RELIGION AND THE RETURN OF MAGIC: WICCA AS ESOTERIC SPIRITUALITY

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
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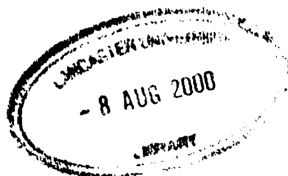

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Joanne Elizabeth Pearson.

RELIGION AND THE RETURN OF MAGIC:

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ABSTRACT

Keith Thomas' celebrated theory of the decline of magic during the seventeenth century, and its disappearance by the twentieth century, stands in stark contrast to the *magia naturalis* of the Renaissance and the later occult revival of the *fin de siècle* from which Wicca developed. In this thesis we contend that in the ferment of Renaissance Europe, magic remained an integral part of western esotericism, of which Wicca in the 1990s is a current manifestation. Using Antoine Faivre's characterisation of esotericism and Wouter Hanegraaff's historical emphasis on esoteric connections, we construct a framework to enable us to assess Wicca as an esoteric religious tradition in the 1990s. Within this framework, and running throughout the thesis, we investigate an apparent transformation in the understanding and practice of magic. We argue not only that Wicca is a specific religion and part of the Western Esoteric Tradition, but that the use and understanding of magic in Wicca is not divorced from, but part of religion; rather than a contra-religious, instrumental means of control utilised by individuals, magic may thus instead be understood as a participative group

religious practice. This thesis thus seeks to go beyond the conflation of Wicca with other forms of witchcraft and paganism in order to uncover Wicca as a specific form of spiritual expression. The seemingly ever-increasing popularity of Wicca in the Protestant world suggests that Thomas' theory, whilst accurate for the restricted historical epoch with which he engages, in fact requires revision as a consequence of the development of Wicca as a religion in the second half of the twentieth century. Thus, instead of religious changes causing a decline in magic, as we approach the twenty-first century it may in fact be more appropriate to speak of religion and the return of magic.

INTRODUCTION

RELIGION AND THE RETURN OF MAGIC

for good or ill, magic continues to appeal and witchcraft will not soon vanish from this earth (Jeffrey Russell 1991: 175).

In these concluding words of *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*, Jeffrey Russell alerts us to both the link between magic and witchcraft and to the considerable appeal of the image of the witch throughout history. He thus provides the starting point for the present thesis: if witchcraft (and magic) has indeed 'not vanished from this earth', what forms does it take at the end of the twentieth century, how are Wicca and magic understood by practitioners, and how is Wicca to be characterised in the spiritual milieu of the 1990s?

CATEGORISING WICCA

Since its inception in the 1950s and continuing into the 1990s, modern witchcraft has attracted increasing public attention[1]. Once misunderstood[2], it has become a relatively

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[1] The publicity of Wicca and its emergence into relative popularity from the 1950s is assessed in Chapter One. In the 1990s, the increase in public attention can be seen in the medium of television, where Wicca has been included in Channel 4's series on alternative spirituality, *Desperately Seeking Something* (broadcast 25.11.96) and *Everyman's* 'Pagans' Progress' broadcast on BBC 1 (30.11.97).

[2] We refer here specifically to the misconstrual of modern witchcraft as Satanism resulting from the theological notion introduced in the sixteenth century that 'the essence of witchcraft was adherence to the Devil' (Thomas 1991: 534). This misunderstanding still persists, and came to light most recently in the ritual abuse cases of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

acceptable spiritual alternative within the plurality of modern religiosity[3]. Drawing on pagan traditions of the past, images of the witch, and the occult revival of the *fin de siècle*, modern witchcraft presents itself as a modern-day mystery religion (Wicca), a form of feminist/Goddess spirituality[4] (feminist witchcraft), the survival of ancient rural wisdom (hedgewitchcraft) and as a means by which magic is returned to an otherwise disenchanted world. Publications on the subject of modern witchcraft increase seemingly year by year[5], and serious academic study of witchcraft and Paganism is becoming more popular[6].

Yet the emergence of modern witchcraft into relative popularity since the late 1970s and 1980s[7] has engendered diverse manifestations of what is often called, simply, 'the

---

[3] In particular, the acceptance of Wicca as one alternative form of religiosity in the modern world can be seen in the inclusion of Wiccans, representing Paganism, in Interfaith meetings.

[4] The overlap and distinctions between feminist spirituality and Goddess spirituality will be clarified in Chapter One.

[5] This has been particularly so in the past decade; examples can be found in Chapter Two and in the bibliography of this thesis.

[6] See, for example, the collected volumes edited by Harvey & Hardman (1996), Lewis (1996), Pearson *et al* (1998) and other works discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. Undergraduate courses which include the study of Paganism and Wicca have been taught at Bath Spa University College, Bristol, King's College, Lampeter, Lancaster, and Winchester. Postgraduate research on Wicca and Paganism is being conducted at all the above institutions, as well as, for example, at Cheltenham and Gloucester CHE, Goldsmiths' College, and the London School of Economics.

[7] Salomonsen (1996: 42) reports that 1979 is 'the year referred to by many of my informants when "it" all happened: the Goddess movement burst forth in full bloom. The new "gospel" was being spread through a number of important books and conferences'. These publications include Christ and

Craft'[8], and thus the question of characterisation has become a key issue. On the one hand, in popular literature one might find references to white witches, black witches, green witches, hedgewitches, ditch witches, feminist witches, teenage witches, New Age witches, media witches[9]. In academic studies, on the other hand, witchcraft has been interpreted as New Age[10] (Heelas 1996; Hanegraaff 1998), as a New Religious Movement (Barker 1989), as a revived religious tradition (Hutton 2000; Crowley 1998), and as nature religion (Crowley 1998; Harvey 1997).

The Sociology of the Occult

Early research which included, but was not primarily concerned with Wicca, witchcraft and Paganism was conducted principally by American sociologists concerned with questions of 'deviancy' in what they termed 'occultism'[11]. James Beckford, however, stated the problems inherent in the 'sociology of the occult' when he argued that most sociologists are only interested in the occult as a convenient indicator of deviance or error. He says,

---

Plaskow's *Womanspirit Rising* (1979), Merlin Stone's *When God was a Woman* (1976), Naomi Goldenberg's *Changing of the Gods* (1979), Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon* (1979), and Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* (1979).

[8] A term which we avoid in this thesis, as 'the Craft' is also used to denote Freemasonry and Druidry.

[9] See, for example, *The Cauldron: Pagan Journal of the Old Religion* (91: 30), February 1999 in which this list of witch types appeared (and see p. 46 of the present thesis).

[10] For a refutation of the conflation of Wicca with New Age, see Pearson 1998; also Hanegraaff 1998: 85 points to the 'complicating factor' of neopaganism in characterisations of the New Age.

[11] The 'sociology of the occult' is discussed further in the review of previous research in Chapter Two.

> the notion of *deviance*, *deviance-amplification* and *labelling* already constituted a ready-made conceptual and theoretical framework in which [occultist groups] were readily reduced to a matter of personal or social problems. It is as if these movements simply flew into a very sticky spider's web of concepts and assumptions which immediately reduced their significance to an expression of alienation, anomie, relative deprivation or 'the flight from reason' (Beckford 1984: 260).

The occult tends to be defined as deviation from a given norm, a norm which is in turn defined in terms of modern scientific rationalism. As Wouter Hanegraaff points out, 'to approach occultism only negatively and indirectly (in terms of its contrasts to "the" scientific and rational world-view) precludes any possibility of understanding it in its own terms and on its own premises' (1995b: 119-120), as well as perpetuating a superficial dichotomy between science and the 'irrational'.

Beckford's 'sticky spider's web of concepts and assumptions' is just as relevant to the inclusion of Wicca and, to a lesser extent Paganism, within the field of the New Age Movement and New Religious Movements (NRMs), fields which are themselves subject to contestation. As Elizabeth Puttick (1997: 233) points out, 'We may talk . . . about Christian-based, Eastern-based, Western occult and New Age movements, which tells us little beyond the obvious and fails to highlight either the significant differences between these groups or the similarities between movements in different groupings'.

The New Age Movement

The inclusion of Wicca and Paganism under the New Age rubric has been contested regularly over the past five years[12]. Wicca is, for the most part, 'more overtly religious and precisely defined than the New Age' according to Simes (1997: 490-98, cited in Hutton 2000[13]), but given the use of terminology borrowed from Jungian psychology in popular books on Wicca[14], with much reference given to individuation and the search for the Self, it is easy to see why a connection has been made between Wicca and the characteristic 'Self-spirituality' (Heelas 1996: 18) of the New Age. However, focusing on an examination of the evidence for British Wicca's rejection of identification with the New Age, I have previously asserted that the three central principles of New Age teaching presented by Paul Heelas in his study of the New Age movement are inapplicable to Wicca as it is practised in Britain[15]. Fundamental differences between Wicca and the New Age were examined through the attitudes of Wiccans and New Agers to the terms 'commitment' and 'authority'.

Using Colin Campbell's concept of the cultic milieu and the distinctions between cult and sect, Hanegraaff (1998a: 15) suggests that 'sources qualify as New Age *the more* they diverge from sect characteristics and approach the cultic profile '(ibid.: 18). Yet Hanegraaff includes Wicca as New Age, despite the fact that Gardnerian/Alexandrian Wicca in Britain does precisely the converse, demonstrating predominantly sect

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[12] See York (1995), Harvey (1997), Puttick (1997), Hanegraaff (1998a; 1998b), Pearson (1998)

[13] Page references for Hutton's forthcoming volume are not provided as they are unavailable at the time of writing.

[14] Vivianne Crowley's *Wicca* (1989; 1997) being the most obvious example.

[15] Pearson 1998: 45-56.

characteristics. Hanegraaff's reason for including Wicca is due to a focus upon post-1970s, largely North American derivations of Wicca, and he may well be correct to do so. Indeed, he points to a 'New Age Paganism' as well as types which fall outside the New Age rubric. Yet, as we shall show, Wicca in its classic form nevertheless remains somewhat different, and should not be conflated with later derivations which seem to be more assimilable to the New Age. Hanegraaff's conflation is managed with some reticence, and he is aware that the classic form of Wicca perhaps wouldn't be termed 'New Age' if it had remained esoteric. Our point is simply this: that Hanegraaff is not sufficiently aware - and indeed, there is no reason why he should be - of Alexandrian/Gardnerian Wicca in Britain which remains esoteric and is therefore of a type outside Hanegraaff's categorisation. Yet Hanegraaff also denies Wicca a place within esoteric spirituality on the same grounds, and it is the stated purpose of this thesis to explore the applicability of this category to Wicca.

New Religious Movements and 'Revived' Religion

Contrary to the reaction against being labelled New Age, however, Wiccans generally find it more or less acceptable for Wicca to be classified as a new religion whilst recognising that the term is not particularly accurate. The term 'New Religious Movement' (NRM) has been used to cover 'a disparate collection of organisations, most of which have emerged in their present form since the 1950s, and most of which offer some kind of answer to questions of a fundamental religious, spiritual or philosophical nature' (Barker 1989: 9). Eileen Barker includes witchcraft in her appendix listing examples of NRMs, yet she has not conducted any research on Wicca and Paganism, concentrating instead on new religions based on Eastern practices, and

on Christian sects. Additionally, Barker appears to focus on similarities between the religions she includes under the rubric of NRMs, ignoring those differences which would, to my mind, give considerable doubt to the inclusion of Wicca and Paganism as NRMs. For example, as we shall see in Chapter Four, Wicca does not depend upon charismatic leaders and, given the structure of Wicca in small-scale, autonomous covens, it seems ridiculous to suggest that the religion *could* operate around a single guru figure. Furthermore, as the data collected and reported in Chapter Two of this study indicates, the attraction of Wicca is not limited to any particular age group (except, perhaps, the over-twenties, which is hardly narrow) or cultural group. And since Wicca does not offer or promise 'salvation', and expects its practitioners to integrate their spiritual practices and expression in their everyday lives, existing relationships with family and friends tend to be maintained. Lastly, the practice of secrecy and privacy within Wicca, meeting for ritual in private homes or secluded woodland and operating in small autonomous covens with no overarching organisation, indicates that the religion does not present an open challenge to wider society and culture.

Many Wiccans in fact prefer the term 'revived religion', since they draw upon ancient traditions and manipulate them for the twentieth century[16]. But there are few witches today who feel the need to invent for witchcraft a physical lineage going back to the dawn of time. The representation by practitioners of Wicca as 'the Old Religion' is rarely accepted as valid in anything other than a symbolic sense. For as Ronald Hutton

[16] Seventy five of the one hundred and twenty witches in a survey I conducted in 1995 (discussed fully in Chapter Two of the thesis) regarded their religion as 'revived'.

has pointed out, 'the Paganism of today has very little in common with that of the past except the name, which is itself of Christian coinage' (1993: 337) whilst the relics of Paganism which survived did so in a manner which was completely detached from any religious context which they may once have had.

Nature Religion

'Nature Religion' is a relatively recent academic construct under which to group a variety of religions, including Paganism, eco-spirituality, and indigenous religions. It is also popular with Wiccans - one hundred and three out of the one hundred and twenty (86%) witches represented in the 1995 survey told me that they regarded their religion as 'nature religion' Yet at present, 'nature religion' is a contested designation, and is itself an emerging field. The current use of the term 'nature religion' stems from Catherine Albanese's usage in her book *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age* (1990). Albanese defined nature religion as beliefs, behaviours and values which make nature a 'symbolic centre'. Whilst recognising the value of the construct in bringing to light the diversity of religious practices which do take nature as a symbolic referent, Albanese's term has been criticised as too broad to be of practical use. Bron Taylor suggests instead that we use phrases such as 'the natural dimension of religion', or 'nature influenced religion' to distinguish those religions which see nature as important but not sacred, and keeping 'nature religion' exclusively for reference to religions which regard nature as sacred.

Wiccans do regard nature as sacred, but relate to nature with a combination of intimacy and distance, shaping it with sacred circles and ritual to suit their own needs

for relationship with the earth. The nature/culture duality thus persists in nature religion, reflecting a turn to nature as a source of revitalisation, attempting to re-engage with a nature from which they feel estranged, to re-enchant the natural world which has been exploited and dominated. Since Wicca and Paganism are not salvation religions, they do not reject the world or the everyday reality of living in the world, but seek to enhance life on earth. Earthly existence is not regarded as fundamentally sinful or binding, with a need for salvation or escape. How much one takes this as a need to defend and protect the earth, however, is open to question.

It is clear, therefore, that modern witchcraft occupies a somewhat ambiguous position *vis à vis* contemporary religiosity, yet it has appeared to be easily assimilable to the so-called 'sociology of the occult', the New Age Movement, and NRMs, which have tended to reduce Wicca and other Pagan religions to inappropriate categories. Such already existing fields of study have proved inadequate to accommodate Wicca, and it is this problem which the present thesis ultimately seeks to address. New designations such as 'revived religion' and 'nature religion' may prove to be more applicable as terms of categorisation.

MAGIC AND RELIGION

A Brief Outline of the Debate

The difficulty in interpretating and characterising Wicca is exacerbated by the deliberate blurring of the boundaries between religion and magic within Wiccan practice. Magic has long been associated with religion and science according to the

tripartite distinction formulated by Sir James Frazer[17]. In regarding magic as more of an art than a science, an art which attempted to make things happen[18], Frazer (1890) saw magic as distinct from religion and proposed an evolutionary schema in which magic predated religion, which in turn preceded science, and introduced the dichotomy of magic as manipulation contrasted with religion as supplication. Bronislaw Malinowski (1948: 86-87), in his study of the Trobriand Islanders, argued against an absolute trichotomy and instead considered magic, religion and scientific knowledge to be co-existent, each being used for different purposes and in different contexts in an appropriate manner. He did, however, maintain a distinction between magic and religion on the grounds that religion referred to the fundamental issues of human existence, whereas magic was concerned with specific and concrete problems.

For sociologists, the distinguishing features of magic and religion were somewhat different from those expounded by the anthropologists, being concerned with the well-being of the community. Thus, Durkheim (1995) stressed the individuality of magic, distinguishing magical beliefs and rites from religion on the basis that religion unites people together in society whereas magic, as an individual rather than collective

[17] I am aware that Edward Tylor predated Frazer in the discourse on magic. However, since Tylor was predominantly concerned with the distinctions between science on the one hand, and magic as pseudo-science on the other, a discourse which does not directly concern us here, it seems more pertinent to begin our dicussion with Frazer.

[18] It is therefore interesting to note that Aleister Crowley, whose magical work, largely derived from the Golden Dawn though permeated by Crowley's own style of invention and innovation, has influenced Wicca very strongly, defined magic as 'the Science *and* Art of causing change to occur in conformity with Will' (Crowley 1973: 131, emphasis mine).

practice, does not. For Durkheim, magic falls outside the group dynamics necessary to religion as a social institution, a distinction pre-empted by Marcel Mauss who considered magic to be any rite which plays no part in organised religion and which is therefore private, secret and mysterious. A. R. Radcliffe Brown (1948) introduced ritual and social value to theories of magic, and the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1937: 30, 201) emphasised a sociological dimension in stressing the importance of networks of social links, tensions and conflicts to Zande magic, which is used not to change nature but to combat powers and events caused by other people.

Such distinctions, however, have not been without criticism. As H. S. Versnel points out (1991: 177), the distinctions between magic, religion and science have been under attack since the 1940s, and earlier. R. R. Marrett (1911), for example, claimed that the distinctions between magic and religion are illusory, stemming from ethnocentric projection and the distortion of history, and coined the term 'magico-religious' in an attempt to bridge the division. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) saw magic as the naturalisation of human actions and religion as the humanisation of natural laws; consequently, both magic and religion imply each other and are complementary and inseparable. Taking the lack of distinction between magic and religion to its logical extreme, Lévi-Strauss suggested that magic as a concept is empty of meaning and should therefore not be used. As Versnel points out, however, the problem is that one 'cannot talk about magic without using the term magic' (1991: 181). Furthermore, Versnel outlines the criticisms of Marrett and others in describing the 'modern concept of magic' as,

> the product of an evolution which started in late antiquity in the context of Jewish-Christian conflict with remnants of pagan cults and which acquired its definitive Western connotations under the double influence of a comparable theological conflict between Protestants and Roman Catholics in the 16th century and the subsequent evolution of Western scientific ideas. Magic [is an] essentially modern-Western, rationalistic and biased concept and as such quite unsuitable for application to the study of non-Western cultures where similar dichotomies cannot always be demonstrated, either terminologically or conceptually (1991: 180).

Criticisms of evolutionary theories of magic have come predominantly from anthropologists and sociologists concerned with the applicability of western concepts of magic to non-western peoples, resulting in a 'confusing spectrum of divergent theories' (Versnel 1991: 181). Tanya Luhrmann (1994: 8-10), however, pre-empts our concern with modern, western, industrialised people who practice magic in arguing that the opposite is also true: that the paradigms of magic presented in anthropological work among primitive societies are inadequate to interpret magical practices in literate, post-industrial western society. We must therefore seek new ways of understanding the relationship between magic and religion.

Religion and the Decline of Magic?

Max Weber's understanding of the decline of magic in the wake of the Protestant Reformation appears initially to be the best starting point for such an investigation, not least because Weber's work has been followed in Keith Thomas' landmark study

Religion and the Decline of Magic ([1971] 1991). For Weber (1966), whereas religion was rational, organised and functional, magic was primitive, the 'guardian of the irrational' (Wax & Wax 1963: 501). He regarded magic as a widespread form of popular religion in pre-industrial society, recourse to which prevented the rationalisation of economic life. Keith Thomas provides historical evidence to suggest that religion and magic were indistinguishable before the seventeenth century, and that distinctions between religion and magic were the product of a specific epoch in European history, when the Protestant Reformation attempted to take the magic out of religion during the sixteenth century. Protestantism, according to Thomas, thus created the division of magic from religion, and the subsequent decline of magic allowed for the 'rationalisation of economic life'. Thomas concludes that the decline of magic was complete by the end of the seventeenth century, with the growth of urban living, the rise of science, and the ideology of self-help emancipating people from the need for magical beliefs (1991: 794). Intellectual changes, new technology, and new aspirations thus replaced belief in magic with optimism in man's ability.

However, it was precisely the sixteenth century that produced the foundation of the Western Esoteric Tradition, as the Renaissance spread beyond Italy throughout Western Europe. Within Renaissance esotericism, magic was viewed as 'the circulation and transformation of universal pneuma by the force of love' (Orion 1995: 92), a common cosmic spirit (*spiritus mundi*) which operated as a channel between the heavens and man, the macrocosm and the microcosm. This understanding of magic

was by no means in conflict with religion[19], for magic was not regarded as purely instrumental and pragmatic but, at its highest level, as mystical religion which has love as its foundation. The tension between various *uses* of magic, however, becomes evident in Cornelius Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* of 1533, where pragmatic goals are superseded by religious goals such as prophecy and mystical experience. Nevertheless, as Hanegraaff (1999a: 21) points out, 'even in the explicitly "magical" occult philosophy of Agrippa, the general framework is one of a spiritual path oriented towards the attainment of *gnosis*. The pragmatic aspect oriented towards short-term goals may get a lot of attention, but in the end it is always subordinate to the long-term goal of mystical attainment'.

We must therefore question Thomas' rather limited definition of magic as 'the employment of ineffective techniques to allay anxiety when effective ones are not available', which have today 'either disappeared or [are] at least greatly decayed in prestige' (ibid.: 800). Like so many scholars, Thomas fails to engage with the developing understanding of magic during the sixteenth century, preferring instead to confine his understanding to that articulated by the turn of the century scholars mentioned above. In contrast, this thesis takes as its starting point the argument that 'magic is the hidden underside of modernism. We have to go back to Yeats to find a moment when magic and the cultural transformation of society are clearly articulated

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[19] Although ambiguities are evident in the works of Christian mages such as Marsilio Ficino, who attempted to reconcile the practice of magic to Christian doctrine, particularly as expounded by Augustine in his *City of God*, this is largely because the Hermetic passages relating to the animation of statues with the powers of the cosmos seemed to breach the Second Commandment (see Hanegraaff 1999a: 1ff.).

together but this link is one of the dominant notes of the twentieth century' (MacCabe 1998: 82). In terms of historicism, we might be forgiven for expressing astonishment that previous works have neglected to note the overlaps between the developing esotericism of the Renaissance and the beginning of the Great Witch Hunt, on the one hand, and the occult revival expressed not only in the growth of initiatory societies but also in the art and literature of the period, and the development of scholarly enquiry into religion, anthropology, science, and magic on the other. Perhaps we might argue that MacCabe's 'dominant notes' are dominant precisely because they have been so ignored as currents of western history?[20]

Such notes are, however, being heard again in the more recent academic studies of magic[21]. Rosemary and Murray Wax proposed in 1963 that magic can best be understood as a worldview rather than as a rite or a cult, a worldview which is distinctive from the rational worldviews of western science or Judeo-Christian religion, but which is itself 'a sensible, coherent system of thought and action employed by practical and intelligent people' (1963: 502). Jan van Baal (1963) likewise stresses an emphasis on magic as a participatory worldview, and urges a focus on what magic expresses rather than on its supposed results. Van Baal regards magic as part of religion whilst maintaining manageable distinctions which he says are idealtypical and pragmatic rather than absolute and rigid. Contemporary researchers

[20] There is a great deal of scope for research in this area, which the present author intends to undertake in the near future. The necessity of such a project, and its implications, are discussed in the conclusion of the thesis.

[21] Throughout this thesis, we shall adopt more recent understandings of magic, whilst at the same time drawing attention to characteristics of magic derived earlier.

such as Wouter Hanegraaff (1998a), Richard Sutcliffe (1996), and Sarah Pike (1996) have all embraced magic as a participatory practice, Hanegraaff linking magic historically to esotericism and Sutcliffe regarding it as a form of gnostic spirituality within the broader spectrum of the Western Esoteric Tradition, a spirituality which is radically individualistic and aimed at self-transmutation.

Concentrating on the earliest known form of modern witchcraft, Wicca[22], this thesis engages with studies of this Western Esoteric Tradition as a means of assessing Wicca as a form of esoteric spirituality, and considers the effectiveness of esotericism as an appropriate category for Wicca in relation to previous categorisations. In particular, the thesis engages with the field of western esotericism as delineated by Antoine Faivre and, following him, Wouter Hanegraaff.

ESOTERICISM

In terms of scholarly literature, both Faivre and Hanegraaff note modern witchcraft's connections to the Western Esoteric Tradition[23]; however, their focus is not an assessment of Wicca as esoteric religion. Emic characterisations of Wicca, such as that provided by Vivianne Crowley (1996b: 81-2), present Wicca as an esoteric

[22] There are forms of witchcraft which claim to predate the emergence of Wicca in England, most notably Traditional and Hereditary witchcraft. However, since there is no evidence to support these claims, we follow Ronald Hutton's assertion that Wicca is the classic, earliest *known* form of modern witchcraft (Hutton 2000, forthcoming). An extensive demarcation of the field of witchcraft follows in Chapter One.

[23] Faivre 1994: 17; Hanegraaff 1998a: 85.

mystery religion and draw clear distinctions between esoteric Wicca and exoteric witchcraft and Paganism. Crowley writes,

> [w]ithin modern Paganism we have seen initially a revival of the inner esoteric aspects of Pagan tradition. These are small, closed groups to which entry is solely by initiation ceremonies . . . More recently we have seen the growth of exoteric Paganism, whereby modern Pagans have devised rites and ceremonies, held more and more often in public, to celebrate marriage, the birth of children and death, and whereby Pagans have sought to develop religious teaching for their children and to extend ministry to those of the community who are in need, whether in hospital, hospice or prison.

According to practitioner understanding, then, Wicca can be characterised as an 'esoteric' mystery religion distinguishable from 'exoteric' witchcraft and Paganism. In terms of scholarly analysis, however, the accuracy of this insider position is unclear. Through an application of current academic research in the field of western esotericism to Wicca in the 1990s, it is hoped that we may find an adequate framework which will enable us to assess Wicca as a form of esoteric spirituality.

Academic Understandings of Esotericism

Antoine Faivre, the foremost scholar of the esoteric field, defines esotericism as a form of thought expressed through exemplifying currents, rather than a specific genre (1994:4), and identifies six components of esotericism: correspondences, living nature, imagination and mediations, experience of transmutation, the praxis of concordance,

and transmission (ibid.: 10-15)[24]. Of these, the first four are essential to a definition of a tradition as esoteric whilst the latter two Faivre considers to be 'relative' elements, frequently occurring in combination with the four fundamental characteristics but unnecessary to the categorisation of a practice as esoteric (1994: 14). Throughout the course of the thesis, it will be necessary to trace the presence of Faivre's six characteristics in contemporary Wicca in order to assess Wicca as a possible form of esotericism. A preliminary discussion of each characteristic is thus essential before we proceed to the main body of the thesis.

Characteristics of Esotericism

The first of the four fundamental characteristics is *correspondences*. Real and symbolic correspondences are believed to exist throughout all parts of the universe, both visible and invisible: '[t]hese correspondences, considered more or less veiled at first sight, are, therefore, intended to be read and deciphered. The entire universe is a huge theater *[sic]* of mirrors, an ensemble of hieroglyphs to be decoded. Everything is a sign; everything conceals and exudes mystery; every object hides a secret' (Faivre 1994: 10). But, Faivre warns, the presence of correspondences alone does not necessarily indicate esotericism, for doctrines of correspondence can be found in many philosophical and religious currents[25].

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[24] Faivre has identified these characteristics from the corpus of writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus (see Chapter Three, note 45 for further details of this corpus).

[25] The notion of correspondences was also, of course, popular in *fin de siècle* writings, for example, Baudelaire's sonnet, 'Correspondances' which, 'reassigns to the poet his ancient role of *vates*, of soothsayer, who by his intuition of the concrete, of immediately perceived things, is led to the idea of these things, to the intricate system of "correspondences"' (Fowlie 1990: p.29). Freeman (1999: 139)

The second characteristic is *living nature.* In accordance with the theory of correspondences, the cosmos is regarded as complex, plural and hierarchical and nature thus occupies an essential place within it: 'Nature is seen, known, and experienced as essentially alive in all its parts, often inhabited and traversed by a light or hidden fire circulating through it' (ibid.: 11). This spiritual force permeating nature is exemplified in the Renaissance understanding of *magia naturalis*, a 'complex notion at the crossroads of magic and science' by which both knowledge of the networks of sympathies and antipathies that link the things of Nature and the concrete operation of this knowledge is indicated.

Imagination and Mediations constitute the third characteristic of esotericism. Faivre explains that it is the imagination that allows the use of intermediaries such as symbols and images 'to develop a gnosis, to penetrate the hieroglyphs of Nature, to put the theory of correspondences into active practice and to uncover, to see, and to know the mediating entities between Nature and the divine world' (ibid.: 12). The imagination is regarded as far more than mere fantasy - it is the 'organ of the soul, thanks to which humanity can establish a cognitive and visionary relationship with an intermediary world', what Henry Corbin called the *mundus imaginalis*. *Imaginatio* is a 'tool for knowledge of the self, world, Myth. The eye of fire pierces the bark of appearances to call forth significations, "rapports" to render the invisible visible' (ibid.: 13).

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points out that Arthur Symons, in *London: A Book of Aspects* (1908), works along similar lines, 'picking his way through what Baudelaire termed 'des forêts de symboles' in order to perceive deeper truths'.

The fourth, and last, of the fundamental characteristics is the *experience of transmutation.* The alchemical term 'transmutation' is used to define the initiatory path of development by which 'the esotericist gains insight into the hidden mysteries of cosmos, self and God' (Hanegraaff 1995b: 112). As transmutation implies a change in the very substance of a thing or person[26] there is, according to Faivre, no separation between knowledge (gnosis) and inner experience, or intellectual activity and active imagination (1994: 13).

We now come to the two 'relative' elements, included by Faivre because they frequently occur alongside the four fundamental elements. The fifth characteristic is termed *the praxis of the concordance*, which is understood as a 'consistent tendency to try to establish common denominators between two different traditions or even more, among all traditions, in the hope of obtaining an illumination, a gnosis, of superior quality' (Faivre 1994: 14). This characteristic is taken to its extreme in the discourse of the perennialists who postulate the existence of a primordial tradition which overarches all other religious or esoteric traditions of humanity[27].

The sixth and last characteristic of esotericism is *transmission*, which refers to the possibility or necessity of teaching being transmitted from master to disciple following a pre-established channel. Inherent in this characteristic is the insistence that 'a person

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[26] As opposed to mere 'transformation', which implies a change more or less limited to outward appearance.

[27] This *philosophia perennis* became the 'Tradition', constituted by a chain of mythical or historical representatives including Moses, Zoroaster, Hermes Trimegistus, Orpheus, the Sibyls, Pythagoras and Plato.

cannot initiate himself any way he chooses but must go through the hands of an initiator', and that both the initiator and the initiate must be attached to an authentic tradition (Faivre 1994: 14-15).

The Importance of Historical Continuity

These six characteristics, according to Faivre, are not doctrinal but serve rather as receptacles into which various types of experiences are distributed. Although the six components can be positioned unequally, the first four must all be simultaneously present in order for something to be considered esoteric. Yet this alone is not enough. According to Hanegraaff (1995b: 121), it is also crucial that we demonstrate how the original contents and associations of esotericism that originated in the Renaissance are reinterpreted. Following and developing Faivre's work, Hanegraaff defines an esoteric tradition as an 'historical continuity in which individuals and/or groups are demonstrably influenced in their life and thinking by the esoteric ideas formulated earlier, which they use and develop according to the specific demands and cultural context of their own period' (1995b: 118)[28]. Hanegraaff outlines the historical perspective of esotericism as a 'container concept encompassing a complex of interrelated currents and traditions from the early modern period up to the present day, the historical origin and foundation of which lies in the syncretistic phenomenon of Renaissance 'hermeticism' (1999: 4). He goes on to trace this esotericism through the later developments of alchemy, Paracelsianism, Rosicrucianism, kabbalah, Theosophical and Illuminist currents, and 'various occultist and related developments

[28] The historical connections between Wicca and esotericism will be outlined and discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

during the 19th and 20th century' (ibid.:4) many of which, as we shall see in Chapter Three, are the direct precursors of Wicca. Specifically, Wiccan magical practice draws upon the magical heritage which underlies contemporary Wicca[29], and provides historical links to the Western Esoteric Tradition. Furthermore, an initial outline of Wiccan magical practice may reveal some of Faivre's six characteristics.

WICCA, MAGIC AND ESOTERICISM

Although 'magic of any kind was not connected with the worship of deities' and '[t]he distinction in pre-Christian society between a priestess or priest and a sorcerer or witch was usually plain' (Hutton 1993: 291), this is not true of modern Wicca which separates magic from neither religion nor science. Far from the primitive or ancient rites described in anthropological fieldwork among, for instance, the Zande, Wiccan magical ritual and ceremonial magic can be highly ordered and stylised, based on formulaic laws of correspondences particular to Renaissance magic which have been transferred to Wicca largely through the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.[30] Fieldwork suggests that Wicca in fact operates with three 'types' of magic which are contained within the continuous cycles of rituals in which Wiccans engage.

Three 'Types' of Magic

The first of these types could be termed 'lesser', 'natural', or 'horizontal' magic, and would include traditional concepts of spellcraft, for example chants, dances, and

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[29] See Chapter Three.

[30] Wicca's dependence on the magical work of the Golden Dawn will be elaborated upon in Chapter Three.

poppets[31]. These isolated, specific spells may be performed separately from ritual or at the end of ritual, and tend to be time and place specific, immediate rather than continuous, goal orientated and pragmatic, for example a job spell. In this sense, magic in Wicca is partly concerned with the 'specific, concrete' problems referred to by Malinowski and is thus distinct from religious concerns with the fundamental issues of human existence.

The second magic could be termed 'higher', 'ritual' or 'vertical'[32] magic, and would in conceptual terms be identical to ceremonial magic, though its practice may be different. This type of magic tends to be performed as part of ritual (e.g. a kabbalistic ritual might be used to empower planetary talismans) and integrated into a whole system of correspondences. Systems of magical correspondences form associative clusters of phenomena thought to share common affinities, the purpose of which is to link the microcosm with the macrocosm[33]. For example, the kabbalistic sephira of Yesod is associated with such things as: the Moon (planet), violet (colour), 9 (number), quartz (precious stone), mandrake (plant), jasmine (perfume). These are in turn associated with other phenomena: thus, the Moon relates to specific lunar deities such as Diana/Artemis, Selene, Hecate, Thoth, Ashtarte, and to water (the element which it rules), mirrors (due to its reflective nature), the sea, tides and flux, the colour silver as well as violet, moonstone as well as quartz. In this way, huge systems of

[31] Wax dolls made to represent people, used principally for healing.

[32] Our use of the terms 'horizontal' and 'vertical' is based on Salomonsen's use of a horizontal and a vertical axis to describe, respectively, the 'magic of everyday life' and the 'magic of ritual' (1998:156).

[33] The reflection of the macrocosm in the microcosm is a key Hermetic principal embedded within the magic and philosophy of the Western Esoteric Tradition and thence transferred to Wicca.

magical correspondences are built up such that the mention of 'Yesod' or 'the Moon' automatically sets off a chain of images, linked through association, which can be used in magical ritual. Though goal oriented, 'vertical' magic is less immediate and specific than 'low' magic, tending towards the sequential and processual, magic performed as part of ongoing ritual continuity. This 'high' magic can be practised separately from any particular religious belief system although, in Wicca, it tends to be integrated within both a religious and magical worldview.

The third magic is the magic of transmutation, the stripping away of layers and forging of the 'True Will' or pure self. It can be termed the 'greater magic' or 'spiritual alchemy', to borrow Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki's phrase (1986: 21-22), and is both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' in nature, integrated into both ritual and the everyday world. This magic is journey-oriented, relating to an ongoing process of spiritual and personal growth which is experiential, holistic and non-specific, not limited (to this life) but perceived as an eternal process. In Wicca, the means by which this is done is not the specificity of the spell or defined piece of magic, but the greater magic which is forged within the ritual setting and which occurs as a gradual process marked by the initiatory three degrees and the sequence of rituals which make up the Wheel of the Year[34]. It is

[34] This cycle of festivals is known as the Wheel of the Year, and incorporates eight festivals: Imbolc (1st February), Spring Equinox (21st March), Beltane (1st May), Midsummer (21st June), Lammas (1st August), Autumn Equinox (21st September), Samhain/Hallowe'en (31st October), and Yule (21st December). Since this thesis is not concerned with a description of Wicca or Paganism, this cycle of festivals is not portrayed at length in the main body of the text. However, since the Wheel of the Year is referred to within the thesis, a description of the festivals is provided in Appendix 2. The reader is also

not, therefore, measurable scientifically as an effect brought about by a cause, as spellcraft may be, but rather by the noticeable experience of transmutation. The efficacy of the greater magic, the Great Work, can only be measured in incomplete stages, for it is believed to take many lifetimes to come to fruition, or what Jung has termed individuation[35].

Esoteric Characteristics of Wiccan Magical Practice

Even in such an introductory characterisation of Wiccan magical practice, then, we can already discern the explicit presence of two of Faivre's characteristics: correspondences and the experience of transmutation. Implicit, however, are the necessity of *transmission* within the initiatory structure, and the remaining two fundamental characteristics of *living nature* and *imagination/mediation* which, as Faivre points out, are not really separable from correspondences and transmutation but are separated only for methodological reasons. Faivre and Hanegraaff's recent work on esotericism thus appears to be of direct relevance to our concerns in this study. We have alluded earlier in this introduction to the emergence of Wicca into relative popularity, the development of recent variations of modern witchcraft, and the consequent ambiguity of Wicca's position within the categorisation of modern religious practices. Whilst it is impossible to define Wicca as a current manifestation of the Western Esoteric Tradition at the beginning of our study, it is anticipated that esotericism will prove an adequate framework in which to explore and assess Wicca

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referred to Crowley 1996: 157-170; Farrar & Farrar 1989; Harvey 1997: 1-13; Samuel 1998: 132-3, 140 n.35-37.

[35] See Vivianne Crowley 1996: 176-7, 224-5.

and its differences to other forms of witchcraft and Paganism. The organisation of this framework can thus now be outlined.

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

As indicated earlier, this thesis concentrates on the earliest known form of modern witchcraft, Wicca. We therefore begin our examination, in Chapter One, with a review of the development of Wicca and Paganism from the 1970s onwards in order to illustrate the milieu which surrounds Wicca and the paradoxical location of Wicca at both the centre, and on the boundaries, of Paganism. Such a demarcation will enable us to focus specifically on Wicca throughout the course of the thesis whilst maintaining an awareness of its context, and also to introduce key terms and concepts and provide an introductory context for our deliberations. Chapter Two will then consider previous research on witchcraft and paganism, methodological and theoretical considerations, and provide empirical data. This review will clarify the need for our study and outline the procedures adopted. The chapter will also assess the problems encountered by researchers studying Wicca, and suggest methods of mitigating them.

Chapter Three constitutes an historical examination of the roots of Wicca. There exists a marked lack of in-depth analysis of Wicca as a specific type of witchcraft and historical perspective on its origin and cultural background. An effort will therefore be made in Chapter Three to place Wicca in its proper historical context, concluding with an assessment of the connections between Wicca and the Western Esoteric Tradition.

Chapter Four marks a break with the early part of the thesis as we move into the arena of participant observation and begin to investigate the presence of Faivre's characteristics in 1990's Wicca. We start, not with his first element but with the last, that of transmission. This would seem to make sense in that we begin with entry into the Wiccan community, entry which is by initiation only, before proceeding to the teaching and learning of magic and ritual in Chapter Five. Here, we consider specifically the use of correspondences, imagination and mediation, living nature, and concordance in Wiccan magic and ritual.

It is anticipated that Chapter Three will ascertain the emergence of Wicca from the occultism of the *fin de siècle* which both Hanegraaff and Faivre regard as a manifestation of esotericism[36]. We might therefore expect to find that Wicca is indeed historically connected with the esoteric tradition. Furthermore, given the ease with which the six elements of esotericism appear to fit the structure and practice of Wicca, we might expect Wicca to emerge as an esoteric tradition. Following the systematic investigation of the historical context of Wicca and of the presence of Faivre's six characteristics, we can then move to a conclusion as to whether Wicca can accurately be characterised as esoteric, and consider the adequacy of esotericism as a means of categorising Wicca *vis à vis* previous attempts.

It is thus hoped that we shall provide some answers to our initial questions concerning the forms Wicca takes, the understanding of Wicca and magic by practitioners, and the characterisation of Wicca. Yet we must also expect further questions to arise during

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[36] cf. Hanegraaff 1998a: 85; Faivre 1994: 34-5.

the course of the thesis, and the implications of these questions for future research will be indicated and discussed as a further contribution to this developing field of study.

CHAPTER ONE

DEMARCATING THE FIELD

> *The complicating factor . . . is that Wicca is a neo-pagan development of traditional occultist ritual magic, but that the latter movement is not itself pagan. In other words . . . [Wicca] gradually and almost imperceptibly shades into a non-pagan domain* (Hanegraaff 1998a: 86).

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Paganism as a field of study is coterminous with the emergence of Pagan traditions and practices into relative popularity. Paganism originated in 1950s Britain in the form of a 'relatively self-contained, England-based occultist religion' (Hanegraaff 1998a: 85) known as Wicca[1]. From this 'relatively clearly circumscribed center *[sic]*', other Pagan traditions and other varieties of witchcraft derived in 'increasingly syncretistic and nondogmatic directions' (ibid.: 85), such that in 1996, of the estimated 110-120,000[2] Pagans in Britain, only 10,000 were initiated Wiccans. Contemporary Paganism now includes a variety of traditions of witchcraft[3], some forms of Druidry[4], Asatru[5], some shamanism[6], and 'non-aligned' Paganism[7], which

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[1] Specifically, Gardnerian Wicca and later joined by Alexandrian Wicca in the early 1960s.

[2] Estimate provided by Hutton, R. (r.hutton@bristol.ac.uk), 27th July 1998, *Intro*. E-mail to the Nature Religion Scholars' List (natrel-l@uscolo.edu).

[3] As will become clear, there is no normative Wicca or witchcraft which can be generally applied, and we use the terms to refer to quite different genuine entities.

[4] We say 'some forms of Druidry' because not all Druids are Pagans. For the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, Druidry overlapped with Christianity and many Druid orders operated as social or

heavily outnumber initiatory Wicca. Thus, from being at the forefront of the development of modern Paganism, Wicca has become one of many Pagan traditions. In this chapter, we examine this development and delineate Alexandrian/Gardnerian Wicca, as practised in Britain in the 1990s, as the focus of our study.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WICCA

It is largely undisputed that the modern religion of Wicca was formulated by Gerald Gardner in England in the 1940s, slowly becoming more widespread and public after the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1951. Gardner was born in the early years of the *fin de siècle* in 1884, in Crosby, Liverpool. After spending most of his life working in the colonies of India and the Far East, he returned to England in 1936 and retired to the New Forest with his wife, Donna, where he became involved with the Fellowship of Crotona, an occult group of Co-Masons[8] established by Mrs. Besant-Scott, a daughter

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charitable, rather than religious, bodies. It was not until the 1980s that specifically pagan Druidry was developed, with the foundation of orders such as the British Druid Order, one of the earliest Pagan druid orders to be founded (1979), which has a shamanic and Wiccan influence.

[5] Asatru, also known as the Northern Tradition, is a Pagan path which bases itself on Norse gods and mythology.

[6] I am grateful to Gordon 'The Toad' MacLellan for pointing out to me that not all shamans are Pagan, or even religious.

[7] This term refers to those people who identify themselves as 'Pagan' but who do not belong to any specific Pagan tradition such as Wicca or Druidry. Ronald Hutton uses the term 'non-initiatory' to describe this group of Pagans. However, since many Druids, shamans, and followers of Asatru prefer not to use an initiatory structure either, I prefer 'non-aligned' as a more accurate descriptor of Pagans who belong to no specific Pagan tradition.

[8] Co-Masons admitted women as well as men, unlike Freemasonry.

of the theosophist Annie Besant. The Fellowship of Crotona allegedly contained a hidden inner group of hereditary witches, who initiated Gardner in 1939. Quite what this group was remains unclear. In the most recent study, Ronald Hutton reports,

> I have been completely unable to find any solid evidence of pagan witch covens (including the New Forest one) in existence before 1948, when it is reasonably certain that Dafo and Gardner led one in Hertfordshire. On the other hand, there is ample evidence for a rapid proliferation of Gardnerian and non-Gardnerian groups in the 1950s; it should not be forgotten that the blueprint for pagan witchcraft was published as early as 1952, in interviews given by Gardner and Cecil Williamson to popular magazines.[9]

With the permission of the 'coven', and under the pseudonym Scire, Gardner included the rituals of witchcraft in his novel *High Magic's Aid* (1949) but it was not until after the repeal of the Witchcraft Act that Gardner was able to publish more open accounts of witchcraft under his real name - *Witchcraft Today* was published in 1954, followed by *The Meaning of Witchcraft* in 1959. He broke away from the New Forest coven and established his own coven, moving to the Isle of Man where he became 'resident witch' at Cecil Williamson's Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Castletown.

Witchcraft Today vaulted Gardner into the public spotlight, and he made numerous media appearances. The media attention and popular appeal was something totally

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[9] Hutton, R. (r.hutton@bristol.ac.uk), 28th March 1998, *Update of Wiccan History*. E-mail to Nature Religion Scholars list (natrel-l@uscolo.edu).

unexpected, and Gerald revelled in it. According to Valiente, Gardner 'started posing before the cameras of the press and preening himself on his great discovery of the survival of witchcraft. . . [His] motives were, I believe, basically good. He was desperately anxious that the Old Religion should not die . . . [but] he had a considerable love of the limelight and of being the centre of attention' (Valiente 1989: 65-6). Believing witchcraft to be a dying religion, then, Gardner propelled it into the public domain, initiated many new witches, and encouraged covens to spring up, operating according to the outlines provided in his books.

As a Freemason, Rosicrucian, and probable member of the Ordo Templi Orientis[10] and other secret societies, Gardner's lack of secrecy regarding witchcraft may come as a surprise unless his belief that Wicca was dying is taken into account. In fact, it was not until after his death that Gardnerian Wiccan rites began to be published, the first British publication (1964) being a virulent attack on Gardner by 'Rex Nemorensis', now known to have been written by Charles Cardell based on information passed to him by Olive Green, who infiltrated Gardner's coven in 1958. Thus, although Gardner refused to keep secret the *existence* of the 'witch cult', he does not seem to have placed the rituals, mainly written by Doreen Valiente in collaboration with himself, in the public spotlight. This was to come in the 1960s, when Alex Sanders established his own version of Wicca, which became known as Alexandrian Wicca[11]. He, like

[10] A German occult order at one time headed by Aleister Crowley (see section on Crowley in Chapter Three).

[11] There is, however, no evidence to suggest that either Gardner or Sanders considered themselves to be in control of Wicca, and they did not name Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca after themselves - Valiente says that it was Robert Cochrane who first came up with 'Gardnerian', as a pejorative term to

Gardner, was a prolific initiator, but did not confine himself to Britain: many covens in Germany and elsewhere in Europe sprang from his visits to the continent. Sanders sought publicity from the very beginning, and although many witches reacted against this in the 1960s and 1970s, he is now generally considered to have made Wicca more accessible and brought about greater public awareness.

For the purposes of this thesis, then, Alexandrian/Gardnerian Wicca is a form of witchcraft derived from Gerald Gardner's creation of Wicca in the 1950s, added to by Alex Sanders in the 1960s, and combined, largely by Vivianne Crowley[12], in the 1980s. In terms of later developments, it represents the classical, original form of Wicca and is still with us at the time of writing. However, as indicated above it is not the only type of witchcraft. The growing popularity of witchcraft over the last three decades has seen the development of a variety of forms of witchcraft and Paganism which have fanned out from classical Wicca.

We begin our study, then, with a consideration of the various terms used within Paganism and Wicca, before focusing on the differences between Wicca and Paganism and delineating Wicca, witchcraft and Paganism. Such a review of the recent history of Wicca and Paganism from the 1970s onwards will serve to illustrate the milieu which surrounds Wicca. This will enable us not only to demarcate our field of study,

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distinguish Gardner's 'new' Wicca from traditional witchcraft, and Stewart Farrar named Alexandrian Wicca, according to Maxine Sanders. Additionally, the organisational structure of Wicca, as we shall see in Chapter Four, precludes a leader, either male or female.

[12] Who was initiated into both Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca.

but also to introduce key terms and concepts and provide an introductory context for our deliberations.

PAGANISM

'Paganism', as it is used today, is a comprehensive term used to designate a variety of traditions and practices which revere nature as sacred, draw on pagan religions of the past, use ritual and myth creatively, share a seasonal cycle of festivals, and tend to be polytheistic at least to the extent of accepting the divine as both male and female. As Tanya Luhrmann points out, it is a term which 'implies a polytheistic nature religion whose deities are meant to be personifications of nature, often as they were found within the ancient pantheons' (Luhrmann 1989: 83).

In North America, 'neo-Paganism' is the preferred term in academic circles, in order to differentiate between the paganism of the ancient world and modern Paganism. However, this prefix is not universally applied, with some scholars feeling that 'neo' equates to 'quasi' and thus indicates that there is something inauthentic about modern Pagan practices[13]. Since 'neo-Paganism' is not in common use in Britain, amongst either practitioners or academics[14], we consistently use simply 'Pagan' in this thesis. It is necessary, however, to examine the meanings of the word 'pagan', and to consider how contemporary Pagans interpret these meanings.

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[13] 'Neo' this and 'Neo' that - a discussion on the Nature Religion Scholars list (natrel-l@uscolo.edu), February/March 1999. See also the introduction to Pearson *et al* (1998).

[14] Michael York being the exception.

Interpretation 1: 'Country-dweller'

According to Ronald Hutton, there are three meanings which have been attributed to 'pagan' (Hutton 1993: xiv). In the first meaning, 'pagan' is taken to refer to 'country-dweller', an interpretation which seems to have developed mainly with the Romantic literature[15] of the nineteenth century and Victorian urban growth[16]. As Nick Freeman has pointed out, 'no London memoirist from the Victorian period (or indeed, ever since) can resist lamenting the disappearance of the 'countryside' in and around the city' (1999: 13). The growing interest in the environment, and the urge to leave behind the towns and cities and enter once more into communion with 'nature' as 'the countryside' encouraged popular usage of the term 'pagan' as one who dwells in the rustic areas. Hutton suggests that the growth of urban areas during the Victorian era caused 'an almost hysterical celebration of rural England' from the 1870s onwards. Pan as great god of nature became one of the most prevalent ancient images to be drawn upon[17], as did Gaia as Mother Nature and Mother Earth, such that by 1900, 'the

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[15] Freeman (1999: 11) stresses that 'the majority of major Victorian poets and artists confronted the modern city with a marked lack of enthusiasm – it was a filthy and dehumanising environment and poor soil for their sensitive plants'. He cites Browning's willingness to provide representations of Renaissance urbanisation whilst largely avoiding the Victorian conurbation, and the artistic radicals of the 1860s (such as Swinburne, Rossetti and William Morris) who forsook their own time for a largely imaginary past.

[16] According to the Census of 1851, the English urban population outnumbered the rural for the first time. Between 1821 and 1841, the population of London rose by 20%, Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield increased by 40%, while that of Bradford rose by an incredible 65% (Williams 1975: 188).

[17] We might cite as examples Arthur Machen's 1894 novel *The Great God Pan*, and Saki's *The Music on the Hill* (1911), both of which feature Pan as a central figure, whilst Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1907), and J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* made Pan accessible to children. Russell (1990: 137)

poetic vision of the English, when contemplating the rural world, was dominated as never before by the great goddess and the horned god"[18] (Hutton 1996: 9). The veneration of nature in modern Paganism, the concern for the earth as deity, and the pantheism of seeing the divine in all of nature has led modern Pagans to maintain an attitude of reverence for the wild, untamed countryside on the one hand, and of sadness or revulsion at human estrangement from this ideal, living in towns and cities away from the land, on the other.

For some Pagans, veneration of nature and identification as 'Pagan' manifests as a romantic attachment to the countryside, a dream of living away from the towns and nurturing a closer relationship with nature[19]. For others, direct action against the destruction of the environment - at road protests, proposed building sites, Manchester Airport's second runway, or simply to protect an old tree - is the favoured means of expressing their concern for nature and their belief that nature is divine, ensouled, or at the very least, alive. Others, however, see nature as all-inclusive, regarding all that we do as 'natural' for we, as humans, are also part of nature. Whilst it is a fact that most Pagans live in urban areas, and very few depend directly upon the land for their living,

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interprets Pan, god of wild nature, as a deliberately chosen symbol of opposition to Christianity among occultists, due to Christian associations of Pan's characteristics (cloven hooves, horns) with their image of the Devil. Certainly, this is true of the infamous Aleister Crowley (discussed later in this chapter), whose Hymn to Pan provoked storms of outrage when it was read out at his funeral in 1947.

[18] The great goddess (Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter) and the horned god (Herne, Pan, Cernunnos) are deities of central importance within Wicca and Paganism.

[19] As Russell (1991: 171) points out, 'most are urban, as is usually true of those who love nature (the farmers are too busy fighting it)'.

Graham Harvey points out that, for many Pagans, 'respectful and intimate relationships with nature include[s] the awareness that "nature" includes all that we eat and drink' (Harvey 1997: 12), which presumably includes food and drink bought from supermarkets!

However, as Robin Lane Fox and Pierre Chuvin have pointed out, most town-dwellers were in fact pagan at the time the term 'pagan' was coined. Thabit ibn Qurra, a Sabian from Harran (835-901 C.E.) praised ancient paganism to the Caliph of Baghdad with the following words, which clearly have nothing to do with a rustic existence:

> Who else have civilised the world, and built the cities, if not the nobles and kings of Paganism? . . . They have filled the earth with settled forms of government, and with wisdom, which is the highest good. Without Paganism the world would be empty and miserable (Scott 1985: 105).

By the early fifth century, *pagani* was used by Christians simply to refer to those who were not members of their own religion, and since resistance to Christianity in late antiquity was led by the nobility and academics, it is highly unlikely that 'pagan' was used to relate to religions exclusively of the countryfolk.

Interpretation 2: 'Civilian'

This brings us to the second meaning, that of 'civilian', provided by Robin Lane Fox (1986: 30-31). He points out that, by the second and third centuries, the *pagani* were those who had not enlisted as part of God's 'army', as soldiers of Christ against the

forces of Satan. Among early Christians, *pagani* thus came to be used to distinguish the *militia Christi* from mere 'civilians'. This meaning, however, died out by about the fourth century. By this time, the pagans were simply those who had not yet received baptism, and the term seems to have been used objectively as a term of identification rather than as a pejorative term of contempt. 'Pagan' as 'civilian', as one not enlisted in the 'army of God', expresses the synonymity of 'pagan' with 'heretic' in the popular mind, sometimes as non-Christian and often as anti-Christian. Undoubtedly, many Pagans today see themselves as opposing Christianity, identifying with the persecution of witches in early modern Europe by the Church, and reacting against the patriarchal, monotheistic religion of Western culture[20]. This may be particularly true among people who have recently decided to identify themselves as Pagans, and who are perhaps rebelling against their upbringing, education, society, and culture. Hutton points out that the writings of contemporary British Pagans exhibit,

> an intense and consistent hostility to the Christian Church. The follies and deficiencies of this institution are regularly held up to ridicule and abuse. Such bitterness may be therapeutic for those who have recently rejected Christianity, and is natural in view of the conviction of modern pagans that the Church was directly responsible for the Great Witch Hunt with whose victims they identify (Hutton 1993: 336).

Such an attitude of 'being Pagan' in opposition to 'being Christian' is, in my experience, rare. Rather, in the majority of my conversations with Pagans during my

[20] An identification which we shall explore in Chapter Three.

fieldwork I have found toleration and respect for other religions and practices to be extremely high. Much has changed in the 1990s, since Hutton's *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles* was first published in 1991; indeed, the influence of his own historical research has had a dramatic effect on the Pagan view of history. As he himself comments in the introduction to the 1993 edition, Wicca at least 'has proved capable of re-evaluating its own claims with a genuine scholarly rigour' (1993: xiii). The effect of recent scholarship on the history of the Great Witch Hunt and on the history of Wicca is discussed more fully in Chapter Three. Here, it merely remains to point out that Wicca has been instrumental in the development of interfaith meetings with members of other religions[21], and as Paganism has grown in popularity, and public awareness of it has increased, it has adopted a less reactive posture which no longer requires legitimisation through false histories or hatred of the Christian Church.

It is clear, however, that hatred of Christianity is still in evidence among a minority of Pagans. Discussions of Interfaith activities often centre round an unwillingness to 'get together with Christians to explain [Paganism]' (*Pagan Dawn* 128: 21), and a failure to understand that Interfaith work consists of many religions rather than just Christianity. Protests against Interfaith work occasionally take the form of accusations that Interfaith Pagans are engaging in, 'a dangerous activity, because it spreads a false sense of security, completely ignoring the fact that it goes against **all** Xtian *[sic]* teaching to accept **any** form of alternative religion - therefore the only reason has to be

[21] *Pagan Dawn* 128 (Lughnasadh 1998), p.19-23 explains Pagan involvement in Interfaith, trying to allay fears that Interfaith is used by Christians as a means of converting people of other faiths to Christianity.

for the purpose of infiltration, dividing and conquering' ('Paganism Today and the Interfaith Debate' in *The Cauldron* 88, May 1998, p. 19-20, emphases in original). It should perhaps be pointed out that much of the anti-Interfaith, anti-Christian feeling appears to stem from fears of persecution aroused by the ritual child abuse cases of the late 1980s, 'which attempted to embroil everyone of an alternative belief in the tendrils of 'Satanic child abuse'' (ibid.: 19), and also from the ongoing and general Pagan affinity with the witchcraft reputedly persecuted in the Great Witch Hunt which has been interpreted by one historian as 'a protest against the dominant religion, and a form of social rebellion' (Cohn 1976: 122)[22].

