Traditional and Innovative Trends in Post-Gardnerian Witchcraft

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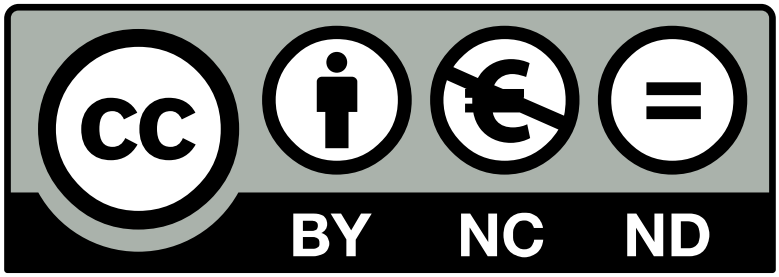

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Abstract

The publication of Gerald Gardner's non-fiction works on witchcraft has led to the current public existence of two different trends of religio-magical belief and/or practice, which both identify themselves as *Wicca*. One form places a strong emphasis upon the transmission of traditional practices and a form of initiatory lineage similar to that practiced by Gardner himself. The other covers a wider range of views on each of these aspects, but with the most common position being a strong distance between the traditional practices—giving a greater importance to innovation—and a complete or near-complete abandonment of the concept of initiatory lineage.

Both trends often see themselves, and each other, as being within a wider religio-magical stream of post-Gardnerian Pagan Witchcraft, of which the innovative form is a larger part, though in different ways: The traditional view of the innovative form typically labels that form *Eclectic*, even in cases where the practitioners would understand *Eclectic* differently, and considers it to be something outside of what it terms *Wicca*. The innovative form generally label all post-Gardnerian Pagan Witchcraft, or beyond, as *Wicca*. As such, it recognises all traditional practitioners as Wiccan, but does not generally make a more significant distinction between, e.g. Alexandrian and Correlian or Gardnerian and Dianic, than between Alexandrian and Gardnerian, and therefore often does not even recognise the self-identification of the traditional streams.

Hence, the traditional stream considers the differences between the two streams as significant to the point of typicality while the innovative stream considers the differences as much less important. Examining these differences offer a chance insights into both.

Contents

I On Wicca and Wicca

"You keep using that word. I do not think it means, what you think it means." —William Goldman, *The Princess Bride*.

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;" —William Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet," Act II, scene ii.

What's in a Name?

The oft-debated history of the emergence into the public eye of Wicca, following the publication of Gerald Gardner's non-fiction works on the subject,[i] and the later influence of Alex Sanders and others upon that movement, has been much written about, and has been the focus of much recent research.[ii] The ongoing disagreements on the precise relationship of Gardner, Sanders and other figures of the time to the traditions of the Wicca, and to what went before them (what we might call Wiccan prehistory) is not relevant to this work. What suffices, is that by the early 1960s there was an appreciable degree of public knowledge of the Wicca, which has continued to grow since.

More important to this work is the question of what exactly Wicca is? At the time of writing, common usages could be defined as follows:

1. The priesthood of a collection of related mystery tradition, fertility cults, practicing cross-gender initiation and witchcraft, holding a shared initiatory lineage to certain covens in the New Forest region of England.
2. Any form of witchcraft (that is to say, a synonym).
3. Modern Pagan witchcraft.
4. Forms of Pagan witchcraft and/or religion including; those of the New Forest lineages, those of the New Forest lineages but which do not continue the traditional practices, and others which have been heavily influenced by what is publicly stated by or about members of the New Forest lineages.

There are also some rougher definitions that we may argue are used in practice, though they tend towards imprecision; with people perhaps using it for any form of witchcraft tied to a specific religious view, any form other than Satanic witchcraft (generally because the speaker frowns upon Satanism), and other even vaguer distinctions based on whichever aspects the speaker sees as particularly Wiccan, perhaps even excluding those Wiccans close in practice to Gardner, Sanders, the Mohs, etc.

These latter definitions are hardly definitions at all, but the very difficulty with such definitions recurs repeatedly in works on Wicca and modern witchcraft, as demonstrated by attempts at a

i [Gardner 1954] & [Gardner 1959]

ii For example; [Heselton 2000], [Hutton 1999], [Heselton 2003] & [Hutton 2003] between them reflect two positions in an ongoing debate on just what can be justifiably said on the matter by historians.

firmer definition relying heavily on imprecise terms, and making no stronger statements than "most" or "practically all."[i]

This work focusses on the first and fourth definition, and the relationship between the two movements so described. Since all witchcraft so described owes something to the influence of Gardner's publications and activities, albeit in different ways, I refer to such witchcraft as a whole as *Post-Gardnerian Witchcraft*[ii].

In this work, *Traditional Wicca* will be used to refer to the first; those which continue the lineages and practices. While the term *British Traditional Wicca* has been suggested by the New Wiccan Church as a more specific term,[iii] which is gaining currency, this term is not presently widespread outside of the US and Canada, and raises its own difficulties.[iv] It is as a compromise between the advantages of that term and concision, that I use the term *Traditional Wicca*. For reasons that will be given below, the term *Innovative Witchcraft* will be used for those forms of Post-Gardnerian witchcraft which are not *Traditional Wicca*.

The very definitions would entail that Traditional Wicca preceded Innovative Witchcraft, (if we dismiss testimony from a few groups that claim a long lineage and that Gardner borrowed wholesale from them, increasingly a position only of the most marginal traditions[v]), and implies a relationship in which the cultural and technological borrowings are entirely in one direction. This is often accepted by practitioners of both, though obviously with differing opinions on the value of this split.

As we look closer, this becomes less clear. To begin with, it is not entirely clear from Gardner's writings just what the relationship between witches generally and those he refers to as *The Wica* is.

To a modern Traditional Wiccan reader today, it certainly seems that The Wicca, the most common spelling in current usage, are those particular witches with which Gardner was personally familiar, and who accepted him as one of their own. This reading however hinges on turns of phrase rather than any explicit statement, so those who would claim, *The Wicca*, as a term within witchcraft for all witches will point to exactly the same passages to make their counter-arguments.

A related complication is that, at that time, Traditional Wiccans often wouldn't have accepted many practitioners of other forms of witchcraft, including Innovative Witchcraft as witches. In particular, the self-initiated, or those of a lineage which ultimately derives from a self-initiate,

i e.g.; [NWC 2004]

ii Clearly then, I mean *Post-Gardnerian* as in "after Gardner" rather than "after the Gardnerian Tradition." Hence Gardnerians are also Post-Gardnerian in this sense.

iii op cit.

iv e.g.; [WIK 2006] (editors notes for page on "British Traditional Wicca") Here an attempt to define "British Traditional Wicca" for an encyclopædic entry raises an objection from someone who understands the similar (and identical when initialised) term "British Traditional Witchcraft" as referring to non-Wiccan traditions native to Britain.

v E.g. [Anon 2004]

would not be accepted as witches as, "only a witch can make a witch." With knowledge of the older non-Wiccan forms of witchcraft being limited due to the relative lack of communication, *Wicca* was indeed seen as synonymous with *witch*, for the simple reason that only Traditional Wiccans, to apply the term retroactively, were seen as witches at all. Stewart Farrar not only described *Wicca* as an internal term witches use for their religion, in his first book on the subject, but admitted that he knew nothing about the lines now labelled *Traditional Initiatory Witchcraft*, save that they work robed.[i] Such an admission would not be seen in a book on witchcraft today. This is partly because not every author would be as honest as Farrar in ever admitting ignorance on any matter, even when they should be! Partly also, Farrar was new to the Craft, being initiated in the course of his writing the book, and not at that time claiming expertise, but rather to be writing as a reporter. Mainly though, the availability, if not always the quality, of information obtainable by even the most cursory inquiries today is vastly beyond what was available to the most devoted of seekers at the time, until they managed to make personal contact with someone of the Craft.

