known data or were founded on no data at all, and the metaphorical narrative promoted as the literal concrete truth, seemed to defenders of Pagan scholarship to be letting the side down massively.

As scholars and as Pagans, it would seem that we have a double duty to address these issues of accuracy. The question now is — should we proceed? — and if so, how?

While I was considering this, Caroline Tully, a colleague from the U of Melbourne, wrote recommending the anthology *Archaeological Fantasies: How Pseudoarchaeology Misrepresents the Past and Misleads the Public* (Garret Fagan, ed; Routledge, 2006). She

directed my attention to one interesting example, a case in which a popular author threatened an academic archaeologist with legal action, claiming 'defamation', over some disputed details of ancient Egyptian history. Tully felt that the popular author had no interest in taking part in, or even allowing, a dialogue about the past, and was demanding that his 'shonky' version remain unchallenged.

Well yes, I thought, we've seen quite a lot of that sort of thing. But then Tully cited another article, called 'Oh No it Isn't: Skeptics and the Rhetorical Use of Science in Religion' by Asbjorn Dryendal, in Lewis & Hammer's *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science* (Brill, 2010). The author describes the 'consumer protection' ethos of the skeptical debunker, and the frequent lack of response from the very people who we assume must need to heed this debunking, as 'serving to underline the role that skeptics fulfill as moral entrepreneurs'. By analyzing the method of skeptical debunking, including the 'pathos' aspect of not even being listened to after all the skeptic's hard work, the article seems to be questioning the skeptic's motivation in debunking in the first place.

Tully wonders if our annoyance at the popular success of these bad-history Pagans — at the ease with which they obtain their 'histories', as well as their high esteem in the eyes of people even less educated than themselves — is really such a noble motivation at all? Are we working in order to save a gullible public from the cynical lies of those attempting to gain profit or authority over others by fraud? Is this annoyance, possibly based on envy, an acceptable, reasonable and justified reaction to the public's eager acceptance of pseudo-history over the painstakingly researched work of professional academics?

These seem to me to be really good questions, and it's easy to understand why those who didn't live, as Pagans, through the earlier period (c1980-1995) in which 'easily constructed pseudo-history' was the order of the day, might have reasonable qualms about making the kind of effort needed to debunk the current attempts to reestablish the authority enjoyed then by the promoters of these paradigms.

Witch Wars and How to Prevent Them

I can offer a really brief, two-word 'reason why': 'Witch Wars'.

In her article 'Witch Wars: Factors Contributing to Conflict in Canadian Neopagan Communities' (*The Pomegranate* 11, Feb 2000, 10-20), Sian Reid defines a Witch War as a dispute, conducted in an open and public manner, which polarizes a community to such an extent that everyone must either choose sides or withdraw from the community.

Although Prof Reid acknowledges that many participants in these conflicts suffer from weak interpersonal skills, she cites the major cause of Witch Wars as conflict over issues of authority, authenticity, and legitimacy — usually between traditional Witchcraft groups and larger Pagan meta-organizations. These latter are typically organized for the purpose of promoting Pagan public relations, acquiring legal status in order to benefit from tax exemptions available to other religious bodies, and being able to offer religious services, usually marriages, in a legally recognized context.

Traditional Wiccans often object to the PR activities of these larger organizations, fearing that the version of Witchcraft being promoted to the media or to interfaith groups lacks depth or authenticity. And despite the well-intentioned motivations behind efforts to be recognized by government agencies, the perception of many traditional practitioners is that 'if such recognition is given to the large organizations, it will reside with them exclusively, effectively creating two classes of Witches: those whose practice has legal standing and those whose practice does not. This will force those who want the benefits of legal standing to affiliate with and conform to the practices of the larger organizations,' a situation which does not sit well with the British Traditional Wiccans who already believe that the leaders of these Pagan organizations lack the authority and legitimacy to assert this kind of hegemony.