Interpretation 3: 'Locality'

According to Hutton (1993: xiv), however, it is Pierre Chuvin, in his *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (1990), who provides the definitive account of the word 'pagan', our third and final meaning. Chuvin argues that pagan simply meant 'followers of the religions of the 'pagus' or locality, i.e. the old, rooted faiths instead of the new universal one' (1993: xiv), and thus, by the sixth century, *pagani* had indeed come to mean 'non-Christian'. The interpretation of 'pagan' as a follower of the religion of the locality is becoming more noticeable among modern Pagans, who perceive themselves to be creating links with the energy of the land at a local level, celebrating their rituals with reverence for the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place, or with gods and goddesses

[22] Cohn (ibid.: 262) also makes an interesting point when he says the development of the witch stereotype may have reflected a need to 'create a scapegoat for an unacknowledged hostility to Christianity', but in any case maintains (ibid.: 102) that witches 'represent a collective inversion of Christianity - and an inversion of a kind that could only be achieved by former Christians'.

traditionally associated with a locale. A recent account of pagan Druidry by Emma Restall Orr, Joint Chief of the British Druid Order, expresses this interpretation of Paganism as local religion:

> [Paganism] is a religion of locality. i.e. it is where the devotees revere the spirits of the landscape around them, the water courses and wells on which they depend, the soil of the fields and forests that surround them, the sprites and elementals, sometimes to deification. It is a basic attitude in the Pagan mentality that the spirit of the land is the most potent force (Restall Orr 1998: 140).

The term 'pagan' can thus be interpreted by modern Pagans according to all three definitions provided above, indicating 'country-dweller', non-Christian, and the religion of the locality. The latter interpretation is, however, by far the most popular among modern Pagans, who are well aware of their own and ancient pagans' urban rather than rustic existence, and who are reluctant to define themselves in terms of reference to Christianity - in the multi-faith, globalised world of the late twentieth century, it is no longer deemed appropriate for any religion to be named according to its relationship with Christianity and consequently labelled 'non'- or 'anti'-Christian'. Paganism today, then, refers to a number of religions which view nature as sacred, ensouled or alive, which tend to be pantheistic, polytheistic and/or duotheistic rather than monotheistic, including both gods and goddesses in their pantheons, who try to

live in balance and harmony, accepting darkness and light, life and death, as part of one sacred whole[23].

WICCA AND PAGANISM

As we have already noted at the beginning of this chapter, in 1996 the estimated number of Pagans in Britain was 110,000 - 120,000, of whom only 10-20,000 were initiated or formally inducted members of organised and distinctive Pagan traditions. Of this 10-20,000, 10,000 were initiated Wiccans and 6,000 were pagan Druids, with smaller traditions making up the remaining 4,000.

Wiccan/Pagan Relations, 1970-1999

Historically, Wicca has been regarded as a core group around which Paganism has emerged. In September 1970, the Pagan Front was established after readers of a small-circulation[24] inter-coven newsletter, *The Wiccan*, decided to make 'a real attempt to overcome the fragmentation bequeathed to us by the Christian Church of past centuries, and any existing undercurrent or hostility from this or any other source'[25]. The inaugural meeting of the Pagan Front was held on 1st May 1971, chaired by founder member Doreen Valiente, but it was not until 1989[26] that the organisation

[23] cf. York (1995: 147) who points out that 'in place of the New Age's stress on the "White Light", Neo-Paganism - especially Wicca - incorporates the interplay between light and dark'.

[24] The first issue, in 1968, had a print run of just 12 (Pengelly *et al* 1997: 26).

[25] *The Wiccan*, issue 91 February 1989, page 1.

[26] By 1989 its circulation was 250 (ibid.: 49). Prudence Jones notes that subscriptions to *The Wiccan* varied from 50 to 100 during the 1970s and 1980s, 'but the Hallowe'en 1988 printing had more than doubled from that of May, to 240, and from then the trend was unstoppable' (ibid.: 21). Indeed, the

changed its name to the Pagan Federation, which even then saw itself as 'speaking for the mainstream of revived Wicca in this country', offering a referral service between covens and 'genuine enquirers' and providing a 'forum for dialogue between Wicca[27], which spearheaded the re-emergence of Nature religion in our time'[28]. Wiccans thus worked hard to establish the Federation, and every Pagan Federation president until 1997 was Wiccan. Added to this, Wicca also provided much of the available Pagan literature until the 1990s.

This formative period for Paganism is now over. As Paganism has grown considerably in popularity, it has come to consider itself autonomous from Wicca; 'exoteric Paganism[29] had come to stay - it embraced a constituency far beyond Wicca, and the Pagan Federation had to be reformulated to take account of the new developments' (Pengelly *et al* 1997: 23). In 1994[30], the journal of the Pagan Federation changed from *The Wiccan* to *Pagan Dawn*. The editor at this time, Harry Field, explained in the last issue of *The Wiccan* that it was time 'to adopt a title more in keeping with [the Pagan Federation's] readership. Whilst *The Wiccan* has always

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present membership of the Pagan Federation exceeds 4000, all of whom subscribe to the journal, now re-named *Pagan Dawn*.

[27] Presumably this dialogue was necessary for, by its own admission, *The Wiccan* 'fulminated regularly against the outrageous antics of Alex Sanders' (issue 91, page 2).

[28] ibid.: page 2.

[29] Although the purpose of this thesis is to seek etic, scholarly evidence of Wicca's place within western esotericism, it is worth noting this further example of the emic perspective that Paganism is the exoteric expression of Wicca's esoteric spirituality.

[30] Issue 113, Samhain (October 31st) 1994.

prided itself on trying to cater for *all* paths, we are aware that its very name gives many people the misleading impression that the Pagan Federation is a purely Wiccan organisation'[31]. Readers were asked to send in suggestions of a new name for the magazine, and *Pagan Dawn* was chosen by the Pagan Federation committee. The election of the first non-Wiccan Pagan Federation President in 1997 has given added weight to this process of differentiation. More recently still, over the last year the Pagan Federation has been conducting written discussions about the three principles it adheres to. The second of these three principles[32] is called the Pagan Ethic and is, in fact, the Wiccan Rede: 'An it harm none, do what thou wilt'. This principle, according to an article in *Pagan Dawn*, 'was instituted and named back in the early 1970s, when Wicca and Paganism were synonymous in the minds of the PF leadership. Today, this is simply no longer appropriate . . . Since the PF is no longer a Wiccan organisation, it does us little good to identify ourselves as such in the minds of many by continuing to use this "Wiccan Commandment"'[33]. Such thinking reflects the growth in popularity of Paganism as distinct from initiatory Wicca.

There are various reasons why initiatory Wicca remains small despite the growth of Paganism, and it is perhaps possible to interpret this numerical imbalance in terms of

[31] Issue 112, Lughnasadh 1994, page 1. The name 'The Wiccan' was then taken over by a group of Wiccans who wished to produce a specific Wiccan magazine, written by Wiccans for Wiccans.

[32] The first principle is 'Love for and kinship with nature: reverence for the life force and its ever-renewing cycles of life and death'; the third is 'Honouring the totality of Divine Reality, which transcends gender, without suppressing either the female or male aspect of Deity' (*Pagan Dawn* issue 126, Imbolc 1998, page 14).

[33] *Pagan Dawn* ibid.: 15.

the perspective indicated above: that Wicca is esoteric and Paganism is its exoteric manifestation. Although some Pagans perhaps desire initiation into a Wiccan coven, many regard Wicca as hierarchical in structure, and elitist in that it requires initiation of 'the chosen few', retaining 'secrets' which it does not share with the rest of the Pagan community, leading to claims that Wicca constitutes an elite Pagan 'priesthood'. Pagans tend to be non-hierarchical, and so the majority remain outside the initiatory Wiccan traditions, being committed to Paganism in general rather than to a specific spiritual tradition. Power and authority outside the self is rejected by Pagans, in a similar manner to that adopted by the New Age Movement, whereas Wicca embraces a hierarchy of experience. Although Frederic Lamond, a long-standing Wiccan priest, has suggested that in the future Wiccans should 'be available as priests to the Pagan community when needed'[34], Wiccan priests and priestesses do not consider themselves to be 'clergy' to a Pagan 'laity'. Rather, they regard themselves as priests and priestesses within their own particular religion, with no laity, although they do perform ceremonies such as handfastings (weddings) and open rituals as and when required[35]. Yet, since Wiccan initiates are heavily outnumbered by people who identify themselves as Pagans yet do not belong to any formal Pagan group or tradition, the aura of elitism is perpetuated. Wicca may thus be seen to use initiation, secrecy, and intimate community to maintain strong, concrete boundaries which demarcate who is an 'insider' and who is an 'outsider', keeping its structure and practice distinct from the

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[34] *Pagan Dawn* issue 122, Imbolc 1997, page 20.

[35] Wiccans are not the only celebrants to offer this service, however. Many Druid priests and priestesses perform these ceremonies as, increasingly, do those who feel inspired to act as celebrants whether or not they have been formally initiated or inducted into any specific group.

general mêlée of Paganism in which 'inside' and 'outside' status is not an issue. We shall consider this issue in some depth in Chapter Four, where we analyse Wiccan community and the esoteric notion of transmission.

As Paganism has increased in popularity and alternative traditions to Wicca have become established, the distinctiveness of Wicca in relation to the wider, non-aligned Pagan community has become, somewhat paradoxically, both more and less pronounced. Within Wicca, practitioners increasingly feel that the growing popularity of Pagan spiritualities has 'eroded the traditional secrecy of Wicca' (Chapman 1995: 5), and that the distinctiveness of Wicca needs to be re-established. Outside Wicca, however, the distinctiveness of Wicca is less pronounced as the popularity of the religion has led to new and 'unorthodox' derivations of Wicca and conflation between the various forms.

'Witch' and 'Wiccan'

The somewhat confused use of the words 'witch' and 'Wiccan' may provide a useful point at which to begin unravelling the tangled threads of Wicca, Paganism and various forms of witchcraft. It is usual for initiated Gardnerian/ Alexandrian Wiccans to refer to themselves and each other as both Wiccans and witches when in closed company, where they can be sure of the context in which 'Wicca' will be placed, for they feel that Wicca is being simplified through 'how-to' books in order to make it more acceptable. The growing popularity of such written material on Wicca has led to

many self-styled groups forming who refer to themselves as covens[36], thus creating a 'popular' Wicca made up of people who have read a book on Wicca and joined together with friends in groups[37], but who are not initiated into an established Wiccan tradition[38].

Increasingly, at the level at which Wicca interacts with popular culture, there appears to be a certain amount of 'trendiness' attached to identifying oneself as Pagan and, especially, Wiccan. For example, the film *The Craft* (1996) proved especially influential with teenagers, and teenage girls in particular wrote to the Pagan Federation for advice about joining a coven[39]. Certainly, the 'teen witch' image is increasing in popularity, with Silver Ravenwolf's book *Teen Witch* proving to be a bestseller in the

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[36] A coven is made up of a group of witches who have been initiated into that coven and meet regularly for religious festivals and for training. Russell (1991: 157) suggests that the word 'coven', which first appears as a Scottish invention in the sixteenth century, derives from the French 'couvent' and the Latin 'conventus', meaning 'gathering' or 'meeting'. He claims that 'Murray's intense interest in covens was transferred to Gardner, who made the coven the centre of modern witchcraft'.

[37] Since researchers are often limited in their field work by access to Wicca as an initiatory tradition, it is with this latter type of Wicca that the researcher is most likely to make contact, since witches who are not initiated into a Wiccan tradition do not tend to be bound by oaths of secrecy.

[38] i.e. the esoteric characteristic of *transmission* - of the necessity of initiation by a properly authorised person into an authentic group - is not present.

[39] This is problematic, for Gardnerian and Alexandrian covens do not tend to accept people for initiation below the age of eighteen, although there are some exceptions. The film 'Practical Magic', screened at British cinemas in early 1999, had less of an impact perhaps because it did not specifically portray teenagers as witches but concentrated for the most part upon two sisters in adulthood. Further information on the age of members is contained in Chapter Two.

United States. The image of the witch as a figure clad in long black robes with long, preferably black hair has been glamorised in the Gothic music scene, where the 'witch' also drapes herself with occult or Christian jewellery and wears striking make-up. In 1998, the video for the song *Frozen* by the pop star Madonna made use of this 'Gothic witch' imagery, as well as representations of the Triple Goddess, a deity figure promulgated by Jane Harrison which is now common in modern Wicca. Madonna was seen by one initiated Wiccan in Britain as tapping in to the cultural trend for witchcraft with an immaculate sense of timing. Thus, it is unsurprising that the February issue of *The Cauldron: Pagan Journal of the Old Religion*, contained the following list of witch-types:

> white witches, grey witches, black witches, green witches, teen witches, feminist witches, media witches, hedge witches, kitchen witches, New Age witches, and even weekend witches (issue 91: 30).

As 'Wicca' becomes increasingly popular and the figure of the witch maintains its hold on the human imagination, appropriation of the word 'Wicca' becomes an increasing source of annoyance to those who see themselves as practitioners of a serious religion which demands a great deal of commitment and dedication. Thus, whereas even ten years ago one could assume that those who identified themselves as 'Wiccan' were initiates of the Alexandrian and/or Gardnerian traditions of Wicca, there is no longer any guarantee that someone who describes themselves as 'Wiccan' is an initiated witch. The terminology of identification has thus become confused, and many Wiccan initiates regard it as important to preserve Wicca as distinct from Paganism. Rob

Hardy expressed his opinion saying he would 'hope to see the Craft keep its individuality and not be swallowed up by general Paganism'[40].

Some Distinctions

That there is considerable overlap between Wicca, witchcraft and the wider Pagan movement is not in doubt - witchcraft and Paganism have drawn from a heritage popularised by Wicca which includes, for example, the Pagan seasonal cycle of eight festivals which make up the Wheel of the Year[41] and the practice of a Goddess/God nature-based spirituality. That there are distinctions, however, is often overlooked. In Britain, very few Pagans are Wiccan initiates[42], and the two terms are considered to be distinctive: 'All Wiccans are Pagans, but not all Pagans are Wiccans. Nor should they be, any more than all Xtians *[sic]*should be monks or nuns. The way of the mystic is not the way of everyday life, and to pretend otherwise is sloppy thinking and false psychology'[43].

'Wicca' can thus be used to describe very different paradigms. On the one hand, 'Wicca' is used to refer to 'covens' of friends who have no initiation or training but gather together to celebrate the seasons or full moons, a practice which this thesis

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[40] *Pagan Dawn* ibid.: page 21.

[41] Which Gardner apparently learned from Ross Nicholls of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. The Wheel of the Year is therefore not adopted by Pagans strictly from Wicca, but from Wicca and Druidry.

[42] In addition to the figures previously cited, membership of the Pagan Federation in 1994 was made up half of Pagans and half of various types of Wicca (self-initiated, non-initiated, and initiated). *The Wiccan* 112 (Lughnasadh 1994).

[43] Comment (anonymous) in *The Wiccan* issue 94, October 1989.

regards as witchcraft or non-aligned Paganism. On the other hand, 'Wicca' is styled as an esoteric religion and mystery tradition operating in small, closed groups to which entry is solely by initiation ceremonies which include oaths of secrecy and which are designed to trigger personal transformation and the experience of transmutation. For our purposes, since those who designate themselves Wiccans also identify themselves as 'witches', we can characterise Wicca as a religion and mystery tradition which incorporates witchcraft, natural magic, and ceremonial magic into a religious system in which all initiates are members of a priesthood. 'Wica' *[sic]*, introduced as a term of identification by Gardner in the 1950s, has now become a constructed designation combining these elements.

Gardnerian/Alexandrian Wicca can thus perhaps be regarded as an 'esoteric' mystery religion which is distinguishable from 'exoteric' witchcraft and Paganism[44]. Emically, we have seen, Crowley portrays the exoteric as dealing with the religious needs of society by, for example, providing meaningful rites of passage, and the esoteric as concerned with mystical and psychological matters of personal and inner transformation. From Wicca, a more open Paganism has evolved, 'whose principal function is not to practise magic or to initiate into the mysteries as such' (Crowley 1994: 19). Both esoteric Wicca and exoteric witchcraft and Paganism are regarded as

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[44] Mary Daly (1981: 221) wrote that 'to limit the term [witch] only to those who have esoteric knowledge of and participation in "the Craft" is the real reductionism'. We would concur wholeheartedly that it is not appropriate for 'witch' and 'witchcraft' to be limited to those initiated into Wicca, for anyone can call themselves a witch quite legitimately However, Wicca does require initiation into, and the practice of, an esoteric mystery religion and our point is simply that the two terms can and do refer to different entities.

equally valid, differing predominantly in their aims and practices rather than in their religious outlook. Thus, both Wicca and Paganism worship ancient Pagan deities, but Wicca 'is also a Mystery tradition to help us grow in understanding of ourselves and hence nearer to the Gods, a system for developing and using psychic and natural powers, and a body of natural lore which is often called natural magic' (Crowley 1996a: 1). A shared terminology and understanding of what is and is not 'Wicca' helps maintain important boundaries, aiding the differentiation between Wiccan priests and priestesses who are initiates of the self-styled esoteric mystery religion of Wicca on the one hand, and other forms of witchcraft and Paganism on the other. It is also helpful in demarcating the boundaries of our investigation.

Given the distinctions we have uncovered, this thesis concentrates on the concept of 'Wicca' as a religion which links itself to the mystery traditions of the ancient world, making use of material gleaned from the mythology and known history of the mystery traditions in Egypt, Greece and Rome, and whose initiates identify themselves as priests and priestesses of a modern Western Mystery Tradition as well as regarding themselves as witches and magicians. As we have indicated above, those witches who most consistently come under this definition are those of Gardnerian and/or Alexandrian lineage and the thesis thus concentrates on initiates of these traditions.

WICCA AND WITCHCRAFT IN THE 1990s

Etymology and Connotations

In the 1990s, as the twentieth century draws to a close, what is a modern witch? The terms 'Wicca' and 'witchcraft' are a focus of discussion within contemporary Wicca,

for etymologically, the meaning of these words is debatable. If 'Wicca' derives from the same root as the Anglo-Saxon word for knowledge, *wit, wittich* which stem from *weet* meaning 'to know', then it lends itself to modern witches' understanding of themselves as 'wise' men and women who practice the 'Craft of the Wise'[45]. Similarly, if 'Wicca' derives from *wik*, meaning to 'bend or shape', it links nicely with modern witches' definition of magic, which is to bend or shape energy through will in order to make manifest something on the physical plane. Jeffrey Russell (1991: 177), however, asserts that although Wicca derives from 'weik' and 'wicce', the 'Old English *witan,* 'to know', and all related words including 'wise' are totally unrelated'. Ronald Hutton has also pointed out that 'Wicca' does not stem from the same root as that for knowledge. Rather, he says, '[i]t may be related to that signifying 'awakening', and as it stands was simply the Anglo-Saxon word for a *male* witch (female, 'wicce')' (1993: xiv), the plural form of which may have been 'Wiccan'. In my fieldwork, I have repeatedly heard witches claiming that 'Wicca' and 'witch' come from both of the former definitions[46]. However, I have never heard the latter meaning, that of 'awakening', mentioned within the Wicca community.

The words 'witch' and 'witchcraft' hold many connotations in the public mind, most of which are negative. Both words tend to draw people's minds to story-book notions of the 'wicked witch', to the historical persecutions of witches for being 'in league

[45] This phrase apparently pre-dates Gardner. Doreen Valiente points to its occurrence in *The Arrow and the Sword* (1947) by Hugh Ross Williamson, regarding the death of William Rufus and Thomas à Becket. It is, however, beyond the remit of this thesis to investigate the origins of the phrase.

[46] And see Valiente (1989: 81); Farrar and Farrar (1981: 22).

with the devil', and to modern reports of satanic abuse in the sensationalist tabloid press. It is for these reasons that modern witchcraft is often called Wicca, and this would appear to be officially recognised since definitions of both terms have now found their way into the Oxford English Dictionary[47]. Among Wiccans themselves, as we have noted, both words are used as terms of identification. The word 'witch' is used by many practitioners in an attempt to reclaim it and place it in a modern context, feeling that 'Wicca' is a sanitised version of witchcraft. Others use the term 'Wicca' in an attempt to define witchcraft as a religion, since the word 'witch' may be taken to refer to the practice of 'witchcraft' which may be perceived as historical use of spellcraft and natural magic on behalf of clients, witchcraft as a craft used to make a living, rather than as a religion. Additionally, 'witchcraft' lends itself primarily to images of witches gathered for a sabbat[48] or under a full moon to perform magic and

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[47] **witch 1a** a sorceress, esp. a woman supposed to have dealings with the Devil or evil spirits **b** a follower or practitioner of the religious cult of modern witchcraft **2** an ugly old woman or hag **3** a fascinating girl or woman.

Wicca the religious cult of modern witchcraft.

Both definitions are taken from Pearsall & Trumble (1996).

[48] The witches' sabbath, or sabbat, was traditionally regarded as the meeting to which witches flew for their rituals. Hutton explains that the origins of the term come from the identification by early demonologists of witches with Jews, both of which were characterised as the antithesis to Christianity (Hutton 1993: 303, cf. Cohn 1976: 101). 'Sabbat' in contemporary Wicca refers to the eight seasonal festivals which are marked with ritual and which together constitute the mythic-ritual cycle known as The Wheel of the Year. 'Esbat', on the other hand, was a term introduced by Margaret Murray to denote gatherings for the purpose of business rather than religion. 'Esbat' does appear in a French source (Pierre de Lancre), but it does not have the same meaning. Russell (1991: 168) points out that the meaning of the term is dubious - it does not appear in any medieval or early modern document, but was

fertility spells, practices which in turn lend themselves to anthropological analysis of more or less spontaneous ritual as part of primitive, magical religion. As Wiccan author Vivianne Crowley explains,

> Wicca is the name given by its practitioners to the religion of witchcraft. The word 'Wicca' derives from the Anglo-Saxon word for witch and has been used in its present sense since the 1950s. Within the Wiccan community, the term 'witchcraft' is used in a special sense to mean a Pagan mystery religion and nature religion which worships Goddess and God and is open to both men and women. The words 'witchcraft' and 'witch' are often capitalised by practitioners[49] to distinguish their form of 'witchcraft' from anthropological and other uses of the word (Crowley 1998: 170-171).

However, by identifying themselves as witches, Wiccans have to come to terms with the connotations of the word 'witch', including an identification with witches who were persecuted in the early modern period, fairy tale images of the wicked witch and the good witch, literary images such as Shakespeare's witches in *Macbeth*, gathering

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'taken from de Lancre by Murray, who then derived it from the French *s'esbattre*, which she translated as 'to frolic''. In modern Wicca 'esbat' is used as a term for 'moon rituals' which are held between Sabbats (usually every two to three weeks) and where training and instruction are given.

[49] A practice which we follow for the same reasons. We use capitalisation for Wicca and Witchcraft where we are referring to them as specific contemporary religions. Anthropological studies of witchcraft as a practice which may, or may not be part of a religion, are left in lower case. Likewise, feminist witchcraft is left uncapitalised since the use of the witch figure in the context of feminist witchcraft is not necessarily religious, whereas in Wicca it explicitly is.

on the blasted heath, and popular images of Halloween witches with warts, hooked noses, green skin and black cats. As Briggs reminds us, 'Witches are everywhere in modern children's literature. Sometimes they retain their old character, representing evil in its most virulent form, but more often they have become either harmless tricksters or repositories of ancient wisdom. Such trends remind us how easily the pliable figure of the witch can be manipulated to fit the spirit of each age' (Briggs 1996: 5).

The Image of the Witch

The image of the witch is thus usually negative, and we might question why people choose to identify with such a term. Perhaps one reason is that, despite the negativity, the witch is imagined as powerful - she can make people sleep for one hundred years, she can see the future, she can curse and kill as well as heal, she can pervert the course of history by putting a new king on the throne, she can defy gravity and fly, and, of course, she can turn people into frogs! Although, as Briggs points out, the witch in early modern Europe gained her power from those 'hidden and potent forces' imbuing the world, which ultimately stemmed from either God or the devil (Briggs 1996: 4), the powerful imagery of the witch is attractive, particularly for women. As Ronald Hutton recounts,

> the advantage of the label 'witch' is that it has all the exciting connotations of a figure who flouts the conventions of normal society and is possessed of powers unavailable to it, at once feared and persecuted. It is a marvellous rallying

> point for a counter-culture, and also one of the few images of independent female power in early modern European civilization' (Hutton 1993: 335).

Thus, the witch appears as an active and powerful figure, culturally constructed throughout history and easily manipulated to fit each age. In the second half of the twentieth century, the witch has been reclaimed from association with 'evil' and, according to Lynne Hume (1997: 87) 'the symbolism of the witch transcends phallocentric imagery and conveys the image of an independent, anti-establishment, political, spiritual and magical being'. But she is no longer an image only of independent female power, but of human power, available to both men and women through living in harmony with the tides of nature. If '[h]istorical European witchcraft is quite simply a fiction', as Briggs assures us (1996: 6), then modern witches are free to construct their own fiction, to use their imagination to affirm a positive image of the witch. The 'slippery' status of witchcraft 'as a logical and linguistic construct whose boundaries are both arbitrary and insecure' (Briggs 1996: 7) can be seen to aid this ongoing process of reinvention.

Evidence of this ongoing process of reinvention can be found in the many varieties of witchcraft extant in the 1990s, from radical feminist separatists in North America to the stereotypically conservative Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca in Britain. It is increasingly obvious from a cursory glance at the literature that specific traditions of witchcraft are plentiful: Alexandrian, Gardnerian, Traditional, Hereditary, 1734,

Regency, Reclaiming, Dianic, Faery, Seax, Radical Fairies, Celtic[50], to name a few. The majority of these witchcraft-types were generated in North America in the 1970s and 1980s, when witchcraft diversified into a variety of forms, some of which are far removed from the original. In Britain, Alexandrian and Gardnerian, and the combined Alexandrian/Gardnerian traditions remain the classic, specifically Wiccan, forms of witchcraft among the growing popularity of non-initiatory, popular forms imported from the USA or emerging from the growing cultural taste for identification as a witch or Pagan, particularly among teenagers.

CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF WITCHCRAFT: THREE IDEAL TYPES

Wicca has thus developed into a number of contemporary forms since the 1950s, some of which term themselves a variation of 'Wicca', and some of which identify themselves as a type of 'witchcraft'. Out of these, three main ideal types have emerged - Wicca, feminist witchcraft, and hedgewitchcraft. These three different genuine entities are often conflated into a mythically normative 'wicca' or 'witchcraft' which is then generalised across a broad spectrum. The problems inherent in such generalisations will become clearer when we consider the previous research on Wicca in Chapter Two. It is therefore necessary to present an 'ideal typology' of witchcraft in the 1990s at this early stage of the thesis, firstly in order to avoid confusion, and secondly in order to specify the focus of this study.

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[50] Many other varieties of witchcraft developed from Gardnerian Wicca (largely in North America) can be found at Beaufort House *Index of English Traditional Witchcraft*. Available from http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/5756/tradlist.html/ [Accessed December 1998].

Wicca

Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wiccans are those with a provable line of descent by initiation from Gerald Gardner, Alex and Maxine Sanders, or both. Gardnerian Wiccans trace their initiatory lines back to Gerald Gardner and practise a form of Wicca subtly different from that of Alexandrian Wicca. Alexandrians trace their initiatory lineage back to the more recent influential figure of Alex Sanders. Due to increased dialogue between Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca, many practices are in fact a synthesis of the two traditions, and an increasing number of Wiccans are initiated jointly or separately into both traditions, thus tracing their lineage back to both Gardner and Sanders.

Wicca emerged in Britain as a highly ritualistic, nature venerating, polytheistic, magical and religious system, which made use of Eastern techniques but operated within a predominantly western framework, in the 1950s. It arose from the cultural impulses of the *fin de siècle*, in particular from the occult revival of the 1880s onwards. Various threads were gradually gathered together and woven into Wicca in the 1940s by Gerald Gardner.

By the mid-1950s, as noted earlier in this chapter, Wicca had become relatively popular due to Gardner's love of publicity which drew the religion to the attention of the public, and in the early 1960s it was imported to North America. Gardner died in 1964, but his tradition of Gardnerian Wicca was firmly established, much to the annoyance of those who practised Traditional and Hereditary witchcraft, which they

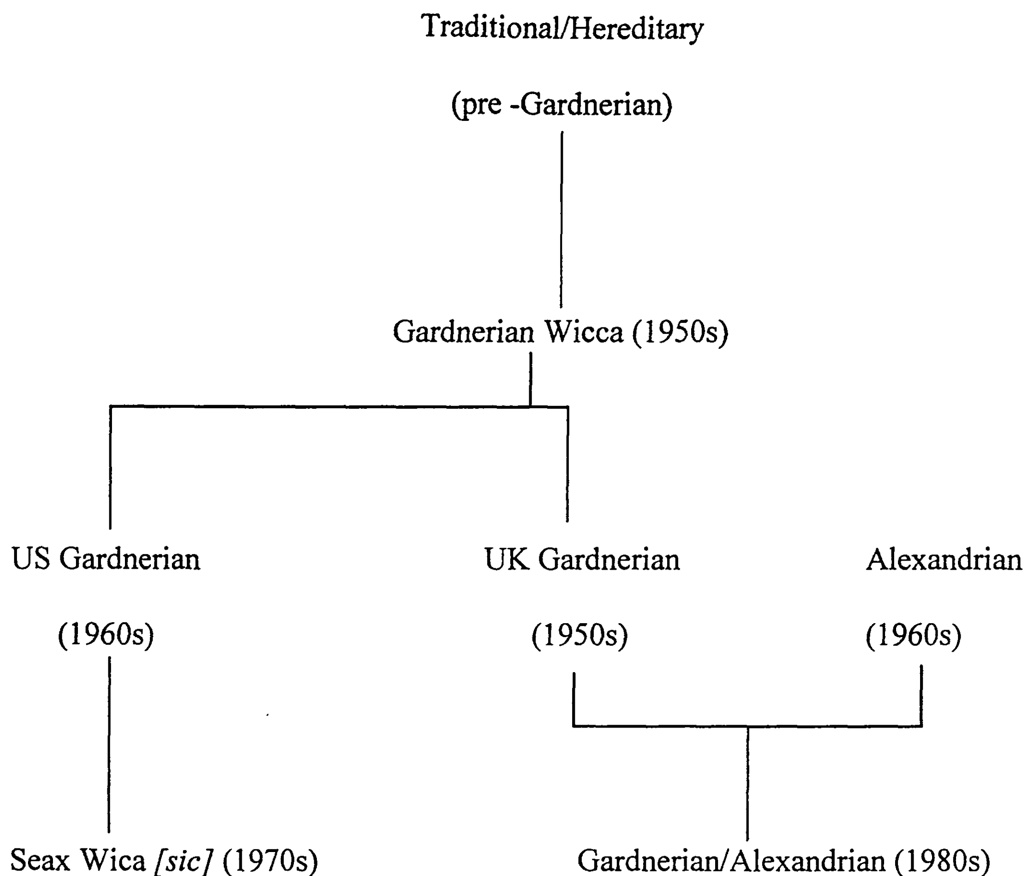

Fig. 1.0

The Development of Gardnerian/Alexandrian Wicca

believed to be a witchcraft religion older than Gardner's Wicca[51]. Into this stream was injected another current in the 1960s, as Alex Sanders brought a stronger application of high ritual magic to his branch of Wicca.

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[51] We have already noted that no evidence has yet been produced which can prove the existence of pre-Gardnerian Wicca, but the claims were often vehement. Doreen Valiente notes, 'the real traditional witches, I have been told, were furious at the behaviour of Gerald Gardner in 'popularizing' the Old Religion and regarded such enterprises as the opening of his museum on the Isle of Man as a disaster' (Valiente 1989: 85). She further states that she thinks it was Robert Cochrane, who claimed to be a

The 'wars' between the Alexandrian and Gardnerian traditions superseded those between the early Gardnerians and the Traditionals/Hereditaries. Sanders was regarded as a maverick, seeking sensational publicity in newspapers and on the television (as Gardner had done). He was seen to be bringing Wicca into disrepute, and as a result many of the Gardnerians went underground. The schism was made worse when, in the 1970s, two of his initiates, Stewart and Janet Farrar, published many of the Wiccan rituals which were supposed to be kept for initiates only. Over time, however, it was recognised that the Alexandrian stream of Wicca was as valid as the Gardnerian, and the rifts started to heal. Thus, in 1989, nine months after the death of Alex Sanders, the editors of the Pagan Federation journal *The Wiccan* announced an end to hostilities:

> our members include not only 'Elders' . . . from Gerald Gardner's original covens of the 1950s, their continuations and daughter covens, but Witches from other traditions, both newer and older; even, amazing as it may seem to original readers, many Alexandrians. Whoever is of good will, who loves Nature, and who worships both the Goddess and the God, is welcome in our Federation, and the current started in the 1960s by that old ritual magician A. Sanders has stood the test of time (*The Wiccan* 91, February 1989, p.2).

Hereditary witch, who 'invented the word "Gardnerian" - originally as a term of abuse' (ibid.: 122), and that Cochrane 'frequently expressed hatred of "Gardnerians" . . . [and] relished the prospect of having what he called "a Night of the Long Knives with the Gardnerians"' (ibid.: 129). Valiente produces references to newspaper articles which back up her recollections of division and denigration between traditional and Gardnerian witches in the 1960s.

Today, many Wiccans are initiates of both Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca, including Vivianne Crowley, author of one of the most popular books on Wicca[52]. The differences between the two traditions have been played down, and the similarities and synthesis emphasised to such an extent that some Wiccans claim that there is no difference between them. And whilst others retain a 'pure' Gardnerian or Alexandrian practice, a great deal of ritualising and socialising occurs between practitioners of both traditions.

Both Alexandrians and Gardnerians, for instance, style their traditions as 'mystery religions' after the mystery schools of the ancient Mediterranean world. Within these mystery traditions are three degrees of initiation, which are used to mark spiritual and psychological transformation gained through experience of ritual and magic. In Alexandrian Wicca, the second and third degrees were given together, but the influence of the Gardnerian practice of maintaining a gap of at least a year and a day between the first, second and third degree initiations has made this less common. Gardnerian Wicca was commonly associated with 'low' magic, or natural magic, and the traditional image of witchcraft as something inherent, a power which one is born with, but the influence of the Alexandrian practice of training people to use their witchcraft and training in ritual technique has now influenced many Gardnerian covens. Thus, both traditions have influenced each other, and both regard themselves as so similar that we can now talk of 'Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca' in one breath, or conflate the two and refer to them as 'Alexandrian/Gardnerian', especially given the number of Wiccans who are initiates of the two traditions combined. It is

[52] Crowley 1989; 1996.

for this reason that we concentrate specifically on the Alexandrian, Gardnerian, and combined Alexandrian/Gardnerian traditions of Wicca in this thesis.

One of the American derivations of Gardnerian Wicca, Seax Wica *[sic]* is, however, a rather reactionary interpretation of Gardnerian Wicca and it is therefore pertinent to provide a brief outline. The Seax-Wica, or Saxon Wicca tradition, is based on Saxon mythology and has four principle deities - Woden, Frig or Freya, Thunor, and Tiw. It was devised in 1973 by Ray Buckland, a former Gardnerian High Priest, who became disillusioned with the corruption he perceived to be inherent in the Wiccan structure of the three degrees of initiation, which he felt encouraged egotistical behaviour, and the secrecy which prevented many genuine seekers from becoming witches. Accordingly, Seax Wica provides for self initiation as well as for initiation by and into a coven, there is only one degree of rank rather than three, and there is no oath of secrecy. In fact, Seax Wica is openly available to anyone through Buckland's book, *The Tree: Complete Book of Saxon Witchcraft* (1974). In many ways, Seax Wica follows the style of feminist witchcraft, with the annual election of a High Priestess and/or High Priest by all coven members, and collective decision making on matters such as wearing robes or worshipping skyclad, or allowing non-initiates to attend circles as guests. Where it differs from feminist witchcraft, however, is in its emphasis on the High Priest and the male deity as equal in importance to the High Priestess and the female deity.

Feminist Witchcraft

The development and movement of Paganism beyond its traditional boundaries took place largely in North America in the late 1970s and 1980s, at a time when the New Age Movement was becoming conscious of itself as a movement and when feminist spirituality was emerging[53]. This should draw our attention to obvious parallels between the three movements. All three are, for instance, rightly regarded as having their roots in the counter-culture of the 1960s and developing interdependently. An example of the development of new forms of witchcraft will suffice to illustrate the point. Wicca as it was traditionally practised in Britain was exported to the United States by Raymond Buckland in the 1960s where, according to Orion (1995: 143), it was transformed into a 'very different kind of religion'[54]. In particular, Wicca was adapted by the women's spirituality movement, resulting in the development of Pagan Goddess spirituality and feminist witchcraft traditions such as Dianic and Reclaiming witchcraft. This "mutant 'Feminist Witchcraft'", according to Salomonsen (1996: 32), developed as female witches gradually took part in the Women's Movement and 'in some cases met, in other cases helped create, the Goddess Movement' (ibid.: 32; Bonewits 1989: 110). The Goddess Movement, however, has not adopted witchcraft but has used its ritual expression for inspiration[55]. Wicca and feminist/Goddess

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[53] See, for example, Hanegraaff 1998a: 85-7.

[54] Orion (1995: 143) lists several differences, including a less formal and hierarchical ritual style which is more inventive and celebratory, Native American influences such as shamanism and drumming, the superimposition of psychotherapy onto Wicca, and the application of Wicca to political activism.

[55] Salomonsen (1996: 33) further points out that the Goddess Movement does not associate itself with the occult, magical tradition or with Paganism; '[a]lthough Neopagan men (and women) may worship the Goddess, women in the Goddess Movement do not regard them as feminists'.

spirituality thus blend into each other, and it is predominantly this blurring of distinctions between the original British Wicca and North American feminist witchcraft into a normative, generally-applied (mis)understanding of Wicca/witchcraft which has been the reason for misrepresentative categorisation.

The distinctly feminist branch of witchcraft shares little commonality with Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca in Britain beyond an initial framework consisting of the ritual Wheel of the Year. Feminist witchcraft, for example, explicitly emphasises the Goddess as representative of divinity, attempts to maintain an explicitly non-hierarchical organisation inherited from the feminist consciousness movement (in which women rotate leadership and make collective decisions), and engages in political activism after the feminist rubric 'the personal is political is spiritual' (Culpepper 1978: 222). Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca, however, emphasise both Gods and Goddesses as representative of divinity, allow a 'hierarchy of experience' (implicit in their organisation in covens led by a High Priestess and/or High Priest and the structure of three degrees of initiation), and tend to maintain a distance between spirituality and politics. Thus, whereas Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca can be considered one entity, feminist witchcraft is an altogether different entity, consciously distinct from its non-feminist kin.

In order to distinguish between these two currents, I refer to Alexandrian and Gardnerian 'Wicca' and to feminist 'witchcraft'. This distinction in part reflects the terminology used by practitioners. On the one hand, Wiccans use the term 'Wicca' to denote a mystery religion involving a process of initiation and rigorous training within

a cosmos polarised between male and female forces, all of which is an inheritance from the magical secret societies from which Wicca is descended. The term is also used in order to differentiate between the anthropological study of primitive, tribal witchcraft[56] and the Wiccan religion of Western, literate, post-industrial society (re)invented by Gerald Gardner in Britain in the 1950s, and developed since that time into its contemporary forms. On the other hand, feminist witches prefer the term 'witchcraft', using it to describe a religious practice based upon the human (female) witch becoming empowered through interaction with the Goddess as divine counterpart of the witch, an empowerment which is sought in order to provide personal liberation for the individual woman and thus sustain women in their struggle against patriarchy. Feminist witchcraft is thus located within the wider feminist spirituality and Goddess movements, making use of a constructed image based on a feminist reading of the witchcraft persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and a myth of matriarchy, both of which are preferred alternatives to a legacy from secret societies, which are regarded as a predominantly male preserve, and Gerald Gardner as founding father. Feminist witchcraft thus makes a statement of connection with an image from the past mythologised into a modern context[57].

In general terms, we have discussed feminist witchcraft and so we shall limit ourselves here to an outline of the two best-known forms, Dianic witchcraft and Starhawk's

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[56] I use here as specific examples E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* and Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath.*

[57] The use and interpretations of the Great Witch Hunt and the myth of matriarchy by both feminist witches and by Wiccans will be considered in Chapter Three.

Reclaiming, in order to illustrate the merging streams and influences on various branches of witchcraft. The Dianic tradition of witchcraft emerged in the USA from the feminist consciousness movement, and characteristically stresses the worship of the Goddess, sometimes exclusively. Dianic covens are largely feminist and/or matriarchal in orientation, with an emphasis on rediscovering and reclaiming female power and divinity, and consciousness raising. Often, they are radical and lesbian in orientation. One of the first feminist covens was formed in Dallas, Texas by Morgan McFarland and Mark Roberts in the late 1960s, though it only later came to be called after Diana, one of the principle names for the Goddess in witchcraft[58], and by the 1980s the increasing number of feminists joining Dianic covens made feminist witchcraft the fastest growing segment of witchcraft in the United States. Its popularity among feminists was assured by the writings of the radical feminist Zsuzsanna Budapest, and later by Starhawk.

As well as her engagement with Dianic, feminist witchcraft, Starhawk is also an initiate of Faery Wicca. Faery Wicca was developed by Americans Victor and Cora Anderson and Gwyddion Pendderwen in the 1970s, based on the ancient myth of the Tuatha De Danaan, the Tribe of Dana, a race of people skilled in magic, healing and crafts, who arrived in Ireland bringing with them a Great Mother Goddess called Dana. This mythical race eventually retreated into the Otherworld, the World of Faery. Faery Wicca was originally a very small and secretive tradition, but many of the fundamentals of the tradition have become widespread through the writings of Starhawk. Faery Wicca is polytheistic and does not emphasise male/female polarities

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[58] 'Diana' was named as the witches' goddess by the American folklorist Charles Godfrey Leland (1899).

as much as other traditions. Nature is honoured and deities (whose names are secret) personify the forces of nature, life, fertility, death and rebirth. Emphasis is placed upon pragmatic magic, self development and theurgy. It is an initiatory tradition, and thus some material is kept secret, though much is now taught openly and has been published.

It was from her basis in Faery Wicca, feminism, and environmental and political activism, that Starhawk established her own tradition of witchcraft, Reclaiming. As the name suggests, feminist witchcraft as practised and taught by Starhawk is based largely upon reclaiming the image of the witch and empowering women (and men) with the Goddess in order to effect political, environmental and social change. The Reclaiming 'Principles of Unity' explicitly sets out these aims: 'we work for all forms of justice: environmental, social, political, racial, gender and economic. Our feminism includes a radical analysis of power, seeing all systems of oppression as interrelated, rooted in structures of domination and control'[59].

To a certain extent, the development of feminist manifestations of witchcraft in North America has affected Wicca in Britain and Europe. This is not surprising when one considers that Starhawk's earliest book, *The Spiral Dance*, has proved to be an ever-popular volume since it was first published in 1979, selling over 100,000 copies in its first ten years of publication. Her work is therefore widely available, although less than one-third of the British Wiccan respondents to a questionnaire I distributed in

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[59] Reclaiming Principles of Unity, September 1998.

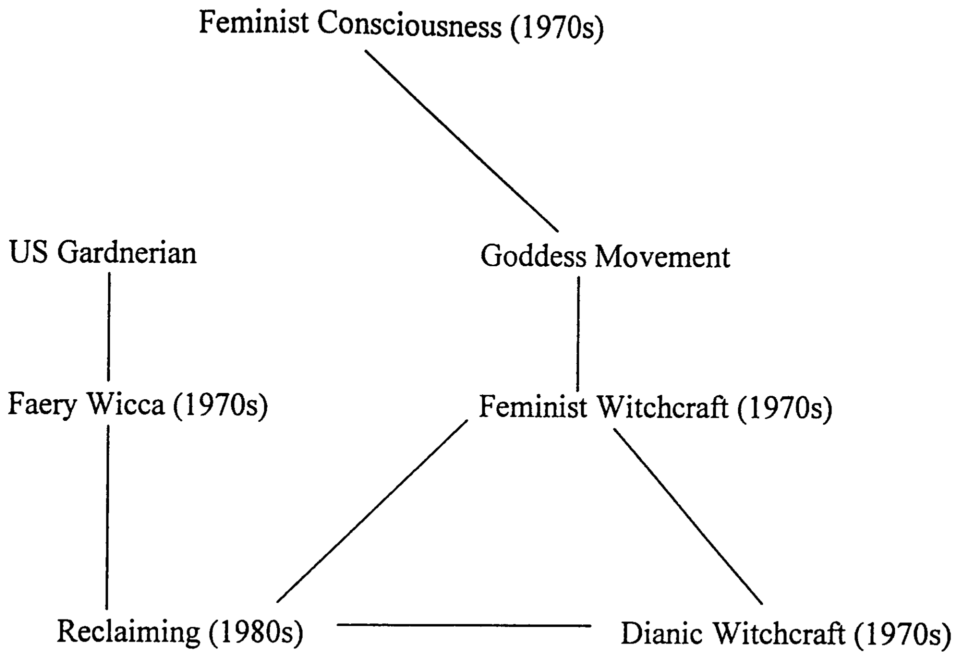

Fig. 1.1

The Development of Feminist Witchcraft

1995[60] named Starhawk as an influential figure. It was not until the summer of 1998 that a UK Reclaiming 'Witchcamp' was held in Britain, and European Wiccan attitudes towards Starhawk's redirection of witchcraft towards political activism are cautious. Dalua, a Norwegian Gardnerian/Alexandrian High Priest, told me, 'I personally prefer not to go as far as for example Starhawk has done, making the Craft into some sort of action group for political, environmental or humanitarian purposes (in most cases we have good choices outside of the Craft)'[61], thus illustrating the characteristic maintenance of a distinction between politics and spirituality in Wicca.

[60] The questionnaire and the data accumulated through it is discussed at length in Chapter Two.

[61] Personal comment October 1998.

The differences between North American feminist witchcraft and British Wicca do not, however, constitute a major theme of this thesis. We shall engage predominantly with Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca, the most popular form of witchcraft in Britain, although contrasts with feminist witchcraft will be alluded to in varying contexts.

Hedgewitchcraft

A third strand of witchcraft must also be considered: Hedgewitchcraft. Hedgewitches are usually solitary practitioners, and as such operate with no hierarchy or organisational structure[62], do not necessarily regard witchcraft as a religion, and therefore may, or may not, honour gods and goddesses. Where witchcraft is seen as religious practice, a ritual of self-dedication to a particular god and/or goddess may be performed rather than an initiation. Hedgewitches perceive Wicca as the organised form of witchcraft, operating almost as an institutionalised religion, and in order to distance themselves from this they identify themselves as witches, hedgewitches, ditch witches or green witches rather than as Wiccan. They have little in common with Wiccan history[63] or the myths of feminist witchcraft, but rather regard themselves as the modern version of the cunning man or wise woman. The heritage of hedgewitches

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[62] Although the burgeoning interest in hedgewitchcraft led to the formation of the Association of Solitary Hedgewitches (ASH) in 1994, it operates as a contact organisation only. Solitary Hedgewitches can use the association to make contact with each other in order to share experiences and ideas.

[63] See Hutton 1996: 6-7: cunning folk are 'increasingly significant as role models now that the individual practice of witchcraft is coming into ever greater vogue, but they have little relation to the essentially communal character of mid-twentieth century paganism'.

is thus drawn from the lore of the cunning folk, who were believed to be the wise people in particular rural locations to whom people would turn for healing, midwifery, fertility spells, charms and blessings.

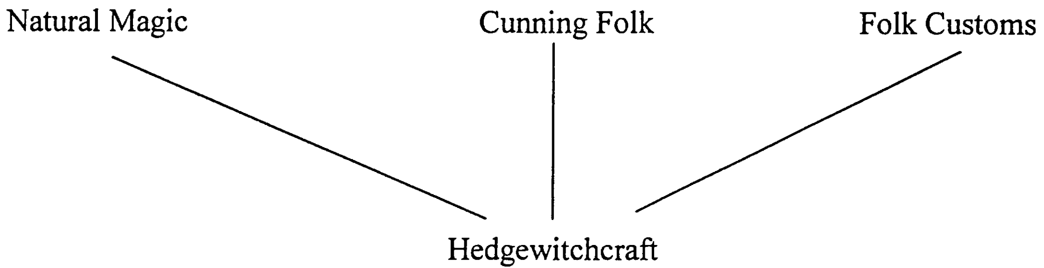

Fig. 1.2 - Influences on Hedgewitchcraft

Magic and spells used in this tradition thus tend to be natural, based on a knowledge of herbalism, the phases of the moon, and the seasonal cycle of the earth. Since its practitioners operate as isolated individuals or partnerships who occasionally join together in larger groups, rather than in covens, hedgewitchcraft is not specifically relevant to this study.

CONCLUSION

Wicca is not, therefore, synonymous with either Paganism or witchcraft, although it has much in common with both of these. However, the common perception among scholars has been to treat these different entities as if they were one and the same and, furthermore, to conflate the entire field of Wicca and Paganism with already existing

but inappropriate categories[64]. Wicca thus occupies an ambiguous position *vis à vis* other forms of witchcraft and Paganism: it is at once central to, and on the margins of both. That Wicca, historically, was central to the variety of Pagan revivals in Britain and America which now constitute modern Paganism is indisputable. But Wicca claims a heritage also from the Western Esoteric Tradition, which Paganism inherits from Wicca but does not emphasise. The fact that developments from Wicca, such as other forms of witchcraft and Paganism, have moved along a different trajectory away from esotericism does not necessarily mean that Wicca as the core tradition has followed. In fact, it may be that Wicca remains as an esoteric Paganism or Pagan esotericism, and this is the focus of our thesis.

Wicca can be characterised as a pagan religion (indeed, as *the* classic pagan religion from which all others derive), a form of witchcraft (one of many), a magical system, an occult tradition, part of the western mystery tradition, and a continuation of the Western Esoteric Tradition. As the opening quotation of this chapter indicates, Hanegraaff recognises that although Paganism has developed out of Wicca, Wicca itself is not wholly situated within Paganism. It is, in fact, solely due to the development of Wicca beyond its original boundaries (i.e. into feminist witchcraft and other pagan traditions) that Wicca is included 'as a borderline case' in Hanegraaff's

[64] In large part, this is due to the emerging nature of Wicca and Paganism as fields of study. As the literature review in Chapter Two will reveal, there have been a number of necessary general and sweeping studies produced over the past five years, but specific studies are still lacking. Such specific studies (as attempted in this thesis) may be regarded as constituting the 'second wave' of scholarship concerning Wicca and Paganism, which will hopefully help define separate strands of overlapping fields.

study of New Age religion as a reflection of 'western esotericism in the mirror of secular culture'.

At the commencement of this study, then, Wicca exists at the interstices of Paganism and esotericism. It can be characterised initially as a self-styled mystery religion which follows an initiatory system inspired and informed by the mystery traditions of the ancient Mediterranean. It believes itself to be a minority religion, suitable only for small number of adepts, and accepts the existence of other religions alongside it. Organised in small, often intense groups called covens, Wicca does not seek converts but believes that those who are right for their religion, which includes the practice of magic in its rites, holds nature to be sacred, and venerates deity in the form of both gods and goddesses, will find their way to an appropriate coven. Wicca is pragmatic and world embracing, holding that life, the body, and the earth are sacred rather than seeking a way of salvation or escape from earthly existence. Such a characterisation presents the researcher with specific problems which need to be addressed, particularly in terms of access.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCHING WICCA

[Witches] have impressed me as people who have an unusual degree of enterprise and of control over their own lives, and demand even more from them, extending this pattern by asking more of religious life than most people do (Hutton 2000).

INTRODUCTION

Having demarcated our field of enquiry in Chapter One, we need now to consider the research which has already been conducted, potential research problems, and methodological approaches which may be adopted for the study of esoteric mystery religions at the end of the twentieth century. We shall also provide interpretations of data collected through survey methods and in the field in order to further our characterisation of Wicca and its practitioners before we move on to the main concerns of the thesis in Chapters Three to Five.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON WICCA

North America

The first studies of contemporary Wicca formed part of surveys on occult phenomena and new religious movements and were carried out in the 1970s by American sociologists such as Edward Tiryakian (1974) and Jacob Needleman and George Baker (1978). The most well-known and influential volume on this 'sociology of the occult'

is Edward Tiryakian's edited volume *On the Margin of the Visible: Sociology, the Esoteric and the Occult* (1974). In this volume, Marcello Truzzi proposes that occultism is characterised by its interest in 'things anomalous to our generally accepted cultural-storehouse of truths', and accordingly it refers to all the movements and tendencies which are based on the 'contradiction of accepted belief' in general, and on a rejection of modern rationality and science in particular (Truzzi 1974: 245-246). Similarly, Tiryakian defines esotericism and occultism entirely in terms of scientifically unverified/unverifiable beliefs and practices based on those beliefs (Tiryakian 1974: 265). The aim of such studies was to establish categories in order to ascertain similarities and differences between groups, to distinguish marginal esoteric culture from mainstream society, and to provide characteristics of deviancy and normality. Processes of conversion, demographics, social conditions underlying the emergence of new religious groups, and statistical material were also included. Paganism, Wicca and witchcraft were not, however, the main focus of such studies.

In 1979, Margot Adler's sweeping survey of Paganism, *Drawing Down the Moon*, was published. Although analysis is minimal in order to allow for greater breadth of coverage, Adler manages to include some rich and detailed ethnography and her aim is to classify different elements of Paganism rather than examining specific issues. In her 1986 second edition Adler does, however, identify several major trends that she has observed since 1979, but her study remains more of a description than an analysis, emerging 'out of her extensive involvement with Neo-Paganism, rather than being driven by questions framed within academic disciplines' (Pike 1996: 362). In terms of the present study, Adler's examination of Paganism is limited in its usefulness in that it

is predominantly based on Paganism in North America. Nevertheless, her research provides a great deal of useful information and illustrative points for this thesis, particularly with regard to my portrayal of Wicca in the United States.

In the 1980s, research on specific Pagan populations began and Gordon Melton published an extensive bibliography (1982). Gini Graham Scott produced *Cult and Countercult* in 1980, based on fieldwork in two groups in California, Kirkpatrick *et al* carried out an empirical study of Wicca in 1986, Loretta Orion published *Never Again the Burning Times* in 1995, a study of Pagan groups in the USA, and Michael Faber's *Modern Witchcraft and Psychoanalysis* appeared in 1993. Scott and Orion's volumes are based on ethnographic fieldwork. Scott utilised participant observation and interviews with twenty individuals in a comparative study between a conservative spiritual growth group and a countercultural Wiccan group in the Berkeley-San Francisco area. The Wiccan group in her study, however, was established by students informed by books, rather than being an initiatory Gardnerian/Alexandrian coven. The group thus represents an early manifestation of the North American developments of Wicca outlined in Chapter One. The description she provides dates back twenty years, and bears little resemblance to my own recent fieldwork experience among Gardnerian/ Alexandrian Wiccans in England. Scott's study can thus be considered to have little relevance to research on Wicca as practised in Britain in the 1990s.

Kirkpatrick *et al*'s 1986 study applied Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge's compensation theory, investigating the working hypothesis that a witch is a powerless person who compensates for his/her lack of power by resorting to magical practices in

order to effect change. Their study material included one hundred and forty four Pagan individuals from the USA and Canada, contacted by mailing questionnaires to the editors of seventy six Pagan journals and to two hundred and sixty leaders of groups or covens. Kirkpatrick *et al* concluded that their data did *not* support their hypothesis. Possible explanations for the discrepancy between Scott's study and that of Kirkpatrick *et al* might be that, in the time between Scott's research in 1974-76 and Kirkpatrick's in 1986, Wicca had developed from social marginality to attract more educated and socially integrated people. Another explanation may simply be that Scott's study is misleading, for even in 1979 Margot Adler's survey reported that the majority of the people studied were fully integrated in mainstream society, and educational data, according to Dennis Carpenter, strongly suggests that Pagans 'may be considerably more educated that the general population in the United States . . . holding jobs requiring considerable educational background' (1996: 59-60).

Loretta Orion is an anthropologist initiated as a witch who has gathered material over a period of seven years through participant observation at seven annual gatherings, participation in a Gardnerian coven for two years, and through a questionnaire which was passed out and to which she received one hundred and eighty nine responses. Orion is particularly interested in the efficacy of Wiccan ways of healing, and she concludes that the witches she studies believe in the possibility of 'perfecting the self by enhancing the natural capacities of the imagination, will and craft' in order to reach their goal of being 'balanced creatures, both at home in one's animal nature and refined by culture' (1995: 272). Orion reveals thorough, first-hand knowledge about Wicca but her study has been criticised for including so many groups and individual voices

that it tends towards the superficial, lacking theoretical perspectives and critical discussion (Salomonsen 1996: 59). Orion's work neverthless remains important to the present study, for it includes the only published, academic account of which I am aware that explores the links between Wicca and Renaissance esotericism.

In contrast to the above fieldwork-based studies, Michael Faber's *Modern Witchcraft and Psychoanalysis* (1993) is a psychological case study of witchcraft based on textual studies of Starhawk's books, interviews with members of a coven in Canada, and participation in one coven ritual. His aim was to demonstrate that witches are mentally deviant, regressive and childish[1]. Through application of object relations theory and Margaret Mahler's thesis that a child must experience a psychological process of development from union with the mother to full separation in order to grow up healthy, Faber concludes that worship of a Mother Goddess impedes the process of individuation. Consequently, when witches search for union and merge with deity, they are demonstrating childish behaviour. Faber's concern with the negative effects of worship of a Mother Goddess on the process of individuation is striking, in that Vivianne Crowley, a psychologist who has been a Gardnerian/Alexandrian Wiccan Priestess for over twenty years, seems to come to the opposite conclusion in her study of Wicca and psychology. She argues that identification with a particular God or Goddess, presumably including a 'Mother Goddess', leads to a true understanding of

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[1] This is a remarkably similar conclusion to that reached by Gregory Zilboorg in his psychiatric research of the witches persecuted in the Great Witch Hunt. Zilboorg (1969: 73) writes, 'no doubt is left in our mind that the millions of witches, sorcerers, possessed and obsessed, were an enormous mass of severe neurotics, psychotics, and considerably deteriorated organic deliria'.

the nature of the Gods, a realisation which, according to Jung, is a *necessary* step in the process of individuation (Crowley 1996: 176). Moreover, as Salomonsen (1996: 54) points out, Faber's reductive interpretations, and his rejection of the fundamental mystical theme of separation-unity is problematic: if Faber's conclusion is carried to its logical end, then anyone concerned with mysticism must be judged as childish and regressive, whether Wiccan, Buddhist, or Christian.

Before we turn to research on Wicca in Australia, Europe and Britain, three recent pieces of American research need to be outlined. Firstly Dennis Carpenter, himself a witch, conducted a psychological-statistical study examining the empirical relationship between individual reports of spiritual and mystical experiences and reports on positive life changes. He used formal interviews with sixteen individuals at a Pagan Spirit gathering in 1993, combined with correlational analysis and descriptive statistics of fifty two randomly-selected individuals at the same gathering (which three hundred and eight four people attended). Carpenter's research hypothesis was that Pagans would 'exhibit a significant positive correlation' in these reports, and this hypothesis was proven: Pagans scored the lowest on experiences of *loss* of self in terms of absorption into something greater, but scored highest on *merging* of self with various aspects of non-human nature. Since many of the spiritual experiences reported seemed to be in the nature of 'everyday' occurrences, Carpenter suggests that this 'transfiguration of the ordinary' among Pagans should be contrasted with the more traditional notion that spiritual experiences occur only in non-ordinary states of consciousness. Carpenter's findings with regard to the notion of merging the spiritual

with the ordinary are important to the representation of Wicca as integrated with ordinary life considered in the present study.