That many Traditional Wiccans maintain a claim to the term as explicitly referring to themselves alone, now that they will recognise others' claims to being witches, seems likely to have in part be by comparison with lines, such as those of Feri, the various lines claiming descent from Robert Cochrane, and those who claim a family tradition. Were the only people claiming to be witches the Traditional Wiccans on the one hand, and the self-initiates on the other, then perhaps if the times had still changed in such a way that many Traditionals were more inclined to recognise some outside of their own lines as witches, they would also have ceded the word *wicca* to them. However, this same increase in acceptance of those outside of Traditional Wicca came alongside a greater knowledge of the determinedly non-Wiccan lines, such as those mentioned above, and non-English speaking lines like Stregaria. Indeed, such increasing knowledge of those lines would in itself have led to their no longer thinking of themselves as the only witches in the world. As such, the reässessment that acknowledged witches outside of New Forest descended lines would necessitate a reässessment of just what *Wicca* meant, to reflect the fact that other witches do not use the word. To many Traditional Wiccans, the most obvious answer to that reässessment would be that The Wicca were those people they had always known as such. Those using the name without New Forest lineage and practice were seen as no more Wiccan after this more tolerant reässessment than they were before.

The counter-argument from those of Innovative Witchcraft is that *wicca* is the same as the Anglo-Saxon *wiċċa*[ii] and hence simply *is* the word for witch. This is probably true,[iii] but even so we do not speak Anglo-Saxon! If the word *computer* can change so much in less than a century that it

i [Farrar 1971]

ii The use of diacritical dots on C's in Anglo-Saxon words to indicate the /ʧ/ sound now normally represented with the spelling CH is a modern convention, not an original feature of the language. It has the serendipitous advantage of resulting in the Anglo-Saxon *wiċċa* being distinguished in spelling from the Modern English *wicca*, and I use the convention purely for this convenience.

now only refers to electronic machines, and the people who once had *computer* as their job-description are largely forgotten, then surely *wicca* could have changed to mean only some witches over the course of a millennium.

Yet, precisely the same logic gives those in Innovative Witchcraft that wish to use the word the final argument that words change and the word is now used as they use it, at least as one sense amongst others.

Drawing Lines

There is a difficulty in determining just which stream a practitioner belongs to or a text describes. While people who have lineage and training clearly descended from a Traditional Wiccan tradition and maintain it as their sole practice are definitely Traditional Wiccans, and autodidactic self-initiates are clearly Innovative Witches, not everything is as clear-cut.

Traditional Wiccan method has always been capable of making use of techniques, views and wordings from elsewhere. While the insistance upon core traditions makes it less fluid in this regard than Innovative Witchcraft, there is no reason why material developed by Innovative Witchcraft would not find its way into the practices of a group of Traditional Wiccans, though it may not be considered "core."

More problematic still is the large number of people who engage in both Traditional and Innovative practice, or which have done one or the other at different points in their lives. Since this includes some of the writers that have had the greatest influence amongst both this can be particularly important.

Additionally, the very borrowing of views and techniques from Traditional Wicca into Innovative Witchcraft, combined with the fact that most Innovative Witches are starting from a *tabla rasa* when they come to construct their practice, means that a Traditional Wiccan expressing a personal opinion as a Traditional Wiccan may have a stronger influence upon Innovative Witchcraft than upon Traditional Wicca, while quite definitely remaining Traditional in his or her own practice. As such, while the author is Traditional Wiccan the influence will be largely upon the other stream under consideration. Defining any such artefact as firmly belonging to one stream or the other becomes close to impossible, and comparison with other sources must be a guide.

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iii It is just about plausible that the word is some sort of independent coinage that, while probably cognate with the Modern English *witch* and the Anglo-Saxon *wiċċa*, is not the same as either. The one argument in favour of this suggestion is that Gardner describes the word as one he heard, not read, and *wiċċa* is pronounced /ˈwitʃːɑ/, not /wɪkə/ as the modern *wicca* is.

If we accept Gardner's claim that it is not his own coinage, it remains considerably more likely that the Anglo-Saxon word was adopted from a textual source and then pronounced as if it were modern English, perhaps influenced by Skeats' *Etymology* being quoted in [Leland 1891], a work that would have obvious interest to a witch. If this was the source, then at the earliest the New Forest Coven or an ancestor coven could have adopted the term is 1891, though other sources for the word have been in existence for the entire history of the English language, so *wicca* could have been adopted from *wiċċa* before that date.

Further, the sympathies of many Traditional Wiccan authors, particularly those with the most influence upon Innovative Witchcraft, may be more firmly with that stream than with Traditional Wicca when it comes to dissemination of information—after all, they may cover matters in books that Traditional Wiccans are going to learn during coven training anyway, and so it is the Innovative Witches that are the audience. Worse still, their sympathies may change over time; Raymond Buckland, for example, is notable as both a defender and attacker of self-initiation at different times of his life. Indeed, an author's sympathies are unlikely to be polarised in a simplistic manner, but rather a perfectly human complex of different views on different topics.

Deeper problems come from the implied assumption that Traditional Wiccan practice has been essentially static, while all deviations can be viewed as innovation. It is certainly true that Traditional Wicca represents a more narrowly defined range of practices, but it is not immune to history. One oft-referenced point is the attitude to homosexuality that Gardner exhibited and many repeated, which has been largely removed by the progress made by the Gay Rights Movement in changing the attitudes of Western society generally and countercultures in particular. Even more notable is the relative promiscuity of initiations of both Gardner and Sanders,[i] and of the first generation of their initiates, compared to the speed with which elevations would be performed. Traditional Wiccan elders are now generally more cautious in this regard, while Innovative Witchcraft will contain many who will repeat the speed of elevation found in the early public history of Traditional Wicca, as well as containing some who start identifying themselves as Wiccan pretty much immediately upon learning about it.[ii]

Another difficulty, is that with *Wicca* entering into the popular lexicon, it could be adopted by people with a lineage outside of Post-Gardnerian Witchcraft, who are hence outside of the scope of this work, but without clear indication that this is so. Forms of witchcraft other than Traditional Wicca have always been with us. The boundaries and definitions quickly become matters of opinion, and as such whether a cunning-man, an otherwise devout Christian who uses folk magic, a magic worker who is outside of any other defined tradition or ceremonial method, and so on is or is not a witch, is in each case open to interpretation. Since *wicca* is sometimes treated as a synonym of *witchcraft*, these other forms of witchcraft are sometimes also labelled *wicca*, sometimes against the protests of the practitioners, but often by the practitioners themselves. If we are to consider this retroactive labelling, there is a danger of opening the scope to the point of meaninglessness.

i [Hutton 1999], [Guerra 2008] & [Farrar & Farrar 1984]/[Farrar & Farrar 1996]

ii This could be argued to be a lesson that keeps being learned by new groups. Those with a Traditional training have the advantage of learning about the issues raised from their teachers, while Innovative Witches repeat the mistake. More reasonably though, one could argue that there are benefits to such speedy initiation which are more pronounced when a tradition has fewer members than when it has grown, and hence new groups repeat conditions also experienced by Gardner and Sanders, in which the benefits of such rapid progress outweighs the problems.

Finally, by 1974 we also had the emergence of Seax-Wica,[i] which makes use of the same word, but since it looks to Saxon culture, it is natural for it to adopt the Anglo-Saxon word *wiċċa* as a sort of "independent reclamation."[ii] The separate use of the word, justified differently to that within Traditional Wicca, would probably have helped to diffuse and widen its use generally.