These were the circumstances that led to the Great Seattle Witch War of '88-91. According to the Seattle BTW leaders, the Laws of the Craft demanded that Pagans use magical-sounding nicknames in public, and that everyone's mundane names were protected from public exposure by the rules of 'oath-bound secrecy'. The local

eclectic Pagans, who used their own names in public, were denounced as 'oathbreakers' and traitors to the Craft.

The supposed source of these rules is The Wiccan Ordains, a document originally produced by Gerald Gardner in 1957 in response to Doreen Valiente's challenges to his authority. Most of the Ordains are rules governing personal conduct and relations between fledgling covens, and address the specific circumstances of Gardner's day. But the rules of secrecy are based on a large number of passages, 70-odd out of about 160 total, describing the relentless persecution, torture, and burnings at the stake of 16th and 17th century English witches by the Christian authorities. Individual covens are forbidden to communicate with one another; tools and writings are to be destroyed when danger threatens or upon the death of their owners. These selections appear to have been written at least in part to provide Gardnerian Witchcraft with a pedigree dating back at least as far as Elizabethan times. But they mainly seem to be a rather obvious and heavy-handed effort to explain why the Witchcraft tradition into which Gardner claimed to have been initiated had left not a single trace on the fabric of history.

The Wiccan Ordains is the origin of the term 'Burning Times', which was apparently coined by its writer. It's also the source of the all-too-popular paradigm of 'The Witch as Victim Down through the Ages and Who Knows Maybe in the Future Too'.

It's hard to avoid noticing that the language of the Ordains is an awkward and uneven attempt at imitating Elizabethan English. Furthermore, condemned witches in England were hanged, never burned. Even Gardner's most enthusiastic supporters agree that the Ordains is surely a creation of the 20th century (Don Frew, personal correspondence, 10/25/04). But the deliberate use of poorly researched archaic language is felt by many to be internal and inexpugnable proof of intent to mislead. Legally speaking, no one is obligated to honour oaths obtained by fraud, and there can be little doubt that the 'Burning Times' elements of the Ordains were written with the intent to deceive its readers.

To the student of history, the Ordains appears to be a work in progress, a growing, ad hoc response to evolving circumstances, and

not an ancient, venerable, time-tested encapsulation of hard-won wisdom, the sometimes ruthless enforcement of which allowed the Craft to survive through centuries of relentless persecution.

Still, the traditional Wiccans in Seattle insisted that severe punishments for breaches of secrecy were appropriate, even today, because Witchcraft had endured a period of prosecution in the past during which to reveal another witch's identity was tantamount to condemning that person to death, and therefore such offenses were deserving of censor, banishment, or even harsher penalties in return.

At MerryMeet1990, a Pivotal Moment in Craft History

MerryMeet, the Covenant of the Goddess's annual festival and business meeting was held in the Seattle area that year. And by the time Labour Day rolled around, tensions were running very high. The Event took place on a lovely island in the middle of Puget Sound at a charming rustic forest camp, but none of the local Pagans attending were happy campers. The two sides in what had become a full blown local Witch War were obliged to battle it out before North America's most sophisticated and perceptive Pagan leaders.

The film 'The Burning Times', Donna Read's feminist revision of Witchhunt history, had its Pacific Northwest premiere at this event as well, and this did little to calm the waters.

The weekend was already a fair shambles when Alison Harlow (now, alas, of blessed memory) and I walked out of a contentious meeting. Alison & I found ourselves sitting on a stump, bemoaning the apparent collapse of civilized discourse. The specter of self-destruction seemed to loom over our beloved Craft community, as it all too often does over excursive and countercultural movements.

At just this moment, John Yohalem walked out of the meeting himself, and came by to commiserate. He handed us a copy of an article, 'New Light on the Great Witch Hunt,' that had recently (Imbolc, 1990) appeared in *The Wiccan*, a Pagan newsletter from Britain.