Secondly, Jone Salomonsen of the University of Oslo conducted her PhD research[2] within the Reclaiming Collective in San Francisco, California. Salomonsen sets out to conduct 'a theological analysis of Wicca *as text* and of Wicca *as a lived religion*' (1996: 60). She concentrates on providing a detailed study of one particular community (Reclaiming) and one particular representative (Starhawk) in order to 'move beyond the generalizations and sweeping surveys . . . and integrate analytical angles other than reductive sociology or legitimizing anthropology' (1996: 61). Salomonsen provides a comprehensive scholarly analysis of Reclaiming, including vivid ethnography and discussing issues of identity and of ritual practice. Salomonsen's work with Reclaiming primarily constitutes an engagement with North American feminist witchcraft, whilst my own work concentrates on British Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca which is not specifically informed by feminism. Nevertheless, since I have not been able to conduct fieldwork in the USA, Salomonsen's thesis, based on extensive fieldwork, has been invaluable in allowing me to illustrate striking contrasts between Wicca as it is practised in Britain and North America in this thesis.

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[2] Salomonsen's PhD thesis is to be published by Routledge in 2000 as part of a series of volumes on religion and gender to be edited by Ursula King. The only part of her research published to date in English appears in Pearson *et al* (1998). I had the good fortune to meet Jone Salomonsen for the second time in 1997, once her doctorate was complete, and to obtain a copy of her thesis.

Lastly, in 1996 James Lewis edited a collection entitled *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, which brings together studies by (predominantly) North American researchers, both academic and practitioner. The collection covers the Goddess and the witches' worldview, magic and rituals, ethics, and Christianity and Neo-Paganism. Of particular importance are the two literature reviews included at the end of the volume, conducted by Sarah Pike and Dennis Carpenter. Such reviews have been missing from the available academic literature on Wicca and Paganism, and I have found them invaluable to my own outline of previous research. In particular, Pike's review has provided information on North American research as yet unavailable in Britain, particularly with regard to published articles in journals which I have been unable to consult.

Australia

The first study of Wicca and Paganism in Australia appeared in 1997, when Lynne Hume's volume *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia* was published. The result of fieldwork conducted over a period of five years predominantly in Australia, but also in Canada, Hume's book provides a rather general, but nevertheless valuable insight into the growing popularity of Paganism in the Southern Hemisphere, based on the following questions:

> Who are the witches? What would it really feel like to *be* a witch and to engage in the practices of witchcraft? What is the emic viewpoint, the belief system from the adherent's perspective? What spiritual rewards and satisfactions do they reap? How prevalent are Pagans in Australia, and what

> relevance does all this have to Australian society and to mainstream religions? (Hume 1997: 15).

Hume participated in many seasonal rituals, public festivals and workshops at Pagan camps, private rituals and Wiccan conferences all over Australia. She also subscribed to Pagan newsletters, researched occult archive material, interviewed individuals formally and informally, and distributed a questionnaire. Hume does, in one sense, provide another sweeping study of the kind criticised by Sarah Pike:

> Because Neo-Paganism is underrepresented in scholarly literature, researchers are tempted to cover as much of its vast territory as they can, but what is needed is more specificity. Attention to particular groups, events and issues often illuminates larger theoretical problems (Pike 1996: 366).

Yet, whilst research abounds and is increasing in North America, Hume's volume is the first study of Paganism in Australia and as such necessarily attempts to paint a portrait on a broad canvas which one hopes will set the scene for future, more specific studies.

Europe

European studies of Wicca and Paganism are far less numerous than those in North America. In Germany, the Lutheran interfaith official Hans-Juergen Ruppert provided a fair description of contemporary witchcraft as a serious nature religion not to be confused with satanism in his *Die Hexen kommen. Magie und Hexenglaube heute*

(1987). In the same year, Thomas Hauschild published his historical survey of witchcraft, including the contemporary revival, in *Die alten und die neuen Hexen. Die Geschichte der Frauen aus der Grenze*. In 1986, journalist Gisella Graichen recorded conversations with ten women and three men who identified themselves as witches in her book *Die neuen Hexen. Gespräche mit Hexen.* The majority of the thirteen interviewed were lesbian feminists, and thus the study falls outside the remit of this thesis.

In France, I am aware of only two relevant studies, Anne Danieul's *Le Sorcier assassiné. Jeteurs de sort d'hière, chamans et chercheurs d'aujourd'hui* (1981) and Dominique Camus' quasi-sociological study *Pouvoirs Sorciers. Enquète sur les pratiques actuelles de sorcellerie* (1988). Danieul's study, however, concentrates on contemporary French magicians concerned with spiritual development outside any religious structure, and Camus' research focuses on magical techniques to obtain specific results, with no consideration of underlying religious beliefs. They do not, therefore, provide any relevant research into Wicca or witchcraft as a contemporary religion, and are not overtly concerned with modern Paganism. None of the above five studies have been translated into English, and neither have I been able to obtain copies. I am therefore grateful to Frederic Lamond for drawing these studies to my attention, and providing brief synopses of each.

In Scandinavia, Petra Junus has undertaken PhD research among Swedish women, in the Department of Theology at the University of Uppsala. Her study, *The Living Goddess: Women's Identity and Religiosity as a Process of Change*, is concerned with

the Goddess and Wicca-inspired religiosity, and is based on psychology, feminism and gender studies[3]. Laila Walberg is beginning research for her doctorate on 'Wicca, Druidism and the Celtic Heritage' at the University of Uppsala in Sweden, and Asbjørn Dyrendal (1993) has analysed the concept and category of 'nature' in Starhawk's work for his MA dissertation at the University of Oslo. Lastly, in 1983 Lene Sjørup studied witchcraft in the context of American feminist theology, and wrote the preface to *Spiraldansen*, the 1984 Danish edition of Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance*.[4]

The only study of Scandinavian Wicca translated into English, however, is Stein Jarving's *Paganism in Norway: Witchcraft and Asatru in Historical and Recent Times*, due to be published in a collection edited by Shelly Rabinovitch (forthcoming[5]). Jarving traces the development of Wicca in Norway from the initiation of one Norwegian witch in London in 1989, to a community of almost fifty initiates in three covens and two smaller groups in 1998. Thus, says Jarving, 'Norway is *'independent'* as a Craft community, and well on its way to develop a regionally distinct *'flavour'* of Craft'. Since the Norwegian language is similar to Danish and Swedish, Norwegian witches have also helped to train and initiate witches in Sweden and Denmark where, 'even to this day, we have not yet located anyone there who were initiates in our

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[3] Petra Junus attended the *Nature Religion Today* conference in 1996. She provided me with an abstract of her thesis *Den levande Gudinnan: Kvinnoidentitet och religiositet som föränd-ringsprocess*, in English, but has not yet translated any other part of her work.

[4] Information on these last two Scandinavian studies has been taken from Salomonsen (1996).

[5] This volume is as yet untitled and has no publication date; it therefore does not appear in the bibliography.

tradition of the Craft, except for those we have initiated ourselves. We knew that Starhawk had been visiting Scandinavia, but have found few remains of her inspiration'.

Britain

In 1983, Tanya Luhrmann began fieldwork among witches in London, and her book *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (1989) became the first academic study of Wicca as practised in Britain. Her inquiry was not based on questions of social deviancy, as the earlier North American sociological studies had been, but instead set out to consider why people become involved in the occult and whether one has to be, or becomes, 'irrational' in order to 'believe' in magic.

Assuming that magic is a non-conformist, irrational mode of interpretation which requires a complex social and mental initiation process in order to be appropriated, Luhrmann developed the notion of 'interpretive drift'. This 'slow, often unacknowledged shift in someone's manner of interpreting events as they become involved in a particular activity' (Luhrmann 1989: 340) is used to explain people's acceptance of magic and of magical practice. Luhrmann utilised participant observation, social interaction, and formal and informal interviews among witches in London covens and magical groups, yet her study is limited in two ways. Firstly, her study is limited largely to one Wiccan coven in London and to witches practising in the London area, yet the subtitle of her book, *Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, suggests a representative study of Wiccan magical practice in the whole of England. Her study is, to my mind, limited in scope and is based on a small, unrepresentative

sample: capital cities are rarely representative of a nation. Secondly, whilst Luhrmann argues that the paradigms of magic presented in anthropological work among primitive societies is inadequate to interpret magical practices in literate, post-industrial western society, she fails to question her own premise that western magicians in the 1980s must *fool* themselves into believing in magic in order to retain their rational stance in their everyday lives.

However, 'interpretive drift' does not seem to apply to Luhrmann herself, a 'rational' scholar who, as a modern, successfully socialised scientist, is apparently immune to such irrational concepts as religion, witchcraft, and magic. Although she was initiated into a coven and welcomed at a variety of rituals, Luhrmann stresses, 'I am no witch, no wizard, though I have been initiated as though I were', and points out, 'I never have, and do not now "believe" in magic' (Luhrmann 1989: 18, 19). Like Faber, Luhrmann retreats to a position of reducing Wicca and magical practice to a childish, regressive state, in which 'these witches were recreating a childhood world, enchanting adulthood' (ibid., 19). In so doing, Luhrmann ignores the fact that magic has existed as part of human life experience for millennia, instead reducing reality to empirical daily life by which the reality of any religious view of the world is invalidated. The consequence is that witchcraft (and indeed, religion) becomes 'something else', becomes 'other', and is devalued.

Katherine Ewing, an American anthropologist, has criticised this reductive and analytical approach to religion, adopted by Luhrmann, and its implicit methodological premises. Ewing claims that,

> [t]hough [Luhrmann's] research strategy involved becoming initiated into several practising groups, her research did not lead her to question her own premises about rationality. She assumed that belief entails a move from a stance of rationality to an acceptance of the irrational, an assumption that, it could be argued, is embedded within the atheistic hegemonic discourse in which anthropology participates (Ewing 1994: 573).

Ewing also reminds us that a scholar who takes belief seriously 'unfortunately' runs the risk of 'going native', one of the few taboos remaining in anthropology, but also stresses that the opposite stance is problematic - if we refuse to acknowledge that the people studied may know something about the human condition that might also be personally valid for the anthropologist.

Consequently, according to Salomonsen (1996:58), Luhrmann's methodology repeats the Freudian dogma that 'reality thinking' and 'fantasy thinking' must be sharply distinguished. Nevertheless, her research 'might well be said to document the extent to which fantasy thinking, imagination, emotionality, dreaming and play (the so-called irrational) are the creative foundations *of*, and not the cognitive contradiction *to*, reality thinking (the so-called rational)' (ibid.: 58), despite the fact that, whilst recognising the importance of imagination, play and fantasy, Luhrmann insists that they are irrational and stand in opposition to rationality.

Whether Luhrmann placed herself in an anthropological straight-jacket or not, her work has come to be regarded as definitive for Wicca in academic circles, and she

remains the only academic to have published a monograph specifically concerned with Wiccan practice in Britain to date. Her work is therefore relevant to the present study, but we must bear in mind that although she experienced the benefits of participation as an insider, she may have misrepresented herself to other participants, or denied her own experience in her ethnography. In either case, however, "*the effect of her denial is to make her claims of respect for the people she worked with sound somewhat hollow*" (Ewing 1994: 573, emphasis mine).

The most recent study of Wicca, Ronald Hutton's *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, is due to be published in 2000. Professor Hutton has been kind enough to let me read proofs of three chapters from his book, two of which concern the history of Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca, and the third of which is concerned with contemporary Wiccan practice. I have thus been able to assess my own empirical and fieldwork research against Hutton's study, and have found that our results are extremely similar. Hutton's work is discussed in more detail below (pages 122-4).

Other research in Britain is more general and wide-ranging that the two monographs outlined above. Graham Harvey and Charlotte Hardman published the papers presented at a conference held at the University of Newcastle in 1994 entitled *Paganism Today* (1996). Charlotte Hardman outlines the development of modern Paganism and its main features in her introduction, and specifies the aim of the conference which was 'to encourage debate between practising Pagans and academics working on aspects of Paganism' (1996: xvi). This 'debate' is reflected in the

presentation of the variety of contemporary Paganism, by academics, practitioners, and practitioner/academics. *Paganism Today* covers the historical perspectives of Paganism, the main traditions in contemporary Paganism, and Paganism in practice, seeking 'to fill a gap in the literature on Paganism' (ibid.: ix), by providing a wide-ranging overview of contemporary Pagan religions.

Paganism Today thus covers a remarkable selection of modern Pagan traditions in Britain, and provides clear insight into the variety of religious expression to be found under the umbrella of Paganism. Most pertinent to the present study are chapters by Susan Greenwood and Shan Jayran. Greenwood analyses Wiccan groups to examine the use of magical will and power by female and male magicians; using the examples of Aleister Crowley, feminist witchcraft, and Wicca, Greenwood argues that the development of the magical will is, in fact, gendered. In 'Darklight Philosophy: A Ritual Praxis', Shan Jayran narrows the focus to that of a specific ritual circle which she performed at the conference, describing and explaining the words and gestures she uses whilst underpinning her text with her philosophical observations.

Paganism Today began the investigation into an understanding of the place of Pagan religions in late twentieth-century Britain. This investigation was taken up in a volume from the *Nature Religion Today* conference held two years later. In this collection, Susan Greenwood again contributes a chapter relevant to this thesis, in which she considers sexual identities in witchcraft, and it is in this volume that Jone Salomonsen's work (discussed above) appears. However, both Greenwood's and Salomonsen's research is predominantly in the field of feminist witchcraft; only my

own chapter, and that of Vivianne Crowley who writes about Wicca as nature religion, is based on British Alexandrian/Gardnerian Wicca.

Wicca is included in both Michael York's monumental attempt to contextualise alternative spirituality in Britain in the twentieth century, an extremely general study published as *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements* in 1995, and in Wouter Hanegraaff's *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (1998). Both of these volumes are broad surveys of the cultural and spiritual milieu of the late twentieth century, but whilst York's *Emerging Network* offers empirical sociological data and an analysis of the relationship between the New Age and Paganism, Hanegraaff's volume analyses the historical background of both the New Age and Paganism, using primary sources to trace foundations in the Western Esoteric Tradition of the Renaissance. As we have indicated, we make use of Hanegraaff's work in our attempt to characterise Wicca as a contemporary current of the Western Esoteric Tradition. Further historical exposition is provided by Diane Purkiss in *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*. Her analysis of modern witchcraft, however, relies largely on North American sources and does not provide an adequate representation of Wicca as practised in Britain.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study is designed to address the shortcomings of previous research and to add to the body of research on specific groups, as opposed to earlier generalised surveys, which is now required in order to deepen our understanding of esoteric and

Pagan religions. As the previous research outlined above suggests, much of the research on Wicca has been conducted in North America. The present study, however, has as its focus Wicca as practised in Britain. The history, context, and researched community are thus different from previous research, and it is therefore relevant to provide some empirical data for Britain and to compare conversion processes between North American witches and British Wiccans. It is also relevant to provide illustrations of the apparent contrasts between Wicca as it is practised in Britain and in the USA throughout the thesis.

The thesis will in particular add to the literature on British Wicca, complementing Ronald Hutton's historical investigations by providing contemporary analysis, and updating Luhrmann's narrowly focused fieldwork which is now sixteen years old and out of date. It is, to my mind, necessary for up-to-date fieldwork to be used when studying Wicca, since as a religion it is relatively young and is thus constantly changing as it evolves. Studies of ten to twenty years ago are hardly relevant to the Wicca of the late 1990s, and the same will be true of my own research within a decade; a constant process of updating must therefore go alongside continual fieldwork. Importantly, none of the previous research systematically considers Wicca as part of the Western Esoteric Tradition.

Studying Wicca: Access and Limitations

Among the Wiccan community in Britain, Luhrmann is regarded as a 'pretender' who was initiated into Wicca on false pretences, was unethical in her research, and misrepresented witches in her book. Certainly, as I have indicated above, Luhrmann

portrays witches as somewhat childish and irrational, a portrayal which I have found to be a misrepresentation in my own fieldwork. I cannot claim, however, to know if the accusations against Luhrmann are true, although Luhrmann herself says, 'I was honest about my enterprise, but my intention was to fit in, to dispel outsider status, and *I was rather relieved when people forgot what I had so carefully told them*' (Luhrmann 1989: 18, emphasis mine).

British Wiccans have been criticised by scholars as 'naive'[6] for forgetting that an anthropologist is always on duty, and as feeling 'jilted'[7] when Luhrmann finished her study and moved on. Yet such comments do not take into account the underlying trust inherent in initiatory Wiccan covens. One of my contacts, who was an initiate of one of the London covens which accepted Luhrmann as a visitor at rituals, explained that she had felt Luhrmann operated covertly and that she had used information given in trust, i.e. in a circle[8]. Since a generally accepted 'rule'[9] in British Wicca is that things said in a circle between participants in ritual are not to be repeated outside, it is hard to accuse witches of being 'naive'. Rather, since Luhrmann had been initiated, and was

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[6] Salomonsen, 1996:56.

[7] Comment by Chas Clifton (clifton@uscolo.edu), February 1999. E-mail to the Nature Religion Scholars (natrel-l@uscolo.edu).

[8] In 1995, when I was involved in organising the conference *Nature Religion Today: Paganism, Shamanism and Esotericism in the 1990s*, a colleague suggested inviting Tanya Lurhmann. When I mentioned this to my contact she told me that, if Luhrmann attended the conference, British witches would not support the venture.

[9] Wicca does not have any formalised rules as such. However, as we shall see in Chapter Four, there are commonly accepted and observed rules within the religion, this being one of them.

also known to be studying Wicca *in the field*, it is not unreasonable that Wiccans expected her to honour commonly observed rules and to be capable of drawing a line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. It is hardly surprising, then, that when I began my own fieldwork in 1994, eleven years after Lurhmann started her fieldwork, I found Wiccans still feeling they could not trust anyone studying Wicca and was even asked by one priestess, 'You're not going to do another Tanya on us, are you?' The effects of previous research in a particular field on later researchers can thus be extremely negative.

Breach of trust by a researcher in an initiatory religion cannot, to my mind, be excused by accusing the researched community of naiveté. This is particularly so when working in religions which regard themselves as secret, initiatory mystery traditions. Luhrmann asserts that she was initiated 'as though she were' a witch. She must therefore have taken vows of secrecy at her initiation and, as Vivianne Crowley reminds us in the introduction to her volume *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Millennium*, '[t]he words of the oath of the first initiation bind us to secrecy' (Crowley 1996: x).

Without a doubt, then, in conducting the first academic study of British Wicca, Luhrmann undermined what could have become a trusting relationship between Wiccans and researchers, and thus made it more difficult for those following after her. It has taken considerable effort to rebuild that relationship, which could have been avoided if Lurhmann had, as Sarah Pike points out,

> dealt more completely with the ambiguities and tensions that accompanied her role as participant-observer. She discusses what she shares with the London magicians and yet disavows an identity as a magician or witch. Such disclaimers are problematic when studying within one's own culture . . . More clarity on her part about the nature of her ambiguous role as insider/outsider would have been helpful (Pike 1996: 366).

The ambiguities which can present themselves in ethnographic studies are made all the more explicit when one is studying a group of people who make themselves inaccessible through veils of secrecy. Thus, the self-styled mystery religion of Wicca, with three levels of initiation, is not easy to investigate from the position of an 'outsider'. A barrier must be crossed in order to study Wicca as a religion in any level of depth and without misrepresenting its practitioners. Luhrmann crossed that barrier and was initiated into at least four groups, one of which was a Wiccan coven; but the barrier was crossed as part of an intellectual process, and she remained an outsider to the extent that she was able, allegedly, to disregard her initiation vows, break the trust of those who accepted her into their homes and rituals, and act unethically. How then does the researcher enter such a field and undertake effective fieldwork with integrity, without dishonouring the mode of entry (initiation) and the trust of one's research community?

The 'Insider/Outsider' Dichotomy

Since Luhrmann herself failed to address these concerns, and has been criticised for this, we cannot ourselves neglect to grapple with the ambiguous insider/outsider role.

I have myself crossed the same boundary as Luhrmann, but with one difference - my initiation into Wicca was not part of an intellectual process related to my doctoral research, but rather it was a genuine initiation into a religion which I had been personally involved in, albeit as a pre-initiate, for some eighteen months previously. During those months, I began to study on the Wicca Correspondence Course, attend Pagan events, and make contacts with initiated witches. It was not until twelve months later that I registered as a PhD student in the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University.

I have not, therefore, broken the anthropological taboo against 'going native', for I already was a 'native'. The situation has, in fact, been quite the opposite, 'insider going outsider, going native in reverse' (Puttick 1997: 6). Rather than being an outsider who has become intensely involved in my field of research to such an extent that I became part of it, I have instead come from inside my field of research to employ an insider/outsider position which would allow me to study Wicca as scientifically as possible on a foundation of thorough knowledge. Nevertheless, the ambiguities remain. Could I, as an insider, maintain the required objective stance deemed necessary to produce an effective study?

The 'insider as researcher' position is becoming increasingly common, as Liz Puttick points out, and must therefore be considered within the academy. As a former member of the Osho movement, Puttick has first-hand experience of this process and is worth quoting at some length. She says,

> this is now becoming an increasingly common situation, resulting in the blurring of boundaries between the subjects and objects of study. As new religions are becoming more integrated into mainstream society, they appeal more than ever to . . . academics, who may therefore cross the line out of personal interest. At the same time members of NRMs are becoming less anti-intellectual, perceiving the value of certain academic disciplines for understanding religion, and joining the ranks of academia as students and teachers. This trend presents a challenge to traditional notions of objectivity and the subject/object duality which are the basis of scientific methodology (Puttick 1997: 6).

She goes on to explain Weber's *Verstehen* methodology, which values primarily an understanding of the inner experience and interpretation of practitioners, since 'only if he [*sic*] can gain some apprehension of what it means to be a believer can he say anything useful about the religious movement he studies; and yet, in gaining that understanding, he must not actually become a believer' (1982: 13). Even here, then, the bias is still towards the outsider position and we must therefore question whether one can truly be an outsider and gain any understanding of the practitioners' stance in a mystery tradition such as Wicca which requires initiation as the means of entry.

I have mentioned already the vows of secrecy which form part of the first initiation in Wicca, and can add that the postulant enters the Wiccan circle in 'perfect love and perfect trust'. It is, to my mind, a serious breach of trust if one then breaks one's oath in order to fit a pre-ordained academic code. We must, it seems, ask ourselves

whether such codes are any longer viable given the increasing popularity of alternative spirituality. If one follows the established rubric of maintaining distance in order to produce quantitative studies of a sociological nature, then one risks basing such studies on a profound lack of understanding of the religious community itself. On the other hand, if one involves oneself in a religious community to produce qualitative studies, one risks neglecting to provide any empirical data through which the community being researched may be contextualised. It seems far more appropriate to combine the two approaches, so that quantitative material is informed by a solid bedrock of depth understanding and qualitative material is adequately framed and contextualised by empirical data[10].

We return, then, to my original question: could I, as an insider, maintain the required objective stance deemed necessary to produce an effective study? Firstly, we must make the point that objectivity as an absolute cannot exist - research, especially research which involves people, will always have some effect on the researcher, and will always be filtered by the researcher's own subjective views. It is therefore necessary to apply a rigorous self-reflexivity in order to bracket out personal beliefs

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[10] Hanegraaff (1995) presents an extensive argument for the importance of empirical data in the study of religion whilst emphasising the requirement that the researcher maintains respect for the world view of believers which 'encompasses an empirically perceptible one *and* one or more meta-empirical realms' (1995: 101). See also Puttick (1997: 9) - 'we are accountable to the multi-level complexity of "truth": to present as complete and comprehensive an interpretation as possible in the context of broader social and spiritual trends'.

and values, *whether one is an 'insider' or an 'outsider'* to the religious community one is researching[11].

It has not been an easy decision to 'come out', as it were, as an insider. Yet it has become increasingly clear that it is necessary for me as a researcher to situate myself with reference to my object of study. Given the depth of my knowledge about Wicca as a mystery religion, it is all too obvious that I must be an initiate in order to have gained this knowledge, and it therefore seemed impossible to pretend to be anything else. As Puttick asserts, 'I personally believe that to admit one's personal position is more valid and illuminating that hiding behind the defence of scientific objectivity, which is anyway unobtainable' (1997: 8). In addition, it is a fact in religious studies that there are some religions which can be studied whether one is 'inside' or 'outside' that tradition. It is perhaps less clear that there are also some religions where this is not the case. I cannot follow Luhrmann's disclaimer and say that 'I am not a witch though I have been initiated as though I were', for such disclaimers reveal a profound lack of respect for both the religion and the discipline of academic study, as well as bringing into question the integrity of the researcher. As Ninian Smart has asserted, if one 'visits a village simply to get material for a doctorate, without consideration of the villagers as fellow human beings with their own sensitivities and concerns, that is arrogant and heartless' (Smart 1997: 6)

I would maintain that the insider perspective is at least as valuable as that of the outsider; as Berger points out, 'one's own faith and the experience brought on by this

[11] c.f. Puttick (1997: 6).

faith will actually constitute "data" or "evidence" upon which inductive reflection can take place' (Berger 1979: 141). However, if the two perspectives can be combined, as I have attempted to do in this thesis, then perhaps we can move towards a study of

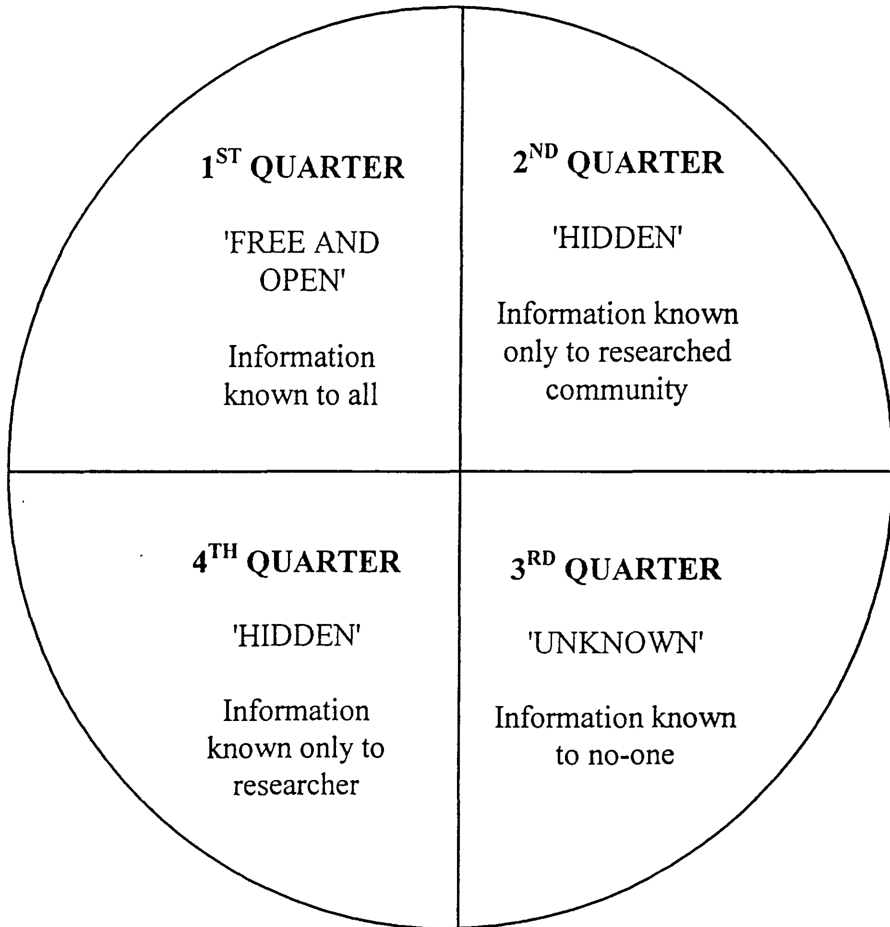

Fig. 2.0 - The Insider/Outsider Position

religion which provides a depth of understanding which is both ethical and informative, and which denies the value of neither the religious community nor that of the academy. In the diagram above (Fig. 2.0), I have attempted to portray the research

relationship[12]. The first quarter is 'free and open', representing that which is known to both the religious community and to the researcher, that which is common knowledge, though it may be inaccurate[13]. The third quarter represents that which is known neither to the researcher nor to the researched community. The second and fourth quarters represent respectively that which is known only to the researched community and that which is known only to the researcher - those areas which are likely to be, and indeed may even remain, hidden realms[14]. It is in the interface between the second and

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[12] I am grateful to Derek Reinhard who, after chairing a paper I presented on this subject at the AUDTRS conference in 1999, pointed out to me the similarities between my diagram and the Johari Window. The Johari Window was developed by Professor Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham (Johari being a combination of the author's first names - 'Jo' and 'Hari'), and is used to map four states of awareness. The 'public' state represents what I know of myself and the public knows of me; the 'secret' state represents what I know of myself which the public does not know of me; the 'blind' state represents what the public knows of me which I do not know of myself; and the 'unknown' state represents what neither I nor the public knows of me. If we therefore combine the Johari window with my diagram, we can thus also consider our own 'blind', 'secret', and 'unknown' states, and perhaps thereby attain a greater state of awareness as to our own motives as researchers. For further information, see Luft, J. and Ingham, H. (1955).

[13] Inaccurate 'facts' which are known by both the community and the researcher are likely to be stereotypes, such as the 'common knowledge' that all witches are female and have black cats, or that all witches are devil worshippers.

[14] In our use of the word 'hidden', we are concerned chiefly with knowledge which is 'hidden' due to lack of expertise or experience, particularly at the beginning of a study, rather than implying that things are deliberately hidden by either the researcher or the researched community. Although this latter scenario can sometimes be the case, resulting in a possible 'stalemate' or stagnation of the research, we would suggest a rather more fluid scenario whereby those 'hidden' sections *on both sides* become less

fourth quarters that the relationship between the researcher and researched community is negotiated, and where the research proper takes place.

Thus, to take Wicca as an example, the first quarter could represent Wicca as a Pagan religion, a generally known 'fact' about the researched community which the researcher also knows. The third quarter, on the other hand, could represent the secrets of the ancient mystery religions upon which Wicca draws, but which have not been revealed during the course of history and are therefore known neither to the researcher nor the researched community. The second quarter could represent the differences between different Wiccan traditions and the ongoing differentiation between Wicca and Paganism, which might be 'hidden' to the researcher, at least at the beginning of the research period. The fourth and final quarter, on the other hand, could represent the different theories and categories of religion which may be hidden from the researched community simply because the community does not know of them.

In leaving aside the first and third quarters, which deal with what is widely acknowledged and what is unlikely ever to be known, we come to the crux of the research, the 'grey areas' as it were. Here, the researcher and the researched community engage in a dialectic relationship in which the researcher aims to learn about the community (second quarter) within the framework of his or her own reference points (fourth quarter), whilst the community finds out about its own context

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predominant as the research progresses and, consequently, the 'free and open' section is expanded in a mutually beneficial and respectful manner.

within that wider frame of reference and aims to maintain its integrity within it[15]. In initiatory religions such as Wicca, this relationship can become exceedingly strained as the researched community also attempts to maintain its 'mysteries' or secrets in the face of investigation. Thus, whilst the information offered through such a relationship can assist in discarding incorrect perceptions among outsiders (resulting from lack of familiarity with Wicca), it may also, as Hanegraaff (1998a:6) warns in a general sense, 'unveil aspects of the religion which are unknown and surprising (and not necessarily welcome) to the believers themselves'.

If the researcher is an 'insider', and thus has one foot in the second quarter and the other in the fourth, the tension between the two can be impossible to manage. However, it is perhaps possible that, if the researcher is also a member of the researched community, he or she can act as a bridge between the two. In so doing, the researcher may be able to not only maintain a deep understanding of the community but also retain an 'objective' stance through the application of theory and the adoption of a relevant methodology which allows for both distance *and* involvement. The researcher thus acts as both insider *and* outsider, embodying the resulting tension in a positive manner which enables constant reflexivity in the movement from inside to outside the community, and back. In so doing, the three accessible 'quarters' are opened up to the researcher, and a more holistic study of the community can be undertaken. What we may expect from multi-dimensional methodology and the

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[15] cf. Jan G. Platvoet (1983: 6): 'methods of collecting data and interpreting them have a hermeneutical setting: they are operated in a two-way framework of interpretation intimately linked to the person of the investigator and necessarily involving his or her subjectivities in their operation'.

valuing of insider as well as outsider perspectives, however, is, in Hanegraaff's words, 'a many-voiced and probably endless debate, in which the dialectics of *emic* evidence and *etic* scholarly discourse may nevertheless produce valid knowledge' (Hanegraaff 1995: 109, emphasis in original). The theory and multi-dimensional methodology adopted in this thesis in an attempt to contribute such 'valid knowledge' to the field are outlined below.

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Theory

Studying a religion such as Wicca necessarily entails an elective theoretical approach. I have thus turned to history in order to contextualise Wicca, whilst ritual theory, Victor Turner's theories of communitas and liminality, and the psychology of Carl Jung have been utilised to consider Wicca as a religion expressed through ritual, and to explain Wiccans' experience of the Divine. Studies of ritual have tended to be largely based in predominantly oral societies, with few studies being conducted of ritual in literate, stratified, industrial and post-industrial societies (Bell 1997: 205). This thesis seeks to add to the body of knowledge concerning the role of ritual in contemporary British society, in particular among communities whose membership is made up of people who not only tend to be of above average education but who, for the most part, fully engage with western capitalist society.

Underlying the whole of the thesis is an acceptance of the primacy of experience and the subsequent adoption of Berger's inductive approach in order to theorise this experiential dimension. Berger offers three options for religious thought: the

deductive, the reductive and the inductive. The deductive approach is to reassert the authority of a religious tradition in the face of secularisation, whilst the reductive option reinterprets a tradition in terms of modern secularity. The inductive approach, on the other hand, returns to experience as the ground of religious affirmation - 'one's own experience, to whatever extent this is possible, and the experience embodied in a particular range of traditions' (Berger 1979: 62).

This third option, according to Berger, is open-minded and has a nonauthoritarian approach to questions of truth; it 'is the only [option] that promises both to face and overcome the challenges of the modern situation', affording 'a quite distinctive experience of inner liberation' (ibid.: 62; 63). In his outline of 'the inductive possibility', Berger further claims that the approach begins with empirical evidence, 'taking human experience as the starting point for religious reflection' (ibid.: 127). Schleiermacher's perception of Protestant orthodoxy and Enlightenment rationalism as arid and unsatisfactory form the basis of the turn to experience, of which the Romantic movement's emphasis on *Gefühl*, which Berger translates as 'experience' rather than as 'feeling'[16]is a prime example.

Wiccans themselves claim that their religion is experiential, and one of the reasons given by Wiccan authors for writing about a supposedly secret mystery tradition is that the mysteries cannot be written in words but must be experienced - Wicca cannot, they say, be learned from books or even taught, but must be experienced and learned for

[16] A term which, he argues, is confusing.

oneself[17]. Given this basis in experience of Wicca as a religion with no doctrine, dogma, or codified tradition, and Wicca's rejection of Enlightenment rationalism as the sole basis of truth affirmations, it appears that Berger's inductive approach is admirably suited to our considerations in this thesis. In addition, the inductive approach accepts the researcher's own experiences as 'data' and is thus applicable to my position as 'insider/outsider' outlined above.

Use of Texts

The Wiccan emphasis on experience is not conducive to the development of a textual base. Thus, the only text which all initiated Wiccans have is a 'Book of Shadows', which differs from one initiatory tradition to another. The Book of Shadows contains rituals, spells and instructions, and is hand copied by each initiate from their initiating High Priest or High Priestess[18]. Traditionally kept secret, a number of versions of the Book of Shadows exist on the Internet, Janet and Stewart Farrar published a version of the Gardnerian Book of Shadows in *The Witch's Bible Compleat* (1991)[19], and a great

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[17] Janet and Stewart Farrar (1989: 30), for example, explained that their decision to publish Wiccan material was taken because "to clarify sources and origins is not to 'take the mystery out of the Mysteries'. The Mysteries cannot, by their very nature, ever be fully described in words; they can only be experienced. But they can be invoked and activated by effective ritual. One must never confuse the words and actions of ritual with the Mystery itself. The ritual is not the Mystery - it is a way of contacting and experiencing it".

[18] Books of Shadows, in the 1990s, also tend to exist as typed 'Disks of Shadows'.

[19] This volume contains the bulk of the contemporary Gardnerian rituals, and was published with the active help of Doreen Valiente, who wrote most of them and had herself made a large amount of material available in her 1978 book *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*. The core ritual format and texts of Gardnerian Wicca is therefore available to all.

deal of the standard text is now available in the literature on Wicca. I have not, however, found it particularly useful to concentrate on a textual analysis of the Book of Shadows, although I have access to a number of versions. One reason for this is that the Book of Shadows was only ever intended as a starting point, a book of ideas to which Wiccans could refer, rather than as a sacred tome to be revered. Thus, all the Wiccans with whom I am acquainted keep a separate, personal Book of Shadows, write their own rituals and run their covens according to their own rules, and it seemed more useful to me to focus on current practice rather than a fifty year old book. I shall, therefore, refer to the Book of Shadows only when quoting from other writers and researchers. During the course of my fieldwork, I have attended hundreds of rituals, been given copies of many ritual texts, and written rituals myself. Since the rituals in my possession have been authored by a variety of Wiccans, however, I shall limit any quotations to those rituals which are either published or which I have written myself.

The published writings of well-known witches, such as Gerald Gardner, Doreen Valiente, Pat Crowther, Janet and Stewart Farrar, and Vivianne Crowley can be considered as a quasi-textual base and are useful in that they reflect the development of Wicca from the 1950s to the present. As the 'founding father' of Wicca, Gerald Gardner's books *Witchcraft Today* and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* reflect a need to embed Wicca in a historical trajectory going back as far as the Neolithic period, linking Wicca not only to the witches persecuted in the Great Witch Hunt, but to the ancient mystery religions and the builders of Stonehenge. Wicca is portrayed as the

surviving Pagan religion, forced underground by the emergence of Christianity two thousand years ago, and now realising its true place once again[20].

Further publications on Wiccan history and practice came from women who were involved in the early formative days of Wicca. Of these, Doreen Valiente, Gardner's one time High Priestess, and Pat Crowther, another Gardnerian initiate, focused largely on redressing the imbalance caused by the media attention on Gardner and Sanders, presenting women's position in covens as priestesses rather than as sex objects and providing far more explanation of Wiccan theology and ritual practice in the 1970s and 1980s.[21] The late Doreen Valiente, Gardner's High Priestess and collaborator in the 1950s, has written a number of influential books including *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present* (1973), *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* (1978), and *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (1989). In *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* particularly, Valiente provides a history of her involvement with Gardner, her split with him, her time with Robert Cochrane's Traditional witchcraft group, and her anger at Alex Sanders' publicity in the 1960s and 1970s[22]. Pat Crowther, a slightly later Gardnerian High

[20] Chapter Three of the present study constitutes an examination of Wiccan history and Wiccan beliefs about its history.

[21] See Crowther 1985; Valiente 1973, 1978, 1989, 1990.

[22] Doreen Valiente, in an interview with *Pagan Dawn* issue 127 (Beltane 1998: 23), stated that she did not introduce the concept of the Goddess into Wicca, for she was attracted to Wicca through an article in a 1952 edition of *Illustrated* which remarked, 'A coven is nowadays led by a woman officer because of the shift in emphasis towards the life-goddess as a woman - and away from the lord of death'. The concept of the Goddess was therefore already present and, following along the lines of the Golden Dawn and co-Masonry, Wicca was always open to both men and women. Yet it is evident that, once

Priestess, published her *Lid off the Cauldron: A Wiccan Handbook* in 1985, detailing her memories and outlining Wicca and its practices in an effort to educate people and prevent them from getting caught up in dark occult groups[23].

Janet and Stewart Farrar are two of the most prolific Wiccan authors to date. They have, between them, written *What Witches Do* (1971), *Eight Sabbats for Witches* (1981), *The Witches' Way* (1984), *The Witches Goddess'* (1987), *The Witches' God* (1989) and *Spells and How They Work* (1990). *The Witches' Bible* (1991) is made up of *What Witches Do* and *Eight Sabbats for Witches* combined. Recently, the Farrars have filmed two videos, *Discovering Witchcraft: A Journey Through the Elements* and *Discovering Witchcraft: The Mysteries* (1998).

In the late 1980s, one of Alex Sander's initiates, Vivianne Crowley, who was also a Gardnerian initiate, reintroduced Dion Fortune's incorporation of psychology into the Western Esoteric Tradition by introducing psycholigy, as well as the Jewish mystical system of the kabbala, which was one of the foundations of the Golden Dawn, into Wicca. Crowley's 1989 book *Wicca: the Old Religion in the New Millennium* has become something of a modern Wiccan classic text. The 1996 second edition has been translated into German and Dutch, and she has also written a number of books relating to Paganism in general.

Gerald had died in 1964 and Alex Sanders had retired to Hastings in the 1970s, the most visible representatives of Wicca were women.

[23] see pages 1-7.

Methodology

The experiential emphasis in Wicca, and the consequent lack of an underlying textual base, has necessitated the adoption of a methodological approach involving both qualitative and quantitative techniques, based upon in-depth fieldwork and participant observation. An early survey produced empirical data on Pagan groupings and individual profiles, providing illustrative and supplementary information against which later fieldwork analysis could be tested. My fieldwork was conducted over a period of four years, and involved close contact with one hundred and five initiated Wiccans of two specific Wiccan traditions, and extensive participant observation at over two hundred rituals. Such close contact provided detailed information which added depth to the survey results. This combination of a variety of methodological approaches has enabled me to present the subject of my research in an objective yet carefully-informed manner.

Each of these methodological dimensions has proved necessary for a comprehensive understanding of contemporary Wicca as a religious movement. Methodological integration is both complementary to researching religions like Wicca, and is more likely to provide a rounded portrayal of people's experiences. By using a variety of methods, 'one can build up different pictures of a phenomenon which reflect the complexity of 'reality'' (O'Reilly 1996: 7), and this is especially necessary when one is researching dynamic religions which contain little or no dogma to which people can adhere, and in which views can and do shift and change as a person develops on his or her spiritual path. So with a variety of methods I hope to be better able to build up

different pictures which reflect the complexity of Wicca. The different methodological approaches which are adopted in this thesis are described below.

The Survey: Distribution, Aims and Results

In 1995, I conducted a survey of Contemporary Goddess Religions through a questionnaire consisting of thirty three questions. The questions ranged from data on which Pagan organisations respondents belonged to and how 'green' Pagans feel they are, to more in-depth questions concerning how Pagans got involved in Goddess worship, why they were attracted to it, and what their concepts of deity are. Many of the questions were thus open-ended.

Initially, three thousand questionnaires were printed and distributed. Distribution was facilitated largely by the Pagan Federation: I personally delivered stacks of the questionnaires to the 1995 national Pagan Federation conference in London, from which regional Pagan Federation co-ordinators took batches for circulation in their own regions. The Pagan Federation North West region also sent out further questionnaires in a 1996 edition of their regional newsletter *Elements*. In 1996, the world-wide organisation The Fellowship of Isis mailed out one thousand questionnaires with their newsletter *Isian News*. The questionnaire was also advertised in the journal of the Pagan Federation *Pagan Dawn*, *The Cauldron*, the British Druid Order's *Druid's Voice*, *Touchstone* the journal of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids, the largest Druid organisation in Britain, and *Folksvang Horg*, a Goddess-oriented Northern Tradition newsletter. In this way, people who had been missed by the main questionnaire distribution were able to write directly to me and

request a questionnaire. Personal distribution was important in that I was able to make the questionnaire available to Pagans attending conferences at which I had been invited to speak. Lastly, in August 1995 I attended a large European Wiccan gathering in Sussex, and was able to distribute roughly one hundred and fifty questionnaires at this event.

It is thus largely due to the support of the Pagan community that I was able to use both cluster and network sampling techniques. However, I was not able to control the distribution of the questionnaires beyond the initial circulation. Whilst the survey was intended to be limited to Britain, the global nature of the Fellowship of Isis meant that in fact I received replies from Europe, Africa, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, the United States and Canada, as well as Britain and Ireland. Although three hundred and fifty questionnaires were finally returned, some of those returned were photocopied and it is therefore clearly evident that more than the original three thousand printed were in circulation. It is impossible to state the rate of return, therefore, though it would appear to be in the region of 10%. Since the questionnaire was not intended for scientific statistical analysis, the questions being open-ended and many respondents adding pages in order to answer questions at greater length, I do not consider this to be problematic. Rather, the questionnaire was intended to provide supplementary information for the thesis, enabling me to gather large amounts of material and obtain focused responses at the beginning of my research. Initiating my research at an early stage with this survey provided questions as well as answers and thus enabled me to focus my research.

An additional problem was posed by the shift in focus of my research from Goddess worship among Pagans to the more defined analysis of Wicca presented in this thesis. Nevertheless, since responses from self-identified Wiccans (see Fig. 2.1) made up the largest proportion of questionnaires from respondents involved in a specific tradition (34%), and since a third of those not yet committed to a particular path stated they had leanings towards Wicca, the survey remains an integral part of the thesis, providing much additional and important information.

It is hoped at some future date that the responses from other Pagan groupings can be followed up in a separate study. However, for the purposes of this thesis I have focused on those questionnaires in which the respondents (a) live in Britain and (b) identify themselves as initiated witches or Wiccans. This has necessitated excluding responses from witches outside the remit of the focus of this study from my statistics, though I have at times referred to their responses in order to illustrate salient points.

One hundred and twenty self-identified Wiccans responded to the survey, of whom sixty five were women and fifty five were men. Gardnerian Wiccans numbered fourteen, Alexandrian Wiccans five, and combined Gardnerian/Alexandrian Wiccans twelve. By far the largest number was made up of the seventy three respondents who identified themselves as 'Wiccan', adding no further specification. The remaining sixteen responses came from the six traditional witches, one hereditary, two Seax Wicans, one Dianic, three shamanic and three Celtic witches. Their ages ranged from the eighteen to twenty-four grouping to the over sixty-five, with most falling in the twenty-five to forty-four range (see Fig. 2.2). We can see from Fig. 2.3 that Wiccans

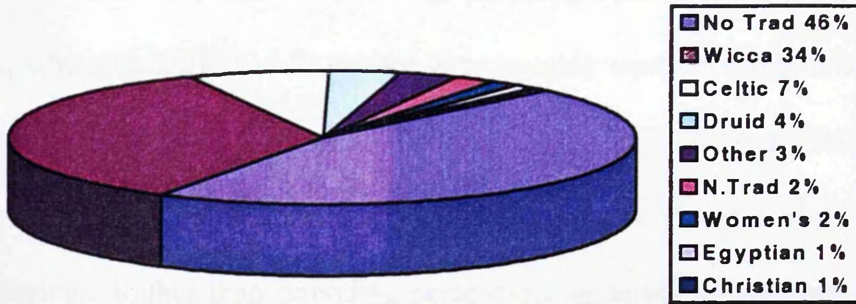

Fig. 2.1 - Respondents According to Pagan Groupings

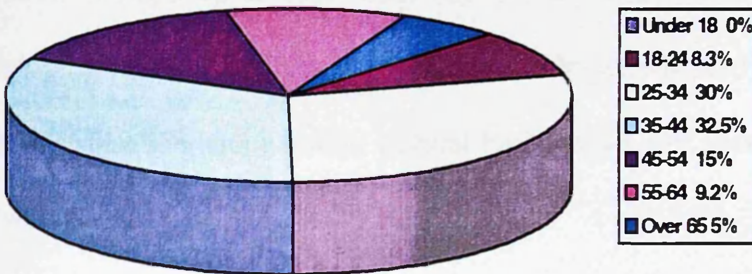

Fig. 2.2 - Age Range of Wiccans

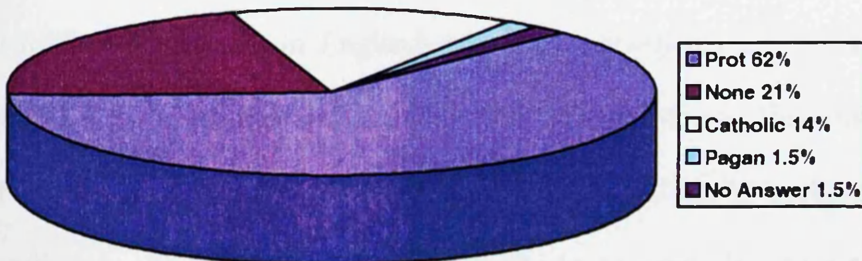

Fig. 2.3 - Religious Background of Wiccans

are overwhelmingly of Protestant religious background. This can be compared with Jone Salomonsen's portrait of the religious background of Reclaiming witches in the USA, where Catholic and Protestant were roughly equal in representation (35% and 32% respectively), and 21% were of Jewish background. Stark and Bainbridge (1985: 401) also note the proportion of witches in North America who had a Jewish upbringing. Rather than providing percentages or absolute numbers, however, they instead produce a table where 1.0 represents the proportion of the US population who claim a particular religious affiliation. It is thus impossible to provide a statistical comparison between Stark and Bainbridge's study, Salomonsen's, and my own. It is worth noting, however, that 3.1 witches said they had a Jewish upbringing, whilst only 0.7 were brought up as Protestants and 1.0 as Catholics. 1.7 claimed no religious upbringing, and 3.8 fell in the 'other' category. In contrast, only one of my respondents indicated that she had a Jewish cultural background, but added that she was brought up with no religion[24].

That Protestantism is the religious background of the majority of initiated Wiccans in Britain is consistent with the religious background of the general populace at large. The latest figures from the *UK Christian Handbook* indicate that there are some thirty two million Protestants in England and Wales, compared to only five and a half million Roman Catholics and three hundred thousand Jews. We could assume then that Wiccans in Ireland, for example, may be of Irish Catholic background, reflecting the religious affinities of the Irish population in general. Vivianne Crowley (1998: 171) puts forward the idea that Wicca is more popular in Northern European,

[24] cf. Carpenter (1996:389-90).

Protestant countries where people lack any focus for the divine feminine (i.e. the Goddess), rites of passage and a sense of ritual, factors which remain popular in the Catholicism of southern Europe and the Mediterranean. Certainly, the very small number of respondents of Catholic background in my survey, together with the fact that responses from Europe outside Britain were from Scandinavia, Germany, Austria and France rather than Spain, Portugal and Italy suggest that Crowley's assertion may have some truth in it. However, this goes beyond the remit of our thesis, and it is not possible to ascertain this as a fact from my survey.

Fieldwork

In the process of conducting my fieldwork between October 1994 and October 1998, I made the acquaintance of approximately one hundred and three Wiccans, of whom fifty three were female and fifty were male. Over half the Wiccans (fifty seven) were initiates of the combined Alexandrian/Gardnerian tradition, a further nineteen were Gardnerian, and twenty three were Alexandrian. This predominance of Gardnerian and/or Alexandrian Wiccans reflects my earlier assertions concerning the distribution of Wicca in Britain, and underlines my reasons for choosing to study these Wiccan traditions rather than Traditional/Hereditary witches or North American feminist witchcraft. Of the four remaining, I was unable to ascertain their tradition. The fifty-seven Alexandrian/Gardnerian Wiccans were divided between eighteen different covens; the nineteen Gardnerian Wiccans were in five separate covens; and the twenty-three Alexandrians were in eight covens. Twenty-four of the Wiccans were First Degree, forty-two were initiated to Second Degree, and thirty-seven were Third Degree. It is interesting to note that there was almost an equal proportion of men and

women in my fieldwork population[25], which suggests that Wicca is not predominantly a religion for women and that its emphasis on the Goddess is attractive to men as well as women. It would thus be inaccurate to assume that Wicca in Britain is part of the feminist spirituality movement.

Graph 2.4 below shows the distribution of types of witchcraft in my survey and in my fieldwork. The majority of respondents to my questionnaire did not specify the tradition of Wicca into which they were initiated, and we therefore have a preponderance of 'non-specific' Wiccans. Through my fieldwork contacts with over a hundred initiated Wiccans, whose backgrounds I knew and with whom I was in close contact, I was able to categorise them according to initiatory tradition. It is likely that the subsequent fall in numbers in the 'Wicca' category and the rise in the Alexandrian/Gardnerian category are linked, and that those who did not specify their tradition in the survey are, in fact, of the Alexandrian and/or Gardnerian traditions. The survey respondents and my fieldwork contacts do not, however, constitute the same group of people. Although there is certainly some overlap, I only know for

[25] cf. Carpenter (1996: 386). Jeffrey Russell (1991: 171), who included contemporary North American witchcraft in his historical survey of witchraft, says that 'women outnumber men by about two to one, and this imbalance may be growing because of the increase in feminist witchcraft'. Early survey results from Canada in 1995/6 presented by Siân Reid to the Nature Religion scholars list in June 1999 indicated that three-quarters of her 187 respondents were female, and only one-quarter male. The Australian national census in 1996 resulted in a figure of 1,849 witches, of whom 1,242 were women and 607 were men - i.e. two-thirds of Australian witches are female (source: report made available to the Nature Religion scholars list, June 1999). The Australian census also revealed 4,353 Pagans, and 556 Druids. It will be interesting to see what figures are produced in the 2001 UK Census.

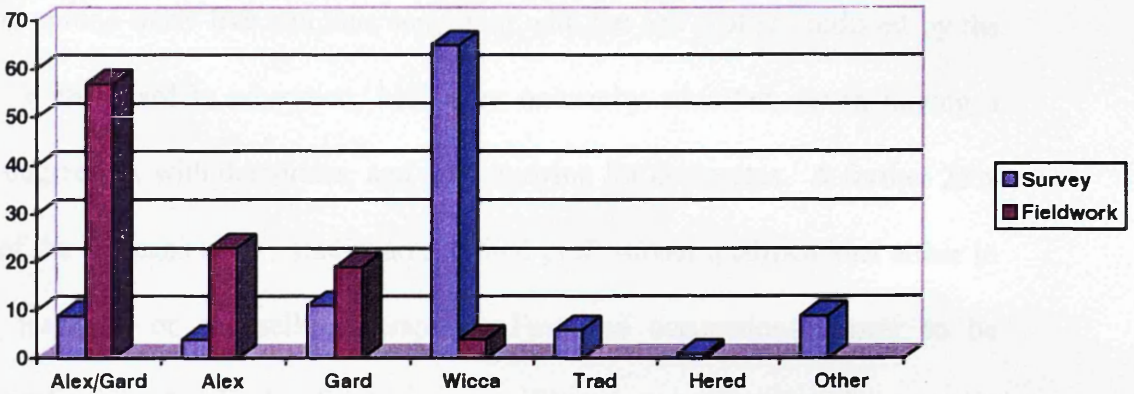

fig. 2.4 - Witchcraft Types: Survey Against Fieldwork

certain of seventeen fieldwork contacts who also filled out one of my questionnaires, either because they told me so or gave their completed questionnaire to me personally; there are probably more than seventeen overlapping subjects, but since the questionnaires were anonymous it is not possible to produce a definite number.

My contact in the field with so many Wiccans has provided information of much greater detail than the survey. In this way, I have been able to profile degrees of initiation (indicated above), education, sexual identity, and marital status with explicit regard to Wiccan and non-Wiccan partners, none of which would have been possible from the initial survey. Thus, for example, only fifteen Wiccans were married to or in a relationship with non-Wiccans, compared to fifty-two who had Wiccan spouses or partners. In addition, thirty-five of my contacts were single, and one was widowed. It would seem, then, that relationships between Wiccans are the norm, and this is consistent with the nature of coven leadership in which an existing heterosexual partnership acts as High Priest and High Priestess. One of these partnerships is lesbian, and a further six people are gay, lesbian or bisexual.

The Wiccans I met were predominantly in their twenties, thirties or forties, the average age being around thirty five and thus consistent with the age profile produced by the survey. With regard to education, half were university educated, seven having a masters degree, six with doctorates, and four studying for doctorates. A further 25% at least of the Wiccans in this study had acquired professional qualifications either in nursing, teaching, or counselling/therapies. Favoured occupations appear to be healing professions (medical - fourteen; counselling, psychotherapy - five; total - nineteen people), education (students - twelve; academics - five; teachers - two; total - nineteen people), computers (thirteen), administration (nine), entrepreneurial (fifteen had their own businesses). Only one person was seeking employment.

I worked closely with twelve of the thirty-one covens to which these hundred or so Wiccans belonged, nine of which were situated in the geographic location of the North West of England. Of these covens, I was a fully participating member of three: one Alexandrian, and two joint Alexandrian/Gardnerian covens. During the four-year period of my fieldwork, I attended ten first degree initiations, five second degree initiations, and one third degree initiation. I also attended two handfastings, four Wiccan workshops in the North West, three Wiccan workshops in London, and four Transpersonal Psychology workshops run by and attended mostly by witches, again in London. I was also able to attend a European Wiccan gathering in August 1995, consisting of some one hundred and fifty witches, and three smaller gatherings of between ten and twenty witches; all of these gatherings were held in Britain. Through email and internet access, I have been able to talk to witches in Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, North America, and Australia. My own location in terms of geographical

proximity lent itself to more effective fieldwork in the north west of England however, not only with regard to attending and participating in rituals but also on a day-to-day level of communication amongst the network. By referring to Wiccan covens in the North West of England, then, we can provide a detailed example of Wicca in a specific area.

The North West Covens: A Case Study

My fieldwork in the North West was coterminous with the fieldwork for the thesis as a whole, and focused on nine covens in the North West of England, each of which has had a range of between two and seven members. The decade from 1988 to 1998 appears to have been formative for Wicca in the North West region. During this time, Wiccan activity in the region has intensified. Only one coven (Coven A) in the study existed in 1988, being joined by a second (Coven B) in 1989. From these two covens, an additional six groups (C to H) were established. The remaining group (Coven I) is independent of these covens. In the years 1996-98, other groups in the area have become more openly active, one even taking part in a BBC television programme, *Everyman: Pagans' Progress* shown in November 1997. However, not all groups are integrated into a community network of covens, and I have concentrated this study on covens who keep in regular contact with each other and attend each other's circles.