Well before this time though, we had several influences affecting the use of the word.

The first is the mismatch, between the number of people made aware of Wicca by public personalities such as Gardner, the Sanderses, the Bucklands and the Farrars, and the number of people who could train would-be initiates, or at least refuse them training in such a way as to reduce the risk that they would not, as Aidan Kelly puts it, "start an imitation based on Rosemary's Baby if they weren't let in."[iii] Hence, despite a rate of initiation and elevation that would be remarkable today, there were still disappointed seekers who had a sense of what they wanted, but were left to their own devices.

A second is the distribution of the *Pagan Way* material, intended to relieve this difficulty, much of which was clearly Wiccan-derived, and yet clearly also not subject to the same restrictions on transmission.

A third was the publication of Lady Sheba's *The Book of Shadows*, which makes use of the word *Wiccan*[iv] and contains several passages generally attributed to Doreen Valiente or otherwise claimed as belonging to Traditional Wicca.[v]

Each of these factors led to there being people outside of Traditional Wicca, but being influenced by it in practice to greater or lesser degrees.

A crucial point was the introduction of the concept of *Self-Initiation*. This would allow people to not just work with such material prior to eventually meeting a teacher; or to produce a personal practice from them, that sufficiently met the needs of someone who doesn't feel called to be initiated into a tradition; but went beyond this, and enabled them to claim an initiation without any contact with initiates.

At this point the split was complete. There were now two different groups, who were calling themselves *Wicca*, who need not have any contact with, and increasingly not even much awareness of, each other.

The split made, further severance was inevitable, due to something that long existed within Wicca, and indeed all forms of witchcraft; the practical willingness to make use of just about anything that works.

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i [Buckland 1974]

ii Though perhaps *Sax Wiċċecræft* would have been a closer term for the stated intent?

iii [Kelly 1994]

iv [Sheba 1971]

v Compare with material described as such in [Farrar & Farrar 1984].

This has been noted already, in terms of the difficulty in precisely determining whether particular people are Traditional or not, without strong knowledge of their practice. Obviously, it leads to a great deal of variety within Traditional Wicca, but is balanced by traditions providing a framework with which to attach any such innovations and borrowings.

Without the insistence upon tradition, and indeed with some aspects of the traditions remaining out of reach, the new strains of Wicca-inspired witchcraft naturally came to value borrowings and innovations more highly still. From the perspective of Traditional Wicca the result is a very eclectic mix indeed.

If anything is typical of these strains of witchcraft, it is this high value placed on innovation, whether continual or in the formation of a body of lore that would then crystallise into something that could be passed on as a new tradition. While Traditional Wiccans often label such strains *Eclectic witchcraft*, there are several problems with this term. The first, is that from another perspective, one might label Traditional Wicca *eclectic*; what else would an outsider label traditions in whose liturgy one can find material originating with Kipling, Shakespeare, Leland, Crowley, Freemasonry and *The Carmina Gadelica*,[i] if only in turns of phrase, or which for public god names pair the Gaulish Cernunnos with the Tuscan Aradia?[ii]

The second, is that within these strains, *eclectic* is used to refer to people who deliberately take their cultural and magical practices from a very wide range of sources, in a highly syncretistic manner. Non-traditional witches who concentrate upon a particular pantheon would often not consider themselves eclectic, but rather as Celtic, Germanic, Norse, Egyptian, Hellenic or whatever other culture or material they most closely identified themselves with. Often this would be the case, even if some of their gap-filling was quite definitely eclectic by any stretch of the word—they would view this more as an eclectic borrowing into an otherwise non-eclectic practice; or as being eclectic with a small ‘e’, where deliberately more varied borrowings would be *Eclectic* with a large ‘E’.

Finally, the term could reasonably be applied to forms of witchcraft which have not borrowed anything from Traditional Wicca, do not self-describe as *Wicca* and have had little impact upon the history of either of the strains examined here, nor the public view of them, and as such are not of interest to this work.

To avoid this difficulty I am using the term *Innovative Witchcraft* for these strains of witchcraft. It has the advantage of being a generally positive term, while at the same time it does not entail an insult to Traditional Wicca by implying that the Traditional Wicca are not innovative; I feel that Traditional Wiccans would generally agree that while they value innovation, they do not value it over their traditions, and hopefully therefore none will take offence if I cede that word to other strains of witchcraft.

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i [Farrar & Farrar 1984]

ii For that matter the Mohs used the term *American Eclectic Wicca*, to describe their practice prior to *eclectic* becoming more strongly connected with those who were outside of Traditional Wicca.

It has the difficulty of not using the term *Wicca*, and as such appearing to take sides in the debate on whether this term applies to them or not. The term *Innovative Wicca* though while not just finding objections from the other side of that debate, could also raise objections from those Innovative Witches who agree that the word *Wicca* does not apply to them, while almost everyone who claims the term *Wiccan* also claims the term *witch*.[i] While part of the concept of this work is to examine two groups which both use the name *Wicca*, some groups who do not use that word share much the same history.[ii]

Innovative Witchcraft could be applied to a form of witchcraft that was developed from pure inspiration, or was influenced by non-New Forest traditions like Feri, in much the same way that those examined here were influenced by Traditional Wicca. While a possible difficulty with the term as a general coinage, such forms of witchcraft being beyond the scope of this work removes the difficulty here, if nowhere else.

This scope excludes a variety of religious and magical practice whose origins are outside of anglophone culture, including many where the aptness of the label *witchcraft* is debated. It also excludes The Regency, its descendants, and other modern forms of witchcraft which have a lineage dating back long enough to either predate Gardner, or at least date to avoid the influence of the large amount of post-Gardnerian material now in circulation, without having to be deliberate in such exclusions.

Where people have been influenced by both Wicca and other forms of witchcraft, determining whether to consider them in scope or not is, by necessity, somewhat arbitrary. With the Roebuck Tradition, for example, while the Finnins received training from Ed Fitch and initiation from the Mohs, their primary identifiable influence was from the Clan of Tubal Cain,[iii] and so I deemed that tradition to be outside of my scope. On the other hand, much the same could be said about Starhawk and her Reclaiming tradition, with Feri being a greater direct influence than Wicca.[iv] Ultimately, the influence that Starhawk had on others who were also strongly influenced by Wiccan sources, or who identify as Wiccan, was such that I could not ignore her.

A consolation is that in attempting to not just examine those works that have gained the largest degree of fame or notoriety, but also to at least touch the surface of the large number of publications, including the vast number of web publications, that come especially from the

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i There are some exceptions; [Silverlotus 2004] for example claims, “I am Wiccan, but I am not a Witch.” Such people would appear to be devotees of some form of Neopagan religion which is faith-based rather than practice-based, and which includes little or no practice of magic, though it often would include a belief in the efficacy of magic, and a tolerant view of those who do use it. While they also represent a Post-Gardnerian stream of philosophy, they are by definition outside of the scope of the current work.

ii There may even be a difference of opinion within the same tradition, or even the same coven, on whether the term applies.

iii [Finnin 2008]

iv [Starhawk 1979]

Innovative streams of witchcraft, it is inevitable that I will exclude a large amount of informative material, no matter how I define the scope.

Where terms like *Wicca* and *witchcraft* appear in italics in this work, as they do frequently above, I am considering them as terms, and examining them as signifiers rather than what they signify. Where I use the term *Wicca* unqualified by the adjective *Traditional* I am deliberately leaving the definition vague, and using it in a way which holds whether or not one includes any or all Innovative Witchcraft in that. At no point do I attempt to define the terms *witch* or *witchcraft*, except in so far that it is taken to include all Traditional Wicca and practically all Innovative Witchcraft; debates on whether some practitioners of Innovative Witchcraft should be considered so far removed from Traditional Wicca, as to not be witches at all, and to just what further practices outside of any Post-Gardnerian influence should be considered witchcraft, I have also deemed out of scope.