According to its author, who was a professor of History at an English university, there now seemed to be solid evidence that the actual body-count of the European Witchhunt was more on the order of tens of thousands rather than millions; that in areas like Spain and southern Italy which were securely in control of the Inquisition 'accusations of witchcraft were regularly dismissed as a nuisance, much as the medieval Church had done'; that victims were typically those who had 'made a large number of local enemies' and were 'accused of witchcraft by their neighbors'; that 'the most bloodthirsty persecutors were not the strongest but the weakest, the least able to rise above local animosities' and the most likely to try courting popularity by prosecuting unpopular groups and individuals; and finally, that the victims of the witchhunt were not Pagans at all, but Christians being unfairly accused by other Christians, a tragic side effect of the religious wars between Protestants and Catholics that were sweeping through Europe at that time.

The English professor's name (if you haven't already guessed) was Ronald Hutton.

John began passing Hutton's article around, and pretty soon we had attracted a small crowd. There was clearly a dramatic contrast between Hutton's calm and scholarly assurances and the maniacal sensationalism of the Burning Times film. And in light of the terrible things the local antagonists seemed willing to do to one another, the popular idea that the 'historic Witch' was basically a healer, and that all information to the contrary is nothing more than 'patriarchal' slander, probably needed to be reexamined. And, now that you mention it, wouldn't those who claim to be practitioners of benevolent magic be constantly tempted to blame their failures on the malefic magical intentions of others? Throughout history, weak leaders have been unfairly accusing unpopular people of evil doings. And historically, witch-hunting occurs as a tragic side effect of internecine conflict, whether the rivals are Protestants and Catholics, McCarthyists and New Deal Liberals, or BTWs and Eclectics.

The next 5 years were pretty exciting. John was elected COG information officer for the upcoming year, and he published Hutton's article in the Lughnasa 1991 issue of the *COG Newsletter* (under the title 'Aftermyth'). Scholarly articles and books on the actual history of

the Great European Witchhunt began circulating, many of which had been written from the mid-1970s onward as the result of a dramatic increase, mostly centred in Europe, in research into the history of women.

We read some of the earlier scholarly books about the Witchhunt as well, including Starkey's *The Devil in Massachusetts* (Anchor, 1949). The obvious similarities between what happened in Salem and the kind of accusations made before and during Merrymeet 1990 were positively astounding. Surprisingly enough, parallels to the mechanisms at work in the Great Satanic Panic of the 1980s literally jumped off the page. No one reading the details of how the allegations of a pack of unbalanced young girls caused a little Puritan community to turn homicidal is ever likely to 'believe the children'.

Among the most significant of this scholarship was Hartley's 'Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-Witch' (*Journal of the History of Medicine*, 1990). The author convincingly demonstrates that the midwives, herbalists, village healers, cunning folk, etc, from whom we contemporary Wiccans believed we are spiritually descended, had almost never been targeted by the witchhunts. What's worse, and even more shocking, was that according to the trial records, these people were far more likely to be accusers than accused.

This was no surprise to the anthropologists among us — or to careful observers of the disordered behaviour of the rival factions at Merrymeet 1990. An important part of the job description of village magical healers, be they cunningfolk or shamans, medicine men or witches, is the magical ability, and the willingness and authority, to accuse others, even to torture and death, as practitioners of malefic magic.

The Rise of Pagan Scholarship

By the middle of the '90s work had started on the launch of *The Pomegranate*, and the Contemporary Paganism Study Group had begun its ultimately successful campaign to be recognized by the AAR. Pagan scholarship was on the rise, and what Chas referred to

as Paganism's 3 'cheerfully ahistoric narratives', the 9 Million Women; the Prehistoric Paradise of the Goddess; and the Unbroken Chain of Initiatory Ordination Going Back to the Neolithic, were being regularly exposed to the light of scholarship.

During the 2nd half of the '90s, this scholarship went public. Reliable information began penetrating every aspect on Contemporary Paganism, and was enormously influential in this effort to render us relatively bullshit-proof, and relatively free of the aggressive obscurantism that we'd been saddled with since 1980. And once the results of scholarly research into the causes and mechanisms of the Great European Witchhunt became widely known — that most of the deaths were caused by magical practitioners accusing others of evil-doing — Witch Wars stopped cold and then fell off the table entirely.