Over the course of the four-year study, forty initiated Wiccans formed part of the North West community, with twenty six remaining as part of the community at the end of my fieldwork period. Of the fourteen individuals no longer part of the community at the end of October 1998, five had relocated but maintained contact with North West

Wiccan friends, two work as a magical partnership and never made any real links to the community, and the remaining seven are accounted for through natural wastage - having being initiated into the community, they subsequently left their covens for a variety of reasons. The age of Wiccans in this community at present ranges from late twenties to early fifties, the average age being approximately thirty-five to thirty-seven years, consistent with the average age throughout my fieldwork and indicated by the survey.

The nine covens constituting the Wiccan community in which I undertook the major part of my fieldwork are all closed-group, initiatory covens. Seven of the covens are of joint Alexandrian and Gardnerian lineage, and the remaining two are Alexandrian. Two of the High Priestesses were initially initiates of the Alexandrian tradition who were later initiated into the Gardnerian line. Five of the nine covens were established and run by High Priestesses and High Priests who are married couples. Of the remaining four covens, two are run by High Priestesses with non-Wiccan husbands, another by a High Priestess who later initiated her husband and now runs the coven jointly with him, and one by a single High Priestess. Inter-group communication tends to be based on both lineage and geographical proximity.

Covens A and B (the two 'mother' covens of the North West) were produced from covens in London during the last ten years. Covens C, D and E refer to each other as 'sister' covens, since they all share the same 'mother'/'parent' coven (B). Coven I has no traceable link to any of the North West covens, though its High Priest thinks they originate from Alexandrian Wicca and ceremonial magic traditions. Coven I have

therefore made their links with other North West covens largely on the basis of friendship.

As mentioned above, in 1988 only coven A was operating before B was established in 1989. Two years later, in 1991, Coven F was formed as a daughter coven of A, and covens A, B, and F were the only active[26] covens in the area until 1994, when my fieldwork began. During 1994, the High Priest and High Priestess of Coven I moved to the North West but remained unknown for at least one year, and Coven C, the first daughter coven of Coven B, was established. In 1996, Coven B ceased to exist in the North West due to relocation, but another daughter coven, D, was established. Coven F also relocated during 1996, though it retained three original members. Both covens B and F understand themselves as a new coven after the relocation rather than as a continuation, albeit in a different geographical area, of the original coven. When relocation is not an issue, but membership has changed, covens such as A identify each major influx of new members as a new coven, even though there is always some overlap in membership. The third daughter coven of B, Coven E, was formed in 1997, and a member of Coven C left to form Coven G the same year. Coven D ceased to operate as a coven in late 1997, but re-established itself late in 1998, and Coven H was established as a second daughter coven of A right at the end of this study (October 1998).

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[26] By 'active' I mean that these covens were recognised and known by the wider Wiccan community, the 'Greater Craft' outside of the region. It seems likely that there were a number of other covens in the region who operated in a closed framework, either as secret groups or small networks who shied away from involvement with the wider Wiccan or Pagan community. Indeed, some such covens came to my attention during the last two years of fieldwork, as I have indicated.

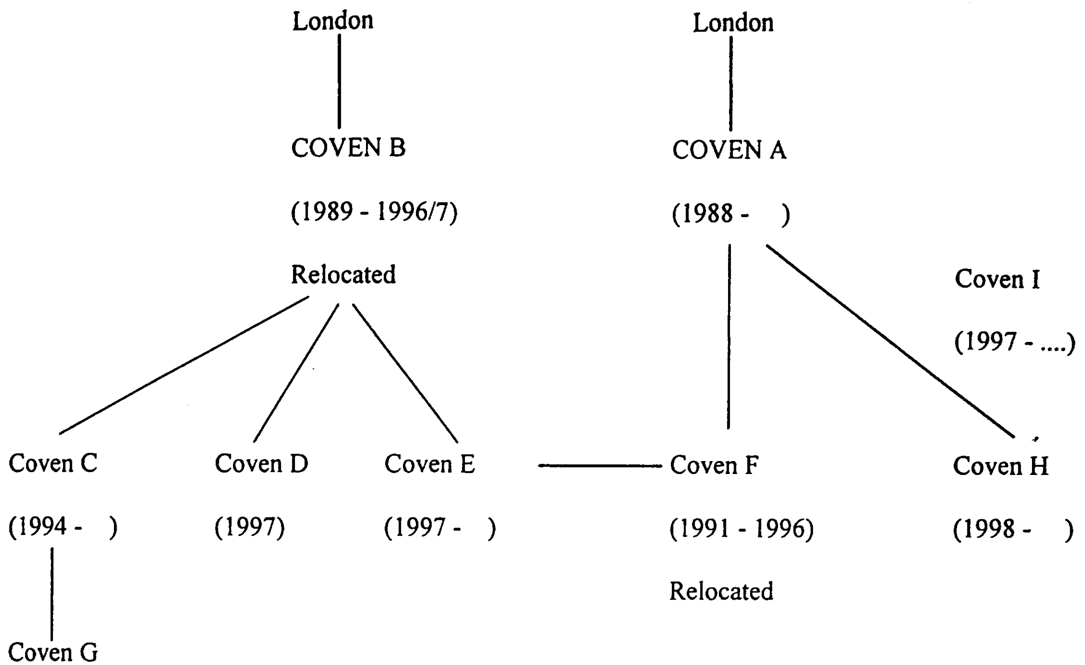

Fig. 2.6 - The North West Covens

By the end of 1997, then, six covens were extant in the North West. Coven A has now been established ten years, but the other four covens - C, D, E, G, and I - though all still in existence, are relatively new. In its life, Coven A has seen fifteen to twenty people go through it, and has, in effect, been four different covens: the first from 1988 to 1991, the second from 1991-94, the third from 1994-98, and the fourth began in early 1998. It presently consists of four members, has two fully independent[27] daughter covens (F and H), and a further second degree couple hived off who intend to establish a further daughter coven[28]. The first daughter coven, F, retained strong links

[27] A coven run by a third degree High Priestess and/or Priest is fully independent. Covens run by second degree High Priestesses and/or Priests are not fully independent and still retain strong links with the parent coven.

[28] Planned for December 1998 and therefore after the closing date of this study.

with A after its relocation further south, but does not maintain contact with other North West covens.

Coven B lasted for seven years in the North West, training ten people during this period. In 1996, the year the High Priestess and High Priest relocated, it had six members and one fully independent daughter coven. Coven D was formed at the time of relocation. Coven E, a coven run by a second degree couple, was formed a year after relocation and maintains strong links with B as it is not yet fully independent. Coven E currently has three members, as does coven C. Coven C's own daughter coven, G, has five members. Coven I existed as a partnership of husband and wife from 1994 to 1997, when a new member was initiated. It presently consists of three members.

Taking the highest number of members in any particular year, the community formed by these interrelated covens consists of a relatively stable number of some twenty-one to twenty-four members, falling in 1996 to nineteen due to the relocation of the High Priestesses and High Priests of two covens. Six members have been part of the community for at least eight of the last ten years, and one has been present since 1988. The average number of members in a coven has remained at around five (falling from an average of six to four and a half due to the prevalence of new covens) throughout the four years of research. At the close of the study, there were twenty-four Wiccans in the North West covens, plus a High Priestess and High Priest whose coven will be formed in December 1998, after the end date of this study.

Studies of Wiccans in particular geographic locations thus necessitates concentration on a particularly small representative community, in this case numbering twenty six individuals, who practise Wicca in much smaller, core groupings which interact with each other through bonds of lineage and/or of friendship, sharing many common features yet retaining individual coven boundaries. We shall assess these communities further in Chapter Four.

Some Sociological Conclusions

Ronald Hutton has calculated that currently there are approximately ten thousand witches[29] in initiatory traditions in Britain (2000). My own fieldwork is thus based on in depth fieldwork and detailed participant observation of 1% of the estimated present number of Wiccans belonging to initiatory traditions in Britain. This is not a significant ratio in terms of large-scale sociological study. It is, however, a large number of individuals when we take into account Wicca's secretive nature as an initiatory mystery religion, and such fieldwork may therefore allow us to draw some general conclusions regarding Wiccans in Britain at the close of the twentieth century.

The age range of Wiccans in Britain is fairly evenly spread over the twenties, thirties and forties range. Hutton's findings confirm this distribution[30]. Given the fact that

[29] cf. Russell (1991: 171), who gives a wide estimate of 20-100,000 neopagan witches in the world.

[30] As does Russell (1991: 171), who claims that most witches are in their teens, twenties and thirties, and Siân Reid's survey (see note 14), in which more than half the respondents fell within the 20-40 age range. Lynne Hume (1997: 103) notes that Australian covens have 'a fairly wide age spread, though the largest number appear to be aged between twenty-five and fifty-five, tending towards the younger end of the spectrum'. cf. Carpenter (1996: 385-6).

Wicca is only fifty years old and has only recently (in the last ten years) grown quickly, it is unsurprising that there are only a relatively small number of Wiccans in the older age range of fifty or over. As Wicca continues and grows older itself, we can expect to see age distribution diffusing to cover the range from fifty to one hundred. The lack of people under the age of twenty is due to the practice followed by most Wiccans of not initiating people under the age of eighteen; I only met three people who had been initiated under the age of twenty, and most of the Wiccans with whom I had contact were at least twenty-five before they were initiated. A significant number were much older. We are therefore unlikely to see the age distribution of Wicca lowering to cover the under-twenties. Indeed, the Pagan Federation has recently decided (November 1998) not to lower its membership age below the age of eighteen, although a network for teenagers interested in Paganism, called *Minor Arcana*, was established in 1998.

As Tanya Luhrmann noted in the 1980s, British witches come from a wide range of backgrounds and occupations. In Australia, Lynne Hume found that witches were represented across a wide socioeconomic range, and met witches who were 'university professors, students, school teachers, engineers, musicians, a prison officer, artists, entertainers, sales people, computer specialists, cleaners, chefs, clerks, cashiers and the unemployed' (Hume 1997: 102). The occupational profile produced by the present study (outlined earlier in this chapter) revealed a preponderance of witches involved in education, computer specialists, artisans, and owners of businesses or private practices, and are similar to Hutton's findings in the 1990s (Hutton, 2000). My findings differ, however, in the large proportion of Wiccans involved in medicine, an

occupation which Hutton does not mention. In my study, those working in the health field included one radiographer, one occupational therapist, and twelve nurses. Given that my study was concentrated in the North West of England, an area which Hutton's study did not include, this may be evidence of a regional exception. In my survey, which covered Britain as a whole, the occupation profile showed only three nurses, plus one consultant surgeon. Nevertheless, I agree with Hutton's assertion that occupational profiles of initiated witches reveal 'a higher than usual amount of independence and self-organisation . . . a greater than usual love of reading and commitment to constant self-education' (2000)[31].

CONCLUSION

In considering the research on Wicca which has already been conducted, we have ascertained that the majority of studies have focused on a conflated Wicca/witchcraft as practised in a North American context, a conflation which we have suggested (in Chapter One) requires disentangling. Having indicated that British Alexandrian/Gardnerian Wicca is fundamentally different to its feminist kin, this chapter has considered at some length the problems inherent in the only published study of British Wicca to date, that of Tanya Luhrmann in the mid-1980s. On the basis of the differing foci and research problems of previous studies, we might conclude that further research is necessary for a clearer understanding of Wicca in Britain. In response to the ambiguities noted in Luhrmann's work, we have outlined both the potential problems of studying Wicca and the methods and theories adopted which, we suggest, might mitigate these problems. Through a consideration of the

[31] Russell (1991: 171) also notes that 'most witches are relatively well educated'.

ambiguities of the insider/outsider dichotomy, we have argued that researching one's own community can be an effective means of contributing to the scholarly knowledge of religion - one which, in its most positive application, may allow for a more complete understanding of religious communities and their practices.

In order to orientate the reader, this chapter has provided a considerable amount of background data, gathered through a variety of methods which has enabled a limited amount of cross-checking of results. These results have been further verified through comparisons with the work of other scholars where possible and appropriate. We have pointed out, however, that this thesis is not primarily concerned with quantitative data gathered through surveys. Instead, we have briefly considered the primacy of experience as the essence of religion, and we have identified Wicca as a predominantly experiential religion which expresses itself through ritual. This experiential dimension is fundamental to an understanding of Wicca, as we shall show in subsequent chapters. The experiential dimension which allows Wiccans and witches to 'remember' history in a way which has often been informed more by experience (as a woman, as an outsider, as a victim) than by the results of historical research will be our focus in Chapter Three. The means by which individuals find Wicca and enter covens, based predominantly on the experience of 'recognition', will be explored in Chapter Four. And in Chapter Five, the thesis closes with an examination of the experience of Wiccan ritual itself.

CHAPTER THREE

WICCA'S MAGICAL HERITAGE:

MYTHOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

There is finally the shattering of all the self-evident truths concerning the historicity of history, of those truths which bear so heavily on our modern minds that failure to attach importance to the historical meaning or to the historical *reality of a religious phenomena may seem equivalent to denying it* all *reality.* (Henry Corbin 1969: 96, emphases in original)

INTRODUCTION

In reading the words of Henry Corbin above, we are reminded of our need for history, our need to understand our roots and the roots of those meaningful practices in which we engage. Lack of historical fact concerning the origins of a religion is often taken to be a sign of inauthenticity although, as Russell (1991: 154) notes, '[e]very religion has its founder, and much that surrounds the origin of every religion is historically suspect. Lack of historicity does not necessarily deprive a religion of its insight'.

Modern Wiccans share this need for a history, and are often regarded as manipulators of history, clinging stubbornly to narratives long since proven false by scholars of history and archaeology, largely because research into the historical roots of contemporary Wicca has only just begun[1]. According to Robin Briggs (1996: 5), the

[1] Ronald Hutton's early investigations into contemporary Wicca and witchcraft can be found in the last chapter of his *Pagan Religions in the Ancient British Isles* (1990), and then in chapters of collected

'modern pseudo-religion of witchcraft' is a syncretic construct which cobbles together elements of genuine pagan belief and ritual on the foundation of a false genealogy of descent from medieval witches who followed a pre-Christian nature religion indigenous to the British Isles[2], a 'misconception which threatens to become conventional wisdom'. This picture, Briggs says, 'has just enough marginal plausibility to be hard to refute completely, yet it is almost wholly wrong. The witches of the past were not adherents of surviving pagan cults or guardians of secret knowledge' (1996: 5). The problem, he continues, is that non-specialist writers who know neither their sources nor the specialised literature pick out details and exaggerate their significance or otherwise misinterpret them.

Such misinterpretation and limited knowledge of the historical investigations of the past thirty years has resulted in distortions of the history of the Great Witch Hunt of early modern Europe and a lingering association of modern Wicca with the witches of that period in popular books[3] on modern witchcraft or Wicca. In large part, this is due to the lack of scholarly analysis of the witch trials prior to 1970, as a consequence of which foundational myths were perpetuated to legitimate Wicca. Recent research into

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volumes as work in progress (1995; 1998). His major work on the history of modern pagan witchcraft is due to be published next year. Prior to Hutton, the only historian I am aware of who has written about both historical and contemporary witchcraft is Jeffrey Russell ([1980] 1991). Norman Cohn (1975: x-xi) mentions contemporary witchcraft only in order to dismiss it as anti-historical, in much the same way as Briggs.

[2] Interestingly, Karl Ernst Jarcke in 1828 argued that witchcraft was a nature religion, the ancient religion of the German people, which had survived through the Middle Ages to the present among the common people (see Russell 1980: 132-3; Cohn 1975: 103-4).

[3] See for example Crowley 1989, 1996; Farrar and Farrar 1981.

the origins of contemporary Wicca, however, has brought about the revision of historical narrative within Wicca in Britain over the past ten years.

The scope of this chapter thus falls naturally into three parts. Firstly, we examine the myths of continuity which arose within the vacuum of historical knowledge about the witch trials prior to 1970, and as part of the search for a feminist alternative to Wicca's heritage from secret, fraternal, magical societies at the turn of the twentieth century. It is these magical societies which are the direct progenitors of Wicca, and which remain important to the self-identification of Wiccan initiates in the United Kingdom. In the second part, we therefore move from myth to history in order to assess the influence on the development of Wicca of secret, esoteric, initiatory societies such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn[4], and key figures such as Aleister Crowley and the esotericist Dion Fortune.

Thirdly, given the undoubted connection of the Golden Dawn with occult sciences and Romanticism which made it one of the heirs to the Western Esoteric Tradition, we end the chapter with an assessment of Wicca as a current manifestation of this Western Esoteric Tradition. In doing so, we shall be looking not at the development of Wicca from Gerald Gardner onwards, but rather trying to recognise significant affinities, similarities which suggest a current manifestation of what has gone before rather than traceable 'apostolic succession' from one person to another throughout the ages. Such a view of history is in keeping with Hanegraaff's emphasis on an esoteric tradition as 'a historical continuity in which individuals and/or groups are demonstrably influenced

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[4] Hereafter referred to simply as the Golden Dawn.

in their life and thinking by the esoteric ideas formulated earlier, which they use and develop according to the specific demands and cultural context of their own period' (1995: 118).

Our aim is not, therefore, to produce a definitive history of Wicca which, as we have noted, is already in the process of publication by Ronald Hutton (2000 forthcoming)[5]. Neither is it our intention to attempt a history of the Great Witch Hunt, for which there is already a large body of scholarly literature[6]. Rather, our concern is (1) to sketch out important strands of mythology, the primary purpose of which is to enable us to gain an understanding of the use of available historical 'facts', and which also has a secondary purpose in that it furthers our aim of distinguishing between Wicca and feminist witchcraft; (2) to identify key organisations and figures in the development of Wicca; and, with this background information in place, (3) to attempt a diachronic investigation of the roots of Wicca in the Western Esoteric Tradition, an investigation which will take us back to the Renaissance, and beyond that to the ancient civilisations of Egypt and Greece.

MYTHS OF CONTINUITY

Myth is necessary for community, being the unique speech of the many and thus providing a community narrative. According to Paul Morris, '[i]t serves as the means

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[5] For accounts of post-1950 Wiccan history according to the memories of practitioners, the reader is referred to Valiente (1989), Crowther (1998), Bourne (1998).

[6] The reader is referred, in particular, to Trevor-Roper ([1967], 1969), Thomas ([1971], 1991), Cohn (1975), and Briggs (1996), all of whom are referred to in this chapter.

by which the many come to recognize each other and 'commune' together in myth. As the origin, will and destiny of the absolute community is narrated, the community is revealed to itself. The repeated recitation of myth founds and re-founds the community' (Morris 1996: 235). The Wiccan myth of continuity operates as a discourse of descent, creating links to the past. This discourse has a specific history in different communities, and whereas the myth of the burning times has been important in both British Wicca and feminist witchcraft, the myth of the golden age of matriarchy has had relatively little impact in Britain[7].

Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: The 'Burning Times'

Witchcraft is a practice which has a genuinely long trajectory back in time. Initially constituting an old pre-Christian peasant belief that certain people had special powers which could be used to perform beneficial or maleficent magic, those who performed beneficial magic - finding lost goods, healing etc. - were known as 'cunning men' or 'wise women', whilst those who were thought to perform maleficent magic were known as witches. Witchcraft was thus related to magic, and had nothing to do with religion until the sixteenth century when, '[o]n top of the popular belief in the power of maleficent magic was imposed the theological notion that the essence of witchcraft was adherence to the Devil' (Thomas 1991: 534). These two understandings of witchcraft - one old, the other newly introduced from continental Europe - became fused into a new myth in which 'witches were seen as heretics and the sworn enemies of God' (ibid.: 542) and could therefore subsequently be tried and executed. Still,

[7] The myth is, however, implicit in the writings of popular Wiccan authors. See for example Farrar and Farrar 1989: 18-19.

however, witchcraft was not understood as a religion, but as a particular employment of magic, according to the old belief, using power provided to the witch by the Devil, according to the new theology[8].

The time of the Great Witch Hunts of early modern Europe, commonly referred to as the 'burning times[9]', is perhaps the most important epoch with which contemporary witches identify. During a period of some three hundred years, from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the end of the seventeenth century, an exaggerated nine million women were said to have been put to death. The 'myth of nine million' was introduced by the feminist writer Matilda Joslyn Gage in *Women, Church and State* in 1893 in order to emphasise the crimes of the Church against women. She stated, ([1893] 1972: 247) '[i]t is computed from historical records that nine millions of persons were put to death for witchcraft after 1484, or during a period of three hundred years . . . The greater number of this incredible multitude were women'[10]. Although Gage presented no evidence to back up this estimate, the number entered Wiccan mythology: the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic on the Isle of Man, owned by Cecil Williamson with Gerald Gardner as 'resident Witch', sported a plaque commemorating

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[8] cf. Trevor-Roper (1969: 114): 'The weaving together of these various elements into a systematic demonology which could supply a social stereotype for persecution was exclusively the work, not of Christianity, but of the Catholic Church. The Greek Orthodox Church offers no parallel'. Paradoxically, '"the Devil, the Mass, and witches" were lumped together by John Knox . . . and Lancashire, of course, was a nest of both Papists and witches' (ibid.: 118). In turn, Protestant 'heresy' and witchcraft were linked in the Catholic mind.

[9] This is despite the fact that witches were hanged rather than burned in England.

[10] This quotation and the reference for Gage are taken from Daly (1981: 183n.).

the nine million witches who died in the Great Witch Hunt, and Mary Daly's use of the figure in *Gyn/Ecology* ([1978], 1981: p183n.) introduced the myth to feminist witches.

It was not until the late 1980s, however, that estimates of the death toll based on solid evidence were produced, with current scholarly estimates ranging from 40,000 to 60,000[11]. It is therefore not so surprising that the death toll of nine million was popular prior to the production of these estimates. However, despite the production of verifiable and academically acceptable figures, the myth nevertheless retained its hold on Wicca, acting as a mechanism of legitimisation, relating the persecution of witches to the Holocaust and demanding respect through using an enormous number[12] - witches (and women) are assimilated to persecuted minorities in a general distortion of history in order to suit the political aims of feminist witchcraft (Briggs 1996: 8).

The persecution and execution of witches in the Great Witch Hunt has thus been reinterpreted as a holocaust against women, a repackaging of history which implies conscious victimisation and the appropriation of 'holocaust' as a badge of honour (Meštrović 1997: 11) - 'gendercide rather than genocide' (Briggs 1996: 8)[13]. The Holocaust set the standard for enormous persecutions, and by comparing the witch

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[11] Gibbons, J. (jennyg@compuserve.com), 11th March 1999, *Nine Million*, E-mail to the Nature Religion Scholars' List (natrel-l@uscolo.edu). Gibbons reported that Ronald Hutton had suggested a figure of 40,000, whilst 60,000 was favoured by Brian Levack.

[12] See Purkiss (1996), who entitles one of her chapters, 'A Holocaust of one's own: the myth of the Burning Times'.

[13] Or as 'gynocide', a term introduced by Andrea Dworkin (1974, chapter 7) and cited in Daly (1981: 221).

trials to the Holocaust witches were demanding that the same level of respect be given to it. The death toll thus became a matter of fundamental importance, and therefore any attempt to lower the number was perceived as a direct attack on modern witches - as one researcher reported, 'If your estimate is "too low", you are dishonoring the ancestors and trivializing the Burning Times (as if there was some quota of deaths we had to meet in order to be a bona fide atrocity)'[14].

The Inquisition, Christians in general, or patriarchal elites were blamed and held responsible for the burning times in which all witches were the victims and were thus encouraged to wallow in self-righteous indignation over the horrors 'they' inflicted on 'us'. An elective affinity with the image of the witch during the time of the persecutions is commonly regarded as part of the reclamation of female power, a psychological link which is used by modern feminist witches as an aid in their struggle for freedom from patriarchal oppression. The past is thus focused on as a central source of meaning, where the 'burning times' is used as a rallying symbol, and the witch is regarded both as a martyr and as a symbol of repressed female power. Some feminist witches identify themselves as being direct inheritors of a corpus of occult knowledge passed on from the witches of the 'Burning Times': Zsuzsanna Budapest, in an interview with *Whole Earth Review* (Spring 1992: 42), passionately exclaimed, '[m]y European ancestors[15] and yours risked the Inquisition's stakes and racks to keep alive a body of knowledge about power and healing. My generation of witches is

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[14] Gibbons, J. (jennyg@compuserve.com), 12th March 1999. *Nine Million*, E-mail to Nature Religion Scholars' List (natrel-l@uscolo.edu).

[15] Z. Budapest was born in Hungary.

making this wisdom accessible to those who seek a spiritual foundation for political work'.

The popular song 'The Burning Times' by Charlie Murphy reflects the identification of feminist witches with 'the wisdom of a bygone time, witch as wise woman, notions of Christian power and domination, the Inquisition's suppression of women and the myth of "nine million"' (Hume 1997, 44). It contains the lines:

> And the Pope he declared the Inquisition
> It was a war against the women whose power they feared.
> And in that holocaust against the nature people,
> Nine million European women died (ibid.: 44).

Apart from the use of the witch figure as an image of female power however, there was another reason for forging affinities with the nine million persecuted witches of the burning times. Identification with those persecuted was, to a certain extent, understandable before the repeal of the 1736 Witchcraft Act in 1951. Apart from the lack of reliable scholarly estimates of the death toll, then, until 1951 witchcraft was still illegal, and was punishable, albeit not in terms of death by either hanging or burning.

However, even after the 1951 repeal which encouraged Gardner to publicise Wicca and, indeed, to the present day, many witches still fear the subtle persecution of being forced out of jobs or losing their children through trumped-up charges if they are

publicly known as a witch. Thus, on the one hand 36 of the Wiccan respondents to the survey I conducted in 1995 reported that they kept their identity as a witch secret precisely because of fears of persecution for themselves and their families, claiming 'fear of misunderstanding from employers, family, friends, teachers, social workers i.e. children may be taken away' and stating the necessity of remaining secret 'lest I should be criticised and/or labelled/judged/discriminated against'. On the other hand, however, 71 respondents stated that they were open about their witchcraft, believing that only by providing accurate information of modern Wicca and standing up for witchcraft could the misconceptions be erased and, along with it, the fear that leads to persecution. Many said that they were open because they had 'nothing to hide' or 'nothing to be ashamed of - I'm proud of being a Witch', 'I am proud of my religion and I want to dispel misconceptions about it'. One person said she was open because, 'though this can lead to persecution and/or mickey-taking, I feel it is only by being open that one can get people to accept the authenticity of Pagan religion and ethics' and another added, 'people can't ignore us if we're "out"'. Others said they were open but only because they knew it would not be detrimental to their careers if people knew they were witches. For one man, the myth of continuity informed his choice to be open about being a witch since,

> misinformation and false stereotypes/fears about 'witches' and what they do/believe has been perpetuated for centuries . . . I strongly argue that if practising witches/ Pagans want to have an end to being misjudged and victimised/ridiculed and persecuted THE ONLY EFFECTIVE WAY TO DEAL WITH THIS IS TO BE OPEN! counter misinformation and false

> stereotypes with true and accurate information. If people are not denied knowledge of what is 'going on', then they will not have to fall back on age-old falsities (their only other source of knowledge!) for forming their opinions, and consequently their attitudes towards people who hold these beliefs (emphasis in original).

Robin Briggs, in *Witches and Neighbours* (1996), asserts in his conclusion the importance of further work on the Witch Hunts because the human imagination will continue to see the witch as 'other': 'just as rabbits have a 'hawk detector' in their retina, so human beings have a 'witch detector' somewhere in their consciousness, and derive excitement from having it activated' (Briggs 1996: 410). He says, in relation to the satanic ritual abuse claims of the late 1980s which were linked to witchcraft by the popular press, that 'the descriptions of rituals are like identikit pictures, slightly varied combinations of precisely the same elements found in the charges against heretics[16], Jews, witches and other scapegoats in the past. To anyone who recognises their antecedents it is incredible that this tawdry collection of recycled fantasies can be mistaken for anything but inventions' (ibid.: 410-411). Given the 'misguided and dangerous thinking' which allowed the ritual abuse cases to occur, it is perhaps not so surprising that modern witches at times do feel persecuted and identify with the

[16] For example, the charges against the Cathars in the twelfth century were almost identical to those levelled against witches. To both are ascribed a doctrine of dualism between God and the Devil, both are accused of secret assemblies, and both are charged with indulging in promiscuous sexual orgies. See Trevor-Roper (1969: 113) and Cohn (1975: x, 260-2). Cohn also notes that the same charges were levelled against early Christians by pagans (ibid.: ix).

witches persecuted in the Great Witch Hunt - in cases like this, one might be forgiven for agreeing with them that nothing has changed!

A myth of continuity with the persecuted also emerges from a further two sources. Wicca is often described as the 'Old Religion'[17], a term dating from American folklorist Charles Godfrey Leland's *Aradia: the Gospel of the Witches* (1899), which tells of the surviving fragments of an Italian tradition of witchcraft in Tuscany known as *la vecchia religione*. Leland was undoubtedly influenced by Jules Michelet's *La Sorcière* (1862), which 'portrays witchcraft as a justified, if hopeless, protest by medieval serfs against the social order that was crushing them' (Cohn 1975: 105), an emphasis which Leland shares. Both Michelet and Leland emphasise a political and class struggle in which the witch-cults are deployed, using spells and potions against the oppressive ruling classes[18], as well as portraying women as priestesses in control of the religion. Thus Michelet and Leland wrote about a religious cult involved in political subversion which mirrored their own political views, representing witchcraft as 'an early manifestation of the democratic spirit' (Russell 1980: 133). Indeed, Hutton further maintains that '[a]fter the commercial success of *La Sorcière*, it is easy to believe that Wicca was a religion waiting to be re-enacted' (Hutton 1996: 11).

[17] Interestingly, the 'old religion' was used to refer to Catholicism during the Reformation of the sixteenth century, Protestantism, of course, being the 'new religion'.

[18] See Leland's version of the Charge of the Goddess presented in Appendix 2, where this position is made quite clear.

Rather than the myth of a golden age of matriarchy, it is these myths which have influenced British Wicca - the myths of continuity of Pagan religion throughout the era of Christianity, protecting the under-class of women and peasants and representing a level of religious tolerance and liberty barely visible even today. Many British Wiccans have read Leland, though few appear to have read Michelet[19]. However, the chief perpetrator of the myth was Margaret Alice Murray, whose work has been as accessible to Wiccans as Leland's *Aradia.* Murray's *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921) wove together ideas of rural fertility religion popularised by Frazer, Michelet's witch cult, and folk customs to assert her theory that the witch cult contained the vestigial remnants of a pre-Christian European fertility religion - which Murray called 'Dianic'[20] because it supposedly involved the worship of a two-faced, horned god known to the Romans as Dianus or Janus - and which may have first been developed in Egypt. Early views of the history of Wicca thus incorporated efforts at historical legitimisation through claims to an unbroken lineage of witchcraft going back to the Stone Age, presented in terms of an unbroken practice and tradition of witchcraft stemming from the dawn of time.

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[19] This is probably due to lack of accessibility. I have myself been unable to study an English translation of *La Sorcière*, although the original French version (which I unfortunately cannot read) can be located in many libraries.

[20] It is an obvious point, but nevertheless worth noting, that 'Dianic' has been the name of a feminist branch of witchcraft for the past thirty years, though named after the virgin goddess Diana (Artemis), whom Leland characterised as the witches' goddess in *Aradia*, rather than after Murray's Roman god Dianus.

Gardner's books *Witchcraft Today* (1954) and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959), perpetuated the Murrayite theory and made use of Murray's scholastic weight to provide the Craft with a history and tradition which would defy accusations that Gardner had created it *ex nihilo*[21]. An apparent historical context for Gardner's Wicca had been found and given academic credibility, despite the fact that Murray's theory was never accepted in academic circles[22], and her favourable reassessment of witchcraft provided the impetus for a surge of interest in this 'Dianic cult'. Thus, in having Murray write the introduction to his *Witchcraft Today,* Gardner ensured that Wicca was 'founded with the blessing of the reigning academic expert in its field' (Hutton 1993: xiii), and thus appeared to be based on rational academic evidence as opposed to the general occult and magical scene of the *fin de siècle* characterised by 'the flight from reason' (Webb 1971).

During the 1970s, however, historians produced the first specific studies of the Great Witch Hunt and this research overturned Murray's theory. Her sources and her use of them were proved to be defective, with Cohn (1975: 115) observing that her argument 'is seen to be just as fanciful as the argument which Michelet had propounded, with far greater poetic power, some sixty years earlier'. We may therefore quite legitimately ask how her book managed to convince so many people that one scholar, in 1962, was

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[21] Indeed, Cohn (1975: 108) appears to blame Murray for the very existence of modern witchcraft: 'the *Witch Cult* and its progeny have stimulated the extraordinary proliferation of "witches' covens" in Western Europe and the United States during the past decade [i.e. the 1960s]'. See also the preface to Cohn's work (ibid.: x-xi).

[22] Murray's thesis received criticism from the time of its publication - see Burr (1922: 780-83); Ewen (1938); Robbins (1959: 116-7); Rose (1962).

moved to lament, 'The Murrayites seem to hold . . . an almost undisputed sway at the higher intellectual levels, There is, amongst educated people, a very widespread impression that Professor Margaret Murray has discovered the true answer to the problem of the history of European witchcraft and has proved her theory'[23]. Of course, she had done nothing of the sort but, as Hutton points out, nobody in 1921 'knew anything about the reality of the Great Witch Hunt, no systematic local study having been made' (1993: 304) and so, despite earlier criticisms, it was not until the 1970s that Murray's theory was effectively challenged. Keith Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) and Norman Cohn's *Europe's Inner Demons* (1975) exposed Murray's representation of evidence and provided alternative explanations for the Great Witch Hunt.

It is now generally accepted that the Great Witch Hunt was produced by four factors, concerned with delusion and the imagination (Cohn), and social and political forces (Trevor-Roper), rather than with a surviving pre-Christian Pagan religion. These four factors were: popular fear of destructive witchcraft, intellectual belief in a satanic crusade to subvert Christendom, the vulnerability of a growing population to natural disasters which made people more susceptible to the terror of witchcraft, and the 'struggle between the Reformation and Counter-Reformation which according to Trevor-Roper, 'revived the dying witch-craze'. He asserts that every major outbreak of the witch persecutions in the 1560s and after took place in the frontier areas between Protestantism and Catholicism (Trevor-Roper 1969: 121-146)[24]. As Briggs points out,

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[23] Rose (1962: 14 - 15).

[24] See also Hutton 1993: 306.

'on close investigation, the causes turn out to be dauntingly complex . . . the persecution is a classic example of multiple causation, which varied considerably across both time and space during its relatively brief existence' (Briggs 1996: 6). The true tragedy of the Witch Hunt, according to Hutton, was that 'its victims' crimes had no existence outside the imagination. Unlike medieval or early modern heretics, they had no organization and no literature of their own. Unlike those, also, they had no territorial bases and no option of escaping execution by recanting their beliefs. Their offences were illusory, their punishments very real' (Hutton 1993: 307).

With the collapse of the Murrayite thesis, modern witches and Wiccans have had to come to terms with the now established fact that there was no surviving pre-Christian religion indigenous to Britain and Europe - although charms and spells, folk customs, magic, and the ancient mysteries were pagan survivals, 'paganism had not survived with them, for they were the work of Christians who had detached them from any previous religious context' (Hutton 1993: 293). One option open to witches was to do as Ken Rees (1996: 26) suggests, and act 'as if' the myth were true. The other, more widespread reaction was to embrace the historical facts as they became apparent and trust to the efficacy of Wicca itself for legitimisation rather than rely on pseudo-history. Jeffrey Russell thus notes,

> no religion based upon evidence that is *demonstrably* false is likely to survive long. That is why sophisticated witches have increasingly abandoned the argument that the Craft is an ancient religion based on a surviving tradition and

argue instead for its validity in terms of its poetic, spiritual and psychological creativity' (Russell 1980: 154).

Nevertheless, as Nancy Ramsey has suggested, Murray's work 'remains as important in this small part of the field of religious studies as J. J. Bachofen's work in the area of feminist studies of religion. Sometimes, as Mircea Eliade stated, what remains important is the effect an idea had on popular culture, not its validity' (1998: 11). With the final collapse of the Murrayite thesis, and recent research into the origins of Wicca in Britain, myth has been joined by history but the latter has not replaced it. For myth has its own *raison d'etre*, its own role to play in human experience.

The myth of the burning times, and of connection to ancient times, not only gave Gerald Gardner a legitimising authenticity for Wicca, but also provided a common narrative. Thus, on the one hand, at a time when Wicca was new and the Witchcraft Act had only just been repealed, witches were able to perceive themselves as belonging to an ongoing community of witches stemming from the dawn of time. On the other hand, the myth of the golden age of matriarchy provides a community narrative in feminist witchcraft which reinforces women's sense of communion with each other throughout history, and thus acts as a source of strength and empowerment.

The Golden Age of Matriarchy

The existence of early matriarchies and the allied term of 'matrifocality' has, it seems, always been controversial, yet in some forms of witchcraft matriarchy has become a central controlling image and worldview based on interpretations of historic,

prehistoric, and archaeological research. The classic definition of matriarchy was given by J. J. Bachofen as 'rule of the family by the mother, not the father; control of government by women, not men; and the supremacy of a female deity, the moon, not of the male sun'.[25] In *Myth, Religion and Mother Right* (1870), Bachofen argued that society had gone through three evolutionary stages, beginning with general promiscuity, developing into matriarchy and, lastly, becoming patriarchal. After Bachofen, Jane Ellen Harrison, Erich Neumann and Robert Graves promoted the myth in the first half of the twentieth century. Harrison, for example, argued that,

> south eastern Europe had been a peaceful and intensely creative woman-centred civilisation, in which humans lived in harmony with nature and their own emotions and worshipped a single Great Goddess . . . This happy state of affairs, she proposed, had been destroyed before the dawn of history by patriarchal invaders from the north, bringing dominant male deities and warlike ways (Harrison, 1908: 257-322 in Hutton 1998: 93).

That humanity, in her view, had never recovered from this disaster is part of the importance of the myth, as feminist witches regard themselves as reintroducing the world to the Goddess and playing a part in the recovery of humanity from the disastrous turn of events which gave patriarchy the upper hand. Neumann (1955) took the myth in another direction, developing Jung's idea of the Great Mother Goddess from *an* archetypal figure into *the* primary and universal religious archetype vital to the early development of the human psyche, but another development was necessary

[25] In R. Louie, *Social Organisation* 1950: 262.

for the further transformation which would enable the first step on the road to recovery.

One of the most accessible sources for this development was the work of the late Marija Gimbutas, who continued the work of Harrison and Neumann but added a liberationist feel to it. Her own personal leanings towards the myth are expressed in the comment she provided for the back cover of Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor's *The Great Cosmic Mother* (1987) in which she describes the book as 'a vivid picture of the tragic consequences caused by the savage priests of savage patriarchy'. Gimbutas' archaeological work was also interpreted by other feminist writers such as Mary Daly, Merlin Stone, Charlene Spretnak, and Adrienne Rich in the 1970s and 1980s, who transformed the emphasis on the Goddess as a negative and restrictive figure, bound by motherhood and fertility, to that of a positive creatrix. The Goddess thus became a strong role model for women, suitable for the feminist politics of North America. From the sphere of feminist politics, the myth of matriarchy and the figure of the Great Goddess entered the realm of feminist spirituality and were used in feminist witchcraft to inform and teach witches, particularly in Dianic, Faery, and Reclaiming witchcraft[26].

An example of the application of the myth of matriarchy by feminist witches is provided by Jone Salomonsen (1996: 154-181) in her characterisation of the history of Reclaiming witchcraft in San Francisco. The history of witchcraft supplied by Starhawk rests on 'the myth of ancient origin' which Salomonsen explains in four

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[26] See Chapter One.

stages. The first stage, 'Paradise Lost', is the golden age of 'The Mother Times', in which society was matrifocal and matrilinear and the supreme deity was the Goddess, when women were respected leaders and had influence and power. This society was suppressed during a 2000 year long patriarchal war against nature, women and sexuality, heralding the second stage, 'Patriarchal Fall', where society changed from matrilineal to patrilineal as society was centralised and militarised. The third stage, 'Disease: Patriarchal Consciousness', introduces dualism and estrangement expressed in the themes of the sacred, knowledge, morality and gender. Stage four, however, is 'Medicine: The Return of the Goddess', during which the earth becomes sacred and people 'learned again the ancient knowledge and the mysteries, and used that knowledge not to build weapons but to evoke the will to life of the earth herself that burns in every living being' (Starhawk: 1987: 310-11 in Salomonsen 1996: 177).

Through this use of myth, coupled with literature and techniques from the feminist consciousness movement, North American witchcraft emphasises empowerment and the move from being a victim to a position of strength, particularly for women. Perceiving secret societies as a traditional male preserve, witchcraft in the US has moved away from the British stress on lineage and grades of initiation - Reclaiming, for example, has only one degree of initiation, as does Seax Wica [*sic*]. Thus, in feminist witchcraft, initiation is not specifically required to become a witch - indeed, the New York covens in the late 1960s proclaimed:

> You are a Witch by saying aloud, "I am a Witch" three times, and *thinking about that*. You are a Witch by being female[27], untamed, angry, joyous, immortal (Morgan 1970: 540, cited in Daly 1981: 221).

North American derivations of Wicca may have begun, and in some covens continue along British lines. However, the Gardnerian/Alexandrian tendency to trace its lineage from the 'men's societies' of the occult revival of the *fin de siècle,* and thence from a founding *father,* was not acceptable to feminist-influenced witches in the USA. The myth of matriarchy provided an alternative heritage, more in keeping with feminist politics and activism. Salomonsen points out that Reclaiming witches, at least, are aware of their occult heritage[28], but stresses that feminist writers who are not witches, for example Rosemary Radford Reuther (1979: 844-7), seemed to be obsessed with '[getting] the Witches to acknowledge that they have invented the material themselves, *not* to admit that they inherited a great deal from Western men's secret clubs' (Salomonsen: 1996: 61). She acknowledges, however, that Reuther has since become more positive towards the goddess movement, of which feminist witchcraft is a part.

Those Wiccan derivations which are most well-known and written about - Dianic, Faery, and Starhawk's Reclaiming witchcraft - have therefore moved in a different

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[27] An echo of Dion Fortune's essentialist statement that 'each woman by virtue of her womanhood has it in her to be a Priestess' (1989, 158).

[28] She cites Starhawk' inclusion of pillars of correspondences in *The Spiral Dance*, along with other occult passages.

direction from their British counterparts, strongly identifying with both feminism and political activism as well as maintaining an identity as new forms of Goddess-based spirituality. Starhawk's stories and anecdotes about women's spiral dances in prisons and ritual protests at nuclear reactor sites are missing from the writings of British Wiccans, which concentrate more on spirituality as distinct from politics. As Rees says,

> [m]yths of matriarchy may have started off by being historicised and for some people this may still be the preferred reading but more recently the goddess perceived as psychological and political symbol has become dominant. The impression gained is that much feminist witchcraft over the years, especially in the States, has used myth creatively in just these ways. The key issue becomes to behave *as if* the myth were indeed true' (Rees: 1996: 25-6, emphasis in original).

The Use of Myth

It would appear, then, that the myths of continuity adhered to within Wicca and feminist witchcraft act as myths of eternal descent, obscuring and concealing the origins of Wicca. The myth of the golden age of matriarchy, never strong in Britain[29], retains its hold on the imagination of feminist witches. Although it is unlikely that these witches believe the myth to be historical fact, for feminist witches the point of the myth is to behave *as if* it were true. Such readings do not tend to be prevalent in British Wicca, however, where the myth of matriarchy is less important to Wiccan

[29] Although the myth was influential on Margaret Murray.

identity. The myth of continuity in Britain focused, as we have seen, on the witches of late Medieval and early modern Europe[30]. Nevertheless this strand is, to a certain extent, intertwined with the feminist matriarchal golden age in so far as both relate to the persecution of women under patriarchal rule.

It may be that the repeated use of these myths enhanced a sense of community in so far as witches, both in North American feminist witchcraft and in the early days of British Wicca, were held together in memory of those who throughout history were suppressed and persecuted. In the case of feminist witchcraft, there is more than a little sense of rebellious continuity, of refusing to let the myth die, for then those who suffered would also die. In Britain, however, there is no longer much sense of either continuity or community with witches of the past. Recent historical investigations[31] have effectively prevented the ongoing repetition of the myth as fact, and its importance now lies in the expression of individual, rather than communal, identity. There is, however, a growing sense of continuity with *historical* as opposed to

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[30] cf. Murray's introduction to Gardner's *Witchcraft Today*, in which she wrote, 'Dr Gardner states that he has found in various parts of England groups of people who still practise the same rites as the so-called 'witches' of the Middle Ages, and that the rites are a true survival and not a mere revival copied out of books. . . . he gives a sketch of similar practices in ancient Greece and Rome.' This quote suggests that Gardner associated early Wicca not only with the persecuted witches of early modern Europe but also with the religious practices of the ancient Mediterranean. The latter was not, however, a new idea: in 1839 Franz-Josef Mone argued that witchcraft was derived from a pre-Christian cult centred around Dionysus and Hecate in the Graeco-Roman world.

[31] See Hutton 1993; 2000 and Briggs 1996.

mythical streams of continuity - with occult revival of the *fin de siècle* and, prior to that, with the Western Esoteric Tradition.

HISTORY: STREAMS OF CONTINUITY

Hutton provides four separate continuous lines of descent connecting ancient and contemporary Paganism: hedge witchcraft, folk rites, 'the general love affair with the art and literature of the ancient world' and high ritual magic (Hutton 1996: 4, and see 1993: xiv). He explains that all four of these strains were removed from religion, lacking 'any ingredient of genuine worship of the old deities, all being carried on by people who professed the Christian faith. It is this missing ingredient which has been put back by modern Pagans, drawing upon the legacy of all four of these streams (1993. xiv-xv). Hedgewitchcraft, according to Hutton (1996: 6-7), is not specifically relevant to modern Wicca because it was a solitary concern. Although hedgewitchcraft is now becoming more popular, as we have seen in Chapter One, its practice is somewhat disconnected from Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca. The surviving folk rites and customs were, as we have said above, removed from any religious context but have nevertheless informed Wicca's festivals. As we have noted in Chapter One, responses to Victorian urbanisation in art and literature tended to make use of pagan imagery, which directly influenced high ritual magic; in turn, the Wiccan adoption of the initiatory structure of a mystery tradition, and the concept of the priesthood of a mystery religion, were clearly informed by the paganism of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. However, this is traceable some four hundred years earlier than Hutton suggests; as we shall see in the third section of this chapter, this 'love affair with the ancient world' is also apparent in the Renaissance.

All four of Hutton's streams can be found in Gardner's *Witchcraft Today.* Early in his work, for example, Gardner characterises witches as men and women who use charms and potions, communicate with the dead, effect the weather, and cure or curse, i.e. hedgewitchcraft. He also describes folk customs such as the May games (1954: 33, 76). The burgeoning interest in folklore and the popularisation of viewing history through a romantic filter in the nineteenth century provided a great deal of material on which Gardner drew. The bibliography to *The Meaning of Witchcraft* includes Aleister Crowley's *Magick in Theory and Practice* and *The Equinox of the Gods*, Dion Fortune's *The Mystical Qabalah*, the *Goetia*, Graves' *White Goddess*, Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of *The Mabinogion*, *English Folklore* by Christina Hole, Mathers' *The Kabbalah Unveiled* and *Abramelin*, Margaret Murray's books, Leland's *Gypsy Sorcery*, and classical texts including Plato and Bede. We see the influence of ritual magic, folklore, and classical Paganism reflected in this list. Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*, and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* contained vast quantities of information on folk-practices and ancient fertility cults, presenting 'a vision of a timeless, sealed off, rural world, full of ancient secrets' (Hutton 1996: 10), on which Gardner drew for inspiration. Furthermore, Gardner also states, '[a]t one time I believed the whole cult was directly descended from the Northern European culture of the Stone Age, uninfluenced by anything else; but now I think that it was influenced by the Greek and Roman mysteries which originally may have come from Egypt' (ibid.: 54). He thus reiterates his belief that witchcraft is connected to the ancient classical world.

In a sense Gardner was right for, in terms of magic, Wicca does have a lineage traceable back to ancient Egypt. As Hutton has pointed out, 'if Wicca and its successors are viewed as a form of ritual magic[32], then they have a distinguished and very long pedigree, stretching back through the Ordo Templi Orientis and the Golden Dawn to Levi, the New Templars, the Rosicrucians and the Freemasons, and so beyond these to the early modern and medieval texts which derived by many stages from those of Hellenistic Egypt' (Hutton 1993: 337). It is these 'stages' which we shall explore in the third section of this chapter, for the 'early modern and medieval texts' to which Hutton refers constitute the beginnings of the Western Esoteric Tradition with which this thesis is concerned.

Gardner also questions the extent to which ritual magicians may have written, or influenced the writing of, witchcraft rituals, though he rejects this idea (ibid. 52-3)[33]. He says, 'The only man I can think of who could have invented the rites was the late Aleister Crowley', and he then goes on to point out that Rudyard Kipling, the Golden Dawn, and Hargrave Jennings could also have done so. Gardner claims, however, that the rites of witchcraft go back further than these people, and that they therefore could not have written them. We shall see, however, that some of Crowley's work did

[32] Although the use of magic, as we have seen, does not in itself have anything to do with religion, it is a constitutive element of Wicca which encompasses both magic and religion, blurring their distinctions, and the magical heritage of Wicca is therefore important to the development of the religion and the identity of its practitioners.

[33] But see section on Aleister Crowley and Appendix 3 for examples of how exactly texts from ritual magic were absorbed into and used in Wicca.

indeed enter Wicca, though '[e]very Wiccan ceremony in [Gardner's] earliest corpus[34] is either partly or wholly composed of material which cannot be found in an earlier source'[35]. The influence of high ritual magic practised, at the turn of the twentieth century, within secret, magical societies such as the Golden Dawn, Crowley's Argenteum Astrum, and Dion Fortune's Fraternity of the Inner Light, cannot be underestimated.

The Fin de Siècle and the Occult Revival

The nature of the *fin de siècle* has been subject to varying characterisations, relating to both a specific historical era and the spirit of that particular era. As such, the *fin de siècle* denotes the period of time immediately before and immediately after the end of one century and the beginning of the next, and constitutes an image of transition, of society imbued with anxiety and insecurity. Our concern here is with the transition period between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, from the 1880s to the beginning of the First World War. The thirty to forty years constituting this *fin de siècle* have been characterised as an interregnum, a 'working out . . . of unfinished lines; a tentative redirection' (Raymond Williams 1963: 165 in Ledger and McCracken 1995:1), a period in which the process of cultural fragmentation 'threw the norms of the Victorian age into crisis: empires were threatened, feminism was on the march, and the first socialist parties in Britain were

[34] This would be the Book of the Art Magical, a forerunner to the Gardnerian Book of Shadows, which is held in Toronto.

[35] Hutton, R. (r.hutton@bristol.ac.uk), 26th July 1998, *OWC, Witchcraft and Dr. Hutton*, E-mail to the Nature Religion Scholars list (natrel-l@uscolo.edu).

formed' (Ledger and McCracken, 1995:1). Meštrović champions the period as, 'a genuine reaction against Enlightenment narratives' (1991: ix), whilst to Eagleton it is a 'spiritually agitated epoch . . . [which is] at once, more concrete and more cosmic than what came before' (1995: 13), a time in which traditional binaries were cancelled as concerns became compatible rather than antagonistic (ibid.: 13). With the perceived failure of the 'dream of reason', rationality was resisted in order that the 'dream of the *fin de siècle*' might succeed in 'restoring the balance back to the rightful primacy of the heart' (Meštrović 1991: 211).

The *fin de siècle* was a period of spiritual and psychological exploration, which saw the beginnings of a trend which has continued throughout the twentieth century.[36] According to James Webb, the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859 'deprived man of his divine image and replaced it with that of an ape' (Webb 1976: 8) and became a focus in the conflict between science and religion. Humankind was no longer God's special creation, and into this spiritual crisis new waves of scholarship brought further erosion of the Christian establishment. Biblical criticism began to examine closely the documents on which Christianity was built, and such developments undermined the security of establishment religion, increasing the responsibility of the individual.

Spiritualism in particular became increasingly attractive, particularly among women as it openly advocated the feminism which had begun to emerge in the mid-nineteenth

[36] And which can perhaps, in the 1990s, be seen at its most popular level - 'pop' psychology is available to all, and spiritual exploration is *de rigeur*.

century. By the 1890s, women were no longer satisfied with the same role models which had inspired their mothers, and some women began to forge new roles for themselves, particularly in the realm of religion. Amongst these women were many important figures of the occult revival: Helena Blavatsky and Annie Besant of the Theosophical Society; Anna Kingsford, who established the Hermetic Society as an offshoot off the Theosophical Society; and from the Golden Dawn, Annie Horniman, who 'rebelled against the restrictions that her parents sought to impose upon her, and . . . rebelled even more heartily against those imposed upon her sex by society' (Howe 1972: 66), Florence Farr who, according to George Bernard Shaw, 'was in violent reaction against Victorian morals, especially sexual and domestic morals' (ibid.: 68), Maude Gonne, and Moina Mathers.

This whole period has been characterised by Webb as 'the flight from reason', in which 'the resulting crisis of human consciousness produced a revulsion from the methods of thought and action that were responsible for the insecurity of Western man' (Webb 1976: 8). E. R. Dodds, in *The Greeks and the Irrational*, compares the backlash of the *fin de siècle* against the religion of the establishment, and subsequent revival of occult ideas, to Athens in the transition between the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. He theorises that faith is questioned at the end of a century and so in Athens during the transition from the fifth to the fourth century BCE and in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century, people responded to the moral and material ruin they saw surrounding them. Dodds sees the developments in Athens as 'symptoms rather than causes of a general change in the intellectual climate of the Mediterranean world - something whose nearest historical analogue may be the romantic reaction against

rationalist "natural theology" which set in at the beginning of the nineteenth century and is still a powerful influence today'. (Dodds 1951: 248)[37].

The rejection of reason, according to Webb, resulted in the revival of the '[u]nderground of rejected knowledge, [which] has as its core the varied collection of doctrines that can be combined in a bewildering variety of ways and that is known as the occult' (Webb 1976: 9). The occult revival was not limited to Britain, but had a secure position throughout Europe, particularly in France. During the nineteenth century, Eliphas Lévi came to be regarded 'as a kind of saint of the new occult movement' (Wilson 1987: 23), responsible 'for the surfacing, in an admittedly romanticised form, of the whole underground magical tradition' (King 1989: 22). However, there was a definite utilisation in France of the occult as a 'powerful weapon . . . [which] was not only anti-clerical, but anti-Christian, refusing all Judeo-Christian values' (Hutton 1991, 32). Indeed, this has already been mentioned with regard to Michelet's and Leland's writings. Without the same political and social undercurrents that predominated in France, English occultists at the turn of the century tended to work primarily for spiritual enlightenment rather than political subversion, resurrecting 'the doctrine of "spiritual progress"' (Webb 1976: 17) by which the human spirit was thought to be able to evolve, by means of various meditational techniques, towards 'god-head'.

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[37] For further information on *fin de siècle* culture and the battle between 'reason' and the 'irrational', the reader is referred to James Webb (1971; 1976), and Erich Fromm (1960).

It was within societies such as the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn that the idea of 'spiritual progress' was revived and put into practice. Influenced by the close-knit secrecy of Freemasonry and its claims to be the guardian of a powerful secret of ancient provenance, these philosophical and magical societies set about popularising their own claims to ancient wisdom, reviving the Hermetic and Kabbalistic teachings gathered together by Renaissance scholars. Most of the leading occultists of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century were already members either of Masonic or quasi-Masonic fraternities, but in keeping with the early feminism of the *fin de siècle,* the new societies were open to both men and women on an equal basis.

The Theosophical Society, for example, was established in 1875 to explore the alternatives provided by eastern literature, religion and sciences, and became increasingly influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism until Madame Blavatsky reached the extreme conclusion that Western society and religion contained nothing which could be considered good, and her ultimate mission became to 'supplant western ignorance with eastern wisdom' (Godwin 1994: 305). By the mid-1880s, Freemasonry, Spiritualism, and Theosophy had firmly woven themselves into the fabric of British occultism and, with the exception of Spiritualism, into the subculture of secret societies. However, a fourth and, in terms of the development of Wicca, more important strand was being prepared: the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn opened its Isis Urania Temple in London in 1888 under the leadership of Dr. William Wynn Westcott, S. L. MacGregor Mathers and Dr. W. R. Woodman. It is the Golden Dawn which, according to Israel Regardie, had the strongest influence on English occultism and its subsequent development, for 'all modern thinking on occult matters

has been profoundly influenced by these seminal systems . . . there is hardly a legitimate occult order in Europe or America that has not borrowed directly or indirectly from the Golden Dawn' (1983: 7). And it is from the Golden Dawn that Wicca traces its magical heritage.

The Golden Dawn

The key founder of the Golden Dawn was Dr. William Wynn Westcott, a London coroner and Rosicrucian who in 1887 obtained part of a manuscript from a Freemason, Rev. A.F.A. Woodford. On deciphering the manuscript, Westcott claimed to have discovered that it contained fragments of rituals from the Golden Dawn, a previously unheard of German occult order that admitted women as well as men. MacGregor Mathers was brought in to develop the fragments into full scale rituals, which he based largely on Freemasonry, and papers were forged to give the Golden Dawn a history and authenticity. The original manuscript was later shown to be a forgery also, and it was on such dubious grounds that the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was established in London.

The Golden Dawn organised itself as an association of individuals, with a headquarters in London and lodges in Bristol, Weston-Super-Mare, Bradford, Edinburgh and Paris, and a leader (Mathers) who based himself, for the most part, in Paris. An elaborate hierarchy was created consisting of ten grades or degrees, which were divided into three orders - the Outer (Neophyte, Zelator, Theoricus, Practicus, Philosophus, Adeptus Minor), the Second (Adeptus Major, Adeptus Exemptus) and the Third Order (Magister Temple, Magus, Ipsissimus) made up of the astral chiefs

with whom only Mathers could communicate. The secret society quickly caught on, with three hundred and fifteen initiations taking place during its heyday (1888-1896) before, in 1897, members discovered Westcott's questionable role in 'discovering' the Golden Dawn, and irreparable schisms began to form.

From 1888-1896, however, the Golden Dawn members gathered together Western magical knowledge, including studies on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, the Key of Solomon, Abra-Melin Magic, Enochian Magic, as well as material gleaned from the Egyptian Book of the Dead, William Blake's Prophetic Books, and the Chaldean Chronicles. The legacy of the Golden Dawn for contemporary Wicca is immense and this is largely due to the very individualism of the members who undertook research into diverse areas of history, myth, archaeology, magic, and languages to such an extent that Regardie called the Order 'the sole depository of magical knowledge, the only occult order of any real worth that the West in our time has known' (1989: 16), while Jocelyn Godwin called it 'the order that would virtually redefine the British occult world for the Twentieth Century' (1994: 223).