II Traditions in the Craft and Traditions of the Craft

"Because of our tradition, everyone knows who he is, and what God expects him to do" —Joseph Stein, "Fiddler on the Roof."

Denominations

At first blush, the word *tradition* is a straightforward one. *The Compact Oxford Dictionary* offers the definitions.

1. *The transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation.*
2. *A long-established custom or belief passed on in this way.*
3. *An artistic or literary method or style established by an artist, writer, or movement, and subsequently followed by others.*[i]

Each of these can be seen as directly applicable to Traditional Wiccan traditions. Customs and practices are passed from elders to new initiates, (beliefs are a slightly different matter, though there is still an element of this happening), and these customs are considered their traditions. The third definition can be extended as applicable; some distinctions between Traditional Wicca and other religious or magical practices could be considered more a matter of style; certainly some things will be identified as "feeling" Wiccan or non-Wiccan more immediately than one could reason about whether they belong in the Craft.

It is therefore completely within the common dictionary definitions of the word by which we say; *Gardnerian Tradition*, *Alexandrian Tradition*, *Mohsian Tradition*, and so on.

However, in doing so, we have hit upon another use of the term, by which people will use it to refer to religions or denominations within a particular religion. This usage is relatively rare compared to alternatives, such as *religion*, *denomination*, *creed*, etc., and normally only used when one is concerned with a religio-political or religio-historical context, rather than purely religious and spiritual differences. When Irish politicians talk of, "both traditions on this island,"[ii] they are using a phrase has passed cliché into idiom, and is immediately understood as referring not just to the Catholic and Protestant denominations, nor just to the Nationalist and Unionist political aspirations, but to the complex, often shifting, way in which those religious, political and other cultural perspectives interact. Here again, there is something particularly apt in Wiccan preference for this term over the term *denomination*—they see themselves as not bound to their brethren just through common religious expression, but as sharing a kinship that goes beyond that.

Still, it remains that the Traditional Wiccan Traditions are still *traditions* in the more commonly used sense of the word. This is not necessarily so with Innovative Witchcraft. Here a "tradition"

i [OED 2005]

ii For example, President Mary McAleese, speaking at a commemoration of the Battle of Kinsale, 22nd September, 2001.

may be extremely new, having been consciously started rather than arrived at; may not yet actually have been passed on to anyone; and may very often die out before it ever is.

There are degrees of concious effort here. Ed Fitch's *Grimoire of Shadows* is hailed in the promotional material on the back cover of the 2002 edition as, "The Book That Launched a Thousand Traditions,"[i] though in the preface he describes his surprise when a friend of a friend, Joe Lukach, referred to it as a tradition:

> *"Ed," he said, "what you've written is a full tradition in itself. Didn't you realize that?"*

Still, this creation was more a matter of serendipitous results, than a concious attempt to create a tradition. It may also be that Lukach means that he has written enough material that it *could* form a tradition, rather than it being fully a tradition as either of them would understand it.

Lukach was not a witch, but worked one of the Caribbean traditions. This brings us to another sense of the word *tradition*, that of a trend in magical practice which may or may not overlap with religious practice. It is probably this sense that Lukach was primarily considering, when he commented. Again, Traditional Wicca, and specific Traditional Wiccan Traditions, fit this sense of *tradition* also.

In this sense, there is still a strong implication of passed-down knowledge. However, for the most part people do not create *traditions*, they create *orders*. While orders such as the A.·.A.·., the OTO or the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, might be referred to as traditions, they were founded as orders, which then developed traditions, or worked with traditions that were (at least claimed as) preëxisting. Traditions did not spring full-formed like Athena from the foreheads of Crowley or MacGregor Mathers, nor of Gardner and Sanders.

Contrasted to this is the publication of books which attempt to start "traditions" by describing them.

The closest approximation to the deliberate creation of a tradition that we can find in twentieth century Western esoterica outside of Wicca, is probably the publication of *Liber AL vel Legis*, with the entailed creation of a new stream of religious philosophy, and hence if the philosophy found adherents, as it did, a new tradition. What is notable here, is the degree of novelty held to be in the work. As such *Liber AL vel Legis* stands not so much in the company of the founding of new magical or religious orders, as with other revealed texts such as لقرآن (*Al-Qur'ān*), or *The Book or Mormon*, groundbreaking works of religious philosophy such as Luther's *Theses*, or even with declarations of nonreligious beliefs, such as Marx's political *Das Kapital*, or Newton's scientific *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*. All of these works can be held to have started traditions, in one sense of the word or another, and all are remarkable for the novelty they exhibit or are held to exhibit.[ii] None of them had succeeded in creating a tradition until others had adopted

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i [Fitch 2002]

them. It is that act of adopting, and hence of the philosophy being passed on, that makes the tradition.

Another notable point about traditions, is that they are generally created by "great" men and women. This is tautologous—creating a tradition with many adherents will afford you a place in the history books, developing an idea that is roundly ignored will result in obscurity—but still significant. Most people do not believe they are capable of producing a bestselling book, or leading a political party, or any other act that will affect a large number of people to a degree comparable to the founding of a tradition. Those that do so, tend to experience anxiety in their attempts for fame, or merely arrive at fame while pursuing other goals. We would expect someone who set out to deliberately found a new tradition to exhibit a very high sense of self-efficacy.

Sanders may have set himself outside of the Gardnerian tradition, but perhaps more found himself with a tradition in doing so, than consciously created one. He also felt the need to reduce, rather than glory in his position of founder, through his referencing his grandmother as a source. And this from a man who clearly had a high degree of self-efficacy, as needed just to deal with the rôle that he did own to. Probably the earliest completely self-concious attempts to create a Wiccan tradition was Buckland's creation of Seax-Wica,[i] which Buckland attempted when he had already attained a considerable measure of accomplishment, and could be justified in such a view of his own abilities.

By 2002 young newcomers to Innovative Witchcraft, even those who considered themselves to be lacking in experience, could not only harbour ambitions of starting a new tradition, but could quite openly express such an ambition, and expect it to be accepted, and perhaps even commended as a goal that would be benefiting to their form of Craft. One 20-year old Witchvox poster's biographical notes, for example, reads "After gaining more experience with groups, I plan on starting a tradition of my own once I start my family in a few years time."[ii] The positioning of this plan with other plans for her life, starting a family, would suggest that starting a tradition is seen as a considerable undertaking, but no more so than very common ambitions, such as raising a family, developing a house, any particular career plan, or any other long term goal. This goal is catered for directly by Raven Grimassi's *Crafting Wiccan Traditions*,[iii] which suggests the ambition is widespread enough for those who harbour it to count as a market.

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ii Scholars often examine the roots of any idea and compare them with earlier material, including some that did not have as much impact, or that later faded into relative obscurity. Amongst radicals (who enjoy iconoclasm), and Pagans (who often argue both against the novelty of Christian practices, and for the antiquity of their own), this leads to a habit of attempting to establish who or what "really" started any given tradition, underestimating the importance not just of proclaiming something, but of also finding adherents, without which there is no tradition. Whatever one may argue about the precedents of the Law of Thelema, or other Thelemic artefacts, Thelema as a tradition was started by Crowley, not by Rabelais or St. Augustine.

i [Buckland 1974]

ii [Camaralzman 2002]

iii [Grimassi 2008]

It is clear that by this stage, Innovative Witchcraft has inherited the term *tradition* from Traditional Wicca, but is using it almost purely as a term denoting denominations; and spawning such denominations at a tremendous rate. These two features, the change in definition and the proliferation of denominations, are clearly linked, but worth considering separately.