The rise of the Internet during this same period helped a great deal. Scholarly articles could reach a wider audience than ever before, and verifiable information could be disseminated and discussed in a nonexclusive environment and with an openness and candor that many regarded as a welcome improvement to both academic and Pagan discourse.

The Internet as a Mixed Blessing

Of course the Internet was not a universally positive blessing. Many of those who had prosecuted the Witch Wars of the 1980s went on to find a wider and even more impressionable audience for their accusations among a dissatisfied minority, many of whose primary contact with modern Paganism was online.

When Aidan Kelly published his research into Gardnerian origins, *Crafting the Art of Magic* (Llewellyn, 1991), the same allegations were made against him that had been used by the BTW leaders against their rivals in Seattle. Kelly was an 'oath breaker'; he was 'considered dead by his initiators'; he had used fraudulent means to gain access to his sources; he had published documents containing the legal names of others; etc. Local COG councils from coast to coast were organized to condemn Kelly and to strip him of credentials and initiations. Talented public speakers took to bully pulpits at

conferences and festivals with vigorous presentations, and even some impressive slide shows, denouncing Kelly's scholarship and casting aspersions on his intentions in an effort to disprove his findings.

Still, except for the hardships and embarrassment caused to Kelly, all this had very little effect on the ongoing and orderly pursuit of scholarship. I can't think of a single work of serious academic scholarship that's been published in the past 15 years that does not provide support or show appreciation for his work. Subsequent scholars almost uniformly agreed that *Crafting the Art of Magic*, although obviously flawed and undoubtedly preliminary, is a very important book.

At the same time, the pronouncements of the anti-academic campaigners were pretty much ignored. This was especially true in the decade following 2000 when, in an effort to encourage critical discussion, both Ronald Hutton and Jacqueline Simpson wrote articles in response to Don Frew's *Ethnologies* article. No response was forthcoming, and Pagan scholarship continued unabated.

But with the Internet posting of *Trials of the Moon*, the reasonable and collegial discourse that has distinguished contemporary Pagan studies for the past 15 years is no longer the only game in town. *Trials* is currently (Apr 2011) cited in 6 solid pages of Google articles, and almost all of these express support for Whitmore's critiques. To come up with a comparable number of citations, you'd need to Google 'Obama Birth Certificate'.

As Caroline Tully points out on her *Necropolis Now* blog, a lot of Whitmore's success derives from what she refers to as the 'clever publicity technique' of attacking a really big target. She also notes that Whitmore is more than adept at keeping the cauldron stirred — and racking up those Google links in the process — by quickly popping up on every blog that mentions his name. But there can't be any doubt about the enormous appeal of Whitmore's writing. There clearly are an awful lot of Pagans out there who really hate Hutton's work and are actively seeking to be 'saved' from the research and conclusions of committed Pagan scholars.

In the 1980s, Maureen O'Hara, now president emerita of Saybrook Grad School in San Francisco, wrote several articles condemning the pseudo-scholarship that dominated the New Age discourse in her day. She criticized popular writers like Lyall Watson and Rupert Sheldrake for 'theorizing wildly in scholarly-sounding language, sprinkling speculative discussion with isolated fragments of real data regardless of relevance, confusing analogy with homology, breaking conventional rules of evidence at will, and extrapolating from one methodology into others wherein different principles operate' ('Of Myths and Monkeys' *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 25.1, 1985: 61-78).

Of course these same criticisms could be laid against the political rhetoric of the Thatcher/Reagan/BushSr era as well. Things got better for a while — for 15 years, by my reckoning — but now many of the more populist aspects of political discourse have once again begun to deteriorate.

This time, however, the tactics O'Hara was inveighing against 20 years ago are, at least in the US, being brought into play by the Tea Party against another 'really big target', a US president who seems to be universally acknowledged for his positive qualities — except by a corps of determined public speakers, and the large and aggressive minority of strident anti-rational followers to whom they pander.