This wealth of knowledge gathered, translated (where necessary), and systematised by the Golden Dawn has made the Order the most important forerunner of contemporary Wiccan magical practice, but it left little to be desired in terms of community. Although the Golden Dawn recognised the importance of the feminine aspect of the divine, admitted women to equal membership alongside men, and aimed to provide a coherent structure for learning and magical advancement, hierarchy was inherent within the extensive grading system, competition between individuals was rife, and

splinter groups proliferated. The eventual disintegration of the Golden Dawn in the early twentieth century has predominantly been interpreted as a natural consequence of the clash of egos between various people involved in the Order[38].

The Golden Dawn formulae was, in essence, pagan and hermetic, using pre- or non-Christian names of power which were to be found in Hebrew, Greek, Coptic, Egyptian and Chaldean sources, but it took no official stance against establishment Christianity. Like the Theosophical Society, the Spiritualist movement, and Freemasonry, the Golden Dawn attracted many people who were at least uncomfortable with, if not in direct revolt against Christianity; but on the other hand, many members made use of the pre-Christian and magical methods to facilitate their Christian spiritual development. For many members, there existed no abyss between Christianity and the occult, and they found no difficulty in neatly dovetailing their Christian faith with their occult interests and magical leanings. Of course, from the point of view of the Christian establishment, particularly the Catholic Church, the Order of the Golden Dawn would stand condemned, if only on the vow of secrecy extracted from its members. Christian or not, members only had to acknowledge their belief in the existence of a 'supreme being', and the old Pagan gods were just as welcome as, and in fact more popular, than those of conventional religion.

Some members, however, *were* vehemently anti-Christian. Aleister Crowley, for example, expresses his 'agreement with Shelley and Nietzsche in defining Christianity as the religious expression of the slave spirit in man' in the preface to his poem *The*

[38] See, for example, Francis King [1970] 1989: 66-78.

World's Tragedy (1910: XXIX). Christianity was, to him, an 'awful fear of nature and God . . . twisted into an engine of oppression and torture against anyone who declines to grovel and cringe before their filthy fetish' (ibid.: XXXI). Crowley does, however, absolve the figure of Jesus from responsibility, for he sees the problems as arising from within a church, a religion, which has forgotten and deliberately misread the teachings of its founder. What he fights so bitterly against is 'the religion which makes England today a hell for any man who cares at all for freedom. That religion they call Christianity; the devil they honour they call God . . . and it is their God and their religion that I hate and will destroy' (ibid.: XXXI). Crowley appears to have used the Order as a launching pad for his invectives against Christianity, a kind of 'therapeutic blasphemy' (Hutton 1996: 5) for a hatred which stemmed from his Plymouth Brethren upbringing.

Aleister Crowley

Crowley was initiated into the London temple of the Golden Dawn in November 1898 at the age of 23, and his natural aptitude for magic paved his meteoric rise through the grades. Although at first close to Mathers, he became intensely competitive with the Chief and was subsequently expelled from the Order. Confident of his own abilities, however, Crowley awarded himself the highest grade of Ipsissimus[39], and went on to found the Argenteum Astrum (A.·.A.·.), or Order of the Silver Star, through whose journal *The Equinox* he published many of the Golden Dawn's secret rituals between 1909 and 1913. In 1912, Crowley became involved in the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.·.T.·.O.·.), a German system of occultism, becoming the head of the Order in 1922.

[39] A grade supposedly reserved for the Third Order of the non-incarnated Secret Chiefs.

In 1920 he founded his Abbey of Thelema in Sicily, which he envisioned as a magical colony from which to launch the new aeon, the Age of Horus, of which Crowley considered himself to be the chosen prophet. However, the new aeon seemed not to be destined to begin in Sicily after all, as Crowley was expelled by Mussolini in 1923.

Crowley's Thelema was propagated through his Argenteum Astrum and his prolific writings, the most important of which is his *Book of the Law* dictated, so Crowley claimed, by the manifested presence of his guardian angel, Aiwass, on three consecutive afternoons between noon and 1pm in April 1904. The most important and most remembered of these laws is the Law of Thelema - 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law; love is the law, love under will' (Crowley 1986: 297) - set as a positive universal rule in contrast to the Christian Ten Commandments, of which nine are 'thou shalt nots'. The similarity of this law to the Wiccan Rede, 'An it harm none, do what thou wilt' indicates the influence of Crowley on the development of Wicca and Paganism and, indeed, Gardner met Crowley before the latter's death in 1947, and was made an honorary member of Crowley's O.·.T.·.O.·..

The influence of Crowley on Wicca, despite Gardner's refutations to the contrary, is clear. Crowley's work appears in Wiccan ritual, and Doreen Valiente has openly stated that she rewrote much of Gardner's material, replacing that which was obviously Crowley's with her own poetry. In *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* she tells us that Gardner realised he had a real chance to get witchcraft accepted, but she told him this would not happen if they retained the influence of Aleister Crowley. Valiente relates,

> Crowley's name stank . . . [he] may have been a brilliant writer and a splendid poet but as a person he was simply a nasty piece of work . . . Gerald's reaction was, 'Well, if you think you can do any better, go ahead'. I accepted the challenge and set out to rewrite the Book of Shadows, cutting out the Crowleyanity as much as I could and trying to bring it back to what I felt was, if not so elaborate as Crowley's phraseology, at least our own and in our own words (Valiente 1989: 60-61).

We have already noted the similarity between Crowley's Law of Thelema and Gardner's Wiccan Rede, and a few more examples should suffice to prove the point. The wording for the blessing of the cakes in Wicca, for example, is

> O Queen most secret,
> bless this food unto our bodies,
> bestowing health, wealth, strength,
> joy and peace,
> and that fulfilment of love which is perpetual happiness
> (Vivianne Crowley 1996: 188)

It can hardly be coincidence that the blessing of the cakes in Crowley's Gnostic Mass reads:

> Lord most secret, bless this spiritual food unto our bodies, bestowing upon us health and wealth and strength and joy and peace, and that fulfilment of will

and of love under will that is perpetual happiness (Aleister Crowley 1986: 434).

Crowley's invocation 'by seed and root and stem and bud and leaf and flower' has been incorporated verbatim into Gardner's Book of Shadows, and Valiente's 'Charge of the Goddess', which is perhaps the only liturgical text commonly used in Wicca, was rewritten from an earlier Charge from Crowley's Gnostic Mass, which he in turn took from Leland[40].

Further influences come mainly through Crowley's continuation of the Golden Dawn system, in terms of using Goddesses[41] as well as Gods, allowing men and women equal access to his order[42], and further systematising magical lore. Additionally, Crowley's fascination with the East and his accomplished practice of yoga along with his mentor, Allan Bennett, infused his basic Golden Dawn-derived system with practices and terms drawn from Eastern philosophies, such as karma, chakras, kundalini, tantra, yoga, reincarnation, mantras and prana. Thus, Crowley consciously

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[40] See Appendix 3.

[41] He describes the Goddess as the source of all Love, Beauty, Pleasure, Intoxication; She is the Holy Grail, the Cup Cadmean, the Lotus-Throne of Buddha, and of Harpocrates. She is the Moon in her fullest and Holiest aspect, the perfect sphere of pure light - mirror of my pure light! . . . She is Isis, Astarte, Ashtaroth (1972: 177).

[42] Though Crowley used and abused women at will, practising sex magic with respectable married women, prostitutes, chorus girls, sisters of the Order, Scarlet Women, potential scarlet women, and men as well as by himself.

integrated Eastern philosophies and practices with the western esoteric and magical theories which formed the foundation of his Thelema.

In general, however, there was a largely amicable split between Western magic and Eastern philosophy in the occult community of the *fin de siècle*: those interested in researching and studying the wisdom of the East, and perhaps 'converting' to Hinduism and Buddhism joined the Theosophical Society; those who wished to study the Western Esoteric Tradition and perform ritual within an initiatory system joined the Golden Dawn. Relations between the two seem to have existed on friendly terms for the main part, and there were a few occultists who were members of both organisations, bringing together the traditions in a more global fashion, a trend which became more popular after the First World War. One of these was Violet Mary Firth, better known by her magical name of Dion Fortune.

Dion Fortune

Dion Fortune (born Violet Mary Firth) was a member of both the Theosophical Society and of a Golden Dawn offshoot, the Stella Matutina, before forming her own Fraternity of the Inner Light in 1924. She paid tribute to the work of both the Theosophical Society and the Golden Dawn in *Esoteric Orders and their Work*, in which she traces the Western esoteric systems to,

> three main roots, the Qabalistic, the Egyptian, and the Greek . . . The modern stream of Western esotericism contains a blend of all of them, but also much that has been derived from Eastern sources through the mediation of the

> Theosophical Society. . . Analytical psychology and New Thought have also been laid under contribution, and the result is a kaleidoscope philosophy which needs much sorting before it reveals any coherent pattern (1995: 166).

Prior to the publication of Golden Dawn rituals by Israel Regardie in 1937-40, the Fraternity of the Inner Light used mainly Golden Dawn rituals and retained relatively strong links with the Stella Matutina. Gradually, however, the Inner Light rituals altered until they bore no resemblance to those of the Golden Dawn, and Francis King considers that '[t]oday the Inner Light can no longer be considered a magical fraternity, it rather more resembles a heterodox semi-Christian cult, rather like the Liberal Catholic Church of the Theosophists' (1989: 158). Fortune's main contribution to the influences on Wicca, therefore, are to be found in her perpetuation of the Western Mystery Tradition and her self-identification as a 'priestess'. Since psychoanalysis, according to Richardson, was 'the Alternative Therapy of the time' (1991: 51), a fad for Fortune's generation, it could also be the case that she began the process of integrating psychology into the current of western esotericism. She does not appear to have considered herself 'pagan', although Vivianne Crowley refers to Dion Fortune as a 'proto-Pagan' (1998: 170), and her writings, particularly her novels *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*, can be found on the bookshelves of many Pagans and are standard reading for most Wiccans. Fortune was, however, as much involved in esoteric Christianity as she was in specifically pagan ritual and magic; her flirtation with Christian Science, which came to Britain in 1898, 'was the first manifestation of the dichotomy which ran right through her life: between the Gods and the one God;

between the Mystery at Bethlehem and those of Karnak, Atlantis, and Avalon' (Richardson 1991: 42).

The Golden Dawn, the Theosophical Society, Aleister Crowley and Dion Fortune can thus be considered the most important organisations and figures of influence in the British occult revival, which began in the previous *fin de siècle* and continued until Dion Fortune's death in 1946 and that of Aleister Crowley in 1947, shortly after the end of the Second World War. By this time, Gerald Gardner had returned to England from the Far East and begun his association with the New Forest coven: the development of Wicca was already underway. Wicca is therefore, according to Hutton (1996: 13), 'neither the descendant of a continuous sectarian witch cult, nor [was it] born fully fledged from the imagination of one man in the 1940s. It is, on the contrary, a particular, and extreme, incarnation of some of the broadest and deepest cultural impulses of the nineteenth and twentieth century British world'. Certainly, as far as the recent history of Wicca over the past century is concerned, we would concur wholeheartedly with this statement; yet there remains behind this modern history of *fin de siècle* occultism and the development of Wicca streams of influence which reach back into antiquity[43]. In order to understand the Wicca of the 1990s - a Wicca which has, for the most part, embraced its occult heritage and dropped its pretences to pseudo-historical links with early modern witchcraft - we need to return to that same

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[43] We are not, of course, suggesting that Hutton is unaware of these streams of influence; as we noted earlier in this chapter, he also traces Wicca (as a magical system) back through the Renaissance to Hellenistic Egypt.

era which saw the beginning of the Great Witch Hunt itself, the closing decades of the fifteenth century.

WICCA AND THE WESTERN ESOTERIC TRADITION

In accordance with the aims expressed in relation to the earlier sections of this chapter, it is not our intention to present a detailed history of the Western Esoteric Tradition from the Renaissance to the present day; such a history would necessitate a volume in itself[44]. According to Corbin, history can be investigated as a 'longitudinal' development. Such a longitudinal emphasis, he says, constitutes a 'search for the meaning of history not in "horizons", that is, not by orienting itself in the latitudinal sense of a linear development, but vertically, by a longitudinal orientation extending from the celestial pole to the Earth' (Corbin 1969: 81), a 'transhistorical meaning' which 'implies the idea of a *tradition* whose line is vertical, longitudinal (from heaven to Earth), a tradition whose moments are independent of the causality of continuous physical time' (ibid.: 91)[45]. Keeping this in mind, we therefore provide a brief synopsis of the emergence of Renaissance esotericism but we shall then limit our investigations to three key figures - Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and, in particular, Giordano Bruno - in order to point out streams of affinity, rather than apostolic succession, between the esotericism of the Renaissance and Wicca in the 1990s.

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[44] The subject could, however, be expanded into a separate chapter should the thesis be published.

[45] cf. Faivre (1994: 7), who states that our work 'is not a matter of wondering whether a similar tradition really existed as such before the Renaissance, invisible and hidden behind the veil of eventual history, but of trying to seize the emergence of this idea in imagery and discourse'.

In the late fifteenth century, certain Hermetic manuscripts[46] containing elements of Platonism, Neo-platonism, Stoicism, neo-Pythagoreanism, and Jewish and Persian influences were brought to Cosimo de Medici in Florence. Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), a physician and scholar, was immediately instructed to begin their translation. At the same time, refugees from the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 brought the Jewish Kabbalah to Florence. The Jewish Kabbalah was blended with neo-Alexandrian Hermeticism by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola who, along with Ficino[47], was one of the founders of Italian Renaissance Hermetism, or what Frances Yates (1964: 86, 257) has called 'the hermetic-cabalist tradition'[48]. This fertile marriage of Egyptian, Greek and Jewish thought produced 'a practical, spiritual "way" - an attempt to understand the self, the world and the divine' (Fowden 1986: xvi in Orion 1995: 80).

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[46] Manuscripts collectively known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the authorship of which was attributed to the mythical Egyptian figure Hermes Trismegistus, Thrice-Great Hermes. The manuscripts were thought to date from vast antiquity, long before Plato and even longer before Christ - indeed, Hermes Trismegistus was believed by some to be a contemporary of Moses, and by others to have lived at the same time as Noah. The corpus was, however, misdated and it is now known that the writings were by various authors and of varying dates, being 'the records of individual souls seeking revelation, intuition into the divine, personal salvation, gnosis, without the aid of a personal God or Saviour, but through a religious approach to the universe' (Yates 1991: 22). Isaac Casaubon, in 1614, is generally regarded to have been the first person to disprove the pre-Christian provenance of the Hermetic manuscripts.

[47] For further information on Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, the reader is referred to Yates 1964, chapters IV and V.

[48] There are a variety of spellings of Kabbalah, including Cabala and Qabalah. Throughout this thesis we have opted, quite arbitrarily, to use 'Kabbalah', whilst retaining the original spellings used by different authors in quotations.

The Western Esoteric Tradition thus emerged in Renaissance Florence at the end of the fifteenth century, a time when the 'churning turbid flood of Hermetic, cabalistic, Gnostic, theurgic, Sabaen, Pythagorean and generally mystical notions . . . broke over Europe . . . carrying everything before it' (de Santillana 1965: 455 in Hudson 1994: 9). In this climate, ancient materials, Christianity, Judaism and Islam were regarded by men such as Ficino to be mutually complementary, and that systems of thought could be combined together to form one homogeneous whole[49]. For example, in 1486 Pico della Mirandola offered to prove in public debate in Rome that his nine hundred theses drawn from all philosophies were reconcilable with one another. The debate never took place, but Pico's thoughts were obviously at home in the Renaissance climate which Faivre (1992:xiii) describes as an 'illuminated atmosphere in which analogical thinking prevails and . . . in which harmony was more or less universal'.

The will of people like Pico della Mirandola to seek common denominators within this corpus transformed the *prisca theologia* of the Middle Ages into the *philosophia perennis* and the *philosophia occulta*, terms which were (and are) not interchangeable but which designated 'a relatively autonomous nebula in the mental universe of the time, one which was detached from theology per se' (Faivre & Voss 1995: 50-51). Thus on the one hand, the *philosophia perennis* became 'Tradition', constituted by a chain of mythical or historical representatives including Zoroaster, Hermes

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[49] See Yates 1991: 86.

Trimegistus, Moses, Orpheus, the Sibyls, Pythagoras and Plato[50]. The *philosophia occulta*, on the other hand, emerged in Hermeticism and Christian Kabbalah as an autonomous body of reference which came to be seen as 'esoteric' *vis-à-vis* the official 'exoteric' religion. This, Faivre says, is 'the true starting point for what we designate here as "esotericism"' (ibid.: 51). Such an esotericism had been unnecessary during the Middle Ages, when the paradigms of metaphysics and cosmology were embedded in theology, but 'when the sciences of Nature freed themselves from theology, they began to be cultivated for themselves. . . . Henceforth the esoteric field could be constituted, which in the Renaissance began to deal with the interface between metaphysics and cosmology, i.e., to function as an extratheological modality for linking the universal to the particular' (Faivre 1994: 8).

The Renaissance esoteric corpus was formed of three interconnected 'rivers' - alchemy, astrology, and magic - and 'streams' which are intertwined with these rivers, such as (from the end of the fifteenth century) the Christian Kabbalah, neo-Alexandrian Hermeticism, the discourses on the *philosophia perennis* and the primordial tradition, the Paracelsian philosophy of Nature, the Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, and (from the seventeenth century) theosophy, Rosicrucianism, and later initiatory societies. These rivers survived the Enlightenment and the scientism of the nineteenth century, and are still present today. Yet we concur with Faivre that the presence of esotericisms at the end of the twentieth century is not the result of opposition to a secularized and

[50] Yates (1991: 15) notes that Hermes is always either positioned first or second only to Zoroaster in this genealogy, demonstrating 'the extreme importance which Ficino assigned to Hermes as the *fons et origo* of the wisdom tradition which led in an unbroken chain to Plato'.

scientific world. Rather, Faivre and Voss (1995: 53) characterise the 'tenacious permanence' of esotericism as 'the possible forms acquired by one of the two poles of the human soul for its actualization: that is, the pole of mythic capacity (the other pole being so called rational thought . . . modelled after a type of Aristotelian logic)'. Furthermore, as Hanegraaff has pointed out (1995b: 119) with regard to occultism, it 'is not a reaction to modernity but a modern continuation of traditions which far predate the formulation of a modernist world-view . . . hermeticism has actually contributed historically to the formulation of that same world-view'.[51]

It is within this 'illuminated atmosphere' that we find an earlier expression of the 'love affair with the ancient world' identified by Hutton in the nineteenth century. Hellenistic Egypt is, for Ficino and Pico, the forerunner of Christianity and the 'religion of the world'. However, this Egyptianism[52] reached a greater flowering in the life and works of Giordano Bruno (1548 - 1600[53]), an apostate Dominican from Nola, near Naples. For Bruno, the Egyptian 'religion of the world' is purer than either Catholicism or Protestantism, although he seeks for its return within a reformed

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[51] cf. Yates 1967; Righini Bonelli & Shea 1975; Mekel-Debus 1988.

[52] Bruno always places the Egyptian's first, along with the Chaldeans who are followed by the Magi, Gymnosophists, Orphics etc. and then, in the early modern period, by Albertus Magnus, Nicholas of Cusa, and Copernicus (Yates 1991: 235) which, Yates comments, suggests a rejection of 'Cabala for his purely Egyptian insights, an attitude which accords with his highly unorthodox view of the history of the *prisca theologia* or *prisca magia*, in which . . . the Egyptians are not only earliest but best, and the Jews and Christians later and worse' (ibid.: 257).

[53] In keeping with Wiccan mythology, Bruno was burned at the stake in Rome on 17th February 1600, albeit as a heretic and magician, rather than as a witch!

Catholicism. This Egyptianism runs throughout Bruno's work, predating the Egyptomania and Egyptophilia of the seventeenth century identified by Faivre (1994: 17), and further exemplified by the popularity of Lucius Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* during the Renaissance[54], a popularity which continues to this day among modern Wiccans.

It is, in fact, in Bruno's works that we find expressions of the esoteric tradition which appear to have been picked up and reformulated within contemporary Wicca. Bruno is characterised by Yates as an 'abnormal' Renaissance magus in that he takes magic back to its pagan source rather than attempting to reconcile magic with Christianity as Ficino and Pico had done[55]. It is Bruno who takes the idea of divinity in nature (living nature) and appears to develop it into a 'nature religion' designed to replace the 'warring Christian sects' (Yates 1991: 319); and it is this nature religion which seems to have become a cult known as the Giordanisti, a cult which Yates considers may well have existed and may even have been the forerunner of Rosicrucianism[56] (ibid.: 312-3).

Furthermore, it is with Bruno that we find the witch portrayed as transformer of society, in his *Cantus Circaeus* of 1582 and *Spaccio della bestia trionfante* of 1584,

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[54] cf. Yates 1991: 173-4.

[55] See Introduction to the present thesis.

[56] It is by no means certain that this cult actually existed. If it were proven, then we might have the beginnings of a 'linear history' linking Wicca to Renaissance esotericism through the Golden Dawn, Rosicrucianism, and Bruno for, as we have indicated earlier in this chapter, Rosicrucianism was a direct forerunner of the Golden Dawn and thus of Wicca.

some three hundred years before Michelet's 1862 rendition of the same theme in *La Sorcière*. And in his *De umbris idearum* of 1582, might we find a possible source for the Wiccan 'Book of Shadows', following from the *Liber de umbris* attributed to Solomon by the fourteenth century magician Cecco d'Ascoli? Whatever the answer to this question - and it is by no means the proven progeniture of the Book of Shadows - the concept of the Book of Shadows is certainly a continuation of an Hermetic theme popularised and developed in Renaissance esotericism whereby 'the light of divinity [is sought] through having an intention of will towards shadows or reflections of it' (Yates 1991: 195)[57]. As we shall see, this theme naturally includes correspondences, imagination and mediation as identified by Faivre, and is incorporated into Wiccan magical and religious practice.

In noting Bruno's importance to Renaissance esotericism, Yates asks,

> Where is there such a combination as this of religious toleration, emotional linkage with the mediaeval past, emphasis on good works for others, and imaginative attachment to the religion and the symbolism of the Egyptians? The only answer to this question that I can think of is - in Freemasonry . . . one cannot help wondering whether it might have been among the spiritually dissatisfied in England, who perhaps heard in Bruno's "Egyptian" message

[57] Yates (1991: 197) further suggests that 'Bruno's "shadows of ideas" *are* the magical images, the archetypal images in the heavens which are closer to the divine mind that things here below. And it is even possible that Ficino, in his frequent uses of the word "shadows" may sometimes mean this too'.

some hint of relief, that the strains of the Magic Flute were first breathed upon the air (Yates 1964: 274).

We might now adapt Yates' question and ask ourselves, where else do we find a magical religion weaving nature and astral magic into a continuation of the Hermetic doctrine of spiritual progress, with an attachment to the religion and magic of Egypt and (to a greater or lesser extent) an emotional linkage to the early modern past of which Bruno was a part? The answer, we might suggest, is in Wicca.

CONCLUSION

Given the scale of the complex historical questions surrounding the legacy of occultism and the 'magical heritage' of Wicca, we have confined ourselves in this chapter to an examination of the use of history rather than attempting a detailed history of Wicca. Indeed, it may appear that we have ignored the actual history of Wicca from the 1950s onwards, and treated such figures as Gardner and Sanders as irrelevant. However, as noted in our introduction to the thesis, this history is well-documented and in the process of publication, and the brief resumé of the development of Wicca in the introduction to the thesis provides necessary orientation for the reader. The thesis as a whole is, after all, concerned with Wicca as it is practised and understood in the 1990s, and for the purposes of this chapter, we have followed Faivre's (1992: 70) suggestion that, although names, titles, and chronologies are important at the beginning of a study, they are ultimately dispensable and can at this point be considered as reference points only.

We have thus included such 'reference points' only where necessary, concentrating instead upon a more subtle interpretation of connections through time. We concur with the historians that Wicca has no connection with the witchcraft of the early modern period or the witches persecuted during the Great Witch Hunt. And certainly, Wicca is not a modern revival of an age-old pagan religion forced underground by the arrival of Christianity. By the 1980s, Wicca in Britain had developed into a structured, semi-public mystery religion which included natural and ceremonial magic, male and female concepts of deity, a rich ritual corpus, initiation as priests/priestesses and witches, and an increasing use of kabbala and/or Jungian psychology. The insecure practice which invented for itself a tradition spanning hundreds of years, has evolved into the more mature, developed religion and magical system which has the confidence to admit its roots go back no further than the 1940s, yet relies on reviving ancient practices. Yet, at the same time, these theories of connections with the past have been of immense importance to the development of Wicca as a religion at the close of the twentieth century, and have thus been considered in their mythic capacity.

Coterminous with the beginnings of the Great Witch Hunt we find the beginnings of Renaissance esotericism and high magic. Thus, two distinct traditions[58] emerged during the same historical period, of which only the former appears to have had a marked effect on contemporary Wicca and witchcraft than the latter. Since witchcraft and high magic are two distinct traditions, both of which are incorporated into Wicca,

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[58] cf. Russell (1980: 13): 'The high, intellectual magic of the astrologers and diviners is not an integral part of the history of witchcraft. During the great witch-craze in Europe few people were accused both of high magic and of witchcraft. The two traditions are distinct.'

it has been necessary to examine not only Wicca's connections with witchcraft but also with ritual magic.

In concluding that Wicca has no historical links with witchcraft, we are able to perceive that Wicca's real connections are with ritual magic, thus further distinguishing between Wicca and witchcraft. And it is with the development of esotericism during the Renaissance that the true lineage and continuity of Wicca may be found for, as Orion (1995: 103) concludes, Wicca 'represents a resort to a magical philosophy that is quite ancient and has been significant in various historical periods of ideological transition in Western history'[59]. We note that such a connection is not historical in the strict sense of the word. However, we have not been looking for 'apostolic succession' but for 'longitudinal' history, a different attitude towards history in which we find not the 'causality of continuous physical time' but 'the recurrence of the creative act' (Corbin 1969: 91). Thus, the historical meaning becomes more than a series of 'names, titles and chronologies' and we are reminded that,

> it is not only the memory of a history of events that can teach us about the place where "the two seas join", and where in reality spiritual transmission takes place . . . To read esoteric teachings with eyes not only of flesh but of fire, to be connected to one of the traditions that passes these teachings on, is to enter into a "subtle history", the only history where meaning is unveiled. A work is truly "active" only insofar as it allows Tradition to speak in us and for

[59] We are reminded here of MacCabe's (1998: 82) comment in our introduction that 'magic is the hidden underside of modernism'.

us; insofar as it awakens us by bringing us closer to the eternal presences; and asks us to become awakeners ourselves (Faivre 1992: 70).

The remaining chapters of this thesis are devoted to an examination of how contemporary Wicca has, after Hanegraaff (1995: 118), used and developed the esoteric ideas formulated earlier according to the specific demands and cultural context of their own period. In so doing, we shall use the six themes identified by Faivre, beginning with the idea of transmission of tradition - the means by which a person is attracted to, and enters into, the community of Wicca - and then assessing correspondences, imagination and mediation, and living nature within Wiccan ritual[60].

[60] It may appear to the reader that a sudden jump has been made between Chapter Three and the remaining two chapters of the thesis. It has, however, been necessary to provide an historical sketch as well as a great deal of introductory data in order to orient our study before we can immerse ourselves in the community of Wicca and its ritual and magical practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MAGICAL COMMUNITY:

RECOGNITION AND TRANSMISSION

Emphasis on transmission implies that an esoteric teaching can or must be transmitted from master to disciple following a pre-established channel, respecting a previously marked path . . . A person cannot initiate himself, any way he chooses, but must go through the hands of an initiator (Faivre 1994: 15).

INTRODUCTION

If the concept of the *fin de siècle* carries connotations of change, then the concept of the end of a millennium contains expectations of even greater transformations[1]. We have argued in Chapter Three that Wicca has its roots in the Western Esoteric Tradition of the Renaissance, and thence in the secret and magical societies which emerged under the rubric of the occult revival of the *fin de siècle*, a period characterised by the battle between the rational and the irrational, spiritual anomie, and the new freedom of the individual. It was the period in which Durkheim foresaw the rise of the 'cult of the individual', though nourished by society and therefore

[1] Though the approaching new millennium is based on the number of years since the birth of Christ, and can therefore be considered a nonsense to the many non-Christian Pagans, New Agers, and other practitioners of post-Christian spirituality, the cultural *zeitgeist* has an effect on all who are currently involved in life and society as the year 2000 draws near: the end of the millennium encompasses even those who react against it and want no part in any 'new millennium' celebrations.

unrealisable as 'something purely individual' (1995: 425). We now approach the close of a millennium, with its own 'spiritual agitations' and its own brand of fragmentation, of which community is but one strand[2]. In this chapter we investigate the magical community of Wicca, how it is formed, and why people enter into it. In particular, we consider the importance of recognition as a conversion motif and the emphasis on transmission, implied in initiation as the mode of entry into the community.

The rhetoric of late modernity suggests that the individual's need for community and connection with others is denied, whilst traditional religious communities are regarded as coercive, institutionalising the individual and challenging his or her rights and authority. Religious communities are interpreted as 'un-collection[s] of isolated individuals . . . which require all sorts of strange notions, linking individuals to each other, in order to account for the reality of community: Emile Durkheim's 'collective consciousness'; Georg Simmel's 'shared social a priori'; Ferdinand Tonnies' 'organic will', and Talcott Parson's 'values orientation' (Morris 1996: 226). We might also add to this list Carl Jung's 'group mind' and Victor Turner's 'communitas'. The loss of community 'render[s] the traditionless self utterly alone, bereft of personal connections, de-politicized, without clear guidance or certainty' (Morris 1996: 224). To Jean-Luc Nancy, this is an ontological disaster, nothing less than the 'privation of being' (Nancy 1991: 57, cited in Morris ibid.: 235).

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[2] c.f. Zygmunt Bauman (1991: 246), who suggests that '[postmodernity] is "the age of community": of the lust for community, the search for community, the invention of community, imagining community'.

At the close of the twentieth century, then, Durkheim's notion of the individual as nourished by society, by community, has been exploded, leading scholars such as Paul Morris to ask whether 'coercive community or an un-collection of isolated individuals' are the only option (Morris 1996: 225). His answer has been to develop two forms of community, which he calls descent and assent, whilst noting that these are not the only variables but that considerable overlap can and does occur. Communities of descent, according to Morris, tend to be non-missionary whilst recognising conversion as a possibility, look back to the past where descent has its 'origin', and are inherently pluralistic as identity does not depend on ideology but is vouchsafed by descent. As the question of identity of the descent community (or its members) does not depend on universal assent, dissent is not a challenge, or threat, to identity. In fact, according to Morris, descent *requires* plurality and allows for a wide degree of assent singularity, maintaining conformity in other ways, usually behavioural. Descent communities tend to be non-hierarchical, accepting loose formulations, about which universal agreement is always resisted. Assent communities, on the other hand, tend to be voluntary associations (Morris 1996: 238) which are often fanatically anti-pluralistic and intolerant of heretics, maintaining a hierarchy of assent whose task it is to decide who is in and who is out.

A combination of descent and assent, claims Morris, produces communities in which difference is maintained without undermining community. In the following sections, we shall analyse the community of Wicca, keeping in mind Morris' notion of assent and descent communities and the possible combination of the two, and suggesting a further type of community, characterised by 'recognition' and the esoteric notion of

'transmission', in order to better define the community of Wicca. Such a community requires recognition by the individual of the suitability of Wicca for him or her, and recognition of the suitability of the individual for Wicca by those already in the community. Recognition, as we shall see, is a precursor to entry into the community, whose tradition, 'as an organic and integral ensemble deserving respect' (Faivre 1994: 14-15) is maintained through mechanics of transmission which require that a pre-established channel be followed.

COMMUNITY AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF WICCA

A North American Example

North American witches have constructed formal Wiccan organisations such as Covenant of the Goddess (COG) and Reclaiming[3]. Covenant of the Goddess was incorporated as a non-profit religious organisation in the state of California on October 31st, 1975; it states that it is 'an umbrella organisation of co-operating autonomous Witchcraft congregations with the power to confer credentials on its qualified clergy'[4]. Covenant of the Goddess currently has one hundred and fifteen member covens[5], averaging from nine to thirteen members[6], divided into fourteen local councils, with further 'member' covens in areas where no local council exists. In addition, each local council has what is know as 'an assembly of solitaries', and there is a national assembly of solitaries composed of approximately twenty individuals. Covenant of

[3] Although it should be noted that many individual covens exist along similar lines to the British model and are not part of such umbrella organisations.

[4] The Covenant of the Goddess: An Overview (1994).

[5] A coven must have at least three members to qualify for membership.

[6] With one coven reputedly having an astonishing four hundred members!

the Goddess charges each member coven a tithe, the amount of which is set annually, to cover membership administration expenses, and credentials as priest/priestesses or as Elder priests/priestesses also carry an application fee[7]. It is regarded by some covens as too hierarchical an organisation, and they therefore choose not to be affiliated with it.

The Reclaiming Collective (dissolved in November 1997 and presently undergoing restructuring) is likewise registered as a non-profit religious organisation according to the provisions of the California Non-profit Religious Corporation law. Both organisations operate under extensive bylaws, which codify the operation of all members and member covens. Though each member and coven is regarded as autonomous, the Covenant of the Goddess in particular appears to be very hierarchically structured, with all 'officers' having to be eligible for Elder Priest/Priestess credentials; Reclaiming, on the other hand, has only two officers - a 'scribe' and a 'pursewarden'. Reclaiming has no credentials for priests and priestesses or elders, according to its bylaws, perhaps because, as one long-standing member of the Collective has stated, 'What Starhawk writes about is utopian . . . She sees the potential, but believe me, such is not borne out in actual communities (including the late Reclaiming Collective), at least not that I've seen. It's been a bitter irony for many of us'. The Reclaiming attempt to create a utopian community seems, therefore, to be

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[7] I have not been able to ascertain the amount of either the tithe in 1998 or the application fee for credentials. Since the fees are specified as covering expenses only, I would presume that the amount is nominal.

generally considered a failure, and its restructuring is regarded as a necessary development if the tradition of witchcraft it teaches is to continue in practice.

In Britain, however, despite the growing popularity of Wicca, large organisations have not been developed. Partly, this is no doubt due to the lack of legal and tax benefits to be gained in Britain. On the other hand, there is some evidence of problems with larger groups. Lynne Hume recounts the story of one group in Melbourne, Australia, which 'reached an unmanageable size of around five hundred people . . . A few people suggested they should legally incorporate the group thus giving it formal structure, and it was from this point on that things started to disintegrate. What started out with an egalitarian approach . . . turned into an organized group threatened with the imposition of hierarchies, political hagglings and disagreements, which defeated the purpose of the group's early beginnings' (Hume 1997: 104-5).

It is more likely, however, that historical and cultural influences have had considerable impact on the different formations of community on opposite sides of the Atlantic. On the one hand, North American feminist witchcraft is, as we have seen, largely an extension of the feminist consciousness raising movement of the 1970s, with Goddess imagery and the image of 'witch' being used for self- and societal-empowerment. Small, autonomous groups join together in large umbrella organisations which provide legal recognition, protection, and an extensive community in which new forms of societal experimentation can be explored. The emphasis is on egalitarian community, with a far less rigorous initiation programme or, indeed, no initiatory requirement for

entry at all. Feminist witches are less interested in tradition and tend to favour 'much looser, more open structures, many choosing leaderless groups' (Puttick 1997: 221).

On the other hand, Wicca in Britain styles itself as a modern-day, esoteric mystery religion, adopting the structure of secret, magical societies inherited from the occult revival of the *fin de siècle*. Wicca thus creates and maintains extremely resilient boundaries, operating through unstructured, changeable networks containing small, closed autonomous groups with no overarching organisational structure. The differences between feminist witchcraft and Wicca provoked a certain amount of tension during the late 1970s and 1980s. Mary Jo Neitz reports that 'some neopagans were angry about feminist disregard for their traditions (that is, initiation, hierarchy, and the importance of balancing male and female energy). What neopagans called "their traditions", feminists sometimes called "sexist" and "homophobic" (Neitz 1990: 368-9). However, as different manifestations of Wicca and witchcraft continue to develop, it appears that concerns become more to do with differentiation - a concern among Wiccans that they are not confused with feminist witchcraft, and assertions from feminist witches that they are 'not Wiccan'. We have already explored some of the differences between Wicca and feminist witchcraft, and concluded that they are indeed different entities. Our concern here is merely to show that these differences extend to the communities formed within the two types, and we can suggest that American feminist witchcraft resembles a social movement with a religious/spiritual centre, whereas Wicca in Britain remains a minority religion, esoteric by nature, and with little social experimentation.

Tradition and Lineage: The Structure of Wicca and Ritual Integration

Wicca is formed of networks of autonomous covens. Lacking the structure of conventional, mainstream religion, Wicca organises itself in loosely bounded, fluid networks which develop and maintain contact between individuals and groups, and define and defend boundaries. Individual covens tend to be small and fluid, whilst interrelations between covens are permeable, loosely structured, overlapping networks of individuals (Neitz 1994: 130). Relations between groups are likely to be based on personal ties among individuals who trained with the same teachers, or between teachers and their students, especially in the early days of a new coven. However, as a coven becomes more established over time, the leaders (and members) may make their own connections outside of the immediate 'family' network already in place. Thus, individuals and individual covens bond together through formal and informal networks - 'they share a community, but it is not based on residential propinquity nor on membership in a common association' (Neitz 1994: 131)

Wicca has no central authority or roof organisation - Wiccans are initiated and trained by more experienced Wiccans, but there is no official (or even unofficial) roof organisation of witches or covens[8]. The absence of centralised authority and the preference for small, intimate circles which are the basic units of Wicca, reflect the flexibility of interpretation of Wicca at the level of individual covens, though some informal integration does occur through participation in the rituals of other covens.

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[8] Russell (1991: 155) notes that although a number of organisations have been established, 'few have endured more than a year or two . . . These organizations are by and large tolerant, flexible, and undogmatic'.

There is no need or desire for a centralised organisational structure, and although this lack of central authority limits the potential impact of Wicca on society as a whole[9], as an initiatory, mystery religion operating in small, closed groups under vows of secrecy, Wicca has no absolute dogma to spread or enforce, preferring the diversity of interpretation and practice possible in a small, autonomous group structure. Training and credentials as priests and priestesses are not standardised, as in some of the North American Wiccan organisations discussed above, but must be continually renegotiated.

Diversity management

How, then, is such diversity managed? Within Wicca, individual and coven identity tends to be understood as a 'complex, multifaceted, and transient construct [in which] identities intersect to create an amalgamated identity' which is fluid and continually developing (Nkomo & Cox 1996: 348). Nkomo and Cox cite Stuart Hall to further emphasise their point: 'identity is not stable or fixed but socially and historically constructed and subject to contradictions, revisions, and change' (Hall 1992[10] in Nkomo & Cox 1996: 348). Diversity is not regarded as a 'problem', but rather it is embraced as an opportunity for shared learning and as a reflection of the diversity of

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[9] The effect of this lack of organisation will be interesting to follow up in future years, particularly in light of the tension between the growing popularity of Wicca in popular culture and Wicca's emphasis on initiation and secrecy outlined in Chapter One. As Russell points out, 'so long as witches remain unorganized, they will continue to be ineffective. Yet if they do organize and establish doctrine and authority - if they 'transform sacrament into corporation' – their appealing freedom and creativity will be compromised'.

[10] Nkomo & Cox do not provide page references.

Nature and of the Wiccan pantheon of Gods and Goddesses. Alice, an experienced Wiccan high priestess in her forties, explained the need for diversity within a coven:

> A coven can be made up of very diverse individuals [but] if they have been initiated according to the likes and dislikes of the initiator, it is probable that they will be much more similar to each other, and not as diverse. This can create an ambience whereby everyone reinforces each others' prejudices and limits understanding and growth. However, if people are too diverse they will never cohere together as a workable group. Getting the balance right is very tricky . . .

Diversity is seen to promote inclusiveness and individualism. The integrity and creativity of the individual are respected, valued and encouraged, with each member bringing to the coven their own particular interests and means of expression, and each coven providing Wicca with a multitude of diverse foci. Thus, rather than stressing conformity, managed diversity is used by both individuals and covens as a mechanism for defining and defending boundaries.

Beyond the specificity of the coven, groups within a particular Wiccan tradition share common boundaries and common ritual formats which facilitate joint rituals for special occasions such as initiations and festivals, and Wiccan covens within a particular geographical area may join together for such rituals. Identification as an initiate of a specific Wiccan tradition provides access to the network of that tradition, whilst proximity in time and space aids the development of local networks of covens.

At the widest level, the tradition is transmitted through the ritual of initiation, for it is only through the ritual of initiation that members of the community recognise a new member. There is thus a threshold between recognising oneself as Wiccan, yet being outside the community, and being recognised as a fellow initiate within the community. This transition point of the liminal realm is important to our understanding of Wiccan initiation and its effect on both group and individual.

Liminality and initiation

The concept of 'liminality' as referring to the threshold between defined social roles, position, or status was employed by Edmund Leach (1961) to describe the symbolic inversion of status norms in rites of passage as symptomatic of the 'liminal' realm. Mary Douglas (1966) likewise drew upon the concept of the 'liminal', largely in reference to Jewish dietary laws, arguing for the potency and sacredness that characterises such a realm. It is a term most often associated with the work of Victor Turner, however, and most influential for Turner was Arnold van Gennep's 1911 study of rites of passage, in which he outlined his three-stage model of separation, *limen*, and incorporation (van Gennep: 1960). The neophyte in a rite of passage, according to van Gennep, reflects these three stages in his or her outward symbolic behaviour (ibid.: 10,11,21; Turner 1967: 96). Both van Gennep and Turner concentrate on the importance of the liminal stage, as a phase dominated by symbols of transition, ambiguity and outsiderhood in which the neophyte is neither fully separated from their former life/status/self nor fully incorporated into their new one[11]. It is worth quoting Turner's description of the liminal at some length:

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[11] See van Gennep 1960: 93-4, 100-1, 115 and Turner 1967: 94, 96-8; 1969: 95; 1974: 273-4

> the attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (threshold people) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these people elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial . . . It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life (Turner 1969: 95).

In locating moments of transition between social statuses outside of social structure, Turner sets up liminality in opposition to social structure and makes the liminal realm a form of 'anti-structure'[12] during which the neophyte or initiand experiences an internal transformation reflected in external, symbolic behaviour. We can argue, following our characterisation in Chapter One, that Wicca as a mystery religion situates itself on the threshold, the *limen*, of mainstream religion and that, by identifying as witches, Wiccan initiates locate themselves on the threshold of mainstream society. However, initiates of Wicca retain their everyday identity in which they fully engage with society as a whole, and Wiccan initiation is therefore not concerned with change in social status. Rather, liminality in Wiccan initiation is used as a transition point 'betwixt and between' one spiritual state and another - the initiate moves from being one who has an interest in Wicca and perhaps identifies as a witch, to one who is an initiated Wiccan priest or priestess:

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[12] Turner uses 'anti-structure' to refer to that which is outside of, or opposite to, social structure.

I was standing naked, bound, and blindfold before and altar. I felt a hand touch my womb and a voice said, 'I consecrate thee with oil'. The hand then touched my left breast, my right breast, then my womb again, making the symbol of the downward pointing triangle[13]*. 'I consecrate thee with wine', the voice said and the same four movements followed, 'I consecrate thee with my lips, Priestess and Witch'... The ceremony drew to a close:*
'Take heed ye Mighty Ones of the East, that Vivianne has been duly consecrated a Priestess of the Great Goddess'

The final presentation to the Lords of the Watchtowers[14]*, the Lords of the four cardinal directions and it was done. I was sworn forever to the Gods, a Priestess and a Witch* (Vivianne Crowley, 1990a: 47, 59).

If Wiccan initiation is not concerned with changing social status (and indeed, is not a transition point recognised by 'society'), then what *is* happening to the initiate? As we have said already, the first degree initiation ritual in Wicca is not only a rite of admission, but is also designed to effect a spiritual transformation in which the status of the initiand changes from that of neophyte to that of Priest or Priestess, from outsider to insider, crossing the protective Wiccan boundaries of secrecy and of the

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[13] The downward pointing triangle is the symbol of the Wiccan First Degree, and also the symbol for the element of water within ceremonial magic. This is a further example of the legacy of the Golden Dawn for Wicca.

[14] The 'Watchtower' is a concept from the sixteenth century Enochian magic of John Dee and Edward Kelly, inherited by Wicca via the Golden Dawn.

circle[15]. The initiand thus crosses the threshold into the sacred ritual space of the Wiccan circle, and becomes part of the community of both the particular coven into which he or she has been initiated and part of the greater community of Wicca.

The initiate thus identifies him- or herself as an initiate of a specific coven and a specific tradition of Wicca. As we have noted in Chapter One, it is important to witches that distinctions are made between Wicca and witchcraft, and between various forms of Wicca, whilst retaining the notion of the 'Greater Craft', the community of all initiated witches. Thus, an initiate enters the core community of the coven, whose members he or she has come to know, and may be introduced to the wider 'family' of the tradition and of Wicca via a 'family tree' or through the presence of members of the wider community at the initiation ritual.

The 'Wheel of the Year'

As well as initiation, the common ritual framework provided by the Wheel of the Year is shared by all Wiccans. When celebrating one of the eight festivals that constitute

[15] Similarly, at Second Degree the initiate moves from 'Priestess' to 'High Priestess' or from 'Priest' to 'High Priest', a progression which symbolises the movement across inner thresholds within Wicca and, particularly, within oneself. See, for example, Crowley (1996: 195-7): '[t]he first degree is a time for sorting out our material lives and establishing ourselves on our chosen path . . . before we take the second degree we must have begun that journey into self-knowledge [in order to undertake] not an exterior quest, but an interior one, the quest for the Grail of the Self'. At third degree, a certain level of transmutation is expected to have taken place to the extent that 'a state of unitive consciousness in which there is no separation between Self and other, I and Thou' is attained: '*I and the other are One*' (ibid.: 222).

the Wheel of the Year, covens perform ritual in the knowledge that Wiccans country wide are doing likewise, thus creating further links between individual covens and particular traditions. The Wheel of the Year is of profound importance to an understanding of Wicca, representing the ritual framework of the year in which the seasonal changes in nature are celebrated and symbolised in the myth of the Goddess and God. On a collective level, the sequence of seasonal festivals which make up the Wheel of the Year constitutes a 'religious myth [which] weave[s] connections between humans and cause[s] persons and things to exist in 'mystic sympathy' with one another' (Durkheim 1965: 174 in Meštrovic 1992: 100). The pattern of the ritual framework and the cycle of the year are undoubtedly more or less fixed and repetitive, and the significance of each Sabbat making up the Wheel of the Year is dependent on its place in the complete ritual sequence[16].

That all the Sabbats are implicit in each other, despite being separated by intervals of six to eight weeks, evokes responses in the Wiccan understanding of the journey through life, for on an individual level, the Wheel of the Year is intended to be transformatory in nature[17]. In regular ritual gatherings, the core community of the coven becomes a context in which the individual members can explore and develop parts of their own personae, transforming themselves as they experience the rich ritual cycle of their religion, whilst the capacity for reflexive self-analysis in ritual authorises

[16] As Bell (1997: 175) points out, 'any one ritual within a periodic system is incomplete and meaningless by itself; its significance depends upon its place in the complete sequence'.

[17] cf. Harvey (1997: 13): '[p]rogress through several turns of this wheel further enables the individual to look back at their journey and evaluate their growth. The cycle is not, therefore, a treadmill but it enables considerable personal development in ways chosen by the festival celebrant'.

the practitioner's experience. One Wiccan priestess told me, six months after her first degree initiation, that every time she participated in a circle, particularly the Sabbats, she felt as if another door was opening within her and that she was understanding herself, Wicca, nature, the universe on a deeper level - that each ritual was like another initiation, and each festival marked a potent conjunction of time and place. Another witch, borrowing from Starhawk, emphasised the experiential dimension when she told me,

> it is within the measures of the spiral that we become uniquely ourselves, travelling deeper and deeper on the spiral, weaving the web as we go and coming to a greater understanding of ourselves, of nature, of ourselves as part of nature, with each turn of the Wheel.

Since the sequence of rituals is cyclical, there is no official beginning. For some witches, the festival of Samhain or Hallowe'en (October 31st) marks the start of the year, as it is believed to be the ancient Celtic New Year. For others, however, Imbolc (1st February) is the new year, marking the beginning of new growth in early spring. Thus, time is experienced as 'an ordered series of eternal re-beginnings and repetitions' (Smith 1982: 110-16 in Bell 1997: 175). Given the available literature, it could be assumed that Wiccan Sabbat rituals are all either similar or exactly the same wherever they are celebrated[18]; in fact, each coven I have had contact with in my fieldwork has

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[18] If one picks up Janet and Stewart Farrar's *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, one might be forgiven for thinking that here was the published and authorised ritual cycle of Wicca. However, this material is largely the research of the authors into customs relating to each sabbat, and the rituals *they* use; there is

worked rituals differently, though maintaining a common and recognisable framework for both the mythic cycle as a whole and for the particular rituals which are the Wheel of the Year's constituent parts. Thus, each coven will celebrate the birth of the Sun God, the Child of Promise, at Yule, on or near 21st December; the precise content of the ritual, however, varies considerably from year to year and from coven to coven.

By performing Sabbat rituals on a particular date, according to a shared theme which is integral to the mythic cycle as a whole, Wiccans create a sense of 'mystic sympathy'. The style and content of the rituals, however, reflect the identity of each separate coven: a coven with interests in ancient Greek mythology, for example, is likely to incorporate Greek imagery into their ritual, giving the Sabbat a different emphasis to a ritual performed by a coven with, say, Norse leanings. Thus, each coven operates according to their own ideas, theories, theo/alogy and worldview which are reflected in their rituals - a specific ritual worked by a specific coven is a local symbolic expression and contextualised manifestation of its worldview, as the coven asserts its own independence and identity.

In whatever format they are celebrated, however, the seasonal festivals of the Wheel of the Year tie in to the ever-changing cycle of Nature and provide a meaningful perspective for this passing of time and by attuning themselves through ritual with the

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little or no interpretation. In contrast, though the names of the sabbats remain the same, Vivianne Crowley presents an interpretation based on *her* training in Jungian psychology, and thus provides a different emphasis for the Wheel of the Year in her book *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Millennium*.

cycles of Nature, Wiccans gain greater understanding of their own life cycles. Through the Sabbat rituals, 'gods and humans are intimately and inextricably linked and energies flow from feminine to masculine and back again. Sexuality and death are emphasized as normal stages of an ever-repeating cycle of nature, in what Eliade calls the myth of the eternal return. By repeating the primeval deeds of the gods, humans become as gods, and through ritual the gods become alive once again as the human body becomes the vehicle for their descent' (Hume 1997: 124). The sacred is thus present in the mundane, the sun and the earth are perceived in close relationship to each other, the ordinary and the extraordinary are celebrated together in a multi-layered cycle of celebration as Wiccans observe and immerse themselves in the life-cycle of the Earth.

Sheldrake notes that the 'linking of calendars to the cycles of the moon and sun reminds us of the celestial context of our earthly life[19], and seasonal festivals celebrate the quality of the time of the year, and give it a sacred dimension' (1990: 186 in Carpenter 1996: 61). Certainly, the Wheel of the Year is common to almost all Pagan traditions, but to Wiccans the seasonal festivals are designed to do more than attune people to the cycles of Nature. As a mystery tradition, Wicca seeks to use the cycle to bring about transformation as each year goes by for 'the *transformation processes* . . . are in Wicca the rites and ceremonies of initiation, of the sabbats and of the circle' (Crowley 1996: 225). It is through journeying around the wheel that Wiccan initiates see themselves as gradually drawing towards the centre of the wheel through a process

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[19] i.e. this is a further example of the Hermetic concept of the link between the macrocosm and the microcosm.

of individual transmutation, whilst on a communal level the level of ritualisation 'has the powerful effect of tightly binding [each individual] to a small community of like-minded people' (Bell 1997: 193)[20].

Stronger bonds, however, may be made through simple bonds of friendship. Interpersonal attraction between members of a group and between members in different groups creates links that are external to the 'familial', lineage bonds made at initiation. The web-like structure of intercommunication is not, therefore, entirely dependent on lineage links for either its efficacy or its failure. Wiccans can and do lose contact with each other, even with the parent coven. One of the North West covens included in our case study in Chapter Two (Coven I) is an extreme example of the latter: the High Priestess and High Priest of the coven moved to Asia and their initiates therefore had to make their own contacts and links with covens in the North West after their move to the area in 1994. Such links have been built primarily on common interests and friendship in Coven I's case, yet not all Wiccans who maintain contact with each other do so out of friendship. Rather, there is a perception of all initiated Wiccans as 'brothers and sisters in the Craft', and a requirement to keep in touch, support each other, and celebrate together, whether one is particularly friendly with a fellow Wiccan or not. The importance of the Wiccan 'sisterhood/brotherhood' -

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[20] Indeed, Bell (1997: 193) suggests that what she terms 'extreme ritualization' produces a 'high-profile identity as a tight-knit group of *true* followers, a position that heightens the contrast and ill fit with other groups'. Whilst her concept of 'extreme ritualization' is applied to highly orthodox Jewish groups such as the 'Torah-true' Haredim rather than to Wicca, the point is worth noting in terms of the Pagan 'outsider' attitude towards 'elite' Wiccan 'insiders' which we considered in Chapter One and which will be picked up again in our Conclusion.

whether at the core (coven) level, or the peripheral (tradition, geographical, global) level - should not be underestimated.

Lineage

Wiccan stress on lineage - and thereby transmission of tradition - involves appropriation of the rhetoric of descent, using such familial terms as 'brothers and sisters of the Craft', 'mother (or parent) coven', 'daughter coven', and 'sister coven' to describe inter-group relations. Notably, these terms are nearly always feminine in orientation, emphasising a relationality based on those typically female traits which Durkheim depicted as empathy.

In contrast to communities of assent which are characterised by their missionary activities and persuasive rhetoric, entry into Wicca, by means of initiation, cannot be offered but must be asked for 'of one's own free will and accord'; the ultimacy of the decision to become a member of the community of a particular coven sits squarely with the individual's assent. Only once a wWiccan has, through initiation, entered the community of the coven does descent become relevant, as a means of mapping links to the wider Wiccan 'family'. The web of connections between covens is thereby personalised through the use of descent discourse, creating a sense of belonging for the individual which goes beyond the immediate coven into which he or she has been initiated. On both an individual and coven level, matrices of inter-relationship and interdependency ensure continuity whether or not the individual remains as an initiate within the Wiccan community, and whether or not the coven endures.

In this way, a sense of tradition is immediately appropriated by each new initiate, or each new coven, rather than a rootless small community arising *ex nihilo*, with links neither to past, present, nor future. Thus, the community of Wicca is never just localised - each coven is connected to every coven in its tradition by descent, each coven being a local instantiation of that particular tradition, and this is reinforced by each initiate copying out the Book of Shadows of their tradition. For the core community of the coven, identity is, to some extent, dependent on being part of a greater, already existing community which forms the basis of the identity of that particular tradition; such traditions, in turn, are dependent to some extent on the already existing community of Wicca, often referred to as 'the Greater Craft'. This identification with the Wiccan community beyond the local covens is a necessity, for as Morris has pointed out, '[f]or the local level to operate effectively at all, it requires that the community itself be part of some greater already-existing community and that this already-existing greater community be the basis of identity' (Morris 1996: 243).

Are Wiccan covens and their inter-group dynamics therefore an attempt to 'construct communities of assent' on the basis of 'recognition of the foundations of descent'? Morris asserts that 'only such a model can allow for the unique singularity of each member', which Agamben develops as '"inessential commonality" expressing the universal (essence) but one in which differences are not lost' (Agamben 1993: 16-16 in Morris 1996: 237). Certainly, the mutual operation of assent and descent in Wicca allows community to be created on two levels. Assent and recognition introduces the initiate into the core community of the coven, whilst descent and transmission establishes and maintains the connections between the individual coven and the

peripheral community of Wicca. Thus, Wicca incorporates different modes of membership: membership of the coven as local instance of community, and the Greater Craft as wider matrix. Within such a structure, Wicca supports and encourages individuality, diversity and plurality without denying the need for community, and may thus provide a viable alternative to the 'coercive' community or 'un-collection' of individuals of Paul Morris' question. How, then, do people find Wicca?

ACCESS TO WICCA: DIVERSITY AND CHOICE

The reasons people give for participating in religious activities and joining religious communities are an important area of study. American Pagans provided Margot Adler with six reasons for becoming involved in Paganism: development of the imagination, intellectual satisfaction, personal growth, links with feminism and the emphasis on Goddess worship, environmentalism, and freedom in religious belief and practice (Adler 1986: 22-23). In the postmodern era of detraditionalised community, then, reasons for membership are no longer based on remaining within the religion of one's upbringing. As geographic mobility and access to the information superhighway increase, so the religious choices available to people likewise increase: global consciousness affects individual, local choice. Wicca is now accessible through various sites on the internet[21], for example, and Wiccan/Pagan mailing lists allow

[21] Puttick (1997: 206) notes the existence of forty British Pagan groups on the Internet, including the Association of Hedgewitches, Dragon Environmental Group, the Fellowship of Isis, and the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. Pagan and Wiccan sites have continued to multiply as access to the Internet has increased, and a brief scan of the Internet in May 1999 revealed a 'Pagan and Wiccan Top 1000'

newcomers to talk to other Pagans all over the world[22]. How, then, do people come to join a religious group, in particular one as unusual as Wicca?

Finding Wicca, Finding a Coven

Growth

Wicca is non-proselytising[23], and an individual coven will only take on a small number of people over a long period of time. Thus, as we saw in our case study in Chapter Two, one North West coven took on a total of ten people over a seven year period, two of whom dropped out within the first year of membership, and a further two who dropped out within two years. Mass recruitment is neither desired nor feasible, since numbers are limited by practical considerations: covens perform private rituals held in someone's house (if they are not working outdoors), coven members often live some distance away from each other and it can therefore be difficult for meeting dates to be arranged if there are a large number of people. A further consideration is the issue of intimacy: secrecy, intense ritualisation, and ritual nudity

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sites (www.witchcraft.org/index.htm) linked to the web page of the Wiccan group, The Children of Artemis.