For different trends in Innovative Witchcraft to spread rapidly, is inevitable given the the very value on innovation that it exhibits, and the isolation between developing practices. The question then, is not why such groups differ in their practices and beliefs, as why do they identify as a denomination or tradition at all?

One possible influence can be found in the large number of Christian denominations to be found in the New World, particularly in the United States, and the strain of disestablishmentarianism that influenced it. The influence of Non-Conformist Christians fleeing England for the American Colonies upon American history, is well-enough stated to count as schoolchild knowledge in the Americas, if less well-known elsewhere[i]. In less than 40 years, over 7,000 disestablishmentarianist families moved to the Americas,[ii] and this has left its mark upon American forms of Christianity in many ways.

One such legacy is the relative mobility of church affiliations, and a growth in denominations considerably beyond what is often experienced in Europe, particularly within the Baptist family. The degree to which different Baptist churches are independent from each other could have chimed in the minds of some who had were particularly familiar with those churches (ex-Baptists in particular, and those living in areas with a high Baptist population) with the degree of coven autonomy held by Traditional and Innovative covens alike. Even outside of Baptist congregations, Christians in the US have always been more likely to express significant differences through schism rather than internal dissent, compared to Christians elsewhere. The progress of Mormonism, from a position of conflict during the Mormon Wars of the 19th Century, to being a quieter but still strong influence on the culture of Utah in particular, also sets a precedent for dissenting opinions finding a clear independent voice in the United States, which makes schism seem a more productive route than other expressions of dissent.

Attached to this, is a sense of entitlement that has led to particularly liberal legislation concerning the incorporation of religious bodies, the licensing for performing marriages, and so on, that may even have fed back to influence some of their religious beliefs.[iii]

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i In the Old World, we've absorbed enough artefacts of modern American culture to be aware that the history of the colonial "pilgrims" is much celebrated and heavily taught in American schools, but not quite enough for a comparable fluency with that history itself to be common here.

ii [Anne 2007]

iii The practice of healing by laying on of hands via televisual broadcast seems a particularly American religious practice. Perhaps more significant still, is the eschatological doctrine of *The Rapture*, a concept found primarily amongst Fundamentalist groups—despite a lack of scriptural evidence complained of by other Fundamentalists—and in many ways comparable to a particularly American view of protected rights. While English in origin, the relatively small impact the doctrine has had outside of the United States and Canada makes it much restricted to American

As such, when people consider the choices that differences between themselves and their coreligionists offers—to express their dissent from within, to identify themselves with another existing group, or in loose terms (such as "Christian," "Pagan" etc. without any more specific denomination), or to schism and form a new denomination—then the history and culture of the United States makes schism more likely there than elsewhere.

With the two best-known Wiccan denominations being closely associated with their founders, (particularly in Gardnerianism being named after Gardner and Alexandrianism at least chiming with the name of Alex Sanders[i]), and many of the differences seeming to be more a matter of style than of serious theological difference, (particularly if one makes the assumption that doctrine makes the defining difference between religious traditions, as is explored in later chapters), the relative willingness to form new denominations seen in other forms of religious expression in the United States could easily find even greater impact upon Paganism and Wicca in particular. From there it could be exported back to Britain and the rest of the world.

In attempting to explain the fact that the word *tradition* continued to be used, even when it no longer applied in many senses, we are offered fewer clues. The word *denomination* is perfectly apt; *denomination* in itself means simply a named unit, and will immediately apply to any group once it has any sort of defined identity, whether a Traditional Wiccan Tradition, such as the Alexandrian Tradition, a long-standing Innovative Tradition, or a new "tradition" of a single coven.

Perhaps this relates to assumptions about what composes the dividing line between denominations. The best known splits within Christianity have occurred on crucial points of Christian theology—Transubstantiation, free will, theodicy, the nature and source of Salvation—and even those differences that were more strictly political—such as the authority of Church leaders—tended to involve at least one side of the split offering a theological argument for their position. The schisms involved have also led to considerable bloodshed in Europe, and remained divisive in the US even in the 1960s and beyond, as shown by concerns raised by a Roman Catholic becoming President.[ii]

As such, two Innovative Witchcraft groups who held to pretty much the same range of beliefs and practices, but differed primarily on god names and aspects of calendar myths highlighted in their Sabbat rituals, and who generally got on well with each other (or even just pretended to), might not see the differences between them as comparable to that between Christian denominations, and hence not see the word *denomination* as appropriate.

A further influence could have been the lack of clarity on just what made a tradition. Descriptions of the differences between Gardnerianism and Alexandrianism commonly state that Alexandrians

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Fundamentalism; a spiritual equivalent of the expecting the "god-given" rights of tax-paying citizens to be protected. Perhaps the climate described above made the development of such a theory more likely.

i Differing accounts disagree on whether *Alexandrian* comes from Sanders' first name or the Library of Alexandria.

ii [Kennedy 1960]

are “more likely” to make use of ceremonial magic. “More likely” does not a definition make. Some even go on to express the problems with this distinction, since a given Gardnerian coven may make considerably more use of such ceremonial magic than a given Alexandrian coven. For Traditional Wiccans, the most obvious distinction is in the lineage. Having abandoned or downplayed the significance of initiatory lineage, as many Innovative Witches had, the differences became either invisible, or else imagined to be other than they are.

Perhaps *denomination* was simply seen as being primarily a Christian word, and its use was deliberately avoided as such, by Pagans wishing to differentiate their religion from Christianity.

Ultimately though, I think that the strongest influence here is that of inertia and poetry. Innovative Witchcraft inherited, from both Traditional Wicca and Western magical practice, the term *tradition* and found no reason to stop using it. Also, as will be seen elsewhere, the poetry and nuances of Wiccan terminology has a force of its own that it is hard, and perhaps unwise, for Innovative Witches to completely depart from. *Tradition* had simply become a “Wiccan word,” and so it was used.

The Prevalence of Craft Traditions

Since traditions, in the general dictionary senses, are what define Traditional Wicca, it is worth examining some of the better known such traditions, and how Innovative Witchcraft practices maintain, drop, or alter them.

The Wiccan Rede

The Wiccan Rede is probably the most widely known item from the entire corpus of Wiccan writing. In one sense this is strange—it doesn’t appear in descriptions of the liturgy of any Traditional rituals, and is relatively rare in Innovative liturgies—but in another it is easily explicable:

1. It is often compared to what cowans know about their own and other religions, in particular the ethic of reciprocity found in many religions.
2. As such it is often held as justifying a tolerant view of Wiccans by arguing that a reasonable degree of ethical behaviour should be expected from Wiccans, and hence they should not be feared and any form of discrimination or persecution against them is unjustified.

In its most common form the Rede is:

> *An it harm none, do what thou wilt.*

Or in modern English:

> *If it harms none, do what you will.*

Other versions include the slightly extended couplet:

Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfil
'An it harm none, do what thou will'.

Which underlines the apparent completeness of the Rede. Finally, there is the poem, "Rede of the Wiccae" published by Lady Gwynne Thompson, and attributed by her to her grandmother,[i] which includes the above lines amongst others.

So. What then does it mean?

Unfortunately this question has been the subject of much debate, beginning amongst Traditionals and continuing largely amongst the Innovative.

The barest reading would be as follows:

1. Rede means advice, hence you are advised as follows:
2. In the case of your wanting to do something, and that thing not causing harm, go ahead and do it.

Notably, no law is mandated, and no advice is given concerning whether or not one may engage in harmful action; it implies you are not at as complete liberty in such cases as in harmless ones, but doesn't rule out that such harm-causing action might still be appropriate. For the sake of further discussion, we shall label this the *libertarian* reading.