TheurgiCon — Anti-Scholarship Beyond the Internet

At this February's PantheaCon, I sat in on a lot of meetings, receptions and presentations by Pagan interfaith and seminarial panjandrums, and I heard an awful lot of references, offhand and pointed alike, to rebuttals of Hutton in particular and Pagan academic scholarship in general that everyone seemed to know 'were being prepared', or 'were readily available', or 'were already widely circulated' — the works of high-powered, highly-placed, and (apparently) highly-respected 'independent' Pagan public speakers

Glenn Turner, the founder and administrator of PantheaCon, has now begun sponsoring another event — called 'TheurgiCon' — at the behest and for the benefit of these independent speakers. This event

seems designed to appear, at least to the non-academic, like a genuine scholarly conference. But the papers given are neither peer-reviewed, responded to, nor subsequently published. You can Google 'TheurgiCon' for the schedule of last year's event. And for an overview of these presentations, see Gus diZerega's related blogs on Beliefnet.

Careful readers of diZerega's blog posts will notice the number of confident references to 'powerful arguments' in favour of the 'powerful similarities' between Neoplatonism and British Traditional Wicca. And the satisfied assurance with which Harran is cited as a centre of 'Classical Pagan culture into the 10th century'. And the unruffled ease with which the 'discovery' of pre-Gardnerian 'Witchcraft lines' is cheerfully alluded to.

When I read all this, I wrote a letter to Glenn, reminding her that the upcoming annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion is being held in San Francisco this year, in mid-November. I suggested that she might consider scheduling the next TheurgiCon event for the week before or after the AAR meeting. That way, I said, not only could interested academic Pagan scholars be able to attend TheurgiCon, and TheurgiCon's grass-roots speakers would be able to attend the Pagan Studies sessions at the AAR, but also the two groups could meet & greet one another in what could only be an interesting, exciting, and hopefully fruitful exchange of ideas.

Turner didn't respond directly, but the word was passed up to me by way of the grapevine that my suggestions were not without merit, but there were drawbacks as well; chief among them was the inconvenience of the timing. It seems that at least one of the key presenters is intensely occupied with mapping the correlation between classical Neo-Platonism and the Wiccan traditions that Gardner discovered, and he needs to make at least one more trial presentation within the Pagan community before he'll be ready to invite academic scholars to attend.

The implication here — that academic scholars only exist outside the Pagan community — is hard to miss.

So it's been decided that this year's AAR conference is happening a year too soon and TheurgiCon 2011 has been scheduled for sometime in late summer. A 2-day event is being planned.

Concerning Fundamentalism

Between 1995 and 2010, the Pagan speakers who'd built their public reputations on pseudo-historical claims and blatantly false histories, or by denouncing first Kelly and then Hutton, had managed to make virtually no headway at all with the literal Pagan public. It seemed obvious that the more unlikely a claim of ancient lineage appeared to be, the more secrecy protocols or 'legally binding non-disclosure agreements' there were protecting whatever documents were supposed to support these claims from the public eye. Likewise, we'd already noticed that the BTWs in England didn't practice anything close to the level of oath-bound secrecy that the more vocal of their North American counterparts were demanding of the rest of us.

The urgent need of these speakers and presenters for intellectual validation might have been better met if any of them had shown the least interest in the scholarly process, especially in the essential nature of peer review. As Chas Clifton recently remarked about Whitmore's online responses to criticisms of his book: 'Should you actually make a substantive suggestion for improving it, he will be full of reasons why he does not have to do so, because he is "not an academic."'

One witty observer recently remarked that Whitmore and his internet followers needed to get a new hobby and suggested that climate change denial should work well for them. I had to chuckle. But actually, I think that's being a bit unfair. The claims these people are making are only superficially similar to climate change denial. Attacking scholars and scholarship while demanding scholarly status for their own special pleadings does seem similar to the antics of the climate change denial people.