[22] Hume (1997: 96) notes that the spread of Paganism internationally is 'greatly facilitated by the World Wide Web and an increasing number of computer Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) which specifically serve the pagan community'. She notes that the 'techno-pagans' who frequent the BBS network could be considered a separate Pagan sub-group. See also 'Old Religions Meet the New Technology . . . Cyberpagans!' by Jem Dowse in *Pagan Dawn* issue 119 (Beltane 1996).

[23] The ideology being that 'when the student is ready, the teacher will appear' (Hume 1997: 95), a comment I have heard from Wiccans in Britain, who also say that 'people get the spiritual teacher they need'.

assume a high level of trust which is unlikely to be realisable in larger groups. Thus, whilst the maximum number of members in a coven, according to tradition, is thirteen, between six and ten initiates per coven is a more usual figure, and the average number of members in the North West covens in 1998, as we saw in Chapter Two, was five.

Contrary to Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge's assertion that, 'new religions[24] must grow rapidly or fail' (1985: 365), slow organic growth is the preferred norm in Wicca, and indeed is the most realistic means of increase. As a secretive, mystery religion Wicca does not penetrate a pre-existing social network, and membership is therefore rarely generated through initiation of people involved in social inter-relationships existing prior to coming to Wicca. Stark and Bainbridge's statement that new religions 'rarely amount to much because modern societies are so large [and] must grow at astonishing rates in order to reach significant size in a generation or two' (ibid.: 365) assumes that *all* 'new religions' have a desire to bring large numbers of people under their control and significantly affect society as a whole. Yet Wicca neither grows rapidly nor fails, and its structure in autonomous covens may be in part the reason for its organic growth which, although making it less likely that Wicca will become a mainstream religion, also ensures that it does not fail. Wicca is constantly formed and reformed by each new coven, providing a constancy of both transmission and religious innovation, and although some covens are short lived, and may even be said, in common parlance, to 'fail', there are many which endure for

[24] Stark and Bainbridge consider Wicca to be a new religion.

years, incorporating a whole variety of changes in their membership and structure as fully-trained members 'hive off'[25] to start their own group and new members arrive.

Origin of members

Where do new members originate? We have stated that Wicca does not penetrate pre-existing social networks, and using networks of friends or relatives as a means of recruiting people into Wicca is generally regarded by Wiccans as fraught with potential problems; any move which may be considered coercive negates the emphasis on entering Wicca 'of one's own free will and accord' and the stress on 'Know Thyself' as a basic instruction of the mystery tradition. It is also thought that initiating one's friends and relatives may make it difficult to maintain one's authority as High Priestess or High Priest. Nevertheless, in the North West covens eight initiates have entered Wicca through familial and friendship bonds. Two of these eight were partners of already-initiated Wiccans, two were siblings of the initiating High Priestess or Priest, and four had previous bonds of friendship to their initiator. Only two of those initiated with pre-existing bonds of friendship, however, knew their initiator before that initiator was themselves a High Priestess or High Priest, and had thus always known them at least partially as holding this position of authority. Often, a High Priestess or Priest will ask a friend or family member who wants to join Wicca to seek initiation elsewhere, in a coven where they do not know their potential initiator. The decision to initiate a person well known to them is ultimately down to the initiator, who will

[25] This term is used to describe the process by which Second or Third degree Wiccans leave the coven into which they were initiated to form their own coven.

decide whether she or he feels able to act as High Priestess or High Priest to that person.

Wider-ranging and more open networks and groupings, such as the Pagan Federation and its localised groups, could be seen as the social network which feeds Wicca - Wiccan symbols, rituals, and 'laws', as we have noted in Chapter One, have moved through the Pagan network which overlaps the Wiccan network, and a relatively similar worldview is often shared, at least to some extent. Rather than 'recruitment' or 'mobilisation', then, Pagans who join Wicca may be said to be 'carried over' (Neitz 1994: 135). However, most Wiccans do not appear to come into Wicca through Paganism - rather, they access the Pagan scene *after* their initiation as witches. In terms of the market economy, some notion of 'supply and demand' has entered Wicca. Thus on the one hand, one North West coven offers a neophyting[26] course on an 'as and when required basis' - that is, when enough people (usually a minimum of three) telephone and ask for a neophyting course, a training group is formed out of those people and a formal training course is held at the High Priestess' home. On the other hand, in the South of England, the Wicca Study Group and the Craft of the Wise run a series of workshops each year which are pre-advertised and held in public, rented rooms. A charge is made for the workshops, to cover the cost of renting a room, and training for a (relatively) large amount of people is facilitated.

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[26] 'Neophyting' is the name sometimes given to formal, pre-initiation training which might include such things as meditation and visualisation exercises, learning correspondences, reading mythology. In some covens, a neophyte initiation is required.

Entry points

The lack of central organisation and inherent secrecy of Wicca means that statistics regarding numbers of attendees at workshops and other Wiccan events are not readily available. However, the Wicca Study Group figures from 1991 to 1996[27] record one hundred and forty people attending two or more workshops in London. Of these, fifty eight (41%) are known to have been initiated into Wicca, and a further three were known to be preparing for initiation. Further attendees may have been initiated without the knowledge of the people involved in the running of the workshops, but we shall concern ourselves here only with those *known* to have been initiated. I attended the Wicca Study Group workshops as part of my fieldwork and noted that, though most attendees in my group were from London, I myself travelled from Hampshire, one person came from the Welsh border, and a number of people travelled from Essex. It is therefore impossible to say whether all fifty eight people were initiated into London covens, or how far they were spread over a wide geographical area. Of greater importance, however, is the fact that, averaged over the five year period, only eleven or twelve people per year were initiated into Wicca; thus, even when Wicca is made accessible, the rate of growth remains small.

There are thus a variety of means through which people come into contact with covens - from related networks, study groups, and workshops, to private letters and chance

[27] The only figures recorded. Information in personal communication from Vivianne Crowley, who organises the Wicca Study Group.

meetings[28]. It still remains, however, to question *why* people become initiated into Wiccan communities.

'Conversion' or 'Confirmation'? - Joining Wicca

McGuire (1997: 72; 74) posits three types of conversion - radical transformation, consolidation, and reaffirmation - and three conversion rhetorics - choice, change, and continuity. The rhetoric of continuity focuses on the extent to which one's new meaning system and self are the logical extension of earlier beliefs and experiences, and is contiguous with the type of conversions 'in which the new meaning system and self represent a consolidation of previous identities'. Consolidation and continuity would seem a valid expectation of the experiences of people joining Wiccan covens, but types of 'conversion' can be subject to further differentiation.

Conversion motifs

In an attempt to more accurately reflect the diversity of religious experience in both new religions and in the resurgence of traditional religions at the close of the twentieth century, Lofland and Skonovd (1983) have argued for an examination of 'conversion motifs' and proposed six such motifs. The first of these is the intellectual, cited as relatively uncommon but increasingly becoming important as a mode of entry into a religious community due to the widespread accessibility of information technology.

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[28] cf. Adler (1986: 14), 'In most cases, word of mouth, a discussion with friends, a lecture, a book, or an article provides the entry point'; and Hume (1997: 80), 'people come to Paganism through 'extensive reading on a wide variety of subjects or by meeting someone who was already a Pagan, or a combination of both'.

The second motif is the mystical, referring to an experience, or experiences, believed by the individual to be generated from outside him or herself; emotional arousal is high, sometimes involving ecstasis. Thirdly, the experimental conversion motif occurs commonly with New Age groups, involving a low degree of social pressure over a long term process of conversion. The affectional, fourth motif stresses the importance of bonds of affection during the conversion process. Fifthly, the revivalist motif refers to conversion caused by profound experience occurring within an emotionally aroused crowd. Lastly, the coercive motif concerns prolonged and intense external social pressure to embrace a religion, including brainwashing. In a study applying these conversion motifs to Wicca, Melissa Chapman (1995) found it necessary to add a seventh motif, 'recognition', because '[f]or many Wiccans the 'conversion' happens long before the religion becomes apparent'. Thus the recognition motif 'may only be relevant to minority religions such as Wicca which are not immediately available to the religious querent' (1995: 5). As the only extant quantitative account of motivations for people seeking and gaining initiation into Wicca, Chapman's findings are of extreme relevance to the current study.

Chapman's Findings

Chapman's study of conversion to Wicca was based on pilot interviews of six subjects, followed by a field study of one hundred and two initiated Alexandrian and/or Gardnerian witches conducted by questionnaire. Of these, fifty six were female and

forty six male, the mean age was thirty five and a half[29], forty were Gardnerian witches, three were Alexandrian, and fifty nine were both Alexandrian and Gardnerian. Forty five people were initiated to first degree, thirty one to second degree, and twenty six to third degree. In Chapman's study, the coercive motif showed very low presence, affectional and revivalist motifs were moderate, and the intellectual and mystical motifs showed a high presence. Older witches showed considerably less experimentation than younger witches.

Given that studies of Wicca are a recent development, and given that witches have to investigate religious alternatives in order to discover Wicca, the high presence of the intellectual motif is unsurprising despite Lofland and Skonovd's findings that it is uncommon. In many cases, covens do not advertise their existence[30], and in cases where covens do advertise, it is often in a fairly closed way, in magazines obtainable only by membership in a wider Pagan organisation, such as the Pagan Federation, where independent regional newsletter may carry adverts that a coven in a specific area has room to take on suitable trainees. Very often, prospective initiates will come by word of mouth, or from writing to a public address (such as BM Deosil) which may send letters on if it knows of a coven in the vicinity of the person writing. Other options may be through a course, such as the Wicca Study Group or Craft of the Wise, which offer workshops through which attendees might find a group of people with

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[29] Note that the average age of Wiccans in Chapman's study is very close to the mean age of thirty five produced in Chapter Two of this thesis, and well within the range suggested by the survey, fieldwork and case study included in our thesis.

[30] A characteristic shared by Wicca in Australia according to Hume (1997: 94), who notes that advertising is an uncommon mode of entry and that groups are difficult to find.

which to work on a casual basis, or may meet a High Priestess or High Priest of an existing coven which has room for new members. Thus, the inaccessibility of Wicca requires a high degree of searching, and this time plus the pre-initiation waiting period contribute to reading and thinking prior to membership in a coven. Since Wicca is a self-styled mystery religion, the similarly high presence of the mystical motif is consistent with the nature of the religion, and again contributes to the significant presence of the intellectual conversion motif.

The experimental motif requires further examination. According to Lofland and Skonovd's definition, experimentation is linked to social learning, situational adjustment, or intensive interaction. In Wicca, this can only happen after initiation, although interaction at a less intense level than that which occurs within a coven is becoming more feasible through workshops and open rituals organised by such bodies as the Pagan Federation, thus explaining the higher presence of the experimental motif among younger witches. Even this low degree of interaction would not have been possible prior to initiation before the late 1980s. In general, people seeking Wiccan initiation are only able to experiment 'blind' with techniques and philosophies derived from other related subjects (such as magic) or books providing outlines of Wicca and ritual. The increased number of such books has increased the level of experimentation, but also overlaps with the intellectual conversion motif[31].

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[31] Hume (1997: 80) comments: 'modern Paganism depends to a great extent upon the literate world. The availability of books, newsletters, computer networks, television and various forms of media, are imperative to the knowledge and spread of Paganism'.

Chapman found the relevance of the revivalist motif to be moderate, a finding which 'would be unlikely to have occurred . . . before the snowballing revival of Pagan Spirituality eroded the closely guarded secrecy of [Wicca]. The fact that people are reporting revivalist conversion experiences within a Wiccan paradigm indicates the extent to which open festivals and Wiccan type workings have taken off in recent years' (1995: 11). The negative correlation Chapman found between age and level of experimentation is also consistent with this revival of Pagan spirituality, but apart from more females reporting a higher degree of pressure to join Wicca, Chapman found no differences by tradition, degree, age or gender, showing a marked heterogeneity of conversion profiles.

Of most interest to our concern, however, is Chapman's additional motif of 'recognition', which showed the highest presence in her results. Participants in Chapman's pilot study responded negatively to the idea of conversion, regarding themselves as Wiccan prior to confirming this identity with initiation. She reports four out of the six pilot study subjects using the same words, 'coming home', to describe initiation - treating initiation as confirmation of an identity they already had, as consolidation rather than conversion[32]. My own fieldwork among the same subject group[33] supports Chapman's findings, with witches referring to a feeling of 'coming

[32] See also Harvey (1997: 192), 'People do not convert to Paganism and thus do not "become" Pagan'; Adler (1986: 20) relates her own experience: 'Like most Neo-Pagans, I never converted in the accepted sense - I never adopted any new beliefs. I simply accepted, reaffirmed, and extended a very old experience. I allowed certain kinds of feelings and ways of being back into my life'.

[33] i.e. Alexandrian and/or Gardnerian Wiccans.

home' either when they found Wicca, or when they were finally initiated[34]. Some spoke of there being 'no choice', indicating that being a witch, for them, is non-negotiable.

A Wiccan High Priestess of some fifteen years experience explained how she came into Wicca:

> *"I was in the middle of doing a largely scientifically based psychology degree many years ago. Walking very quickly along a path between trees and tennis courts, I was in a mini panic because I was late for an important lecture. The wind was howling and my mind was racing - hardly the most conducive state of mind for a mystical experience. I remember that quite suddenly everything became still and calm, and there was total silence. Looking up from the path, I was highly alarmed to find fog all around me, and that I was apparently alone, which had not been the case a few seconds earlier. Through the fog a male voice spoke, saying, "I am Cerenunnos Lord of the Trees, will you come to me?" Utterly bewildered, I didn't say a word, and all I can say is that I wondered who the hell Cerenunnos was, never having encountered anyone by that name before. Looking around I could see no-one, and only just make out an outline of a tree swaying nearby. Then the voice asked the question again,*

[34] This sense of 'coming home' appears to be applicable across the board. Lynne Hume reports that, among her respondents in Australia, "[m]any say that they felt they were 'coming home' or it felt 'like home', as if all that they had done before was leading up to this homecoming, coupled with the sense of Paganism as being 'right', not in an intellectual sense, but rather in an emotional sense" (1997: 91). Hume calls 'conversion' to Wicca and Paganism 'volitional' conversion (ibid.: 90).

and still I did not reply. Then just as fast as it had all happened, the fog lifted, the noise returned and I was with other students rushing with heads down along the path."

"What do you do with an experience like that? Not rush off to the nearest coven of Witches and ask to be initiated, that's for sure. In fact, I didn't know it had anything to do with Witches at this time. . . I look[ed] up the name Cerenunnos to see who it was. After a false start where I looked under 'S', since the name sounded like Serenunnos, I found the name Cernunnos (pronounced Ker-nunnos) the Horned God of ancient times, a stag god of the greenwood. As a footnote in the book was a mention that he might be linked to Witches and the Christian devil image. During research for my thesis on menstrual taboos, a subject I was sure was wholly unconnected . . . Witches just kept popping up, and when I looked into them, there he was again, the Horned God, Cernunnos, in pictures and writing."

It was only after she had worked out that Cernunnos and the witches were inextricably linked, that she found witches still existed and came into contact with modern Wiccans. Six months later, she was duly initiated. Her story clearly shows the mystical and intellectual motif, in that she had an experience that seemed to be generated from outside herself, which she then reacted to by looking up the name she had been given and reading about Cernunnos. There is, however, no evidence of the experimental, affectional, revivalist, or coercive motifs. Recognition is not explicitly stated in Alice's account, but it is implied in her efforts to find out about witches and

seek initiation once she found that Cernunnos was linked to Wicca. The recognition motif is expressed explicitly, however, in Medea's account of her entry into Wicca:

> *"I was quite happily getting on with my life when the 'call' came. Suddenly something clicked in my mind - it was as if I suddenly woke up, as if I had been going through most of my adult life in a kind of coma, functioning, having a great time, but with my eyes closed. I can't put my finger on what actually happened. I remember it was July/August time, and I had gone to Salisbury. There was a bookshop there which no longer exists, and I bought a book on Goddesses and I knew deep within me that this was important, that the Goddess did exist and that I was part of her. Well, that was it - things haven't stopped since. It was really a very quick leap from this Goddess book to Wicca, and Vivianne's [Crowley's] book had an address which people could write to. I did, and enrolled on a correspondence course since there appeared to be no covens in my area. I flew through the course, joined lots of organisations, went along to Pagan Federation events, and came into contact with the covens into which I was eventually initiated. And I've never looked back. It was no great revelation, I knew people existed who called themselves witches, for I had come across them in California, really I'd say it was a deeply-felt recognition, a 'coming home', which is what everyone says but that's because it's true! Especially the priestess bit - more so than the witch, that was what I felt totally comfortable with. So even when I was initiated, it wasn't like a great momentous change, though obviously it was an important step to take. No, it was more like a sigh of relief - I'd found where I was*

supposed to be quite early on in my life, which made me feel quite lucky. After all, I could have spent my whole life looking for this [Wicca] and maybe never found it, or only found it at the end of my life. Yes, relieved is what I felt".

Emotional/spiritual recognition is the overriding emphasis in Medea's story, though the intellectual and mystical also have a strong presence[35].

Recognition

Recognition as motivation for initiation into Wicca has direct implications for the way in which Wiccan covens are organised, and on the structure of Wicca as a whole. Based on Chapman's quantitative analysis and my own qualitative fieldwork, I would suggest that recognition of oneself as Wiccan is indeed an inherent factor in finding a coven and seeking initiation in British Wicca; that is, recognition of oneself as Wiccan comes *prior* to actual initiation. Such recognition does not, however, give a potential Wiccan initiate access to Wicca - the organisational structure of Wicca necessitates recognition from, and acceptance by a coven in order for initiation to proceed. In this way, Wicca maintains its boundaries and preserves its integrity as a mystery religion operating through small, closed groups, intimate community constructed with initiatory rites of entry, passwords, rules of secrecy, and ritual communitas. Thus, one can recognise oneself as a witch, or as a Wiccan, but initiates of Wicca only recognise as fellow Wiccans those who have been admitted into the core community of a coven through a Wiccan rite of initiation. This recognition specifically links Wicca to the

[35] See also Vivianne Crowley's account of her own entry into Wicca (Crowley 1990a: 58), which shows spiritual/emotional recognition and intellectual motifs.

esoteric notion of transmission as formulated by Faivre - an accepted ritual of initiation by an appropriate person qualified to perform such a ritual, providing entry into an authentic coven, clearly reflects Faivre's assertion that 'a person cannot initiate himself any way he chooses, but must go through the hands of an initiator' (Faivre 1994: 15).

Those qualified to perform the first degree initiation are High Priests and Priestesses initiated to the second and third degree. Here, we find even greater stress on the notion of transmission, for it is during the second degree initiation ritual that the power of the tradition is willed into the person being initiated, thus enabling them to initiate others into the tradition. As Vivianne Crowley[36] explains,

> The initiator then kneels and places his or her left hand under the initiate's knee and his or her right hand on the initiate's head to form what is called *the magical link* and says:
>
> I will all my power unto thee.
>
> The initiator wills all the magical power that he or she has accrued into the initiate via the base of spine and crown chakras. This is not only the initiator's

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[36] Crowley's descriptions and interpretations of transmission and High Priest/esshood are, to our knowledge, the only ones extant at the present time. We therefore rely upon them for this thesis. However, as we have indicated in Chapter Two, studies of Wicca can become outdated very quickly and there is thus a constant need for up-to-date research. Similarly, writings by practitioners on Wicca are also increasing and diversifying. We might therefore expect further such descriptions to become available in the future, at which point it will be possible to provide greater contrasts and enlarge the discussion.

> personal power, but a cumulative legacy of Witch power from all those who have been in the initiatory chain . . . the aim is to make the initiate equal in magical power to the initiator (Crowley 1996: 197).

Accompanied by a Second Instruction or teaching which complements that given in the first degree, esoteric teaching is here unequivocally passed from initiator to initiate[37], and it is this passing on of the tradition which enables a new second degree priest or priestess to initiate others into their tradition of Wicca. This type of transmission seems to suggest that Wiccans must be initiated by someone already in the tradition in order to become members themselves. Wicca thus reflects Faivre's assertion that arbitrary self-initiation does not provide someone with access to the tradition, and neither does recognition in and of itself.

Descent, Assent and Recognition

The recognition factor in seeking initiation into Wicca does, however, raise substantial questions as to the nature of the Wiccan religion and community. There are very few people who grew up as Wiccans, but a new generation of children is being brought up by Wiccan parents[38]. As a result, books are being produced to help Wiccan and Pagan

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[37] Faivre uses the terms 'master' and 'disciple', which seem inappropriate to the relationship between initiate and initiator in Wicca. Initiates do not regard themselves as 'disciples' of their initiator, and initiators do not regard themselves as 'masters'; rather, a hierarchy of experience is acknowledged (which we shall explore later in this chapter), and therefore the notion of transmission from initiator to initiate nevertheless remains.

[38] No figures are available for the UK. Helen Berger (1999: 83) estimates that there are 82,600 children currently being raised in U.S. neo-pagan families. It is important to note that these children are not

parents in the upbringing of their children. The Pagan Federation, for example, has published *A Pagan Child's ABC* by Jeremy and Arihanto, and a children's booklet on the eight Pagan festivals by Sandy B; and New Wiccan Publications published D. Weardale's *The Pagan Child*, which is described as 'a handbook for teachers, carers, childminders and all those involved in looking after the children of Pagan parents'. A workshop on parenting was held at the 1994 Pagan Federation conference, and by 1996 a Pagan Family Newsletter was being produced. *Pagan Dawn* issue 114 (Imbolc 1995) carried an article on Pagan parenting and the first in a series of advice columns to 'deal with the problems surrounding Pagan Families' (ibid.: p.19). Such 'problems' appear to take the form of children sharing secrets at school, indulging' curious friends with tales about [their parents'] practices and beliefs' (ibid.: 18), with the resulting fear of bullying or, even worse, the involvement of social services.

The children of Wiccan parents tend to be encouraged to learn about many different religious traditions, beliefs and practices, and the mythology of comparative religions and civilisations. Wiccan parents do teach their children to respect nature, and will often perform celebratory rituals with their children at the festivals, often because the children have asked to be included but are not allowed to join in the adult rituals. One Wiccan couple with children aged between six and ten, for example, have Hallowe'en parties specifically for the children, where they can dress up, bob for apples, play

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regarded as 'Pagan' or 'Wiccan' children, but as children of 'Wiccan/Pagan parents'. Pagan parents are careful not to indoctrinate their children, deeming it important that their children are left to make their own choices when they are old enough. Pagan Parenting would be an interesting and valuable area for new research in the future.

games, and tell each other 'spooky' stories. The children have a great deal of fun and feel that they are doing something special rather than being left out of their parents' special time of year. Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter are also celebrated with children in mind, though often with an emphasis on myth and narrative; thus, Easter eggs can be explained as a symbol of fertility and new life, and the Easter bunny as the hare, a symbol of the Saxon goddess Eostre. The relationship between Pagan festivals and Christian celebrations are thus outlined, perhaps giving the children of Wiccan parents access to a greater range of traditional religious practices. Thus, whilst children are clearly influenced by their parents' beliefs and practices, they are not under any pressure to 'convert'.

These children will not, therefore, become Wiccans by descent - they are not deemed to be Wiccan because they were born to Wiccan parents, and they will have to recognise themselves as Wiccan and assent if they wish to seek initiation when they are old enough to decide their spiritual path for themselves. Wicca can, however, be portrayed as acting in imitation of a religion of descent, in that one cannot choose one's community of descent - one recognises oneself as Wiccan, and one's community is therefore Wicca. Yet, assent is necessary in order to become part of that community, since initiation must be sought and asked for. If one does not do so, then one's community remains outside of Wicca, within the wider Pagan community which does not form initiatory groups.

The level of personal communal commitment required in Wiccan covens precludes anything less than an *a priori* acceptance of one's identity as Wiccan before initiation,

yet the necessity of initiation as confirmation of such identity and as means of acceptance into the Wiccan community requires assent; as Hume points out, 'the initiation ceremony is a group acknowledgement of membership, because it is thought that one is really a witch 'from within'' (1997: 98). Thus, from the perspective of the initiand, Wicca may be seen as a community of assent which demands vows made 'of one's own true will and accord'. From the perspective of those already within the community, Wicca may be seen as a community of descent, since those already initiated are consciously aware of their lineages and web of connections. Perhaps what may be true of both insider and outsider's perspective is the description of Wicca as a religion, or community, of recognition and transmission. One must recognise oneself as Wiccan prior to seeking the initiation through which the tradition is transmitted.

THE COVEN: CORE COMMUNITY

Cohesion

As noted earlier in this chapter, diversity is celebrated within Wicca rather than treated as problematic. Within covens, individual, personal identity is maintained, and a high degree of similarity in lifestyle is not deemed necessary for the cohesiveness of the group. Thus, in my fieldwork I have found group composition to be extremely varied - covens may include students, self-employed business people, housewives, nurses, high-flying executives, consultants, civil servants, the unemployed, teachers, computer technicians and a multitude of other professions. 'Sacred' identity takes precedence over 'social' identity partly because, as Amy Simes has noted, '[Wiccans] are scarce on the ground, [so] groups will often be composed of people who would never otherwise

interact' (1996: 178). Inter-member attraction does, however, affect group cohesiveness and functioning. McGrath and Altman, in their survey of small group research, found that '[o]ne of the results of high member attraction toward one another . . . is an increased communication rate [for] [p]eople communicate with those they like, and in doing so they show less aggressiveness and defensiveness, fewer communication difficulties, and more attentiveness to others' (1966: 61), all of which are desirable for the functioning of intimate communities. Furthermore, 'high congeniality, cooperativeness, [and] mutuality of liking' (ibid.: 61) indicate high cohesion among group members. In Wicca, however, such cohesion is created through specific mechanisms as well as through natural attraction between coven members.

Firstly, the inaccessibility of Wicca ensures that potential initiates have had to search for a suitable coven and, through a period of pre-initiation training and waiting, have gelled with the group enough for the coven to consent to accept a new member. This qualifying period aids in boundary maintenance, creating 'outsiders' as well as the community of the coven[39]. Since covens, as we have seen, consist of close-knit groups of anything from two to thirteen people, meeting in private homes and forming intimate communities, it is imperative that any new person coming into the coven can be trusted and incorporated into the group, and such boundaries are therefore

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[39] Hume (1997: 97) notes in Australia that some covens have an 'inner court' of initiates and an 'outer court' consisting of interested people, seekers, or those working towards initiation. In Britain, the only 'outer court' I have come across are neophytes (i.e. people working towards initiation), but even in these cases, the neophytes have often undergone a preliminary initiation and are accepted as part of the coven community, albeit at a less committed level than those initiated to first degree and above.

necessary. The bonding of a group, however, is a gradual process, beginning during the pre-initiation period and increasing with the commitment of initiation and after initiation until the new member is fully incorporated into and active within the group. Thus, initiates who move from one coven to another, although already a part of Wicca and perhaps of the same tradition as the new coven, are often required to undergo a further initiation in order to become part of the community of that particular coven[40], for the bonds created through initiation provide an essential sense of security and trust.

Secondly, mechanisms within the ritual of first degree initiation aid the bonding process. The initiand is required to become vulnerable and enter the magic circle as a child, approaching the circle naked and blindfold as a symbolic representation of their openness and vulnerability as they join the coven. The practice of ritual nudity is thus considered important from the point of entry into the coven, and as those already initiated are also naked, this is one of the early methods of bonding the coven community - everyone present must be prepared to make themselves vulnerable and to trust each other. The initiand is also bound with three cords as a symbolic representation of his or her willingness to bond with the coven and, towards the end of the ritual, the initiand's measure is taken[41] and kept by the initiators as a symbolic reminder of the their responsibility towards the initiate, and of the initiate's responsibility to the coven and to Wicca. The measure is usually returned to the

[40] Contrary to Hume's assertion that 'if one has a recognized lineage, a witch will probably be accepted into a similar coven anywhere in the world' (1997: 100).

[41] Using thread, measurements are taken round the head, chest, groin and the length of the body. These are, of course, the traditional measurements for the winding sheet and coffin, and are considered to be of great psycho-spiritual and magical importance.

initiate after the Third Degree initiation, when the initiate is regarded as fully independent and responsible for him- or herself. Additionally, commitment to the coven, tradition and Wicca as a whole is promoted through intimate communication. This includes the giving of two (traditionally secret, but long-since published) passwords for entering the magic circle at initiation - 'Perfect Love' and 'Perfect Trust'. The concepts of perfect love and perfect trust are mutually accepted by all Wiccans, and are emphasised by the oaths of secrecy and protection taken at initiation.

Thus, an initiate enters the core community of the coven, whose members he or she has come to know, and may be introduced to the wider 'family' of the tradition and of Wicca via a 'family tree' or through the presence of members of the wider community at the initiation ritual. The commitment demanded at initiation is aimed, for the most part, at creating reliable and close personal bonds at the core and, to a lesser extent peripheral, levels. The initiate has become part of the relational Wiccan community and will be expected to participate in all rituals as a priest or priestess of the coven. Such participation is considered a responsibility as well as a right, and will further bond the new initiate with the other members of the group.

Given the intense nature of the coven community, we must briefly consider the effect when people leave. Ronald Hutton has noted that '[c]ovens tend to resemble lobster pots in reverse, being very difficult to enter and very easy to leave' (Hutton 2000, forthcoming). It is difficult to be sure of the effects people leaving can have on a coven. On the one hand, those hiving off to form their own coven tend to be leaving in what can be seen as a positive manner, though this is not always the case; yet,

losing people who have been in the parent coven for perhaps five years or more necessarily requires a period of adjustment. On the other hand, some people leave covens through disagreements or because it was not what they expected, and this can prove to be a very difficult time for a coven if intense bonds are broken in an acrimonious fashion.

One coven with which I worked, for example, had an initiate leave five months after his initiation. The parting was not over a disagreement and nor was it acrimonious, yet the people involved found it difficult because this particular priest just disappeared after a phone call to say he was leaving, and never discussed his reasons. The coven's High Priest told me that it was not the fact that he had left which was upsetting, but the manner in which he did it. The coven was affected for some months afterwards, as everyone wondered what they had done wrong and if they were to blame, but quickly they came to the conclusion that the priest must simply have decided that Wicca was not what he had expected, and that he was not willing to put in the hard work involved[42]. It is, however, difficult to follow up people who have left and ask what their reasons are.

Amy Simes reported on a Gardnerian coven in her research which had lost two long-standing members over a disagreement. She says, 'The change was sudden and, from the point of view of the High Priest, quite distressing. Yet shortly afterwards he was

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[42] Hume (1997: 104) surmises that some people who join Wiccan and Pagan groups do so as a symbol of rebellion, and that such people 'do not maintain membership for very long as they are not prepared to do the work involved in the training and when the initial shock value dissipates, so does their interest'.

able to speak philosophically about it, allowing for the fact that such things do occasionally occur for a reason, and perhaps in time everyone would come to see the change as being for the best' (Simes 1996: 177).

Coven Structure

Wiccan coven structure consists of a High Priestess and/or High Priest who run the coven, training and initiating new members, and guiding the group[43]. Membership consists of first and second degree initiates, and perhaps some third degrees. It is usual, however, for third degrees to leave the parent coven to form their own group or work with a partner, and it is becoming increasingly common for second degree couples to also 'hive off' and start their own coven, though under the guidance of the parent coven rather than as fully independent. Vivianne Crowley describes the structure as 'more of a loose net than a hierarchical pyramid' (Crowley 1994: 102), for although in practice the High Priestess and High Priest hold ultimate authority, all initiates are priests and priestesses[44]. In an interview with Crowley, Elizabeth Puttick

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[43] In North America, some High Priestesses call themselves 'Lady X' and High Priests expect to be addressed as 'Lord Y'. Lynne Hume also notes this 'pseudo title system' in Western Australia (Hume 1997: 98). In fieldwork, texts, rituals or informal talk, however, I have never come across the use of 'Lord' and 'Lady' as titles by British Wiccans, although sometimes the God and Goddess are referred to as the 'Lord' and 'Lady'.

[44] In some covens, all members contribute towards the cost of candles, incense, and other equipment, which may aid in fostering a feeling of equality. However, of the nine groups with which I worked closely during my fieldwork, only two shared the financial burden of running the coven between all members. The High Priestess and High Priest bore the cost alone in the other seven covens. One High Priestess told me that this was partly because she expected to provide for her initiates whilst they were training, and partly because she had known covens where everyone did contribute and this eventually

asked about the egalitarian nature of Wicca as opposed to the master-disciple relationship of guru cults:

> I suppose the difference from a cult with a guru is that the assumption in Wicca is that people will progress through the three levels [of initiation] and emerge at the same level as the leader, so the emphasis is on training people up to the same level as oneself, though it's recognised that when they come in there's a difference of experience (Puttick 1997: 215).

Thus, within the coven degrees of initiation are not regarded as hierarchical but as a measure of experience and ability attained by individual initiates. However, no standard or benchmark exists against which initiates can be measured before they are given a further degree. Rather, a candidate's readiness for a further initiation is judged by the initiating High Priestess or High Priest, often in consultation with her or his partner, and after discussion with the initiate. An inherent hierarchy does therefore exist within covens, for although the High Priestess and High Priest function nominally as equals, the High Priestess is ultimately regarded as the highest authority within the group.

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had led to the initiates taking issue over items bought by the High Priestess. In fluid structures where members enter for training and leave after, say, five years to set up their own group, it is perhaps easier to ensure ownership of items by buying one's own equipment rather than having 'coven goods' which remain with the High Priestess and High Priest even though membership changes.

Female Leadership

Female leadership is an important constitutive element of Wicca, and has implications for the way in which covens are organised. Elizabeth Puttick suggests that theological legitimisation of female inferiority has made religious leadership by women extremely rare (1997: 175), for 'the lack of respect or even acknowledgement of the divine feminine legitimates the lack of female leaderships within [the Judeo-Christian] religions' (ibid.: 196). In New Religious Movements, however, Stark and Bainbridge postulate that 'one of the things that attracts particularly ambitious women . . . is the opportunity to become leaders or even founders of their own religious movements (1985: 414, cited in Puttick, 1997: 176), and Puttick agrees that lack of opportunity for leadership within mainstream religion may sometimes drive women to embrace a completely different tradition[45]. In contrast to mainstream religion, Puttick (1997: 213) claims that 'women have always been pre-eminent in esoteric traditions', noting the prominent position of women in the occult revival of the *fin de siècle*[46], and citing in particular 'the esoteric tradition, particularly adhered to in Wicca but upheld by earlier magicians such as Dion Fortune, that feminine qualities are in the ascendant in the inner world where magic takes place' (ibid.: 213). Puttick also points out that, although Wicca was founded by a man, Gardner had a great deal of help from Doreen Valiente, based many of his ideas on Margaret Murray's theories and Leland's account of an Italian witch-cult led by priestesses, and claimed to have been initiated by

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[45] Hume (1997: 83) appears to concur with this assumption, reporting that women who became involved in Paganism claim to experience an 'instinctual feeling which grows the more they question the validity of prevailing structures that exclude women from a priesthood centred around male ideology'.

[46] Women like Maud Gonne, Moina Mathers, Florence Farr, Annie Horniman, Helena Blavatsky, and Dion Fortune, all of whom we have noted as influential in Chapter Three of this study.

Dorothy Clutterbuck (ibid.: 189). Women have therefore been a guiding influence on the development of Wicca since its inception.

Susan Starr Sered (1994) has written extensively on the nature of religions dominated by women, in which there is no discrimination against women on any level of leadership or participation. Although Sered does not consider Wicca *per se*, her examination of women in positions of religious power is applicable to the present discussion. Religions with strong female elements are found to have an interpersonal rather than individualistic orientation, using ritual to strengthen bonds between people through personal interaction, and using their homes as ritual spaces (Sered 1994: 121; 237). The primary concern of such religions is 'with people rather than rules', and rules therefore tend to be local, situational and context related, with no absolute morality, rather than codified: '[w]omen are often more likely to think in terms of process, interdependence, and conflict resolution, rather than justice and law' (ibid.: 156). Women's leadership styles have been the subject of a number of recent studies[47], some of which argue that women have a democratic and participative, rather than hierarchical leadership style[48], and some of which find no difference in style

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[47] Eagly, A.H. & Johnson, B.T. (1990), 'Gender and Social Influence: a social psychological analysis' in *American Psychologist* 38 (9): 971-81. Information from Nkomo, Stella M. and Taylor Cox Jr. (1996), 'Diverse Identities in Organizations' in Clegg, Stewart R., Cynthia Hardy & Walter R. Nord (eds), *Handbook of Organizational Studies*, SAGE: London

[48] Rosener, J. B. (1990), 'Ways women lead', in *Harvard Business Review*, November-December: 119-25.

between *successful* male and female leadership styles[49]. Such studies, however, are based on management in the work place, where one could expect successful women managers to emulate the acceptable style of successful male managers, and conclusive evidence for different leadership styles has still to be secured. Within religious traditions, however, women leaders claim that 'feminine qualities such as love, tolerance, compassion, understanding and humility are also qualities of leadership' which should be balanced with 'courage, determination, clear thinking and self-respect' (Sudesh 1993: 40 cited in Puttick 1997: 180).

Puttick comes to the conclusion that women exhibit a variety of leadership styles in religion, which can roughly be classified under three types - male-identified, feminine, and non-gendered or androgynous (1997: 192). Blavatsky's insistence on wearing men's clothes, being called 'Jack', and denial of ever having given birth to her son is cited as an example of male-identified leadership (ibid.: 193). Women who identify with motherhood as a defining characteristic tend towards a feminine style of leadership, emphasising qualities such as nurturing and compassion as conducive to spiritual growth (ibid.: 194). The androgynous type is regarded by Puttick as 'the most flexible and relevant model of female leadership for the future [and] steers a middle path between imitating and cultivating the traditional masculine models, with the danger of taking on their flaws to an even greater degree, or adhering too closely to a feminine model, which lacks toughness in a confrontation or crisis' (ibid.: 194).

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[49] Powell, G. (1990), 'One more time: do female and male managers differ?' in *The Academy of Management Executive*, 4: 68-75.

Within Wicca, we can observe all three of Puttick's suggested styles. Susan Greenwood (1996: 198) has noted absolutist, male-oriented High Priestesses operating within Wicca, and she quotes from her fieldwork notes, '[t]he absolute power of the High Priestess is amazing - she has the ability to paralyse individual thought, creativity and enthusiasm; her control is absolute, stifling alternative views and ideas'. My own fieldwork, on the other hand, brought me into contact with predominantly feminine-inclined High Priestesses who valued the 'motherly' qualities of nurturing and compassion to facilitate spiritual growth in their initiates. Given the intimacy of Wiccan covens and the fact that the ritual space is usually in the home of the High Priestess, it is perhaps not surprising that a feminine style of leadership, which is also capable of dealing with confrontation when necessary, predominates. This would suggest the applicability of Puttick's non-gendered or androgynous type of leadership to Wicca but, as Greenwood says, '[g]roup dynamics and the individual High Priestess will determine whether the group fosters and encourages individual growth or dependency - I suggest that the potential is there for both' (ibid.: 200). With no centralised training or standardisation, leadership styles within Wicca are thus highly variable and exist within an incipient hierarchy.

Organisational sociology has, for the most part, insisted that women's organisational style is less hierarchical than men's, but that 'only the very smallest groups do not have hierarchy' (Sered 1994: 217). Hierarchy within Wicca is therefore not completely surprising, yet hierarchical structure is contained within the particular coven - there is no pyramidal structure of covens. The organisational style of Wicca relies, for the most part, on a use of power which enables individuals and groups to process personal

experience as a source of religious authority. There is no formal training strategy beyond that of the 'mechanics' of ritual (which will be outlined in Chapter Five) for, in accordance with Puttick's feminine style of leadership, individual learning processes are deemed by Wiccans to be more appropriate to spiritual development than overarching formulas. Such a style reflects the fluid nature of Wiccan covens, in which the High Priestess's power is personal rather than positional, and initiates are expected to spend only a few years in the coven before being ready to move on to form their own covens if they wish. There is thus no necessity for codified rules to structure a large, static institution, for in Wicca there is a continual movement of people in and out of covens and each High Priestess constructs her own rules according to her own experience and the needs of the members of her group.

Rules and Codes of Conduct

Wiccan communities are thus inherently local, rules of practice and behaviour being agreed at a localised, core level and often arrived at by common consensus. Such rules are non-universalistic and non-absolute, maintained only at the localised level. An example of such a rule would be the agreement that initiation is never offered, it must always be asked for. This is a common rule in Wicca throughout Britain. Allowing non-initiates to enter a Wiccan circle is almost always unacceptable, yet those covens which practise a system of pre-initiation training known as neophyting may have their neophytes in a circle, and in certain situations it may be deemed appropriate by an individual coven to grant entry to a non-initiate - if, for example, a specific piece of magic was being worked for a non-Wiccan and it was felt that that person should be present.

Other rules rely on an assumed authority in order to be effective. Some of these are, to a great extent, matters of common courtesy and are mediated through general social interaction. For instance, all members are expected to turn up at the specified time; although I have heard Wiccans joke about 'Wiccan/Pagan Mean Time', it is generally frowned upon to arrive late for ritual unless there is a very good reason. Likewise, everyone is expected to bring food and drink to share during the ritual feasting; although all the covens I have worked with make exceptions for members who have very little money (students, the unemployed), these members are still expected to provide something in token, even if it is only crisps. Thus, the social etiquette of arriving on time for arranged meetings, and contributing to shared meals rather than expecting to be provided for, lends authority for the implementation of these rules. On an even more localised level, each coven maintains its own rules, which are fluid and situational. Thus, some covens will allow their first degree initiates to visit other covens, whilst others will not allow this for the first six months, or for the first year after initiation.

Perhaps the only rule which approaches universal status is the Wiccan Rede - 'An it harm none, do what ye will' - which, as we have seen, has been adopted almost verbatim by the Pagan population in general. Yet such a 'law' is purposefully vague, allowing for individual interpretation. Modern Wicca thus has ethics which are neither codified nor enforced. Rather, there is a strong element of individual responsibility, and ethics are not, therefore, something to be carved in stone, as a list of commandments, but are fluid and situational - an absolute or universal ethical code to which all Wiccans must adhere would take away the individual responsibility. The

Pagan Federation, which adopted the Rede as a common Pagan ethic over the past twenty five years, explains it as a 'positive morality, expressing the belief in individual responsibility for discovering one's own true nature and developing it fully, in harmony with the outer world and community'[50].

The Law of Threefold Return - that what one does to others, whether for good or ill, will come back on one threefold - is another almost universally accepted creed, but again it remains open to widely differing interpretation. To some witches, it is assimilable with the eastern concept of karma, to others it is the Christian concept of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. Recently, however, Doreen Valiente made a point of questioning the law of threefold return publicly in a talk at the Pagan Federation Conference in 1997. She said,

> I have come to question . . . the 'Law of Three'. This tells us that whatever you send out in Witchcraft you get back threefold, for good or ill. Well, I don't believe it! Why on earth should we assume that there is a special law of Karma which applies only to Witches? For Goddess' sake, do we really kid ourselves that we are that important? . . . I have never seen it in any of the old books of magic, and I think Gerald invented it.[51]

Thus, even the so-called 'universal' laws are constantly being questioned by individual witches and discussed among coven members. In fact, the Law of Threefold Return

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[50] *Pagan Dawn*, issue 126 (Imbolc 1998), page 14.

[51] *Pagan Dawn*, issue 128 (Lughnasadh 1998), page 24.

was questioned in *The Wiccan* as long ago as 1975, when it was regarded as being 'in conflict with the purposes of incarnate experience - the evolution of the human soul' and a call was made to abandon it.[52]

Within Wicca, then, individual Wiccans feel themselves to be part of a community, but their activities are not governed by overriding rules and regulations. Behavioural rules are generally subtle and seldom need to be made explicit - small and intimate groups facilitate the agreement of a largely unspoken set of behavioural norms, until such time as the breaking of a 'rule' forces confrontation. For example, ritual nudity is understood on a variety of different levels, as we have seen above, and it is taken as a given that it is not acceptable for any individual to take advantage of another's body; the behavioural norm is of respect and trust which should not require spelling out and, indeed, is unspoken until such time as someone behaves unacceptably. Such a level of trust and individual responsibility is perhaps only possible within the small tight-knit groups typified in Wicca.

CONCLUSION

Whereas the Enlightenment was characterised by the dichotomy between the 'cult of reason' and the 'cult of feeling', the expectation that we must choose 'either/or', the spirit of the *fin de siècle* conflated and merged, accepting 'both' and plurality. Following the *fin de siècle* example, Wicca may be said to re-establish community based on tradition *and* innovation, structure *and* flexibility, individual *and* group. Tradition can thus be understood, contrary to sociological consensus, as the matrix of

[52] *The Wiccan*, issue 45 (October 1975), excerpt in Pengelly *et al* (1997: 33).

innovation and the dynamic process of forward transmission (Pye 1998), and innovation as well as tradition can be trusted as expressive and authentic within communities. Continuity can thus be maintained whilst change is mediated.

Although contact has been made with over one hundred Wiccan initiates during the course of this research, studies of Wicca necessarily concentrate on small representative communities, who practise Wicca in much smaller, core groupings which interact with each other through a variety of mechanisms, sharing many common features yet retaining individual coven boundaries. The small coven communities form the basic units of Wicca, inheriting links with other covens through lineage and creating further links through friendship, sharing many behavioural norms but avoiding universal rules and regulations - imitating communities of descent, but requiring assent for initiation; transmitting tradition whilst requiring recognition. The Wiccan community thus retains a fluid structure that encourages individual and coven diversity, strong individual identity within a context of tradition, and the personal contact of the 'real' community. As Amy Simes found in her research, Wicca and Paganism are 'indicative of a modern spiritual trend which supports and encourages individuality without denying a need for communities within society' (Simes 1996: 188). In such communities, individual identity can remain fluid and flexible, the personal contact of 'real', local communities can be maintained within the 'global village', and a sense of the sacred can be sustained within a traditional framework which attaches the present to the past and the individual to the group.

In addition to the personal contact of the 'real' community, however, there is a further level of community which might be considered 'imagined community', where only an 'image of communion exists' (Anderson 1983:6) - the perception of Wiccans, Pagans and witches that we live in a world in which all things are interconnected, where the individual is seen to exist within an interconnected web in which 'community' has become global, trans-global and trans-human. Here, the individual is encouraged to regard everything - fellow humans, animals, plants, deities, the earth, the stars - as their community. This 'nature-as-sacred' rubric allows many Wiccans to feel a very 'real' sense of community with all that lives, particularly within a specific locality as we discussed in our consideration of the word 'pagan. By extension, however, the stress of locality of community is inflated to encompass all life itself. Thus, whilst Anderson argues that every community beyond the face to face village community is 'imagined' (1983: 6), Wiccans would argue that in fact they use their imaginations in a positive way, a way which enables them to move between the 'many realities' accessible through the medium of ritual.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EXPERIENCE OF 'MANY REALITIES': COMMUNITAS, AND THE RITUAL FRAMEWORK OF WICCA

This other world is perceived as having been there all along, though it was not previously perceived, and it forces itself upon consciousness as an undeniable reality, as a force bidding one to enter it (Berger 1979: 42).

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Four we examined the structure of Wiccan organisation, and the types of community to be found within its boundaries. With no centralised authority or umbrella organisation, Wicca operates in small groups with localised rules which incorporate individual spiritual practices within a community context. We have examined Wiccan community as a community of assent which works in imitation of a community of descent, in which the individual is not subsumed by the group yet the need for community is recognised. We have further characterised Wicca as a 'community of recognition', since practitioners recognise themselves as Wiccan prior to becoming involved in a coven, and the coven recognises them as Wiccan at the point of initiation. We have noted that entry into the community is solely by ritual of initiation, by which the tradition is transmitted. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore this community further in the context of ritual, and to analyse the ritual framework used in Wicca.

RITUAL AND COMMUNITY

As Wiccan community tends to be based on little geographical proximity among its members, and meets only for one night every two weeks for the purpose of working ritual, entry into the community and the bonds of inter-relationship between coven members tend to be of a different nature to those usually found in society. Victor Turner's *communitas* may therefore be a useful aid to our understanding of coven ritual practice. Turner regarded ritual as a practice that facilitates religious experiences which transcend ordinary social structures (*communitas*), inverts them, and serves, after all, to maintain cultural and social continuity.

Turner coined the Latin term 'communitas' in *The Ritual Process* (1969) in order to distinguish those social relationships formed within the liminal realm of ritual space from those bonded in an area of common living, a community. He writes:

> Communitas, with its unstructured character, representing the 'quick' of human interrelatedness, what Buber has called *das Zwischenmenschliche*, might well be represented by the 'emptiness at the centre', which is nevertheless indispensable to the functioning of the structure of the wheel (Turner 1969: 127),

an apt image indeed for both the Wiccan circle[1] and the processual Wiccan ritual cycle known as the Wheel of the Year. Turner makes extensive use of Martin Buber's work

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[1] As we shall see, Wiccan ritual space is formed by the casting of a circle and consequently, Wiccans often refer to their rituals simply as 'circles'.

in his attempt to explain the 'spontaneous, immediate, concrete nature of communitas, as opposed to the norm-governed, institutionalised, abstract nature of social structure' (ibid.: 127). For communitas, according to Turner, is that elusive immediacy of interrelationships into which ritual can release us, and from which we can return to everyday society revitalised by the experience. This dialectic between communitas and society is of the utmost importance to Turner, for he deems it essential to the function of society as a whole: 'even in the simplest societies [he writes], the distinction between structure and communitas exists and obtains symbolic expression in the cultural attributes of liminality, marginality, and inferiority' (ibid.: 130). And because both communitas and structure are necessary to society, communitas remains 'a moment of transition rather than an established mode of being or an ideal soon to be permanently attained' (ibid.: 154).

Turner distinguishes three 'modalities of communitas' (ibid.: 131ff): spontaneous, normative, and ideological. Spontaneous communitas is 'something that arises in instant mutuality, when each person fully experiences the being of the other', a potential which arises in the interstices of the social structure, in ritually guarded and stimulated liminality, but which has no specific social form. Normative communitas contains a certain degree of social organisation which recognises the need to effect some control among members of the group. Ideological communitas is a label used by Turner to describe those societies based on utopian models and aims, a concept which may be of relevance to certain Wiccan-derived groups in North America, such as Reclaiming.

Which model of communitas, then, fits with our characterisation of British Wicca? Turner does not appear to have regarded spontaneous communitas as anything other than transient and 'magical', 'a phase, a moment, not a permanent condition' (ibid.: 140). He adds that, 'wisdom is always to find the appropriate relationship between structure and communitas under the *given* circumstances of time and place, *to accept each modality when it is paramount without rejecting the other*, and not to cling to one when its present impetus is spent' (1969: 139 - my emphasis). It is thus worth considering the possibility that a combination of two or three types of communitas may be more relevant to an understanding of Wiccan practice, and aid our understanding of the movement between Berger's 'many realities' and the process of sustaining the extraordinary within the ordinary.

The key to such a possibility lies with Turner's often ignored description referred to above, where he talks of 'more or less prolonged instants of *ritually guarded* and stimulated liminality, each with its core of *potential* communitas' (ibid.: 136 - my emphasis). Wiccan ritual, as we shall see, builds liminality into its construction of sacred, ritual space and this is especially important for initiations. Within the 'ritually guarded' and 'stimulated' liminality of the Wiccan ritual framework, we can argue that there is indeed a 'core of potential communitas'; yet it is only a 'core' and it is only 'potential'. Spontaneous communitas *is* therefore possible, but it is not something which can be sustained over time, and presumably not outside the ritual space.

As Turner notes, however, this type of communitas is somewhat 'magical' and powerful, yet 'this power untransformed cannot readily be applied to the organisational

details of social existence' (ibid.: 139). Since, as we have seen in Chapter Four, Wiccan covens do not reject structure but rather maintain a localised set of social norms and rules applicable to sustaining small group communities, normative communitas is also apparent, perhaps to a greater degree than the spontaneous type which, despite being a ritually-guided aim is, after all, a potential which is only *occasionally* manifest. Again, to refer to Turner, 'structural action swiftly becomes arid and mechanical if those involved in it are not periodically immersed in the regenerative abyss of communitas' (ibid.: 139), reflecting the need for both structure and anti-structure which Wicca appears to incorporate into its organisation and ritual. However, Wiccans do not see themselves as members of any universal ideological movement nor as participants in small groups withdrawing from any engagement with society as a whole, two things which Turner argues characterise the desire for ideological communitas, and we can therefore consider ideological communitas to be of very little import to the ritual experience of communitas within Wicca.

Wiccan organisation and ritual practice can thus be seen to incorporate both normative and spontaneous communitas, the normative type providing the necessary structure to allow ritually guarded (and guided) liminality in which the seed, the potential core of spontaneous communitas, is contained. Such a structure allows ritual to be seen, following Grimes (1990: 169), as a legitimate means of knowing in its own terms, as an embodied, incarnate means of knowing, and not primarily as a reinforcing interpretation of belief. This view has also been expressed by Roy Rappaport:

> ritual is not simply an alternative way to express certain things, but that certain things can be expressed *only* in ritual (Rappaport 1979: 174 - emphasis mine)

Wiccan practitioners emphasise this experiential knowing as the root of their religion, for Wicca is first and foremost a religion of ritual and ritual expression: according to Wiccans, the true meaning of their religion can *only* be expressed and experienced through direct participation in its rituals. Experience is primary in Wicca, with 'belief' secondary to ritual practice, and thus the inductive approach we have adopted allows us to enter further into the reality of the Wiccan sacred circle.

MOVING BETWEEN 'MANY REALITIES'

We have mentioned briefly Peter Berger's emphasis on the existence of many realities in our consideration of theory and Luhrmann's work in Chapter Two. We now consider Berger's work in greater detail, in order that we might provide a more appropriate assessment of Wiccan ritual activity than 'interpretive drift'.

Reality, as we have previously asserted, is not experienced as one unified whole but contains various zones with differing qualities - what Alfred Schutz called 'multiple realities'. The realm in which we conduct our waking activities, what we commonly refer to as our ordinary everyday life, holds the privileged position of being experienced as 'more real . . . most of the time'. Schutz therefore called it the 'paramount reality'[2]. Other realities, when viewed from this paramount reality, appear as enclaves into which consciousness moves and from which it returns to the 'real

[2] Michael Harner (1990: xii-xv) calls this the Ordinary State of Consciousness (OSC).

world' of everyday life. These other realities are, in Schutz's term, 'finite provinces of meaning'[3], which are accessed by entering an altered state of consciousness (ASC).[4]

The paramount reality is shared with everyone else most easily, which indeed provides the social confirmation that it is, in fact, the paramount reality - it has, in Berger's words, the strongest 'plausibility structure'. Yet this plausibility structure is inherently fragile and easily ruptured - each night, for example, we dream and enter a subuniverse. Schutz thus asserts that the reality of ordinary everyday life pertains only 'until further notice'[5]. Apart from dreams, ruptures in the paramount reality can be produced through a variety of techniques designed to cultivate altered states of consciousness. In its rituals, Wicca makes use of techniques that enable the movement from one reality to another in a controlled manner. Such techniques include the manipulation of atmosphere (candlelight, music, incense), dance, chants, visualisation, chakras, and fasting. More precisely, however, the Wiccan sacred space is believed to be situated 'between the worlds', between realities, and in this sense the paramount reality of everyday life is not completely left behind; rather, the ordinary and extraordinary are merged in what Dennis Carpenter (1995) has called the 'transfiguration of the ordinary'.

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[3] c.f. William James (1985), Lecture III: The Reality of the Unseen, p.53-77.

[4] Harner (ibid.: xii-xv) calls this same state a 'Shamanic State of Consciousness' (SSC).

[5] cf. Corbin 1969: 217 - 'Dream is intermediary between the real (in the mystic sense, that is) "waking" state, and the waking consciousness in the common, profane sense of the world'.

Yet the 'categories of ordinary existence are transformed, especially the categories of space and time. Recurringly the supernatural is conceived of as being located in a different dimension of space or of time' (Berger 1979: 42). In Wiccan ritual the mundane world is *experienced* as other, and perceived from the standpoint of 'a different world', the world of the sacred circle in which the divine and the human can make contact. Wiccan initiates thus stand outside the ordinary world, in *ekstasis*, during their rituals, particularly when they are invoked as a God or Goddess. The ordinary world is relativised, yet it is not rejected. As we noted in Chapter One, Wicca is not concerned with salvation from the world, and its rituals seek, rather, to enhance the everyday world by 'stimulating an awareness of the hidden side of reality' (Starhawk 1989: 27) which, S. Gablik laments, we have lost - 'we no longer have the ability to shift mind-sets and thus to perceive other realities, to move between the worlds . . . One way to access these worlds is through ritual where something more goes on than meets the eye - something sacred' (1992: 22 in Carpenter 1996: 65).

How, then, does the framework of Wiccan ritual facilitate the move between realities and, just as importantly, how does it bring people back to the everyday 'paramount' reality? For as Berger maintains,

> [r]eligious experience relativizes, if it does not devalue altogether, the ordinary concerns of human life. When the angels speak, the business of living pales into insignificance, even irreality. If the angels spoke all the time, the business of living would probably stop completely. No society could survive in the fixed posture of encountering the supernatural. In order for society to survive

> (and this means, for human beings to go on living), the encounters must be limited, controlled, circumscribed. (Berger 1979: 49)

It is through ritual that Wicca imposes such limits and controls, the framework of the circle providing a sacred space in which communion with the Divine can safely take place, where the angels, for a while, can speak. Though Wiccan rituals vary from year to year and coven to coven, a ritual framework provides a boundary within which the Divine can be contacted, and in this way, encounters with sacred reality are assigned to a specific space and time.

THE RITUAL FRAMEWORK OF WICCA

Wiccan rituals, the main focus of which are to contact the Divine, fall into four categories. Firstly, rites of passage are celebrated, including Wiccanings for the birth of a new child, handfastings, and funeral rites. As we noted in Chapter One, these rites of passage form part of the exoteric celebrations of Wicca, marking changes in social status, and including non-initiates (such as family members) in both ritual and celebration. As such, these rituals fall outside the scope of our investigation, and we shall not consider them further. Secondly, worship and training rituals known as esbats take place every two to three weeks; in order to participate fully in ritual and magic, it is necessary for initiates to undergo some training in the specifics of ritual techniques and magical processes[6], and it is usual for esbats to be used for this

[6] A fact which is perhaps reflected in the many 'how-to' books which, as we reported in Chapter One, are so annoying to Wiccans. In fact, according to Wiccans, the sooner a new initiate can learn the ritual and

purpose. Lastly, and essential to Wicca as a mystery religion, initiation rituals are performed, marking the individual as a first, second or third degree Wiccan[7], and eight worship and celebration rituals, Sabbats, are celebrated to mark the changing seasons of the year. These rituals are inherent to the experience of transmutation which is central to Wicca, and all of these rituals serve to bring Wiccan communities together and share a similar ritual framework.