The most common reading seems to be:

1. If something would cause harm, don't do it.
2. If something wouldn't cause harm, do it.

We shall label this the *legislative* reading.

Critiques of the legislative reading will often focus on the impossibility of guaranteeing that one's actions result in no harm. They tend to result in the following reading:

1. If something will clearly do a lot of harm, don't do it.
2. If something will clearly do little or no harm, do it.
3. Otherwise balance the potential for harm of differing courses of action, and pick that which will result in the least harm.

We shall label this the *mitigative* reading. Variants of the mitigative may agree with the libertarian in pointing out that *rede* means advice, not a law or rule, or may treat it as a law as the legislative does, and insist that Wiccans should follow it, or indeed people may state that all Wiccans do.

i [Thompson 1975]

Both the legislative and mitigative reading will result in further debates on whether or not a Wiccan can engage in a particular course of action. In some cases this will result in claims that something could never possibly be done by a Wiccan.[ii]

A fourth reading compares the wording of the Rede with that of the Law of Thelema,[ii] and noting that "do what thou wilt" is contained in both, associates the two; claiming that Wicca borrowed not just a wording, but the Rede itself from *Liber AL vel Legis*. We shall call this the *Thelemic* reading.

Doing so entails that examination of the Rede can essentially become examination of the Law of Thelema, and absorb all Thelemic literature on the topic wholesale to replace what had previously been written by Wiccans and other Pagans. It also raises several problems, starting with the condition of "An it harm none" becoming not just meaningless, but a compromise to expressing one's True Will. Indeed, it also necessitates that *True Will* either be adopted from Thelema, or at least the question of whether and how *θέλημα* might differ from *will*, as commonly understood in English, must be examined. Ultimately, the question passes outside of the scope of Wicca itself, and into that of Thelema. Further, while it claims to be the most historical—being able to cite its sources, so to speak—it is arguably the most unhistorical, for it is the most difficult to correlate to Gardner's writings on Wiccan ethics. Ultimately, the argument that the Rede is related to the Law of Thelema never does seem to overcome the, "An it harm none," part of the Rede without revising it. Perhaps it is mostly for this reason, that the position appears to be a minority one.

The libertarian reading of the Rede has a limited scope, in not addressing any of the cases where ethics are most challenged. Those who hold to it may feel this to be a philosophical advantage, examining one aspect of ethics clearly rather than trying to fit all moral questions into one rhyming couplet. Those who hold to other readings, may consider it to be at a philosophical disadvantage for much the same reason. It is clearly of almost no rhetorical value in inter-religious dialogue, and none in arguing someone's behaviour is or isn't immoral. It can claim a strong historical grounding; being quite revolutionary in times when the impact of received morality upon both social conventions and legislation was much stronger than it is now; and so defending Wiccans who follow the advice of the Goddess:

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ii At the most optimistic, this seems to follow from assumptions about people's success in following the laws of their religion, that would have us live in a world where Christians never lied, Muslims never discriminated against Jews, and Buddhists never shot unarmed terrorist suspects in cold blood. History suggesting otherwise quite clearly, we must conclude by analogy that Wiccans will indeed do harmful acts whatever someone might say about the Rede.

At the most cynical, this gives people a mechanism by which they can dismiss people whose actions they disagree with as not "Real Wiccans," just as others will be dismissed by their coreligionists as not "Real Christians," not "Real Buddhists," and so on.

At the most pessimistic, we can merely conclude that people are making claims for Wiccans as morally unimpeachable that few cowans will be foolish enough to believe.

ii *Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law*
Love is the Law, Love under Will

[Crowley 1904]/[Crowley 1989a]

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.[i]

This same historical grounding makes it, arguably, partially obsoleted, or at least no longer as unique as once it would have been; that one must demonstrate harm before prohibiting something, is now generally accepted amongst liberal and even many conservative perspectives, and will form the focus of debate on any legal bans on what others might enjoy engaging in.

This may have encouraged the legislative and mitigative readings to become the dominant positions. Indeed, these two tend to bleed into each other; the legislative being held as a kind of ideal, with the mitigative as a practical application of it.

Their historical justification is debatable. The mitigative in particular offers, indeed almost requires, a large amount of scope for debate amongst those who hold to it, and it seems strange that such debates should hold so much importance within Wiccan discussion today, and yet not leave a comparable mark upon the earliest public Wiccan writings. The legislative view as an ideal differs from the way Gardner's writings seems to accept that there will be cases where one must do harm, without even considering that things could be otherwise; but this in itself speaks directly in support of the mitigative view. The libertarian view can address that by merely ruling this concern to be out of scope for the Rede, and also in pointing to the tactical sense in reducing the harm one does as addressed by the Laws.

It is not even possible to say with certainty that early Wiccans held to any "Rede." Gardner's writing on the topic of Wiccan ethics makes no mention of the Rede, but argues by analogy with a work of fiction:

> *Witches cannot sympathise with this mentality. They are inclined to the morality of the legendary Good King Pausol*[e]*, 'Do what you like so long as you harm no one'. But they believe a certain law to be important, 'You must not use magic for anything which will cause harm to anyone, and if, to prevent a greater wrong being done, you must discommode someone, you must do it only in a way which will abate the harm'.*[ii]

As well as not referencing the Rede, it is notable that the possibility of needing to do harm is taken as a given, "so long as you harm no one" is not absolute, as it is immediately followed by a consideration of when one might do so; implying disagreement with both the legislative and mitigative readings of the Rede. This is considered with a lack of hand-wringing that is striking in comparison with much of what has been written on the topic more recently. Notable also, is that the degree to which one may render harm in defence of oneself, or another, is in broad agreement

i [Charge]

ii [Gardner 1959]

with Anglo-Saxon legal tradition. It may be more indicative of reasonably law-abiding people living in England in the early 20th Century, than of any pronounced ideological position.

To find anyone addressing service as part of witches' ethics in a similarly pithy manner, we must look outside of Wicca to Cochrane's answer to the Rede; "Do not do what you desire—do what is necessary."[i]

Ironically, while offered as an objection to Wiccan ethics, this seems to be a large part of how many Wiccans, certainly the Traditional and large tracts of the Innovative, actually behave. This offers that when some Wiccans position the Rede as the root of all Wiccan ethics—as some of the Traditional and many of the Innovative do—those who do not do so are not necessarily in tacit agreement, but may actively disagree.

If we consider the Rede to not hold this position of a core ethical dictate, which is a possibility offered both by all the readings, but most readily by the libertarian, then the possibility is raised of other sources of Wiccan ethics existing. Ironically therefore, the libertarian reading, in allowing for other ethical considerations to have greater value, can potentially result in a more restrictive ethic than the others. It is not hard to see an ethical imperative in the Charge, particularly where it says:

> *Keep pure your highest ideal;*
> *Strive ever towards it;*
> *Let naught stop you, or turn you aside;*

And there are also ethical implications to the lines:

> *And therefore let there be beauty and strength,*
> *power and compassion,*
> *honour and humility,*
> *mirth and reverence within you.*[ii]

Ethical considerations relating to the Ardanes, to coven authority, and to oaths also change according to whether one places the Rede in this core position. Positioned so, it potentially allows for these ethical considerations to be overridden, but otherwise it does not.

Considering the Rede to not have such a central position goes against what is probably now the mainstream view of Wicca, not only within witchcraft but also outside of it. Fiction writers can depend upon it being well-enough known that they can have a cowan character, with no special interest in religion or the occult, condemn a fictional self-described Wiccan for failing to obey it.[iii]

Finally. In considering that Gardner's comments on King Pasoule—the closest he comes to mentioning the Rede—are given as a view "witches are inclined to," we are left to consider that

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i [Cochrane 1966b]

ii [Charge]

iii [Renshaw 2007]

some may hold the Rede to be descriptive rather than imperative; that Wiccans may tend to follow the Rede, but there is nothing to say that they have to.