But the rhetorical devices being employed by Whitmore and his supporters are more like the ones that Christian fundamentalists use to debunk evolutionary theory: If a scholar's subsequent work takes

into account more recently developed information, and if the scholar then modifies an earlier idea to fit new evidence in an effort to improve a standing theory, then the fundamentalists feel free to denounce the previous work as 'an extreme position' and claim that the scholar has now 'recanted'. Fundamentalists of all stripes have a hard time understanding the difference between scholarship, which is always progressing, always expanding — 'evolving', if you will — and ideology, which is characterized by eternal truths that are unchanging and in constant need of impassioned defense.

Journalism (and Humour) to the Rescue

As Karen Armstrong has suggested, though, efforts to thwart or counteract the predations of Creationists and other defenders of the doctrinaire have usually proved ineffective, and even occasionally counterproductive. Against the legions of sandaled pilgrims, devotees of the nut cutlet and other seekers of certitude, the careful application of humour has in the past seemed to have some potential for success. This is especially true in the instance of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, but young Mr Henderson, the original author of the FSM manifesto, was an especially brilliant writer. And he had far more control over the quality of his humour than the average academic, whose efforts in these directions tend to be heavily weighted in the direction of irony and cynicism.

The original *Pomegranate* was intended from the outset to function as a conduit, bridging the gap between the Pagan academic and the literate Pagan-in-the-street. The exchange of information was actively encouraged, and provocative and constructive ideas quite often passed in both directions. Pagan academics obviously need the Pom in its current peer reviewed form. But, like the papers read at scholarly conferences that are attended only by other academics, articles in the new Pom quite actually and all-too-effectively disappear from public view.

Resurrecting the old Pom in its original and hopelessly anachronistic print form is clearly not an option. But surely there are bright young scholars among us who are schooled in the arts and technologies of the blog and website. Could it be possible for some of these forward-

looking denizens of the digital interface to create an attractive and easily accessible web presence for, say, the Contemporary Pagan Studies Group? This could be enormously effective venue for the publication of brief and succinct scholarly articles and essays. Articles in the old Pom averaged about 4-5000 words. In the new Pom they run nearly double that. Links to more dense and authoritative articles could be provided, and carefully monitored provisions could be made for the kind of mutually educational dialogue that we now are able to enjoy only on Pagan scholars' lists.

If there are those out there who we feel are letting down the side, let's figure out some way of picking our side back up. We've come a long way since 1995, and there's still, one would hope, no end to what we can accomplish. At the very least, we owe it to the best of the scholars and writers among us to defend their accomplishments and to encourage future achievements.

What Only Children Could Believe

Hilary Mantel, in *Wolf Hall*, her Man Booker Prize winning fictionalized biography of Thomas Cromwell, quotes from the writings of William Tyndale, the first person to translate the Bible into English, in the early 16th century, over 100 years before the King James Version. Needless to say, the implications of this project were not lost on either the Roman church or the English church and state. Hundreds of Britains were imprisoned and scores were executed for importing, owning, or even reading these translations. Tyndale himself was tried for heresy and burned at the stake in Brussels in 1536.

“As the word of God is spread, the people's eyes are opened to new truths. Until now, they knew Father Abraham, and Noah & the Flood, but not St Paul. They could count over the sorrows of our Blessed Mother, and say how the damned are carried down to Hell. But they did not know the manifold miracles and sayings of Christ, nor the words and deeds of the apostles, simple men who, like the poor of London, pursued simple wordless trades. The story is much bigger than they ever thought it was. You cannot tell people just part of the tale and then stop, or just tell them the parts you choose. For centuries

Rome has asked the people to believe what only children could believe.”

Thanks to the work of Prof Hutton and many other Pagan scholars, Contemporary Paganism has been spared the ignominy of believing what only children could believe. Without the likelihood, gods be praised, that any of us will be martyred in flame for apprehending the sheer size of our story.