The generic framework[8] of Wiccan ritual has been derived from ritual practices inherited from ceremonial magic via The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The framework can be divided into four sections[9] - pre-ritual, in which the move from the everyday to the magical reality begins (pre-liminal); creating sacred space, the formulated move into the magical space (separation, pre-liminal); within sacred space, the liminal space in which the ritual proper takes place, where Wiccans connect with the numinous and experience what Victor Turner called *communitas*, and Emile Durkheim termed *effervescence,* or *mystic sympathy*[10] (transition, liminality); and

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magical processes and techniques, the sooner the 'real learning' can begin - the gnosis, or deep, somatic knowing, in which the cosmos is reflected in the human, the macrocosm in the microcosm.

[7] Such initiation rituals can also be termed rites of passage, with the emphasis on spiritual and psychological growth rather than physical maturation or change in social status.

[8] Purification through the elements (earth, air, fire, water), casting of the circle, invoking and banishing elemental watchtowers.

[9] Arnold Van Gennep's three stages of ritual are included in brackets for reference; separation, of course, begins in what we have termed the pre-ritual stage, which Wiccans regard as an integral part of their ritual.

[10] See Durkheim [1915] 1995: xli-xlii, xliv-xlv, 218-20, 228, 424.

post-ritual, the return from the magical to the everyday reality, which includes the formal deconstruction of the sacred space (reintegration, post-liminal). The major stages of the Wiccan ritual are as follows:

I. Pre-ritual

Journeying and arriving

Discussion of ritual and determining intent

Physical preparation of sacred space - moving furniture, setting up altar

Removing the vestiges of everyday life - undressing

II. Creating Sacred Space

Purification

Casting the circle

Invoking the elements

III. Within Sacred Space

Raising power

Invoking the Divine

Magical work, chants, dances

Cakes and wine

IV. Returning to everyday reality

Feasting, singing, discussion

Banishing elements

Getting dressed

Putting away ritual implements; replacing furniture

An assessment of the effectiveness of the ritual sequence in facilitating movement between different realities and the return to everyday consciousness is a difficult endeavour to undertake. As Edmund Leach has pointed out (1976:41), the act of scholarly interpretation of ritual necessitates a deconstructive technique which removes from the ritual experience the sense of synchronous expression and transmission of combined messages; the flow of the dance of ritual is lost. A condensed expression of Wiccan ritual can only be gained by entering into the experiential world of the practitioners themselves, which can be better expressed when removed from scholarly analysis and portrayed in narrative. We therefore intersperse our analysis of the ritual framework with narrative accounts of ritual in order to provide the reader with an indication of the translation of the mechanics of ritual into meaningful spiritual performance.

Pre-Ritual

Wiccan practitioners begin in everyday reality, travelling to the covenstead and physically meeting in one place. The ritual greeting common to Wicca is used - the words, 'Blessèd Be' - as everyone is welcomed, as they arrive, by everyone else. At this stage, the meeting is governed by commonly agreed and accepted 'rules'. Everyone is expected to have bathed beforehand, for example. This is not considered to be a normal bath or shower, but a ritual cleansing of the body, washing away the accumulations of the everyday world in a physical sense, but also allowing the water

to draw away tension and worries, a rite of purification before the ritual begins. Ritual cleansing and the journey to the covenstead or outdoor ritual site are the first of many activities which facilitate the movement from the everyday 'paramount reality' to the magical reality of the Wiccan circle.

Preparation 1: fasting, drinking, and preparing

Other forms of preparation, before the ritual begins, also play an integral role in this movement between realities. Many Wiccans with whom I have worked, for instance, fast for a certain amount of time before a ritual. The length of time spent fasting differs depending on the rite: I noted that, for initiations and sabbats, people tended not to eat for the whole day beforehand, whereas for esbats people often ate lunch and then nothing until the feasting during the ritual[11]. Fasting is, of course, a well-known method of making the transition to an altered state of consciousness. Aiding the process further, a limited amount of alcohol may be drunk before a ritual; taken with a day's fasting, a limited amount of wine, for example, will aid the transition into an altered state of consciousness. In excess, on the other hand, it will of course lead to a state of inebriation or unconsciousness, neither of which are desired states for ritual!

The authority for implementing these rules stems from a combination of understanding and explanation, experience, and peer pressure. There is, of course, no way of checking whether a participant has eaten during the day if they arrive for the ritual in

[11] We say 'during the ritual' because the feasting is usually considered to be an integral part of the ritual, taking place after the main section of the rite but before the movement back into the paramount reality has been completed.

the evening. However, postulants are usually told to fast for twenty-four hours prior to their initiation, and it is explained to them why this is required of them. Afterwards, it is up to the individual to have the self-discipline to prepare for the ritual in this way if that is what is expected, and to experiment with the effects of eating and fasting before ritual. One male Wiccan High Priest in his late twenties told me that whether he ate or fasted made no difference to his experiences in ritual. A Priestess in her thirties, on the other hand, said she felt that fasting beforehand was a means of purification for her, drawing her attention to the ritual that was to be worked that evening, and that she was more easily able to slip into a light trance which was deepened by the ritual itself. She added that she had to be careful not to drink too much - more than one glass of wine would 'go straight to her head' and, combined with the ritual, make her feel sick. However, whilst each individual knows their own body - how much fasting they can endure, and how much they can safely drink - it is down to the authority of the High Priestess and High Priest to stop someone drinking to excess, and the situation of the covenstead in the home of the coven leaders enables them to ask someone to leave or ban them from the ritual if appropriate. Drugs other than alcohol are generally frowned upon before ritual, for ritual is regarded as an effective means of altering one's state of consciousness in its own right, without the need for drugs. As Margot Adler noted, '[t]raditional warnings against the use of magic and occultism suddenly seem similar to warnings against the use of psychedelic drugs. Certain strengths are necessary before using both - a knowledge of oneself, a correct environment - so that these new perceptions can come to us in a manner that encourages our growth rather than our harm' (1986: 159).

One final point needs to be made in relation to individual preparation before ritual, and that is the learning of words. In the majority of the covens I worked with, participants were expected to have learned their words if the ritual was scripted - no ritual scripts were to be taken into the ritual space, and words were not to be read out. The expectation that participants will accept and abide by such a rule rests, firstly, with the High Priestess and High Priest of the coven, and peer group pressure. Ultimately, however, no one can be forced to learn words and the acceptance of this rule is down to the individual.

In my fieldwork, I noted that many new initiates were gradually given more words to learn over time - they were not expected to automatically learn reams of poetry for each ritual. Rather, it was explained that ritual flows better when people are not sifting pages to find their words, and that it was important for self-discipline to learn words. In addition, each initiate would gradually build up a store of ritual words which could then be used in spontaneous ritual, and knowing one's words means one is not limited to following a ritual word for word. It is thus seen as a liberating process, enabling practitioners to 'go with the flow' of the ritual as they gain confidence. Often, people expressed a desire to 'get it right' so as not to let the other members of the coven down. Here, the group feeling of bonding, that the ritual is not just for one person or done by one person, but that all are participants and all benefit from the ritual is important. All are Priests and Priestesses, and another level is therefore a desire to do something wonderful for the Gods, that the Gods should enjoy the ritual too. However, perhaps the main reason for learning words is that it is

difficult to read words when in an altered state of consciousness[12]. Vivianne Crowley explains, '[w]hen we first experience consciousness change, to speak at all is quite difficult . . . To use charges and invocations effectively, we must know them so well that it is like switching on a tap. The invocation or charge should pour forth without any conscious intervention on our part, so that we can concentrate on drawing the Divine energy into the circle' (Crowley 1996a: 187).

Whilst people are arriving, and for sometime after everyone has arrived, talk tends to be of a general nature as people catch up with each over a glass of wine. This is considered by the Wiccans to be a process through which members begin to shed their everyday selves, letting go of worries or tension by sharing their news, whether good or bad, since last the coven met[13]. The amount of 'pre-ritual' time is not specific, and whoever is running the ritual[14] is expected to 'feel' the energies of the different members coming together and thus not begin with the ritual run-through too early or too late. She or he is also expected to keep track of the conversations which are going on, and make space and time available for anyone who needs to to talk through an

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[12] The learning of words draws obvious parallels with the Art of Memory, through which the cosmos is internalised. Here, the ritual framework is the 'place', but is itself regarded as a reflection of the cosmos. By internalising ritual gestures and words, the initiate is forming the cosmos within him- or herself until the reflection is so complete that no conscious effort is required.

[13]This is not to suggest that coven members only talk to each other at this time. In practice, communication continues between rituals.

[14] In the covens with which I worked, the rituals were not always written and run by the High Priestess or High Priest. Initiates were encouraged to write and run rituals as soon as they felt able, again reflecting the Wiccan emphasis on experience - learning by 'doing'.

issue without letting the ritual run aground. The pre-ritual time is also sometimes used for training or for one member of the group to give a talk on something they have been exploring[15], with time for discussion and questions afterwards.

When the person running the ritual feels it is time to begin discussing the ritual, she or he will draw people's conversations to a close. The intent of the ritual will then be elucidated if it is a structured, written ritual, or discussed if (as at many esbats) the ritual is to be more spontaneous. The intent of an esbat rite may be to explore a specific element further, or to develop a relationship with a specific deity, pantheon or mythology, and will often be related to the phases of the moon[16]. Ritual roles are assigned - who is consecrating salt and water, who is casting the circle, who is drawing the quarters, who is invoking and who is being invoked as the Goddess and God - and everyone works out what exactly they are going to be doing in the rite[17]. Whilst this in itself is not a movement into an altered state of consciousness, it is preparatory in that the Wiccans begin to focus more and more on the ritual.

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[15] I myself gave a talk to the coven with which I was working in 1996, on communication; other talks I was present at included magical images and talismans, astrology, the nature of initiation, kabbala, and what it means to be a priest/ess in the everyday world.

[16] For example, a ritual held at the time of the new moon might be centred around a maiden goddess such as Artemis, and might have the intention of working on new beginnings and growing strength. Alternatively, a ritual held at the time of the waning moon might emphasise letting go, healing magic to shrink cancers or tumours, and honour a deity such as Hecate.

[17] It is important to note that there are no rehearsals for rituals. The run-through does not even constitute a reading of the whole ritual, but rather allows for a brief consideration of the order in which the rite will proceed, with time for any questions that may need to be answered.

Preparation 2: the temple

It is then time for the room which is used as a temple to be made ready. As a non-institutionalised, private religion practised in small, closed groups, Wicca has no public temples for its worship. For Wiccans, the world of nature is a temple and many groups hold their rituals outside in the summer months. Given the climate in Britain, however, on a more practical level the temple used by a coven for ritual work and worship is usually located in the home of the High Priestess and High Priest of the coven[18]. Ideally, the temple will be a room set aside solely for ritual purposes. However, often the room will be used for other purposes at other times and therefore needs to be transformed, to a greater or lesser extent, for use during rituals: the temple is thus created anew for each ritual occasion, as regularly as every two weeks, and this again serves to focus the participants' minds on the ritual in which they are about to take part.

Physical preparation of the temple includes general cleaning and vacuuming the floor space, often done earlier in the day. At this stage in the ritual framework, it is generally necessary to move furniture out of the room which is to serve as the temple and place whatever serves as an altar in the north. As in many religions, the altar is one of the chief foci of ritual. In Wicca, it is situated in the North, 'traditionally the home of the Gods and the most sacred direction . . . the direction of the Spiral Castle of the Celtic goddess Arianrhod, *Caer Arianrhod*, where the dead heroes of the Celts went to dwell' (Crowley 1996: 44). Herodotus called the Celts the 'people of the North Wind'. The importance of Celtic mythology in Wicca is thus implicit in the very

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[18] Although I did come across one group who regularly hired a village hall in which to hold their rituals.

setting of the temple, even though Wicca does not adhere to the Celtic, or any other pantheon specifically.[19]

The temple is lit by candlelight, with a candle at each of the four cardinal points plus altar candles. Incense is burned, filling the temple with an aroma conducive to the atmosphere of the ritual: rose for Aphrodite; a heady smell, perhaps including patchouli, for Samhain; cedar and pine for the Hornèd God. Specific incenses are often made by the coven to suit a variety of rituals, and are very effective at creating atmosphere and promoting a change in consciousness. As with alcohol, however, incense can be a drug depending on the herbs being used, and can therefore have something other than the required effect. For example, on one occasion an incense blend containing sandlewood, mugwort and Dittany of Crete proved very disorienting even for experienced practitioners, and prevented the ritual from running smoothly. The other aid to changing consciousness is music, which is often played quietly throughout the ritual, the rhythm working on a subconscious level for, as Berger points out, we can 'get lost' in listening to a piece of music, 'and this zone is quite different from the reality of ordinary, everyday activities' (1979: 37)

Preparation 3: the body and ritual nudity

Before beginning the ritual proper, coveners shed their clothes, a symbolic gesture of removing the last vestiges of the everyday world. If practical[20], this is often done in

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[19] See discussion later in this chapter.

[20] i.e. if there are enough spare rooms, and teenage children are not present in the house. In the first coven with which I worked, it was necessary for everyone to change in the same room, into robes, which

separate rooms[21], one for women and one for men, and provides a time for further talk between the Priestesses whilst the Priests have their own space and time. Separating men and women at this point helps to differentiate ritual nudity from that which may be experienced in other settings, such as unisex changing rooms at a swimming pool or gym, at a naturist resort, or simply between two people who are in a relationship and are used to seeing each other naked, and it is a reminder that working skyclad is not done for titillation or eroticism. As Luhrmann points out, in her experience,

> There are no orgies, little eroticism, and in fact little behaviour that would be different if clothes were being worn. That witches dance around in the nude probably is part of the attractive fantasy that draws outsiders into the practice[22], but the fantasy is a piece with the paganism and not the source of salacious sexuality (1994: 51).

In addition, for new coven members who are not used to getting undressed in the company of others and may not feel comfortable with their bodies, it is far gentler to be with members of one's own gender and to enter the temple surrounded by them.

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were then removed once in the room prepared as the temple. This was due to the fact that there were no spare bedrooms and the High Priestess and High Priest's teenage children were at home.

[21] A fact also noted by Luhrmann (1994: 249), although she does not elaborate on it, except to point our that nudity is contained within the circle.

[22] Luhrmann does not make it clear on what evidence she bases this observation. Certainly, this is not the case according to the survey or fieldwork which inform our present thesis (see Chapter Four).

It is certain that the practice of ritual nudity in Wicca stems in part from Leland's *Aradia*, picked up by Gerald Gardner who was a pioneer naturist. Doreen Valiente notes, '[i]t may well be that Gerald Gardner's naturist beliefs coloured his ideas about witchcraft; because he maintained that witches *always* worked in the nude, and in the climate of the British Isles this is just not a practical possibility' (1989: 98). We may also note as influential those paintings portraying witches as female and nude[23]. Yet Wiccans have sought to legitimate and explain ritual nudity with variety of provenances and explanations[24]. To many, being naked, or 'skyclad', allows power to flow from the body unimpeded[25], and when robes are worn, natural fabrics such as

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[23] See, for instance, *Love's Enchantment (Der Liebeszauber)*, Flemish School 1670-80, which was used as the cover of Keith Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic.* Luhrmann (1994: Plate 4) notes that modern witches sometimes point to this painting as a piece of historical evidence for working in the nude. A further example which Luhrmann points out is an engraving called *The Four Witches* (1497) by Albrecht Dürer (ibid.: Plate 1). Yet there are also numerous representations of the witch in art which, whilst often depicting the witch as female, also paint her fully-clothed – Goya's *Conjuro* and *The Sabbat* (both c. 1794-5), for example.

[24] See Crowley (1996: 98) for provenances from the Celts and the Mysteries of Isis and Osiris; Valiente (1993: 73; 1989: 102) cites ancient Greek and Roman practices of working nude or 'in loose flowing garments', the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii is thought to provide evidence of nudity during a ritual of initiation (1989: 59), and tantric worship 'gives further meaning to the custom of ritual nudity, which is found in the east as well as the west' (1989: 141). She reports Pliny's observation that women and girls in ancient Britain performed religious and magical rites in the nude (1989: 99), but provides no reference for this.

[25] See Valiente 1993: 73 - 'The traditional ritual nudity has for its purpose the free flow of power from the naked bodies of the participants . . .when a circle of naked or loosely robed dancers gyrates in a witchcraft ceremony, the power flowing from their bodies rises upwards towards the centre of the circle, forming a cone-shape which is called the Cone of Power.' Similar reasons are also cited by Russell

cotton, silk or wool are preferred, as natural fibres are thought to allow magical energy to pass through them.

More than this, however, entering the circle naked is a sign of vulnerability and trust, representing the mutual dependency and feeling of well-being which Victor Turner links to the experience of communitas[26]. He cites Martin Buber as an aid to explaining his concept of communitas:

> Community is the being no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from *I* to *Thou*. (Buber 1961: 51 in Turner 1969: 127)

Ritual nudity may well offer a very real example of communitas in which there occurs a 'direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities' (ibid.: 132), 'a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared' (ibid.: 138). And nakedness, says Turner, is 'the master symbol of emancipation from structural and economic

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(1991: 169) from his fieldwork, where witches reported that nudity 'increases their contact with the powers of nature . . . erases class distinctions . . . [allows them] to appear before the gods as they were born, with nothing to hide . . . [and] gives them a salutary sense of freedom.'

[26] and cf. Crowley 1996: 107.

bondage'[27] (ibid.: 146). The contrast with social norms is, indeed, radical, and nudity most obviously discards as inappropriate the 'canons of reality which guide everyday behaviour' (Rappaport 1979:213). Thus, the practice of ritual nudity in Wicca can be regarded as a symbol of freedom, after the Great Charge of the Goddess which exhorts Wiccans to be 'free from slavery, and as a sign that ye be really free, ye shall be naked in your rites'[28].

Removing the last vestiges of the everyday world through undressing thus suggests entry proper into the pre-liminal realm, and marks a movement from the paramount reality into the spiritual realm. Valiente writes, '[a]s a room in an ordinary house becomes a different place by the light of the candles around the magic circle, so the naked witch dancing by the light of those candles is a different person from the usual inhabitant of that room' (1989: 99). As an inversion of social norms, ritual nudity proclaims a levelling of status, a denial of social distinctions, a uniformity - a process by which the coveners become equal. The body thus becomes a symbol in itself, a symbol of trust and intimacy, but nakedness also 'dramatises the paradox of exclusion and inclusion, and is connected to the secrecy. In our society some level of trust among a group of people is usually necessary for nakedness: those among whom one would be naked is usually a relatively exclusive group. Nakedness also necessitates extra care to keep outsiders away' (Neitz 1994: 147, n.14)

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[27] Turner takes as his example St. Francis, to whom 'poverty and nakedness were both expressive symbols of communitas and instruments for attaining it' (1969: 146).

[28] See Appendix 3.

On another level, Wiccans going into ritual regard themselves as going before their Gods and bearing their souls, represented by being naked. But they not only regard themselves as naked before their Gods, but as 'open' to each other and to themselves. Because esoteric mystery traditions are concerned with personal spiritual growth, in Wicca initiates learn to look at the good and the bad, acknowledging what they do not like about themselves - 'we must see our souls naked and unveiled' (Crowley 1996a: 108). In today's body-conscious world, where the media pressure to be ever thinner can be unbearable, it is important to Wiccans that they feel comfortable with their bodies and are accepted by others *as they are* rather than feeling they would be acceptable if only they could lose half a stone. An American witch, Laura Wildman, reported[29] on the Nature Religion scholars list in May 1999 her experience of her first Wiccan gathering: 'for the first time in my life, after years of trying to force my body to fit the conventions of the time and failing, I FELT beautiful. It changed my life forever'.

Yet this acceptance of the body as sacred can also be interpreted within an esoteric framework. In the Western Esoteric Tradition, the Divine is experienced in the things of earth according to the Hermetic maxim, 'As Above, So Below'. Thus, as Faivre (1988: 434) has pointed out,

> if they [esotericists] see the body as a magical object, mystically linked to the planets and to the elements of nature, it is because they find sense everywhere

[29] Wildman, Laura (lwildman@medusa.sbs.umass.edu), 28th May 1999, *Witches' Bodies*. E-mail to Nature Religion Scholars' List (natrel-l@uscolo.edu).

> in things and transcend the illusion of banality, a poetic task par excellence. This path is certainly more poetic than ascetic, but if asceticism is the source of technological progress, it is not necessarily a model to follow to experience totality.

Here Faivre indicates a point vital to our understanding of Wiccan ritual nudity. The body is the most obvious indication of our corporeal existence, as spiritual beings in the physical world. Thus, by working nude, the presence of the physical within the spiritual and sacred space of the circle is made explicit. In his introduction to *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (1992: xxviii), Jacob Needleman writes of the esoteric acceptance of a harmonious relationship between all things, in which the unity of heaven and earth constitutes a 'deeply natural and mutually fecundating relationship'. He explains further that,

> the aim of unity refers to a circulating exchange of force among parts that are, up to a very considerable degree, ineluctably independent as well as being ultimately one in the service of the Absolute or God-principle . . . It is when the levels and separateness of principal forms within reality are clearly seen and diligently maintained that the divine mutual organic exchange of universal conscious energy can flow. When this flows, then *all is one* (ibid.: xxviii, emphasis in original).

The spiritual and the physical, heaven and earth, are thus analogous to two poles of a battery which are necessary for energy to flow. Given the Wiccan proclivity for

engaging in spiritual development whilst fully engaging in everyday life and society, negating dualities, and stepping 'between the worlds' to contact the Divine, we might regard the Wiccan practice of ritual nudity as an obvious manifestation of the separateness between heaven and earth which allows the development of a 'deeply natural and mutually fecundating relationship' between the human (Wiccans) and the Divine. This is also an interpretation of the Hermetic idea of ascension where, upon death, the spiritual man ascends through the spheres, leaving a part of his mortal nature at each one until, entirely denuded of all that the spheres had imprinted on him, he becomes one with the universe (Yates 1991: 25).

The movement from the everyday world to the magical world is thus a gradual process, as practitioners shed the vestiges of their day-to-day life through the journey to the covenstead, leaving worries and concerns behind, physically preparing the temple, concentrating on running through the ritual, and finally by removing their clothes. Curtains are drawn and doors are locked, literally locking out the everyday reality. Ritual gesture then takes over as the circle is cast; the focus of the ritual participants is shifted from the everyday world to the magical world they are about to enter as the final actions are performed which place a boundary between 'the world of men and the realm of the Mighty Ones'.

Creating Sacred Space

This boundary, the creation of sacred space in which time is suspended, is known as *casting* or *building* the circle, and is of vital importance to Wiccan ritual. The carefully constructed, symbolic form of the circle empowers the experiential

dimension of Wiccan ritual by providing a protected space in which the participants may experience other realities - it is 'a bounded and ordered symbolic domain, an experiential context for exploring different instruments of cognition' (Napier 1992: xxvi). Formalised gesture is used in Wiccan ritual to communicate the stages of removal from the everyday to the magical reality. In setting up the circle, the liminal realm, Wiccan practitioners say that they are continually and gradually raising power by working in a clockwise direction (deosil). Alice, the High Priestess we met in Chapter Four, explains this in terms of the five elements represented by the pentagram, one of the dominant symbols of Wicca:

> we are moving from the slow, heavy resonance of Earth, through Water which is slightly faster, through Fire, faster still, and up to the fast energy of Air, from which it is easier to make the transition into the element of Ether for the working of the ritual. Thus the temple is created from the earth plane (from physically preparing the room, to ritually sweeping it with the besom)[30] to a place between the worlds, where the divine and the human can meet.

This ritual sweeping with the besom, symbolising a final sweeping aside of everyday space and time so that the attention is focused on the ritual[31], can in itself be a trigger for entering into an altered state of consciousness. This is especially so for

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[30] A besom is that item commonly associated with witchcraft - the broomstick!

[31] Of course, in outdoor rituals, the sweeping also has the practical purpose of removing objects such as leaves, twigs and small stones from the ritual site, all of which would be painful if trodden on with bare feet.

experienced initiates, who are attuned to the ritual gestures which help the process of transition. Vivianne Crowley explains this in psychological terms - 'As the symbols of the circle become integrated into our psyche . . . they precipitate a changed state of consciousness without any intervention of the conscious mind' (Crowley 1996: 48) - a process which is interpreted later in this chapter in terms of the Art of Memory, by which the cosmos is internalised within the mind of the practitioner.

An opening invocation may then be said, which directs the attention to the purpose of the ritual; each Sabbat may therefore have a different opening invocation, and rituals worked in a specific way or for a specific purpose have their own. A published[32] example is the following invocation, often used at Wiccan esbats:

> *Let us worship the power, the power which moves the universe,*
> *For behold, the Lords of Light have set the stars up in the heavens,*
> *The earth spins, and the moon holds her course.*
> *Let us walk proudly, with heads held high, for the Sky is our Father,*
> *the Earth our Mother, and we are the Children of the Gods.*

---

[32] Throughout the analysis of the ritual framework, we shall be relying on a published version of the words used in Wiccan ritual. The spoken ritual text is reproduced in italics, and can all be found in Crowley (1996a: 56 - 68). Such a reliance on Crowley is acceptable for two reasons. Firstly, by relying on a published account of Wiccan ritual words we avoid the problem created by secrecy. Secondly, with regard to Alexandrian/Gardnerian Wicca in Britain, the words of the rituals are most accessible through Crowley's 1989/1996 volume *Wicca*. Words not in italics are my own description of ritual, unless indicated otherwise.

The casting of the circle is the symbolic removal of the participants from the reality of the ordinary, everyday world ('the world of men') into a neutral space in which the Gods can be approached - 'a boundary between the world of men and the realms of the Mighty Ones'. According to Starhawk,

> [t]he circle exists on the boundaries of ordinary space and time; it is 'between the world' of the seen and unseen, of flashlight and starlight consciousness, a space in which alternate realities meet, in which the past and future are open to us (Starhawk 1989: 72).

The image of the circle is one of the dominant Wiccan symbols, representing the feminine, the Goddess, the womb, tomb and cave, the earth, the moon, the ocean, containment, safety, protection, the cycles of the moon and of the sun, the Wheel of the Year, the menstrual cycle, death and rebirth, and continuity, for a circle has no beginning and no end. It represents, following David Harvey, (1989: 213), 'a site or container of power which usually constrains but sometimes liberates processes of Becoming'.

* * *

She stood before the altar, concentrating, before placing the tip of her athame[33] into a small bowl of water, directing power from her body through the blade and into the water, saying,

> *I exorcise thee, O creature of water, that thou cast out from thee all the impurities and uncleanlinesses of the spirits of the world of phantasm. I bless*

[33] A black-handled, ritual knife.

thee and consecrate thee in the most sacred names of (the God) and (the Goddess).

In one flowing movement, she moved to place her athame in a matching dish of salt, and directing her power into it, she blessed it,

Blessings be upon this creature of salt. Let all malignity and hindrance be cast forth hencefrom, and let all goodness enter herein. Wherefore do I bless thee, that thou mayest aid me.

With another deft movement, she poured salt into the water, and drew an earth invoking pentagram in the mixture with the words,

Remember and ever mind, as water purifies the body so the scourge purifies the soul. I bless thee and consecrate thee in the most sacred names of (the God) and (the Goddess).

Turning, she began to make a sign on each Priest with her fingers dipped into the bowl of salt and water, purifying him with the feminine elements of water and earth. She then passed the bowl to the Priest, with a kiss, and he purified the Priestess in the same way, before passing the bowl back to her. She then walked around the circle, sprinkling salt and water around the perimeter to purify and consecrate the temple.

As she reached the altar in the north, the Priest swung the censer of smoking incense before each Priestess, purifying each with the elements of air and fire, and the Priestess then did the same for each Priest. Returning the censer to the Priest, he processed around the perimeter of the circle, purifying it with the incense before hanging the censer back on its hook.

We had conducted this part of the rite in almost silence, only an occasional murmur of "Blessèd Be" heard above the low sound of the music. Both we, and the temple, were now purified by the four elements of earth and water, air and fire. The actions of purification, the sound of the music, smell of incense and dim light of the candles had created an atmosphere in which we no longer felt part of the everyday world; we had set ourselves apart, in a sacred space which had no time, in order to commune with our gods and work magic.

She stood, focusing her energy down the blade, and then slowly began to move from the North to the East, where she began to speak the words of conjuration as she continued to move back round to the North:

> *I conjure thee, O thou Circle of Power, that thou beist a boundary between the world of men and the realms of the Mighty Ones, a guardian and protection that shall preserve and contain all power which we shall raise within thee. Wherefore do I bless thee, and consecrate thee in the most sacred and powerful names of (the God) and (the Goddess).*

* * *

The words used in casting the circle are an obvious expression of the intent to place a boundary between the physical, everyday reality of life and the magical, otherworldly reality which the Wiccans are entering. Quartered by the four cardinal points, the circle contains within its centre, according to Wiccans, the core which is nothing and all things, ether, the gap at the centre without which the wheel cannot operate. To Wiccan initiates, it is within the symbol of the circle, built up around the practitioners,

that the human and the Divine realities meet. In demarcating the sacred space, the circle serves to separate the sacred from the mundane, but it is also used 'as a symbol of the interconnectedness of all life forms and the ultimate interconnectedness of the sacred and the mundane' (Carpenter 1996: 60). This is represented through the invocation of four guardians, the 'Lords of the Watchtowers', one at each direction.

* * *

The Priestess took up her athame whilst the Priest took the censer. Turning to face the East, we visualised the things of air - mountains, youth, blue, spring, morning - whilst the Priestess drew the pentagram used to invoke air and summoned the watchtower,

> *Ye Mighty Ones of the Watchtowers of the East, Eurus, Lord of Air,*
>
> *We do summon, stir and call ye up, to guard our circle and to witness our rite*
>
> *And we do bid thee, Hail and welcome"*

"Hail and welcome", we repeated, bowing in acknowledgement, before turning towards the South whilst the Priest replaced the incense and brought to the South an altar candle. We visualised those things associated with the south - fire, red, summer, noon, the prime of life - and the fire invoking pentagram was drawn:

> *Ye Mighty Ones of the Watchtowers of the South, Notus, Lord of Fire*
>
> *We do summon, stir and call ye up, To guard our circle and to witness our rite*
>
> *And we do bid thee, Hail and welcome*

We repeated the greeting and turned to face the west, whilst the Priest replaced the candle and held aloft the bowl of water. Water, autumn, evening, blue-green were in our minds as the pentagram was drawn to invoke water,

Ye Mighty Ones of the Watchtowers of the West, Zephyrus, Lord of Water

We do summon etc.

Lastly, we faced North, and the Priest held up the pentacle. We thought of earth, night, winter, old age, and earth was invoked:

Ye Mighty Ones of the Watchtowers of the North, Boreas, Lord of Earth

We do summon etc.

* * *

Thus, the process of preparing for the ritual and creating sacred space is intended to facilitate the transition from the everyday 'paramount' reality to an awareness of a 'hidden' reality. Yet the mundane reality is not completely severed. Rather, ritual in Wicca serves to connect the mundane and the sacred, what Carpenter calls the 'transfiguration of the ordinary' in which the ordinary reality and the spiritual reality are merged.

Within Sacred Space

Often, casting the circle is immediately followed by the dance and chant of the Witches' Rune[34]. In the rune, the formalised gesture used to communicate the stages of removal from the everyday to the magical space gives way to movement controlled only by the rhythm of the chant and the holding of hands in a circle. From the slow circumnambulations which constitute the building up of the circle, the Wiccans join together in a faster, smaller circular movement, in which they feel the power produced

[34] Written by Doreen Valiente. Published in Crowley 1996a: 87; Farrar [1971] 1991: 13.

by their dancing creating what the Wiccans call the 'cone of power' in the centre of the circle.

* * *

We gathered together in the centre of the circle, alternating male and female as much as we were able and, holding hands, began slowly to circle deosil as we chanted slowly the words of the Witches' Rune:

Darksome night and shining moon

East then south then west then north

Harken to the witches' rune

Here we come to call thee forth

We started to move faster:

Earth and water, air and fire

Wand and pentacle and sword

Work ye unto our desire

And hearken ye unto our word

And faster still:

Cords and censer, scourge and knife

Powers of the witches' blade

Waken all ye unto life

And come ye as the charm is made

Now the chanting was rising, getting louder and the rhythm of the dance faster:

Queen of Heaven, Queen of Hell

Hornèd Hunter of the Night

Lend your power unto our spell

And work our will by magic's right

By all the powers of land and sea

By all the might of Moon and Sun

As we do will, so mote it be

Chant the spell and be it done

The cone of power was felt strongly now, pulsing through us and above us as we spun on and on:

Eko, Eko, Azarak

Eko, Eko, Zomelak

Eko, Eko Cernunnos

Eko, Eko Aradia

This last verse was repeated three times, strengthening the power until we felt it was at its peak before we stopped and threw our hands, still held together, in the centre above us, making a cone with our bodies to match that of the energy.

* * *

This dance appears to operate as a bridging mechanism between the formalised framework of the ritual construction of sacred space and the inner sanctum, where the initiates meet with the divine - 'we are using the hypnotic rhythms of dancing and chanting to enter into a deeper state of consciousness . . [where] we are both separate and joined, individual yet one' (Crowley 1996a: 86).

We have seen, then, the movement from the everyday to the magical reality facilitated by preparation, creation of atmosphere, symbol and ritual gesture, dance and chant. By now, it is expected that all the participants will have changed consciousness, and the focus of the ritual - communication and merging with the divine - can take place.

Invocation - the experience of the divine

It is within the inner section of the ritual, when the framework of the sacred circle has been built, that deity is invoked into the body of a Priest and Priestess. The spiritual force of the Goddess and God are believed to be drawn into the body of a Priestess and Priest, a process known as 'Drawing down the Moon/Sun' or, more commonly, as 'invocation'. The Priest or Priestess who is to be invoked stands before the altar and empties their mind, becoming still, becoming an empty vessel which the Divine can enter. The invoker kneels before the Priest/ess and uses the words of an invocation to imagine a visual image of the deity, visualising the image forming behind the body of the Priest/ess and then merging into his or her aura. The energy of the Divine is held within the body of the Priest/ess who, for the duration of this time, is considered to *be* the Goddess and God.

Aidan Kelly notes that, '[w]hat the priestess does internally during this process is - either purposely or 'instinctively' - to alter her state of consciousness, to take on the persona of the Goddess, whom she will represent (or even, in some senses, be) for the working part of the ritual' (cited in Adler 1986: 168). And as Adler notes with regard to feminist witches (and it is equally true of Alexandrian/Gardnerian Wiccans), '[t]hey see many goddesses: the warrior, the amazon, the law giver, the giver of wisdom, the

creator of worlds, the one who lets loose the elemental forces of nature, the giver of life, and even the destroyer. All of these they draw down into themselves and *become'* (Adler 1986: 175). This 'becoming the Goddess or God is what constitutes the experience of the Divine, something which Wiccans perceive as more than an expression of belief. In the centre of the ritual, the Priestess *experiences* the Goddess, a process which Jane Ellen Harrison observes in her *Epilogomena to the Study of Greek Religion.* She writes that the dancer who plays a god in a sacred rite 'cannot be said to worship his god, he lives him, experiences him' (1962: xliv-xlvi). In Wicca, belief is almost a 'non-issue' and the aim of ritual is not to inculcate or define or express belief; rather, Wiccan ritual aims to facilitate identification with, and experience and knowledge of oneself and others, deity, nature, and the cosmos. Ritual is not secondary to belief, and belief is not necessary for ritual to be effective; for belief, in Wicca, is largely irrelevant. Through speaking a Charge, they speak the words of the God and Goddess and thus release the energy into the circle.

* * *

'I invoke thee and call upon thee[35]

O Mighty Mother of us all . . .'

I was standing with my back to the altar, my feet were a little apart, my arms outstretched to the heavens to form the symbol of the Star Goddess. The Priest was invoking the Goddess, calling her to enter the body of her Priestess.

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[35] This personal experience of invocation is taken entirely from Crowley 1990a: 60-61, again because it is the only published account I have been able to find of what it might feel like to be invoked set within a ritual context apart from those I have written myself which I did not deem appropriate for inclusion within a doctoral thesis.

'By seed and root and bud and stem . . .'

My awareness of the people around me faded, I felt my body grow taller. The voice of the Priest was becoming distant. The circle seemed far below.

'By leaf and flower and fruit . . .'

I was becoming the World Tree. My feet were rooted in the Earth, my arms were branches that touched the arch of heaven and around my head swirled the stars. I lost all sense of self - my body was empty, a vacuum waiting to be filled.

'By life and love

I do invoke thee and call upon thee

To descend upon the body of thy servant and Priestess'.

I felt the power - Her power - flow through me and out into the circle. My consciousness was dissolving into unity. There was no longer any 'I' and 'other' - only 'She'. Words came unbidden from a place deep within me:

'I am thy Goddess

High-born full-blooded and lusting free am I

The wind is my voice and my song . . .'

After a while it came to an end. The Priest kissed my feet bringing my consciousness down to Earth once more. I looked at the circle of people around me. I did not need to ask. I could see from their faces that the invocation had worked. Together we had touched that other realm and crossed the boundaries between the self and the infinite (Crowley 1990a: 60-61).

* * *

This, then, is the Wiccan experience of the Divine, or the infinite, which Schleiermacher defined as the essence of religion. This experience, says Berger in his commentary on Schleiermacher, is 'what religion is all about - *not* theoretical speculation, *nor* moral preachings . . . The underlying experience of all religion, its essence, is one of encountering the infinite within the finite phenomena of human life'[36] (Berger 1979: 130). Schleiermacher goes on to assert that this experience of the infinite, of God, is also characterised by absolute dependence. This dependence, however, is not typical of Wicca's relationship with the Divine except in the abstract sense of the interconnection and interdependency of all things in a universal web of life.

In Wicca, the Divine is perceived as both immanent and transcendent, interspersed throughout nature through the web of interconnections, but also the unifying whole. All things are therefore dependent on this universal life force. But the life force is also seen as manifesting in many different Gods and Goddesses with whom humans can relate, reflecting in Wicca the statement of the influential esotericist Dion Fortune - 'All the gods are one god and all the goddesses are one goddess, and there is one initiator' (Fortune 1989: 206).[37] Such a concept of the divine reflects a broader 'unity in diversity' theme which runs through Wicca, and it would therefore be wrong to say that all Wiccans are polytheists, duotheists, pantheists or panentheists. Superficially,

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[36] A statement which we can interpret again as represented in the connection between the physical body (ritual nudity) into which the Divine descends.

[37] cf. Crowley (1989: 12), 'all Gods are different aspects of the one God and all Goddesses are aspects of the one Goddess and . . . ultimately these two are reconciled in the one divine essence'.

Wicca usually appears duotheistic, focusing on the triple Goddess of the Moon (Maiden, Mother and Crone) and the Hornèd God of the woods, the hunt, and Lord of Death. However, in the practical work of ritual the Wiccan worldview is polytheistic - in all the covens I worked with, a variety of Gods and Goddesses were used from many different pantheons, the most common being Celtic, Egyptian, and Greek (see Plates 1-6). Carpenter's research confirms this multi-layered relationship with deity; he writes, 'Some Pagans[38] direct their worship toward a single aspect of deity; many focus their worship upon a Goddess-God pair; and others direct their worship to an entire pantheon. Some work with a pantheon rooted in a particular culture, while others work with a pantheon which includes goddesses and gods from many cultures' (Carpenter 1996: 57).

In the practice of invocation, Wiccans perceive themselves as merging with the divine. For some, this is possible because the Gods are archetypes which humans can relate to by virtue of the divine part of ourselves. For others, the Gods are external forces operating in the universe who can manifest through humans. Many Wiccans view the Divine as both within humans and external, that

> the full nature of Divine reality is as yet beyond our human understanding. We therefore clothe this multi-faceted reality in archetypal images that are an expression of the truth, but not the full truth . . . Whether they are seen as aspects of an impersonal life force, or as cosmic beings with an individuality,

[38] Carpenter refers to 'Pagans' throughout his chapter, but states on page 40 that his research was actually carried out among Wiccans.

Plate 1. Selection of deity statues used in Wicca, showing figures from Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Hindu, Buddhist, Celtic, Hawaiin and Maltese pantheons.

Plate 2. Statues of Wiccan goddesses (*left to right: Aphrodite, Kali, Isis, Sarasvati, Tara, Hawaiin fertility goddess, Isis, Tara, Bast; front - Isis*)

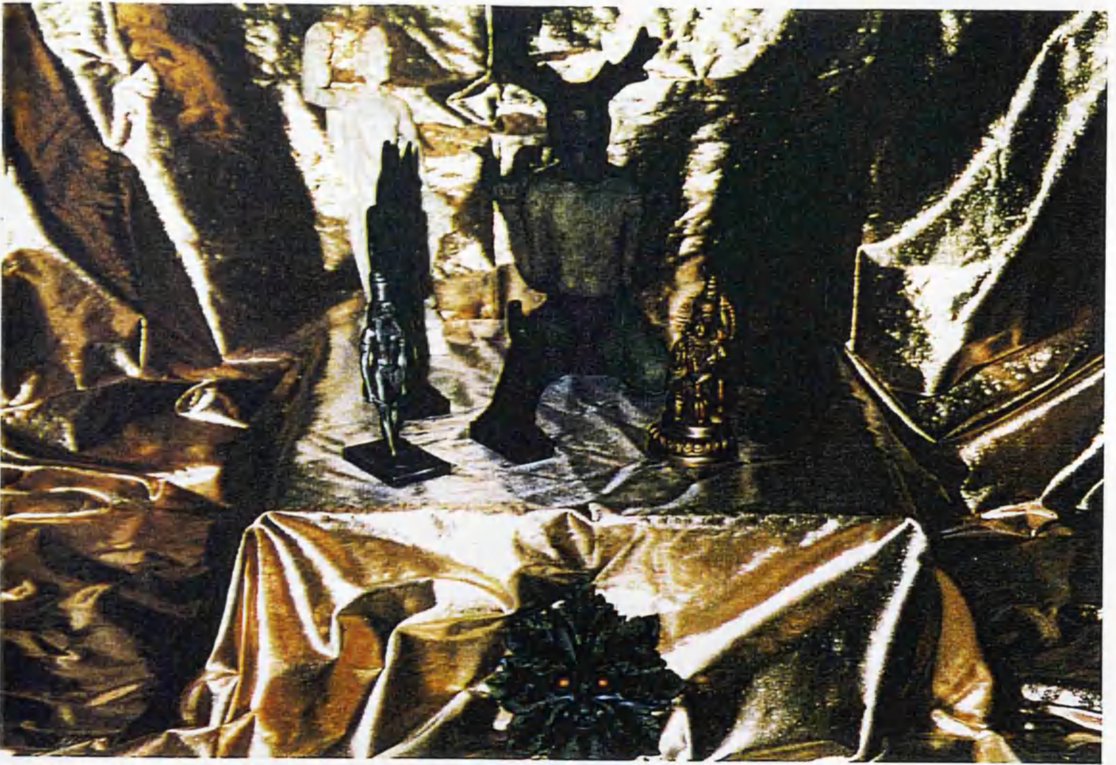

Plate 3. Statues of Wiccan gods (*left to right: Horus, Anubis, Dionysus, Horus, Cernunnos, Hanuman, Anubis, Thoth, Green man plaque*)

Plate 4. Shrine to Venus/Aphrodite

Plate 5. Eastern deities (*left to right: Tara, Sarasvati, Kali, Hanuman, Tara*)

Plate 6. Egyptian deities (*from Sphinx, left: Bast, Anubis, Bast, Thoth, Isis, Sekhmet, Anubis, Horus. Horus; front: Isis*)

> will depend on our own inner experiences and each individual will interpret these differently (Crowley 1996: 178).

It is Vivianne Crowley's work which applies Jungian psychology to the processes of Wiccan ritual which provides us with insight into the purpose of invocation. Crowley contends that, through invocation, Wiccans become attuned to their own Divine self and so manifest part of their own nature by temporarily incarnating the Divine. Such identifications, from a psychological point of view, lead to an understanding of the true nature of the archetypes: 'By temporarily identifying with a particular God or Goddess, Jung believed the worshipper would be led to a true understanding of the nature of the Gods. This realisation is a necessary step in the process of *individuation*' (Crowley 1996: 176).

This Jungian analysis stands in stark contrast to Michael Faber's unreconstructed Freudian assessment that identification with a Mother Goddess is regressive to psychological growth[39]. To Crowley, the practice of invocation and identification with deity is beneficial to psycho-spiritual growth, but it does have its dangers. Proper preparation is required in terms of the framework provided by the circle and the gradual change in consciousness triggered by the ritual gestures involved in this process, but it is also necessary for the person being invoked to be aware of possible side-effects. Such side effects can be feelings of omnipotence, that we actually *are* God, which we then try to act out in our everyday lives. In this case, the function of the circle as a boundary mechanism, providing a safe space in which the Divine can be

[39] Michael Faber's work was introduced in Chapter Two, *Researching Wicca*.

contacted, and the gradual shift back to the everyday reality through the ritual process, is of obvious importance. There are times, however, when something of the Divine is retained by the person who has been invoked: I was told by one Priest how, the first time he was invoked, he spent days wandering around in a daze, still feeling as though he was in that other reality where the human and Divine can become one. I have not, however, come across any long-term detrimental effects during the course of my fieldwork, and nor have I been told of any.

On the other hand, the Wiccan ritual framework could to some extent naturalise the experience of the Divine. Because the fundamental experience of the Gods or God in religion cannot be sustained in the paramount reality of the everyday world, it is embodied in tradition. However, whilst Berger speaks of the authority of religious experience being transferred to the tradition in which becomes embodied - 'there appear sacred rituals, sacred books, sacred institutions, and sacred functionaries of these institutions. The unutterable is now uttered - and it is *routinely* uttered' (Berger 1979: 47) - this process does not appear to have occurred in Wicca. This may be due to the fact that Wicca is only fifty years old, and there has therefore been little time for naturalisation to occur. It may, however, be a consequence of the organisational structure and ritual practice of Wicca. As we saw in Chapter Four, Wicca has no sacred books or institutions. It does have sacred ritual which has a common ritual framework, but its sacred functionaries are *all* initiates who, as Priests and Priestesses, worship a multitude of Gods and Goddesses rather than operating within an institutional organisation. The operation of covens in which Priests and Priestesses retain their individual identity and interests, work spontaneously and innovatively as

well as according to format, and are not 'routinely' invoked prevents the sacred from becoming an 'habitual experience' (ibid.: 47). The ritual framework liberates, rather than limits Wiccan contact with the Divine, and the dynamic relationship between group and individual prevents the experience from being effectively naturalised.

In addition, the nature of invocation relies on both the invoker and the person being invoked. As with communitas, it is not necessarily the case that communion with the Divine will occur at every ritual, or that, if it does occur, it will always be a powerful, mind-blowing experience for all concerned. Undoubtedly, some rituals can be particularly powerful in their effects, but at other times it is clear that the Priest/ess has not, for a variety of reasons, made the contact with the Divine. This uncertainty principle, at least partly, prevents the routinisation of religious experience in Wicca. As Adler recounts,

> I have seen priestesses who simply recited lines and priestesses who went through genuinely transforming experiences. I have seen a young woman, with little education or verbal expertise, come forth with inspired words of poetry during a state of deep trance. I have heard messages of wisdom and intuition from the mouths of those who, in their ordinary lives, often seem superficial and without insight (Adler 1986: 168-9).

However the Divine is envisaged, the sequence of gestures which casts the circle is conducive to entering altered states of consciousness, engaging with an alternative reality, and thus creates a sacred space in which humans and the Divine can safely

meet. The powers of the Gods are invoked into the reality created by the change of consciousness of the practitioners, for it would not be feasible for such connections to be made in the 'paramount' reality of the everyday world. Yet as an esoteric mystery religions, and as has repeatedly been made clear, Wicca does not seek to remove its practitioners from the everyday world of the paramount reality. How, then, does ritual bring people back into that other reality (for so it is perceived during the ritual), the 'paramount' reality of everyday life?

Returning To Everyday Reality

As well as the Charge releasing the Divine into the circle, the ceremony of cakes and wine also pours forth this energy, imbuing the cakes and wine as they are blessed and consecrated by the Priest and Priestess who were invoked as God and Goddess, symbolising the uniting of the Goddess and the God. It can therefore be seen as the culmination of the invocation for, '[i]n the blessing of Cakes and Wine, sacred food and drink are imbued with Divine force to provide us with energy for the spiritual journey that is life. We can then truly feast with our Gods' (Crowley 1996: 188).

* * *

The Priest took the cakes, and offered them to the Priestess/Goddess:

> *'O Queen most secret, bless this food unto our bodies, bestowing health, wealth, strength, joy and peace, and that fulfilment of love which is perpetual happiness'*

The Priestess blessed them, imbuing the food with the remaining power of the Goddess. Breaking off a piece for herself and the Priest, the cakes were passed to the

other coveners. The Priest then held the chalice before the Priestess, who plunged her athame into the wine saying,

> *As the athame is male, so the cup is female, and conjoined they bring forth blessedness*[40].

The food and drink were passed to all in the circle, and the feasting began.

* * *

During the feasting, the process of returning to everyday reality begins in earnest. The Wiccans relax, continue discussions from before the ritual began, answer questions from newer initiates, discuss the ritual, tell jokes, listen to raucous music, drum, chant, leap 'bonfires' lit in cauldrons (if appropriate to the rite), read tarot cards, consecrate pieces of jewellery or talismans, and generally commune with each other. Eating and drinking is considered by Wiccans to be essential for 'grounding', coming back into relatively normal space and time, gradually preparing for leaving the ritual space. Thus, the importance of the feasting and banishing is to help the return to everyday waking consciousness, the food literally being used as a grounding mechanism.

As with learning to slip into altered states of consciousness, it can be notably difficult for newer initiates to 'return' to the everyday world without carrying over some of the magical feeling and power surrounding the experience of ritual. This is often expressed as 'not feeling grounded properly', still feeling 'not quite back to normal',

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[40] Note that the male holds the cup, the female symbol, and the female holds the male athame; 'in this sexual symbolism is the relationship between the God and the Goddess: the two Divine forces ultimately reconciled in One' (Crowley 1996: 188).

light headedness, 'trancey', and perhaps travelling home on public transport the next day on 'auto pilot'. It is for this reason that many initiates will sleep at the house where the temple is situated after the ritual, returning home the next day, and this is especially important after an initiation, where the effects of changing consciousness, realities, and experiencing the Divine may be felt strongly for the very first time, heightened by the initiand having fasted for twenty four hours, gone through a rite of passage, felt nervous and frightened, and perhaps celebrated with a little too much to drink once they had successfully navigated the rebirth of the initiation ceremony.

* * *

Time for closing the circle. A blessing prayer was declaimed and then the Lords of the Watchtowers were thanked and banished:

Ye Lords of the Watchtowers of the East, Eurus Lord of Air,

We thank thee for attending our rite

And ere you depart to your fair and lovely realms,

We bid thee Hail and Farewell

'Hail and Farewell', we all repeated, bowing to each direction as the Lords of the Four Quarters were bid farewell in turn. Hugs and blessings were shared by all present, before dressing and then returning the room to its everyday setting.

* * *

TRAINING

Experienced practitioners are able to access other realities, to change states of consciousness, with relative ease - just the 'swishing of a broom' will trigger the

alteration[41]. It is necessary, however, to consider how the change in consciousness is facilitated for new initiates. If, as Crowley suggests (1996: 48), the symbols used in creating the sacred ritual space gradually become integrated into the psyche, we might assume that learning ritual and magic is partly a matter of gaining experience - the more one does ritual, the more the symbols and gestures will become familiar. However, the means by which these symbols are made familiar and, indeed, the necessity of integrating them into the psyche suggests an echo, at the very least, of the *art of memory*.

The Art of Memory

In her seminal work *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* ([1964], 1991) and in *The Art of Memory* ([1966], 1997), Frances Yates traces the transformation of the art of memory from classical antiquity to the Renaissance and the beginning of scientific method in the seventeenth century. The art of memory has its beginnings as a rhetorical device utilised by Roman orators such as Cicero and Quintilium, in which a series of places within a building are memorised, and images are then associated with these places. When delivering a speech, the orator walks through this building in his imagination, and draws upon the images to remind him of the order and thoughts of his speech ([1964]1991: 191). During the Renaissance, however, Yates explores an 'amazing transformation' of the art of memory into a magical art, an Hermetic art, which culminated with Giordano Bruno (ibid.: 191-2). Whereas previously buildings

[41] cf. Crowley (1996: 48), who reports one priestess' experience of moving into magical space: 'As soon as I hear the swishing of the broom, stillness ripples through my mind. The outside world just fades away'.

had generally been used as the foundation of memory systems[42], in the Renaissance the art of memory came to be understood as 'a method of printing basic or archetypal images on the memory, with the cosmic order itself as the "place" system, a kind of inner way of knowing the universe' (ibid.: 191). Yates considers this to be the equivalent of the Hermetic experience of 'reflecting the universe in the mind'[43] or, as Faivre (1988: 431) has expounded, the art of memory as studied by Frances Yates is 'first of all a means of reading the world so as to interiorize it and, in some sense, to rewrite it within the self'.

This art of memory can be found in Faivre's four fundamental characteristics of esotericism outlined in our introduction to this thesis. The Hermetic doctrine of *correspondences* reveals reflection of the macrocosm in the microcosm, the mirror of the universe in the mind and body of the human. Consequently, the cosmos is multilayered, complex, and plural, containing networks of sympathies and antipathies throughout its essentially *living nature*. And it is through *imagination* that we can 'put the theory of correspondences into practice and . . . uncover, . . . see, and . . . know the mediating entities between Nature and the divine world' (Faivre 1994: 12). The result of such internalisation is the *experience of transmutation*.

Clearly, the 'reflection of the cosmos in the mind' is unlikely to be spontaneously adopted by people being initiated into Wicca, even given the factor of recognition

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[42]Although Yates points out that Metrodorus of Scepsis is reputed to have used the zodiac as the foundation of his memory system (1991: 191).

[43] Hanegraaff 1998a: 429.

outlined in Chapter Four. Yet such reflection and internalisation forms an important part of the training of Wiccan initiates and, indeed, is considered to be an ongoing process throughout the initiate's life. It has been my experience that Wiccan practitioners do follow the Hermetic doctrines of reflection, and 'As above, so below' is an often quoted phrase; yet there would appear to be little awareness of the art of memory. It is our contention that Wicca in fact echoes the art of memory in its application of the theories of correspondences, living nature, and imagination/ mediation, and consequently attains the end result of the process, yet it does so with no explicit knowledge of the art of memory as method. Rather, the newcomer begins with an introduction to the notion of correspondences[44], and builds from there an inner reflection of the cosmos as a result of continued interaction with others in ritual, through experience, and through initiations.

Correspondences, Living Nature, and Imagination

Thinking in terms of correspondences, as we have noted, is an essential part of esoteric philosophy; following the Hermetic maxim 'As above, so below', the microcosm is believed to mirror the macrocosm - everything existing is a sign, and can be read and decoded by human beings after this Hermetic model which Wicca has inherited from Renaissance magical traditions via the Golden Dawn. In training new initiates, knowledge of the elements - earth, air, fire, water and ether[45] - are regarded

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[44] A variety of training exercises are undertaken either in formal neophyting or training evenings prior to initiation, practised in groups and/or individually, formally set out in correspondence courses, and always with the opportunity to report experiences and obtain feedback from more experienced Wiccans.

[45] See Plate 7, which shows some correspondences for the elements of water (top left - green/blue, chalice of water, shells, black mirror, crystal ball, the goddesses Isis and Sarasvati), fire (top right - red,

as one of the foundations of Wiccan magical technique and as keys to the process of transmutation. New initiates are therefore encouraged to familiarise themselves with the generally accepted universal correspondences, such as season, time, colour, planets, signs of the zodiac, archangels, and magical weapons, and to develop their own correspondences. Such personal correspondences might include names of deities, emotions, and personality characteristics, but are often also done for fun. Taking the element of fire as our example, we might find generally accepted correspondences, such as the planet Mars, the southerly direction, the colour red, energy, direction, will, intuition. On a personal level, a fire car might be a bright red ferrari, for example, and a fire film might be *Backdraft* or *Dante's Peak.*

Continuing our theme of fire, we might find visualisation exercises designed to promote an experience of fire within the imagination. For example, in the Wicca Study Group Correspondence Course which I studied, we were instructed to imagine a flaming red pentagram, which we were to walk through in order to experience the realm of fire. I wrote in my notes,

> Saw a wall of fire in front of me, and the elemental king quite clearly within. This figure was definitely male, with a short beard and dark

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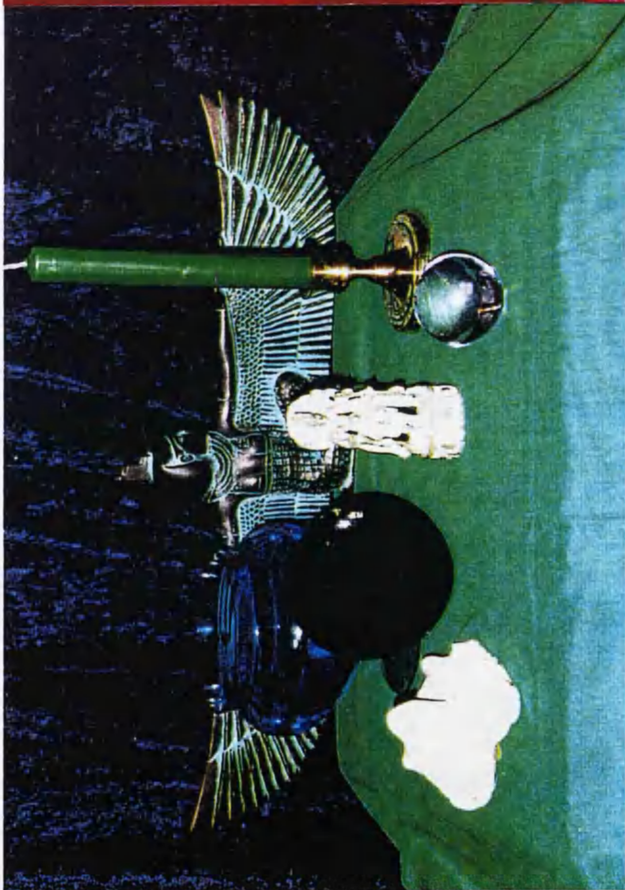
a selection of wands, candle flame, the goddesses Kali and Sekhmet, the god Horus) earth (bottom left - black, pentacle, salt, a selection of stones, the god Herne/Cernunnos, and the Green Man) and air (bottom right - blue, athames, smoking incense, the gods Thoth and Hanuman, and Athene's owl). Ether is not shown as it is considered to be all things and no-thing and is thus difficult to represent visually. Showing these four elements together provides a contrast, but has made it necessary to provide descriptions as a footnote due to lack of space on the plate itself.