Such descriptive readings in turn fall into two camps. Gardner's description is observational rather than definitive, in his stating that "witches are inclined to" such an attitude, and in his general claim to be describing a group of witches that he became acquainted with, rather than any other witches that may have existed. Another form of descriptive use of the Rede makes it definitive of Wicca, or often of witches or even all Pagans. Scott Cunningham's *The Truth About Witchcraft Today*[i] goes as far as arguing that all folk magical traditions ascribed to a similar view to the legislative and mitigative readings of the Rede. Casual surveys of folk magic tends to find that, following a large number of cures for various diseases and ailments, the best represented practices are love charms, ways to escape bad fortune by passing it onto another, ways to curse another, and generally a large number of acts which many Wiccans would consider unethical, however they may view the Rede. But this has not stopped the Rede from being been pushed back, not just in Wiccan history, but in all proletarian occult history.

Opinions in all these regards are not clearly split along Innovative and Traditional lines. Nor are they always easy to determine. The Farrars open a discussion of ethics by quoting the Rede, but largely ignore it from that point on.[ii] Does their opening with the Rede mean they agree it is a central tenet, or does their focusing elsewhere mean they don't see it as such?

The main difference between Innovative and Traditional practitioners in this regard is not which reading they hold to, if any, or indeed if they hold to yet another. Rather it is in the primacy the Rede holds in descriptions of their Craft. Traditional descriptions *often* mention the Rede, while Innovative descriptions almost always do so. Similarly, the ongoing debate on interpretations and their implications is common amongst the Traditional but much more so amongst the Innovative. It would seem that the Rede is important to both, but while it is seen as holding a core position by many Traditional Wiccans, that view is popular to near-typicality amongst Innovative Witches.

Wiccan Prehistory

As stated above, debates on the extent to which Gardner learned, adapted, or invented both Wicca as a whole, and individual elements of Wiccan practice, are not in themselves of direct importance to this work. That there are such debates though, does have an impact.

There isn't a strong consensus among either Traditional nor Innovative practitioners in this regard, though those who tend towards the more absolute position that Gardner invented Wicca out of whole cloth, would certainly be more prevalent among the latter than the former.

A more significant difference, is in terms of perceived implications of the positions of the debate, which in turn relate to how traditions themselves are perceived. To a Traditional view, the origin of

i [Cunningham 1988b]

ii [Farrar & Farrar 1984]

a tradition is not of as much importance as the tradition itself. Whether a tradition dates to Gardner or more recently still, or whether it predates him, does not impact upon it being a tradition. To some who may wish to adopt traditions, this may not be of any significance either. To those, though, who see the continuance of tradition as important, but argue innovations by Gardner (or those that followed him, whether within the Gardnerian Tradition, or in one of the other Traditional Wiccan Traditions, such as Sanders) as not part of the "original" tradition, the matter of just what those innovations were, gains considerable more importance.

The question similarly gains importance as a rhetorical trope that can be used to justify differences from Traditional practice, while maintaining a claim to be continuing a wider tradition. While some claims to demonstrate an innovation during Gardner's time will produce evidence for the claim (for example, by showing the source of a wording, which opens the possibility that not only the wording was novel, but also the underlying practice) others do not. In particular, should a form of witchcraft be found which differs from Gardner's practices (and Cochrane's practice, for example, is very different in many ways) this offers the argument that one is continuing the "real" practice while abandoning the aspect in question.

Tools

Comparing the use of tools between different Traditions requires us first to define just what is and isn't a tool. This is less obvious than it might at first appear; while Traditional Wicca has eight tools—athamé, sword, wand, scourge, censer, pentacle, cords and boline—the exclusion of the cup from that list has been explained by Gardner as being for security reasons only,[i] and there are also several other items commonly used in at least some cases. To any external view, the distinction between one of these items and a tool may not be clear, though to muddy the distinction is to abandon one of the subtler inheritances of Traditional Wiccans. With Innovative Witchcraft, there is often even less of a distinction as to just what is considered a tool and what isn't; with items, particularly those such as cauldrons and besoms that popular culture also associates with witchcraft, being elevated to equal footing with such tools as the athamé and pentacle.

While the elemental associations of the athamé, wand, cup and pentacle gives those four a particular importance in some Innovative traditions, yet others downplay or remove one or more of these, particularly in treating the athamé and wand as interchangeable, and hence removing the need to have both.

Traditional Wiccan Traditions have set markings for many of the tools.[ii] While Traditional Wiccans will often personalise tools beyond these, and may even opt to depart from these traditions, (or mark the tools temporarily, and then remove the markings after consecration, following traditional advice on avoiding detection), these markings are seen as definitely part of the tradition, even when departed from.

i [Gardner 1954]

ii ibid.

Innovative Witchcraft, in comparison, generally lacks any such passing of traditional markings, though groups may adopt some as communal badges or shibboleths. While markings may be taken from published descriptions of Traditional Wicca, or such magical works as the *Lesser Key of Solomon*, in general Innovative Witch writers encourage purely personal markings such as one's name in a magical alphabet. Traditional Wiccan writers are likely to suggest much the same thing,[i] as it would correspond with the practice of personalising tools beyond traditional markings, and allow them to talk of the traditional practice without divulging Tradition-specific details of said markings.

In both Traditional and Innovative Witchcraft, there is value seen in creating one's own tools were possible. In purely subjective terms, Innovative Witchcraft seems to me to both highlight the advantages to a greater extent, while also being most responsible for the creation of a market in manufactured tools sold explicitly for use in modern witchcraft, if only due to their numbers.

Additions of tools to Innovative Witchcraft tend to be either; promotions of items used by at least some Traditional Wiccans to being considered a tool, imports from other forms of witchcraft, such as the stang used in much Traditional Initiatory Witchcraft, or cultural borrowings.

In looking at tools that are sometimes dropped, or for which the traditions are otherwise heavily changed, the athamé, the wand and the scourge stand out.

The athamé has a prime place amongst the eight tools of Traditional Wicca. In particular, while other tools may be shared in use by all participants to a ritual, or only needed for those performing particular rôles, all Traditional Wiccans will have their own athamé, generally from at least the time of their initiations.[ii]

This is common, but not universal, within Innovative Witchcraft. Silver Ravenwolf includes the athamé amongst her list of tools, but notes, "I do not use mine very often as I look upon knives in general as potentially harmful items, even in the kitchen"[iii] which suggests its place in her practice is so different to its place in Traditional Wicca as to be unrecognisable. She goes on to say that the "wand and the athame are basically interchangeable." Arin Murphy-Hiscock meanwhile states, "Wiccans tend to use a wand or an athame, but not both."[iv] This perhaps says as much about ambiguity over the use of the wand as it does attitudes towards athamés. Of those who state this view of the two as completely interchangeable, most seem to favour the wand, though Gary Cantrell states that "the wand is something I have never used."[v] It's also notable in Murphy-Hiscock's case, that she then goes on to say, "Some prefer the wand because it is less aggressive" and has previously stated, "Some solitary Wiccans don't like using a knife at all; they feel that it is

i [Buckland 1986]

ii op cit.

iii [Ravenwolf 1993]

iv [Murphy-Hiscock 2005]

v [Cantrell 2001]

an aggressive weapon with no place in the loving practice of Wicca."[i] This distaste for blades will obviously weigh heavily on how extensively athamés are used in someone's practice.

As well as having a less prominent place in some Innovative practice, there are two common differences in usage amongst both Traditional and Innovative practitioners that are worth noting.