> hair and about age 30 (though obviously ageless). He held out his hand to me and I stepped into the flames. I didn't have any fear, as I knew the flames wouldn't burn me. Other animal beings were also present in the flames - a phoenix, dragons, salamanders. I asked what I needed to learn from him, and he told me I must remember the healing and purifying nature of fire (1st April 1994).

Such visualisation exercises in Wiccan training require consideration as exemplars of Faivre's third fundamental characteristic of esotericism, *imagination and mediation.* Henry Corbin (1969), in his *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, emphasises the Imagination[46] as an active power which 'guides, anticipates, molds sense perception' (Corbin 1969: 80) and 'perceives, and at the same time confers existence upon, a reality of its own' (ibid.: 88). In doing so, he consciously draws upon Renaissance philosophy and Romanticism, for he quotes Alexandre Koyré's assertion that,

> [t]he notion of the Imagination, magical intermediary between thought and being, incarnation of thought in image and presence of the image in being, is a conception of the utmost importance, which plays a leading role in the philosophy of the Renaissance and which we meet with again in the philosophy of Romanticism (Alexandre Koyré 1955: 60, n. 2 in Corbin 1969: 179).

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[46] We follow Corbin's practice of capitalising Imagination to distinguish the Active Imagination, understood as an organ of perception, from the degraded imagination of fantasy.

Imagination is not, it must be stressed, the same as fantasy, for Imagination has its foundation in nature. Since Imagination as a creative function is incompatible with a worldview which denies the existence of an intermediate universe between the universe of empirical, sensory data and a meta-empirical, spiritual universe, Imagination has been degraded into fantasy. Nevertheless, according to Corbin it is only Imagination which can act as intermediary between the world of visibility and the world of mystery, and it is this intermediary character of Imagination which gives it 'the specific power to cause the impossible to exist' and places it 'at once in the sensible and the intelligible, in the senses and in the intellect, in the possible, the necessary and the impossible' (Corbin 1969: 218).

Imagination and mediation thus combine to allow the perception of many realities, to give form to that which is beyond form. Thus, in Imagining the flaming red pentagram, one not only sees into the realm of fire, but is enabled to move into that very reality itself.

Application

In ritual, correspondences, living nature, and Imagination are all applied. Our examination of the ritual framework of Wicca has provided some indication of the application of training in these elements of esotericism; however, it may be pertinent to provide a clear example of such application separately. As part of the ritual framework, the 'Lords of the Watchtowers' are invoked at each direction. The 'Lords' are the 'Kings of the Elements', the 'Elemental Lords', and they are invoked to protect and guard the circle. In ritual, the Watchtowers are invoked by facing the appropriate

direction, drawing the elemental pentagram in the air with the athame, visualising the image of the Lord of the Watchtower, and summoning the entity to the circle.
To continue our previous example, we shall use the element of fire. The Priest or Priestess stands facing the south, the direction associated with fire, and draws a red, fire-invoking pentagram. The coven visualises a tall, young, dark-haired man, dressed in red garments, carrying a spear. The Priest/ess proclaims, 'Ye Lords of the Watchtower of the South, Notus Lord of Fire, we do summon, stir and call ye up, to guard our circle and to witness our rite'.

The correspondences the initiate learns to associate with the element of fire are contained within this ritual gesture: south is the direction of fire, the Greek wind of fire is Notus, the weapon is a spear (wand, staff), its colour is red. Other correspondences might be the time of day (noon), the season (summer), the elemental (salamander). Thus, through learning the correspondences and experiencing ritual, especially by participating in ritual, the new initiate develops a deeper awareness of the symbolism and gesture used to build the sacred space. As the new initiate grows in experience, altered states of consciousness will be triggered more easily, without any conscious thought. The 'reality' of the realm of fire, of the presence of the elemental king, Notus, as one of the guardians of the magical reality of the circle, becomes part of the paramount reality: the initiate has 'moved between realities'.

CONCLUSION

The recent theorisation of ritual which has concentrated upon *how* ritual is performed as much as *what* ritual might be, is key to our understanding of Wiccan ritual and its

purpose. The focus on what Catherine Bell has termed 'self-conscious ritual entrepreneurship' in which groups and individuals 'plan their rites step by step, watch themselves perform them, and are quite likely to sit down afterward and analyse what worked and what didn't, both in terms of the ritual dynamics themselves and in terms of the effects the ritual was expected to produce' (Bell 1997: 224-5) appropriately fits Wicca's experiential dimension. These developments in interpretation stand in contrast to '[t]he tendency to think of ritual as essentially unchanging . . . that effective rituals cannot be invented' (ibid. 223). Whereas previously, according to Grimes, '[p]sychologists have treated private ritual as synonymous with neurosis . . . [t]heologians have regarded self-generated rites as lacking in moral character . . . [a]nd anthropologists have thought of ritual as traditional, collective representation, implying that the notion of individual or invented ritual was a contradiction in terms' (Grimes 1990: 109), scholars researching ritual in literate, post-industrial, western societies at the end of the twentieth century have had to develop methods of interpreting just such private, self-generated, invented rituals which are performed within the amorphous New Age field as well as by Spiritual Feminists, eco-warriors, Pagans and Wiccans.

Magical beliefs like witchcraft, according to Peter Berger, reflect an expression of the human ability to live in more than one psychic reality and are not attributes of irrationalism or primitive mentality. 'Reality', he says, 'is not experienced as one unified whole. Rather, human beings experience reality as containing zones or strata with greatly differing qualities' (ibid.: 37). Some of these realities are based on physiological process, such as dreams, while others are more rupturing and ecstatic

(ibid.: 37). Even though our waking, everyday life is normally experienced as more real most of the time, and therefore has a privileged character in consciousness, it is not the only reality.

In Wicca, ritual is used to facilitate awareness of a reality beyond the everyday, where the Divine can be experienced, in a sacred space which is perceived to be situated on the threshold between the 'world of men and the realms of the Mighty Ones', a space 'between the worlds', 'a place that is not a place and a time that is not a time'. Yet rather than implying rigidification and inviolability, a constraint within which ritual *must* be performed, the framework used by Wiccan practitioners is a mechanism used to build the ritual space and time - it *frames* the movement into another reality, the sacred space of the Wiccan circle, in which human and Divine can safely meet. The framework provides Wiccan ritual with a recognisable format, yet the nature of the rituals performed within the framework of the circle is intensely private, focusing on personal spirituality and processes of transformation, realisation and commitment.

Wiccan practitioners thus renew their sense of the sacred in a legitimated, traditional ritual framework. Spontaneity supplies personalisation and immediacy, whilst innovation lends to Wiccan ritual practice an aura of experimentation and openness to individual appropriation. The framework of ritual thus provides a specific time and space for the 'angels' to speak, and prevents the 'willy-nilly [return] to what Alfred Schutz has called the "standard time" of common human life' (Berger 1979: 152). The everyday reality and the magical reality, rather than being polarised, are instead opened up in order that Wiccans might encounter many dimensions of reality.

CONCLUSION

WICCA AS ESOTERIC SPIRITUALITY

> *the field of western esotericism is indeed a living field. As we proceed with its cultivation, we must approach it as we would any living thing, with care, and perhaps even with a measure of respect, simply in virtue of the fact of what it is, or at least, of what it appears to us to be* (Faivre & Voss 1995: 72).

At the beginning of this thesis we asked three questions: what forms does witchcraft take at the end of the twentieth century, how are Wicca and magic understood by practitioners, and how is Wicca to be characterised in the spiritual milieu of the 1990s? In asking these questions, we sought to add to the developing body of knowledge on Wicca, witchcraft and Paganism, and in particular we aimed to fill a gap in the literature by focusing specifically on Alexandrian/Gardnerian Wicca as practised in Britain in the 1990s.

In order to define this focus, we have argued that previous categorisations of Wicca are inappropriate and that the difficulty in characterising Wicca has been exacerbated by the portrayal of magic as a contra-religious instrumental means of control rather than as a spiritual discipline which may be a constitutive part of group religious practice. We turned to the Western Esoteric Tradition to find a pre-twentieth century understanding of magic, magic practised within a religious context and used as a means to attain spiritual transformation and gnosis. Having considered the six characteristics of esotericism identified by Faivre from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, we

found that these elements were evident within the three types of Wiccan magical practice which we outlined.

Following the introduction to our argument, we then moved to a demarcation of the field, a necessary step to focus our study and define its boundaries. We provided a brief history of Wicca for the purpose of orientation, before turning our attention to terms such as 'Pagan', 'Wiccan' and 'witch' in an attempt to disentangle the knotted threads of this spiritual skein. As a result, we were able to produce some distinctions between, on the one hand, Wicca and Paganism and, on the other, between Wicca and witchcraft. This enabled us to establish three ideal types of witchcraft: Wicca, feminist witchcraft, and hedgewitchcraft.

This differentiation between types of witchcraft allowed us to make a clear statement about the type of witchcraft - Wicca - with which this thesis is concerned, and it then became possible to consider methods of research. We explored some of the previous research in the wider area, but found that the majority of studies had as their focus North American, often feminist witchcraft. Indeed, the only academic study of Wicca in Britain was that conducted by Tanya Luhrmann in the 1980s, and we found that this study was methodologically and ethically problematic. Having highlighted the problems with Luhrmann's work, we considered our own position as 'insider/outsider' and suggested that, with a great deal of self-reflexivity, this position can in fact be advantageous rather than disastrous for scholarly research. Our diagrammatic representation of the researcher/researched relationship, along with reference to the JoHari Window, tried to portray the mutually beneficial results of such a relationship.

We then outlined the adoption of theory and methodology used in the thesis, arguing that multi-dimensional and inter-disciplinary approaches aid the insider/outsider researcher by enabling cross-referencing and forcing the researcher to step back into the quantitative realm from time to time. The data gathered in this quantitative realm was provided, and sociological conclusions were drawn in order to present the reader with an empirical picture of the dimensions of Wicca.

Having demarcated our field and filled in some details about Wicca and its practitioners, we moved on to a consideration of the mythological and historical perspectives of Wicca. Understanding that academic research on the Great Witch Hunt of early modern Europe only began to show detailed results as recently as the 1970s, we examined the way in which early scholarly expositions of the persecutions were used within Wicca to provide legitimisation. We noted that feminist witchcraft in North America had taken a different route, making use of the myth of a golden age of matriarchy to inform its practices in the 1970s, and we suggested that these two different 'rememberings' of history provided further distinctive features between Wicca and other forms of witchcraft. Rather than dismissing Wicca's use of history as devious simply because that history was incorrect, and as wilfully ignorant when such ignorance was, until the 1970s, entirely in line with the current knowledge of the academy itself, we instead acknowledged the validity of myth in the formation of community before moving on to twentieth century history which Wiccans have taken on board. Here, we traced the influences of the occult revival, specifically the Golden Dawn, Aleister Crowley, and Dion Fortune upon Wicca, and then moved behind these

fin de siècle organisations and characters to briefly examine the Western Esoteric Tradition to which they are heirs.

It is within this esoteric tradition that we found further evidence of ideas which are prevalent within Wicca at the end of the twentieth century, particularly within the works of Giordano Bruno. We suggested that it is within the development of esotericism during the Renaissance that the true lineage and continuity of Wicca may be found, whilst noting that we were looking not for unbroken apostolic succession but for the recurrence of the creative act - for an 'historical continuity in which individuals and/or groups are demonstrably influenced in their life and thinking by the esoteric ideas formulated earlier, which they use and develop according to the specific demands and cultural context of their own period' (Hanegraaff 1995b: 118).

Following this historical exposition, we moved to an examination of the magical community of Wicca in the 1990s, considering the organisation and structure of non-institutionalised religion and the management of the resulting diversity of both covens and individual members. In particular, we looked at rituals of initiation and the sabbat rituals of the Wheel of the Year in an attempt to discover their role in integrating the Wiccan community. We then explored the ways in which people sought and found entry into Wiccan covens, specifically discussing the idea of conversion within Wicca. 'Recognition' as a key conversion motif was found to be of extreme importance in the research conducted by Chapman and supported by findings contained in this thesis, and the recognition motif was shown to be appropriate to the 'transmission' characteristic of esotericism. Lastly, we discussed the core community of the coven,

drawing attention to the importance of female leadership and the means by which rules can be implemented by those in authority within a hierarchy of experience.

We thus have a detailed picture of Wicca - we know how it has been categorised within academia, how its relationship to Paganism and witchcraft is expressed, and how we can research it. We also know about both Wicca's history and its use of history. And we know about the communities of Wicca - we have sociological profiles of Wiccan members, and we have explored the ways in which they find Wicca and how covens are organised. Having travelled thus far, we were able to enter into the coven, as it were, and gain an understanding of Wiccan ritual. Using Victor Turner's notion of *communitas*, we considered the way in which ritual bonds communities, and we used Peter Berger's term 'many realities' to reflect the Wiccan understanding of their movement 'between the worlds'. The way in which this movement is facilitated was examined through a stage-by-stage analysis of the ritual framework used in Wicca, which included passages of description and actual ritual words in an attempt to convey something of the experience of Wiccan ritual. We then considered the methods by which Wiccan practitioners learn to 'experience many realities', specifically through the use of esoteric models such as the art of memory, and we found that characteristics of esotericism such as correspondences, living nature and imagination are contained within Wiccan training.

We have thus answered two of our three questions. The various forms of witchcraft extant at the end of the twentieth century have been outlined and categorised as three ideal types, and the practitioner understanding of Wicca and magic has been

considered in some detail throughout the thesis. Our third question, however - how is Wicca to be characterised in the spiritual milieu of the 1990s? - requires further consideration in the light of the thesis as a whole.

CHARACTERISATION OF WICCA

To a large extent, we have dismissed the New Age and NRMs as inappropriate to Wicca. Nevertheless, it remains for us to consider whether the relatively new categories of 'revived religion' and 'nature religion' are any more appropriate to Wicca, or whether it would be more accurate to characterise Wicca as a contemporary manifestation of the Western Esoteric Tradition, a current form of esoteric spirituality.

Revived Religion

As we reported in our Introduction, Wiccans tend to prefer the term 'revived religion' to NRM for, in styling itself a modern-day mystery religion, Wicca sees itself as reviving the mystery schools of the ancient Mediterranean world. Wicca's Gods and Goddesses may be taken from Egyptian, Greek or Roman, as well as Celtic pantheons, and the practice of initiation and secrecy certainly has parallels with, for example, the Isian and Eleusinian mysteries. Research into the mystery cults of the ancient world forms the basis of much Wiccan ritual some of which, in particular the Egyptian rites of Isis and Osiris, are informed by material collected and reconstructed by members of the Golden Dawn as well as more recently published archaeological and historical material. In this realm, however, inspiration for ritual is as likely to come from a statue or display found in the British Museum, or from classical mythology, as from other writings. In making connections back to ancient times, then, practitioners

express a preference for the term 'revived religion' rather than New Religious Movement. Ronald Hutton claims that 'revived religion',

> is the only one which truly does justice to what is arguably the central and enduring characteristic of pagan witchcraft: that it is a modern development which deliberately draws upon ancient images and ideas for contemporary needs, as part of a wholesale rejection of the faiths which have been dominant since the ancient ways of worship were suppressed (Hutton 2000).

It is not, however, an appropriate or specific enough term for use in distinguishing religions, since all religions have a tendency to use what has gone before and could therefore be called revived religions. As Irving Hexham points out, '[t]he thing that is "new" in new religions is the content of their mythological idioms and their conscious use of images, practices and theories from anywhere [and indeed, anytime] in the world' (1997: 162). At present, it seems that the term 'revived religion' is confined to modern western Paganism, in which case why not simply call these religions 'Pagan religions'? The term 'revived religion' may, in time, come to cover more religious traditions, but at present its usage is limited. If, however, the differentiation outlined in Chapter One between the various Pagan religions continues, it may become necessary to consider an alternative umbrella term for what is presently called 'Paganism'. As Paganism becomes distinctive as a religion in its own right, it may no longer be appropriate to use it as a convenient all-embracing term. We may instead need to introduce a term such as 'revived religion' under which would come Wicca, Druidry, Asatru, shamanism, Paganism, the Fellowship of Isis, and other religions

currently considered 'Pagan'. Since all these religions have in common an attitude towards 'nature-as-sacred', however, scholars and practitioners have favoured definition as 'nature religion'.

Nature Religion

As Vivianne Crowley (1998) points out in her discussion of *Wicca as Nature Religion*, Wicca has only recently identified itself closely with the natural world - 'before the 1970s, it was not a nature religion but (in part) a fertility religion'. But the growing popular awareness of environmental concerns brought an influx of changes, and Wiccans realised that 'a nature religion implies a nature to worship . . . Stimulated by those who had participated in the "alternative society" of the 1960s and 1970s, the ethos of Wicca and Paganism was beginning to evolve from one of nature veneration to nature preservation' (Crowley 1998: 175). Direct links had already been made with the natural world in ritual texts such as the Great Charge, written by Doreen Valiente in the 1950s, which contains the following lines:

> I who am the beauty of the green earth, and the white moon amongst the stars, and the mystery of the waters, and the desire in the heart of man call unto thy soul, 'Arise, come unto me'. For I am the soul of Nature who gives life to the universe.[1]

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[1] cf. Crowley 1994: 109 - *Prayer of Praise to the Great Goddess*

Yet among 'organised' Pagan traditions such as Wicca and Druidry, few practitioners involve themselves in direct action. Emma Restall Orr (1998: 153-4) explains the Druid perspective:

> Whilst the extraordinary courage and dedication of the young folk who are willing to risk their own lives for the sake of the forests and the meadows, the wildlife, the SSSIs (Sites supposed to be protected because of their Special Scientific Interest), never ceases to amaze me, most Druids would not work at the cutting edge of confrontation

and a Wiccan view was expressed by a priestess in her early 30s:

> I do resent the occasional implication that unless you've spent time up a tree to protect it, you are not a true Witch. I would love to be able to head down to a site to try and protect it in a physical way, but I have a 9-5 job to do, so can't. But I respect and wish all the best to the folk who can do that. I'll do my own small thing locally, in my own way. Craft is one thing, eco-activism is another . . . I do not think they automatically go hand in hand[2].

Furthermore, the portrayal of nature in Pagan and Wiccan rituals is often nothing more than imagery - of idealised nature, or of cosmological nature. This romantic ideal on the part of urban Pagans has little in common with the reality of living on the land, where nature is anything but romantic. The Pagan/Wiccan ideal of nature thus often

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[2] Hweorfa, 15th October 1998

seems to stem from a genuine desire to be in harmony with nature and, to an extent, to preserve nature, whilst at the same time the cosmology suggests that nature is but a reflection of a greater divine reality. This is in keeping with the Hermetic maxim 'As above, so below', yet the impact of environmental awareness and activism begs the question as to whether Wiccan attitudes towards nature are relevant to the esoteric concept of 'living nature' or whether they are merely a religious rendering of secular concerns. In any case, the concept of 'nature' is itself diffuse and fractured, and it may be for this reason that Wiccan attitudes to nature as sacred incorporates nature as the universe/cosmos, nature as deity, and also human as part of nature. The refusal to place boundaries around a constructed 'nature' necessarily leaves the observer with the impression of a confused and ill thought-out response to the natural world.

WICCA AS ESOTERIC SPIRITUALITY

In order to bring our discussions regarding characterisation to a close, it may be useful to consider the place of Wicca within the psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory of human motivation, as adapted by Elizabeth Puttick. In an attempt to provide a means of greater differentiation, Puttick (1997: 234-9) uses Maslow's theory - more commonly known as the 'hierarchy of needs' - to map alternative spiritualities, including esoteric spirituality, at the close of the twentieth century.

The 'Hierarchy of Needs' Model

The hierarchy of needs begins with physiological needs at level one which, when applied to religion, is characterised by animistic or polytheistic approaches through which gods or spirits are appeased (Puttick cites voodoo and Cargo cults as examples).

At level two, we find safety needs which are reflected in religions such as the Jesus movement, the Unification Church and ISKCON, which are conservative, patriarchal and misogynistic, and which increase safety by eliminating any threat of competing creeds. These first two levels Puttick terms 'traditionalism', whilst the next three she calls 'personal development'.

At level three, esteem needs are considered and religions catering for this level tend to be organised hierarchically, with demarcated priesthoods and levels of initiation or advancement, usually led and dominated by men. According to Puttick, such religions promise wealth, health and happiness, often through self-improvement, examples being est, Silva Mind Control, Scientology, TM and Soka Gakkai. The need for belonging and love are found at level four, where religions have a less authoritarian and hierarchical leadership, tending towards democracy, egalitarianism, and a focus on human values. In such religions, Puttick claims, personal development is the predominant goal, and she cites as examples the Human Potential Movement, Osho, Gurdjieff, western Buddhist groups, New Age, and Pagan groups. Lastly, at level five, we find self-actualisation needs which cover a spectrum of personal development from level three to level five, the difference being that self-actualisation at level five 'extends beyond the humanistic to the transpersonal level . . . Maslow equated it with self-fulfilment but also with the desire to "become everything that one is capable of becoming"' (Puttick 1997: 239; Maslow 1970: 46). In religions at level five, dualism (including gender) begins to be transcended into union with a greater whole, and there are therefore no restrictions on female leadership. Characteristically monistic and

mystical, religions which cater for level five needs include the mystical and esoteric traditions of all religions, such as Zen Buddhism, Dzogchen, Sufism and Kabbalah.

Wicca, Esotericism and the Hierarchy of Needs

Such a scale by which we might look at alternative spiritualities and 'map' them according to these levels is useful when considering a religion or group of religions which, like Wicca, appears to overlap with so many interconnecting strands - Paganism, feminist witchcraft, feminist spirituality, the goddess movement, New Age, NRMs, occult and magical traditions, and esotericism. The 'hierarchy of needs' does carry notions of elitism, and perhaps it would be wise to remember Maslow's own title of the theory of human motivation. For what we are looking at in this scale is not actually a hierarchy but an acknowledgement that different people have different needs which they seek to be met in all areas of life, including religion[3]. Depending for their success on attracting large numbers of people, the so-called 'world religions' cater for multi-level needs. Wicca, as we have indicated in Chapter Four, does not proselytise and operates in a manner which precludes fast growth in numbers. Often regarded as elitist, at least by non-initiatory Pagan groups, and certainly presenting itself as an esoteric religion suited to the few, Wicca is not required to cater for the whole scale of needs.

It is quite probable that Puttick is correct to place Pagan groups at level four, for certainly Paganism is characterised by a lack of hierarchy, leadership and authority, and groups do tend towards democracy, egalitarianism and a focus on human values.

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[3] cf. quote from Hutton 2000 at the beginning of Chapter Two of this thesis.

We could also argue that, although in the Western world we are physiologically catered for in life and do not have to worry so much about basic survival needs, Wicca and Paganism do cater for level one needs in so far as both are polytheistic, and some forms are animistic. Perhaps the fact that these religions cater for needs at this level is in recognition that we do all have basic needs which must be met - food, sleep, shelter, sex - but which we tend to take for granted. In resacralising the earth, celebrating seasonal festivals, and honouring sex, Wicca, witchcraft and Paganism are also honouring the basic physiological needs of humanity. The other 'traditional' need - that of safety - is not, however, evident in Wicca and Paganism. They are not conservative, patriarchal or misogynistic, and there is no attempt to eliminate competing creeds; there are no gurus claiming to hold *the* Truth.

However, as we have repeatedly suggested throughout the thesis, Wicca cannot be presented accurately if it is conflated with Paganism. If Wicca is a form of esoteric spirituality, perhaps even esoteric Paganism or Pagan esotericism, then according to Puttick it should cater for level five needs. Certainly, Wicca can be described in terms of level five characteristics: female leadership is encouraged rather than restricted, and the superficial dualism of male and female deities is, in Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca, usually transcended in terms of regarding the Divine as one, referring to a universal life force, with individuals often quoting Dion Fortune's words, 'all the gods are one god and all the goddesses are one goddess, and there is one initiator' (Fortune 1989: 206). Maslow's interpretation of self-actualisation as the desire to 'become everything that one is capable of becoming' is analogous to Crowley's interpretation of the Wiccan three degrees of initiation as leading towards Jung's concept of

individuation. A further interpretation, according to the concerns of this thesis, is that 'becoming everything we are capable of becoming' implies the experience of transmutation and the attainment of gnosis. Without this experience of transmutation, according to Faivre (1994: 13), the characteristics of correspondences, living nature, and imagination/mediation within a spiritual framework remain merely 'a form of speculative spirituality'.

Having outlined the six characteristics of esotericism developed by Faivre in our Introduction and investigating them with regard to Wicca throughout the course of the thesis, and having also noted the need for historical investigations which were considered in Chapter Three, we can now add that the Wiccan understanding of magic provides the means for attaining the experience of transmutation. We conclude, therefore, that Wicca does contain the four essential characteristics of esotericism outlined by Faivre, as well as the non-essential elements of transmission (through initiation) and the praxis of concordance (which can be seen in the eclecticism of Wicca). Furthermore, the underlying philosophy of Wicca is based on the Hermetic esotericism amalgamated during the Renaissance, which Wiccan initiates use within their own contemporary context. These historical influences provide the link through time which Hanegraaff regards as essential if something is to be categorised as esoteric.

However, Hanegraaff and Faivre both deny Wicca categorisation as esoteric. Underlying this denial, we meet once again the problem of conflation - between Wicca and Paganism, and between Wicca and later developments such as feminist witchcraft.

What Hanegraaff and Faivre fail to grasp is that Wicca, when considered as a specific form of modern witchcraft, does in fact remain 'the relatively self-contained, England-based occultist religion which it originally was', and may therefore be considered in terms of the continuation of the Western Esoteric Tradition. As perhaps further proof of the necessity for further research to be conducted, neither Faivre nor Hanegraaff are as well-informed on the phenomenon of Wicca as they might be, and they thus fall into the same trap: that despite witchcraft's 'often obvious connections with modern esoteric currents', it does not form an integral part of them (Faivre 1994: 17). Yet Faivre understands Freemasonry as esoteric in only certain aspects, and that some forms of Freemasonry are 'almost completely devoid of esotericism'. Similarly, if we understand that there are a variety of forms of witchcraft rather than accepting a mythically normative Wicca or witchcraft which is in fact a conflation of genuinely different entities generalised across a broad spectrum, we may be able to ascertain that, whilst some traditions of witchcraft such as feminist witchcraft may be 'completely devoid of esotericism' others, such as Gardnerian/Alexandrian Wicca, are not.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE THESIS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As a newly emerging field of study, the scope for future research is immense. Throughout the course of the thesis we have indicated potential areas for specific focus. Thus, we might draw attention once again to the children of Wiccan and Pagan parents outlined in Chapter Four. At present, Wicca is not what we could call 'generational' in that its numbers do not grow with either the birth of babies or with the acceptance of children into membership. Considering our emphasis on the importance of recognition and transmission, it would be interesting to see how many children

raised by Wiccan/Pagan parents choose to become Wiccans/Pagans themselves as they mature to adulthood. Aside from this, the ways in which such children are brought up and taught about religion would be an exciting project in itself. However, it should perhaps be pointed out that such a study might be extremely difficult to undertake from an outsider position. We have drawn attention at various points in the thesis to the reactions of Wiccans and Pagans to the Satanic abuse scares of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and studying the children of such people would be all but impossible due to lack of trust. It may perhaps be a possible project for an insider to undertake, bearing in mind the need for scholarly objectivity as well as insider empathy outlined in Chapter Two.

As we indicated in Chapter Two, we expect the present thesis to be outdated within ten years and have suggested that continual fieldwork is necessary in order to keep abreast of developments. The growing differentiation between Wicca, witchcraft and Paganism discussed in Chapter One may prove to be an interesting area to observe over the next decade. Will the increase in popularity of this area of spirituality continue or lose momentum? And if it does continue, will it indeed become necessary to develop further the category of 'revived religion'? Will the organisation of Wicca discussed in Chapter Four change and become more standardised, even institutionalised, in an effort to retain its individual identity in the face of continued popular derivations?

The results of our explorations in this thesis suggest that Wicca is indeed a form of esoteric spirituality, and that this category is more appropriate to Wicca than those

discussed in our Introduction and above. However, if Wicca's real lineage, in Corbin's longitudinal sense, is from the esoteric tradition amalgamated during the Renaissance, then the implications are extraordinary, for we must question whether it is necessary to be Pagan in order to be Wiccan. As Hanegraaff noted in our quote at the beginning of Chapter One, Wicca 'gradually and almost imperceptibly shades into a non-pagan domain'. Although Wicca has been intricately bound up with the development of exoteric Paganism, this thesis has provided evidence of growing differentiation between the two.

Thus, although Wicca is most often classed as 'Pagan', by both practitioners and scholars, this may not necessarily be accurate, or may not be in the future. If Wicca's lineage truly is traceable through the development of esotericism and magic, then despite reactionary hostility to Christianity for the persecutions of the past, it may in fact be the case that one could be both Christian and Wiccan, for example. Indeed, Ronald Hutton (2000) has suggested that Wicca could 'be endorsed by *liberal* Christians, with some reformulation such as the recognition of a Supreme Being who is beyond gender, incorporating both female and male' (emphasis mine). Given the (not always unwarranted) suspicion with which Wiccans and Pagans tend to view the Church, however, I would in turn suggest that any research on Christianity within contemporary Wicca would have to be undertaken with a great deal of sensitivity and care! As Faivre and Voss indicate at the beginning of this chapter, we must proceed with care and with respect, for the study of Wicca, like that of esotericism in general, is a living field being newly cultivated. Yet such cultivation also requires a shifting

and turning over of earth to ensure the fertility of the land, and it is with this in mind that we ask what may be unwelcome questions.

Such a mixture of Wicca and Christianity would, in fact, be in keeping with Wicca's heritage as outlined in this thesis. The Renaissance magicians Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, so important to the development of the Western Esoteric Tradition, were both devout Christians; even Bruno, who sought the re-establishment of the Egyptian 'religion of the world', believed this should be brought about through a reformed Catholicism. As we noted in our deliberations on the Golden Dawn, membership of this organisation did not necessitate a revolt against Christianity and many members - A. E. Waite being perhaps the most famous - remained Christian mystics as well as magicians. Similarly, Dion Fortune was as much an esoteric Christian as she was a proto-pagan and ritual magician, bridging the dichotomy between 'the Gods and the one God; between the Mystery at Bethlehem and those of Karnak, Atlantis, and Avalon' (Richardson 1991: 42). In fact, of the figures influential on the development of Wicca, only Aleister Crowley was virulently anti-Christian and Helena Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society which had less of an impact on Wicca, also became increasingly anti-Christian as she turned to the East for inspiration. As Faivre (1994:6) points out,

> esotericism involves a form of thought. Following this mode of thought does not mean denying or adopting any dogma whatsoever, and the fact that esotericism often happens to be accompanied by heretical propositions is in no way what defines it as esoteric. Just as there is no lack of esotericists at the

> very heart of Catholicism, without being heretical for all that. This said, the status of esoteric currents cannot be defined except as a function of their relationships to the dominant religions. In the Latin West, these relationships have been and remain difficult with the Catholic and Protestant churches.

Further work in the area of Wiccan history and influences upon Wicca may shed more light on the relationship between esotericism, occultism, magic, Wicca, and Christianity, for in an emerging field it is not enough to study 'the current manifestations - the trunk, branches, flowers and fruits' (Harvey 1996: 34). One must also consider the roots. Once a field is well-defined and the historical context fully understood and debated, then perhaps the 'branches, flowers and fruits' can be studied without a great deal of reference to the 'roots'. Such disembedding seems somewhat dangerous, however, in the early stages of an establishing field. We might consider Zwi Werblowsky's lamentation that, 'the trouble with most writings on the new . . . religious groups is that their authors seem to have forgotten, or never learned, history' (1982: 33). Researchers should not, of course, neglect the current manifestations of Wicca and Paganism; our point is rather that, in the colourful round of festivals and rituals, interviews and participant observation, the historical context should not be forgotten but combined with other (sociological and anthropological) research techniques[4].

In particular, more work is needed on the esoteric and *fin de siècle* influences on Wicca. This thesis has attempted to progress this area in particular, but has been

[4] See Hanegraaff 1999: 17.

limited by space and time. Thus, we have touched on Wicca's affinities with esotericism and applied Faivre's characteristics to it; however, a careful reading of, for instance, the works of Giordano Bruno and proof of the existence (or non-existence) of the Giordanisti might reveal further early manifestations of contemporary Wiccan ideas. Similarly, this thesis has concentrated on the magical occult societies of the *fin de siècle* and has barely touched upon the magical and pagan images prevalent in the art and literature of the period[5]. This last area of research is of particular interest to the present author and will be undertaken in the near future.

LAST WORDS: RELIGION AND THE RETURN OF MAGIC

'The true purpose of all magic' according to Crowley (1996:200) 'is transformation. This can be transformation of the outer world but, more importantly, it is transformation of the inner world that is the aim'. Richard Sutcliffe (1996: 112) stresses this transformation, stating that, 'the practice of ritual magick [*sic*] constitutes a specific and radical project of auto-poesis (self-creation), which has as its ultimate aim the transmutation of the self'. The goals of Wiccan magic, especially the third type - the magic of transmutation - can be conflated with those of Wiccan religious rituals which are themselves imbued with magic in both symbology and practice.

We might conclude, then, that far from operating as 'the employment of ineffective techniques to allay anxiety when effective ones are not available' (Thomas 1991: 800), magic in Wicca is understood in the same way as it was portrayed in the Renaissance. Magic is not set in opposition to religion, but rather is an important element of

[5] Hutton has also touched upon this area in his *Discovery of the Modern Goddess* (Hutton 1998: 89-92).

spiritual growth towards the mystical attainment of gnosis, with any short-term pragmatic goals being secondary to this end result, the experience of transmutation which produces 'insight into the hidden mysteries of cosmos, self and God' (Hanegraaff 1995b: 112) and allows 'no separation between knowledge (gnosis) and inner experience, or intellectual activity and active imagination (1994: 13). In terms of Wiccan understanding, magic has been transformed from a contra-religious, instrumental means of control practised by individuals, to a participative, group practice which forms an integral part of religion. Witchcraft, and magic, have indeed not vanished from this earth.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1
THE SURVEY

LANCASTER
UNIVERSITY

Whatever your religion, your help would be greatly appreciated in this nationwide study aiming to assess what the Goddess means today and how reverence for Her is affecting people's lives. This is the first study of its kind in Britain, so by completing this questionnaire you will be making a valuable contribution to expanding the knowledge of what is happening in contemporary Goddess-oriented religions. The research will provide a sincere investigation and is being carried out from the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University. It is hoped that the research findings will be shared with you through various Pagan magazines.

I hope you will participate in this important new project and that you will enjoy completing the questionnaire. Thank you for your participation.

WHAT TO DO

Please answer each question by placing an X in the selected box or by writing your comments in the space provided; if you wish to expand on any answer or would like to express views not included in the questionnaire, please do so on a separate sheet and include it with your reply.

Every question counts, so please feel free to photocopy this questionnaire and pass it on to anyone else who may be interested.

As the questionnaire is anonymous please feel free to express you opinions in the spaces provided.

Q1. Do you worship:

the Goddess ❑ the God(s) ❑
both equally ❑ neither ❑

Q2.. At what age, and/or how long ago, did you become involved in Goddess worship?
....
....
....
....

SURVEY OF CONTEMPORARY GODDESS RELIGIONS

Q3. How did you become involved in Goddess worship? (for example, were you introduced to it through a partner, friend, colleague, family member ; or did it develop from an interest in feminism, magic, comparative religions, psychology, folklore, mythology, past life experience, ecology etc.)
....
....
....
....

Q4. Do you follow a particular tradition?
YES ❑ NO ❑
If YES, which tradition is this?
....

If NO, please indicate if you have leanings towards a tradition or which you have found most useful for information (i.e. through books, workshops,etc.)
....
....

Q5. Are you "open" or "secret" about your spirituality? Please give reasons.
....
....
....
....

Q6. What attracted you to Goddess worship?
....
....
....
....

Q7. Please describe how you perceive the Goddess.
....
....
....
....

Q8. Which aspect of the Goddess do you feel closest to and why?
....
....
....
....

Q9. Do you feel it is more important to worship the Goddess, the God(s) or both equally? (please give reasons)
the Goddess ❑ the God(s) ❑
both equally ❑
....
....
....
....

Q10. Do you see Goddess worship as new, ancient, or a mixture of both?
New ❑ Ancient ❑ Mixture ❑

Q11. Approximately how may books have you read on the Goddess or Goddess related subjects?

None	❑	11 - 25	❑
1 - 10	❑	26 - 50	❑
over 50	❑		

Q12. Do you feel worshipping the Goddess has changed or strengthened your attitude to and relationships with : (please give reasons)
a)women..
....
....
b)men..
....
....
c)nature...
....
....

Q13. Which individuals have had an important influence on your concept of the Goddess
a)by contact...
....
....
....
b) by their writings..
....
....
....

Q14. If you have been involved in Goddess worship for over five years, please describe any changes you have noticed
....
....
....
....

Q15. Have you had experience of any forms of Psi (Paranormal phenomena)?
YES ❑ NO ❑
If YES, of which type(s)?

Clairvoyance	❑	Psychokinesis	❑
Clairaudience	❑	Past Life	❑
Precognition	❑	Synchronicity	❑
Telepathy	❑	Astral travel	❑

Other (please state)
....

Q16. What amount in total would you estimate that you have spent on activities which could broadly be called Goddess based in the last 12 months?

NONE	❑	£50-£100	❑
UP TO £25	❑	£100-£200	❑
£25-£50	❑	OVER £200	❑

Q17. Do you relate Goddess worship to nature? If so, how?
....
....
....
....
....

Q18. In what way would you say that adopting a Goddess-oriented religion/lifestyle might have positively changed your life? (Tick more than one box if required)

No change	❑	More pleasurable	❑
More spiritual	❑	More responsible	❑
More self empowered	❑	More holistic	❑
Happier	❑	More healed	❑
More meaningful	❑	More fulfilled	❑

Other (please state)
....

Q19. Have there been any negative changes (please state)
....
....
....
....

Q20. Have you ever participated in or used any of the following? Also, which of the following are you currently engaged in?

	YES	NO	CURRENTLY
Acupuncture	❑	❑	❑
Animism	❑	❑	❑
Aromatherapy	❑	❑	❑
Astrology	❑	❑	❑
Celtic Studies	❑	❑	❑
Chaos Magic	❑	❑	❑
Direct Action	❑	❑	❑
Divination	❑	❑	❑
Druidry	❑	❑	❑
Earth Mysteries	❑	❑	❑
Ecology	❑	❑	❑
Egyptology	❑	❑	❑
Folk Lore	❑	❑	❑

Feminism	❑	❑	❑
Freemasonry	❑	❑	❑
Golden Dawn	❑	❑	❑
Gnosticism	❑	❑	❑
Green Politics	❑	❑	❑
Healing	❑	❑	❑
Heathenism	❑	❑	❑
Herbalism	❑	❑	❑
Ceremonial Magic	❑	❑	❑
Men's Studies	❑	❑	❑
Mythology	❑	❑	❑
Natural Magic	❑	❑	❑
New Age Movement	❑	❑	❑
North American Indian Traditions	❑	❑	❑
Odinism/Asatru/Northern Traditions	❑	❑	❑
OTO	❑	❑	❑
Paganism	❑	❑	❑
Psychology	❑	❑	❑
Qabalah	❑	❑	❑
Recycling	❑	❑	❑
Reflexology	❑	❑	❑
Regression	❑	❑	❑
Rosicrucianism	❑	❑	❑
Shamanism	❑	❑	❑
Shiatsu	❑	❑	❑
Spiritualism	❑	❑	❑
Sweatlodge	❑	❑	❑
Thelema	❑	❑	❑
Theosophy	❑	❑	❑
Vegetarianism	❑	❑	❑
Wicca	❑	❑	❑
Womens' Studies	❑	❑	❑

Other (please state)

....

Q21. Have you ever attended a Goddess-oriented workshop, lecture, exhibition/festival, or retreat?

YES ❑ NO ❑

If YES, please state the approx. number you have attended in the last 12 months (state number)

Workshop...........

Exhibition/festival..........................

Lecture...............................

Retreat...........................

Q22. To what extent do you consider yourself to be "green"? (please ring one number)

NOT GREEN TOTALLY GREEN

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Q23. Are you a member of or do you contribute to, any pressure groups or alternative political organisation (e.g. Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Green Party etc.)?

YES ❑ NO ❑

If YES, please list organisations

....

....

....

Q24. Do you belong to any of the following organisations?

The Pagan Federation	❑	Green Circle	❑
The Fellowship of Isis	❑	Hoblink/IGLPC	❑
Odinic Rite/Odinshof	❑	PHFT	❑
Pagan Animal Rights	❑	OBOD	❑

Other (please state)

....

Q25. Do you subscribe to or regularly read any of the following? (tick more than one if required)

Pagan Dawn	❑	Isian News	❑
Deosil Dance	❑	Pagan Voice	❑
Quest	❑	Talking Stick	❑
The Cauldron	❑	Druids' Voice	❑

Other (please state)

....

Q26. Do you feel there has been a rise in Goddess worship amongst men and women in the last 30-40 years?

YES ❑ NO ❑

If YES, have you any views on when this increase occurred and what may have caused it?

....

....

....

....

Q27. Do you feel there is a role for Priests/esses of the Goddess in modern life?

YES ❑ NO ❑

If YES, please describe how you see this role

....

....

....

....

Q28. Do you regard Goddess-based religions as (tick more than one if required)

"New Age" religion	❑	feminist religion	❑
Pagan religion	❑	nature religion	❑
revived religion	❑		

Q29. Please describe what the word spirituality means to you

....
....
....
....

Q30. Do you feel Goddess worship has effected any changes in Britain in the recent past?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If YES, what do you think they are?

....
....
....
....
....

Q31. Do you feel worship of the Goddess is likely to continue and to grow among

men ☐ women ☐

If so, what changes do you think this may effect in the future? (Religion, ecology, politics, gender stereotypes, etc.)

....
....
....
....

Q32. Do you think the future holds the possibility of a balance between the masculine and feminine aspects of the divine?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Q33. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of humankind on this planet?

OPTIMISTIC ☐ PESSIMISTIC ☐

Would you please provide some facts about yourself.

Are you Male ☐ Female ☐

Single ☐ Partnered ☐

What is your age?

Under 18 ☐ 25 - 34 ☐ 45 - 54 ☐
18 - 24 ☐ 35 - 44 ☐ 55 - 64 ☐
over 65 ☐

What is your occupation?

....

What was your religious upbringing? (please be specific - i.e. if Christian, state Catholic, Anglican, Methodist etc.)

....

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY. PLEASE FOLD THE FORM AS INDICATED, AFFIX A STAMP AND POST. NO ENVELOPE IS REQUIRED.

APPENDIX 2

THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

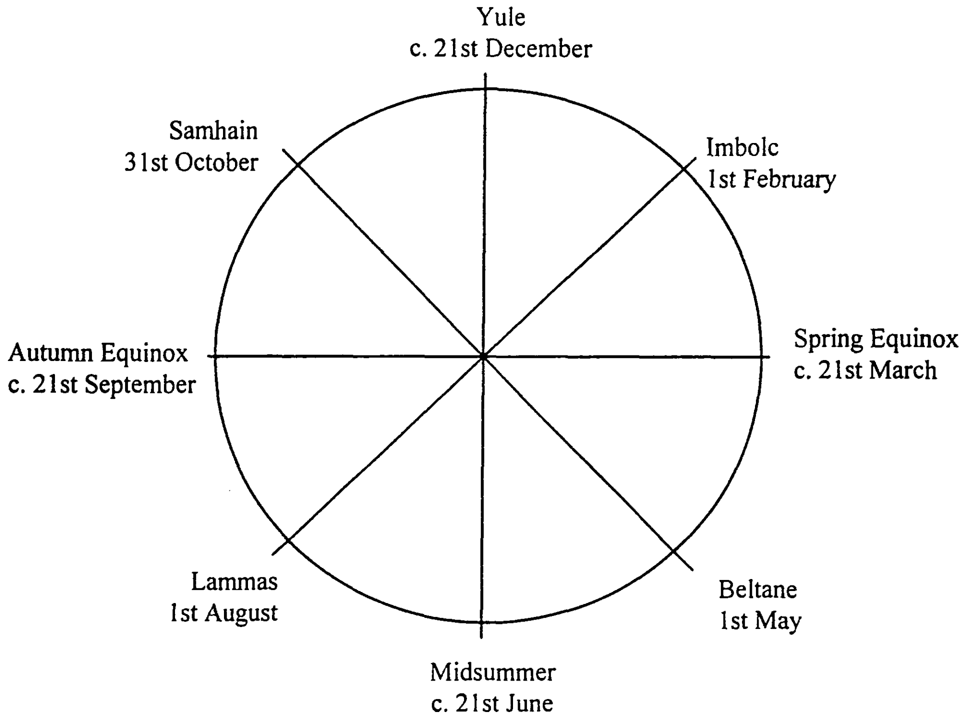

Fig. 3.0 The Wheel of the Year

At **Yule**, the Child of Promise conceived at Spring Equinox is born, representing the rebirth of the son/sun. Symbolically, the festival is seen as a reminder that light dwells in the darkness of the longest night, that life is born in death, from the darkness of the womb which is also understood as the tomb. The Midwinter Solstice marks a transition point between darkness and light, for the longest night is over and daylight will now last longer each day - Yule thus marks the beginning of the light half of the solar year. In nature, the festival celebrates the fact that the sun will now grow in

strength and the life which has been sleeping beneath the surface of the earth will soon begin to sprout forth and clothe the earth. To Wiccans, however, the festivals operate on a psycho-spiritual level as well, and the sun is regarded as a symbol of the self; thus, the rebirth of the sun represents our own potential for the year ahead, our own rebirth. For this reason, small gifts are often exchanged at Yule rituals during the feasting, in much the same way as they are at Christmas. The celebrations are not, however, in reference to duality - celebrating light over darkness; rather, Wiccans honour the fertile darkness of the womb and the earth, out of which life springs, as well as the rebirth of the sun/son.

At **Imbolc** the first stirrings of spring are celebrated as the life-force gathers its strength for the coming year. It is regarded as a 'fire festival', the name given to the cross-quarter days between the solstices and equinoxes, but the emphasis is on light rather than heat - the strengthening spark of light that was born at Yule. On a psycho-spiritual level, Wiccans celebrate the festival as a time of inspiration and invoke the Goddess as Bride, goddess of healing, smithcraft and poetry. The Goddess has returned from the underworld, bringing the promise of spring in her wake, and the God who was born at Midwinter is separated from the Mother in order to grow. It is a time to return from hibernation and begin the new year in earnest. For these reasons, it is also a traditional time for initiation, expressing hopes for personal change as inner intentions emerge into outer manifestation. The past is left behind as Wiccans emerge from the darkness of the winter months, spring-cleaning the psyche as well as the home, with the personal desire for growth and change expressed in the season.

The next festival is the **Spring Equinox**, when light and dark are equal but with light gaining. In nature, spring is really beginning and this festival marks the more recognisable growth - flowers and leaves are appearing, and sewing begins in the fields. The God is 'Lord of the Greenwood and lusting free; probably rutting everything that moves! He is a symbol of youth, a symbol of instinct in tune with Nature . . . He is free, careless of responsibility, the adolescent coming into maturity' (Crowley 1996: 160). God and Goddess are equal, and they come together impelled by primeval sexual drive, but with no commitment to each other. The sap is rising and spring energy is in abundance as the equinoctial gales blow themselves into harmony. After their coupling, the Goddess is pregnant, but the God continues his roaming and does not stay with her. The equality of day and night is taken to represent the God's position, equipoised between the unconscious, animal instinct and growing conscious awareness, and the step forward is recognised as a time to experiment with more outgoing activities than the winter hibernation has allowed. Eggs are often painted and used to decorate the Spring Equinox altar, symbolising new life breaking forth.

At **Beltane**, the marriage of the God and Goddess is celebrated amid the blooming fertility of Nature. The God is represented as recognising his responsibilities to the Goddess; though he is still Lord of the Greenwood, he has committed himself to her and to their child. For Wiccans, this marks a transition from adolescence to adulthood, from animalistic passion to love. Fertility is celebrated by dancing round the maypole, weaving ribbons in a representation of the never-ending spiral of life. 'Beltain is a celebration of the vitality of the Earth. It is a time of love, of carnival, of flowering fertility and abundant provision' (Harvey 1997: 11)

As **Midsummer** draws near, the Goddess calls the God to take responsibility for the land and the people, as well as Her and their son. As the sun reaches its zenith, the God is crowned as a king and can no longer roam wild and free in the greenwood. His heart is heavy, however, for by taking the kingship he sees 'darkness and pain and blood upon the corn, the shadow of [his] death' (Crowley 1996: 163). As the Sun King, he has become conscious of himself and those who depend on him, and also of his mortality. He has reached the zenith of his power in this world, and there is no upward path - from now on he will weaken, just as the sun must weaken as the days grow shorter. Issues of power are relevant to this festival, and in the Wiccan journey the Midsummer ritual helps Wiccans come to terms with their own power - when to use it, and when to let it go.

Letting go is one of the themes of **Lammas**, the time of the first harvest 'when the first ripe heads of grain were cut and ground for the loaves which formed a central part of the feast' (Harvey 1997: 12). The Sun is losing its strength and rising farther in the south, but in human terms we can see the maturation of those things we have tried to grow since Yule. But for the God, the sacrifice must be made, and he is cut down by the sickle of the Goddess, his blood spilt upon the land to ensure the return of fertility the following year, giving His life that life might continue. It is a time to give things up in order to move forward, for the God does not find death, but new life in the realm of the Gods, leaving behind the light of the sun and entering into darkness. Until Lammas, He has been the Lord of Light and life, developing in the conscious world. At Lammas, he begins the transformation into Dark Lord of Death, opening himself to the realm of the unconscious. Opposite to Imbolc on the Wheel, Lammas is a different

kind of initiation, into new life of a different order - the God has entered the heroic quest.

Autumn Equinox is perhaps the most difficult festival to explain. Through the sacrifice and the quest, the God becomes the Great Mystic, initiate not only of life but of death. Just as Spring Equinox can be seen as a sexual initiation, so Autumn Equinox signifies a union on a mystical level as light and dark are once more in balance. At Spring, the double helix of the spiral of life is physical; at Autumn, the double spiral winds and returns as a symbol of reincarnation, an acknowledgement that all of nature shares in the universal cycle of death and rebirth, Autumn's grain becoming Spring's seed. Through entering this spiral and understanding its mysteries, the God transforms into the Great Mystic, and having conquered death and the tomb he returns to take the Goddess with him into the underworld for the winter. Their union mirrors the coupling at Spring Equinox, but now it is deeper and represents a more complete merging of opposites in the great spiral. In Nature, the fruit drops and everything begins to prepare for the winter rest. Wiccans look back over the year so far, at what they have achieved and all they have done, assessing their own harvest in their lives as winter approaches.

Samhain is the last Autumn festival before winter really sets in. The land grows barren and the Goddess and God rule in the underworld. Perhaps the most well-known of the Wiccan Sabbats, Samhain is the time when the veil between the worlds is regarded as thin and the spirits of the dead roam free. For some Wiccans, this is a time to remember their ancestors or those who have recently died. Since most

Wiccans believe in reincarnation, there is not generally an expectation that those long dead will return to visit, for they will have reincarnated. But it is a time for remembrance, and for facing one's own mortality - death is honoured as part of life. Belonging to no-time, Samhain is neither past nor future, and it is therefore a traditional time for divination and games such as apple-bobbing, which symbolise fishing for nourishment in the subconscious or the other world, as well as providing mirth after what can often be a heavy and serious ritual. Many Wiccans tell me that they tend to 'hibernate' between Samhain and Imbolc, popping out of their reverie only for Yule. By this, they do not mean that they literally sleep throughout the winter months, but that they turn their attention inward, consolidating events of the previous year, assessing their own growth and development, and preparing for the Spring. Thus, Wiccans reflect nature in their own lives, allowing activity to go on beneath the surface just as the earth appears barren but in fact much is happening at root level, 'a time when old things decay and rot down in preparation for the feeding of new fresh growth' (Harvey 1997: 3).

To complete the cycle, we return to Yule:

> 'The Goddess has given birth to the reborn Sun,
>
> She has brought forth the Child of Promise,
>
> There is hope again in the land,
>
> The wheel has turned' (Crowley 1997: 43).

APPENDIX 3

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHARGE

Version 1 : from Charles Leland's *Aradia:*

When I shall have departed from this world
whenever ye have need of anything
once in the month, and when the moon is full,
ye shall assemble in some desert place,
or in a forest all together join
to adore the potent spirit of your queen,
my mother, great Diana.
She who fain would learn all sorcery yet has not won
its deepest secrets, them my mother will
teach her, in truth all things as yet unknown.
And ye shall be freed from slavery,
and so ye shall be free in everything;
and as the sign that ye are truly free,
ye shall be naked in your rites, both men
and women also: this shall last until
the last of your oppressors shall be dead;
and ye shall make the game of Benevento,
extinguishing the lights, and after that
shall hold your supper thus.

Version 2: from Aleister Crowley's *Gnostic Mass*

Listen to the words of the Great Mother who of old was called among men Artemis,
Astarte, Dione, Melusine, Aphrodite and by many other names

At mine altars the youth of Lacedaemia and Sparta made due sacrifice
Whenever ye have need of anything, once in the month,
and better it be when the moon is full,
then shall ye assemble in some secret place and adore the spirit of me
who am Queen of All Witcheries,
There ye shall assemble, ye who are fain to learn all sorcery,
yet have not won its deepest secrets,
to those will I teach things that are yet unknown.
And ye shall be free from slavery, and as a sign that ye be really free,
ye shall be naked in your rites,
both men and women,
and ye shall dance, sing, feast, make music and love,
all in my praise.

For ecstasy is mine, and joy on earth.
For love is my Law.
Keep pure your highest ideal:
strive ever toward it.
Let naught stop you or turn you aside.
There is a Secret Door that I have made
to establish the way
taste even on earth the elixir of immortality.
Say, "Let ecstasy be mine, and joy on earth even to me,
To Me".

For I am a gracious Goddess.
I give unimaginable joys, on earth certainty,

not faith while in life!

And upon death, peace unutterable, rest, and ecstasy,

nor do I demand aught in sacrifice.

Hear ye the words of the Star Goddess.

I love you: I yearn for you: pale or purple, veiled or voluptuous,

I who am all pleasure, and purple

and drunkenness of the innermost senses, desire you.

Put on the wings, arouse the coiled splendour within you.

Come unto me.

For I am the flame that burns in the heart of every man,

and the core of every star.

Let it be your inmost self who art lost in the constant rapture

of infinite joy.

Let the rituals be rightly performed with joy and beauty.

Remember that all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals.

so let there be beauty and strength,

leaping laughter, force and fire be within you.

And if thou sayest, I have journeyed unto thee,

and it availed me not.

Rather shalt thou say,

I called upon thee, and I waited patiently,

and lo, thou wast with me from the beginning.

For they that ever desired me, shall ever attain me,

even to the end of all desire.

Version 3: Doreen Valiente, verse form of the Charge[1]:

Mother darksome and divine,
Mine the scourge and mine the kiss.
Five-point star of life and bliss,
Here I charge ye in this sign.

Bow before my spirit bright,
Aphrodite, Arianrhod,
Lover of the Hornèd God,
Queen of witchery and night.

Diana, Brigid, Melusine.
Am I named of old by men;
Artemis and Cerridwen,
Hell's dark mistress, Heaven's Queen.

Ye who ask of me a boon,
Meet ye in some hidden shade,
Lead my dance in greenwood glade,
By the light of the full moon.

Dance about mine altar stone,
Work my holy magistry
Ye who are fain to socrcery,
I bring ye secrets yet unknown.

No more shall ye know slavery,
Who tread my round the Sabbat night.
Come ye all naked to the rite,
In sign that ye are truly free.

[1] Valiente 1989: 61-2

Keep ye my mysteries in mirth,
Heart joined to heart and lip to lip,
Five are the points of fellowship
That bring ye ecstasy on earth.

No other law but love I know,
By naught but love may I be known;
And all that liveth is my own,
From me they come, to me they go.

She then went on to write the prose version of the Charge, the most well-known version:

Listen to the words of the Great Mother, she who of old was called among men Artemis, Astarte, Athene, Dione, Melusine, Aphrodite, Cerridwen, Dana, Arianrhod, Isis, Bride, and by many other names

At mine altars the youth of Lacadaemon in Sparta made due sacrifice.

Whenever ye have need of anything, once in the month,
and better it be when the moon is full,
then shall ye assemble in some secret place
and adore the spirit of me who am Queen of all Witcheries.
There shall ye assemble, ye who are fain to learn all sorcery
yet have not won its deepest secrets;
to these will I teach things as yet unknown.

And ye shall be free from slavery,
and as a sign that ye be really free
ye shall be naked in your rites.
And ye shall dance, sing, feast, make music and love all in my praise.

For mine is the ecstasy of the spirit;
and mine also is joy on Earth,
for my law is love unto all beings.

Keep pure your highest ideals,
strive ever towards them,
let naught stop you or turn you aside;
for mine is the secret door which opens upon the land of youth,
and mine is the cup of the Wine of Life,
and the Cauldron of Cerridwen,
which is the Holy Grail of Immortality.

I am the gracious Goddess
who gives the gift of joy unto the heart of man;
upon Earth I give the knowledge of the Spirit Eternal;
and beyond death I give peace and freedom
and reunion with those who have gone before;
nor do I demand sacrifice, for behold,
I am the Mother of all living,
and my love is poured out upon the Earth.

Hear ye the words of the Star Goddess, She in the dust of whose feet are the Hosts of Heaven; whose body encircleth the universe.

I who am the beauty of the green Earth,
and the white Moon amongst the stars,
and the mystery of the waters
and the desire in the heart of man,
call unto thy soul, arise and come unto me.

For I am the Soul of Nature who giveth life to the universe;
from me all things proceed
and unto me all things must return;
and before my face, beloved of Gods and of men,
let thine own innermost divine self
be enfolded in the rapture of the infinite.

Let my worship be within the heart that rejoiceth;
for behold, all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals,
and therefore let there be beauty and strength;
power and compassion;
honour and humility;
mirth and reverence within you.

And thou who thinkest to seek for me,
know that thy seeking and yearning shall avail thee not
unless thou knowest the mystery;
that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee,
thou wilt never find it without thee.

For behold, I have been with thee from the beginning
and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.

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