The first is the question of whether athamés should be blunt or sharp. That Stewart Farrar mentions the practicality of having a dull blade, while he was still working with Alex and Maxine Sanders, would suggest that this mundane consideration was made, at least, relatively early in the Alexandrian Tradition, and perhaps by other Traditions as well. At the same time, he does still talk of people wishing to keep their athamé sharp to be "traditional,"[ii] which would seem to imply strongly that this dulling is purely a practical matter, and hence while it may be the norm, or even mandated within some covens, this dullness is not inherent to, or typical of, athamés. Indeed, the very description of keeping a blade sharp as "traditional" would suggest the opposite, with dulling being very much a concession to legal or safety concerns[iii].

For the most part, both Traditional and Innovative practitioners seem to share this view; dull blades are the norm, but this dullness is purely for practical reasons. The distinction is made less clear in some Innovative writings though; athamés are often described as "normally dull" but no reason is given, leaving a reader to perhaps surmise that this relates to properties of the athamé itself. Some descriptions are confusing in this regard; one author describes an athamé plainly as "a black-handled knife with a dull or blunt double-edged blade," but then goes on to say "The blade will rarely, if ever, need to be sharpened because the athame is exclusively a ceremonial ritual tool and rarely actually cuts any kind of physical object."[iv] This contradicts, since surely a deliberately dull blade is not rarely sharpened, but never sharpened, and never, rather than rarely, cuts a physical object; a never-sharpened blade may be so deliberately, but a rarely-sharpened blade is merely a neglected one. Perhaps she is considering those of differing practice when she writes of them "rarely" being sharp, but if so then this has not been made clear.

Descriptions of athamés as always being dull are more common on the web,[v] with one page actually describing the author as going against tradition because she sharpens hers while, "This knife is traditionally never sharp."[vi]

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i op cit.

ii [Farrar 1971]

iii Some who insist on using a sharp knife will maintain that a blunt blade can in many ways be more dangerous than a well-handled sharp one.

iv [Nock 2005]

v [Andreanna 1999], [Dragonmoondesigns 1996] & [Tiamat 1998]

vi [Twilight 2006]

Again, it is worth emphasising that dull blades are the norm amongst both Innovative and Traditional practitioners, while opting for sharp blades remains far from unheard of amongst either. The difference is in how some see such dullness as typical rather than merely common.

A bigger difference is in the material of the blades. Ferrous blades are the norm for both Innovative and Traditional use. But while some Traditional writers may concede the use of non-ferrous blades,[i] it is generally a concession rather than an accepted practice amongst them, and many will quite firmly insist on steel. Not using steel is much more common amongst Innovative practitioners, and indeed non-ferrous blades are mandated by some Innovative traditions.

That iron has different magical properties to other metals, has long been held. Pliny the Elder writing circa 77 CE remarked:

> *Iron is employed in medicine for other purposes besides that of making incisions. For if a circle is traced with iron, or a pointed weapon is carried three times round them, it will preserve both infant and adult from all noxious influences: if nails, too, that have been extracted from a tomb, are driven into the threshold of a door, they will prevent night-mare.*

At the same time, just as the properties it was held to possess made it particularly suitable for some purposes, so it made it particularly unsuitable for others:

> *Similar to savin is the herb known as "selago." Care is taken to gather it without the use of iron, the right hand being passed for the purpose through the left sleeve of the tunic, as though the gatherer were in the act of committing a theft. The clothing too must be white, the Feet bare and washed clean, and a sacrifice of bread and wine must be made before gathering it: it is carried also in a new napkin. The Druids of Gaul have pretended that this plant should be carried about the person as a preservative against accidents of all kinds, and that the smoke of it is extremely good for all maladies of the eyes.*[ii]

Of particular note here is the warding, apotropaic, qualities attributed to iron—ferrous metal is held to offer power over spirits—and that Pliny associates the use of selago, with its requirement of being picked without the use of iron, with the Druids. The Druids are even better known, again through the writings of Pliny, for their use of "golden sickles" in gathering mistletoe. While many have cast doubt upon the value of Pliny as a source on the Druids,[iii] the association with the Druids, and hence with "Celtic" traditions, has influenced Traditions that associate themselves with the Celts or the countries of the Celtic Fringe. Further, we can see the apotropaic quality of ferrous materials mentioned with particular regard to the fairies, in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, "in the Highlands of Scotland the great safeguard against the elfin race is iron, or, better yet, steel."

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i [Farrar & Farrar 1984]

ii [Pliny]

iii [Sutton & Mann 2000], [Hutton 2003] & [Hutton 2007]

This would clearly bias those who are inclined to see the fairies in a particularly positive manner to avoid all use of it.

Yet, this very same quality is exactly why one may wish to make use of it. Frazer above is, after all, giving a reason why steel is carried in the Highlands, not a reason why it is avoided, even though taboos on iron are his main concern in the chapter in question. The breadth of his survey of iron being so prized, makes it worth quoting more extensively:

> *But the disfavour in which iron is held by the gods and their ministers has another side. Their antipathy to the metal furnishes men with a weapon which may be turned against the spirits when occasion serves. As their dislike of iron is supposed to be so great that they will not approach persons and things protected by the obnoxious metal, iron may obviously be employed as a charm for banning ghosts and other dangerous spirits. And often it is so used. Thus in the Highlands of Scotland the great safeguard against the elfin race is iron, or, better yet, steel. The metal in any form, whether as a sword, a knife, a gun-barrel, or what not, is all-powerful for this purpose. Whenever you enter a fairy dwelling you should always remember to stick a piece of steel, such as a knife, a needle, or a fish-hook, in the door; for then the elves will not be able to shut the door till you come out again. So, too, when you have shot a deer and are bringing it home at night, be sure to thrust a knife into the carcase, for that keeps the fairies from laying their weight on it. A knife or nail in your pocket is quite enough to prevent the fairies from lifting you up at night. Nails in the front of a bed ward off elves from women "in the straw" and from their babes; but to make quite sure it is better to put the smoothing-iron under the bed, and the reaping-hook in the window. If a bull has fallen over a rock and been killed, a nail stuck into it will preserve the flesh from the fairies. Music discoursed on a Jew's harp keeps the elfin women away from the hunter, because the tongue of the instrument is of steel. In Morocco iron is considered a great protection against demons; hence it is usual to place a knife or dagger under a sick man's pillow.*[i]

And indeed he goes on, though the above should suffice. As well as demonstrating the wide extent, and hence the normalcy, of such uses of ferrous metal, this is notable in two further ways. Firstly, it demonstrates that deliberately *avoiding* contact with fairies is the norm in folk traditions. Secondly, it shows that while iron was frequently taboo amongst priesthoods, it was a taboo that was deliberately broken by some; to use iron religiously or magically is to deal with the other worlds in a manner in which one does not supplicate to the forces of other planes, but deals with them actively and assertively, and perhaps even aggressively. It is to not just act as a priest, but also to act as a magician.[ii]

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i [Frazer 1922]

ii If someone wanted to determine a term for a magician who deliberately broke priestly taboos he or she might well, depending on their own prejudices, arrive at the word *witch*.

Either extreme, of avoiding the use of ferrous metal, or of always using it, are both reasonable reäctions to the implications of this view of iron's qualities, as also are many more moderate views. It is clear though, that the wider extremes are not easily reconciled.

In practice of course, many will be influenced merely by what they have read or observed from others as to how things are done, rather than by examining arguments for them. Steel appears to remain the norm amongst post-Gardnerian witchcraft generally, simply because it is the norm in Traditional Wicca, and because steel is the most frequently used metal by bladesmiths working with mundane purposes in mind. Those who are influenced by another tradition, such as Feri, by some forms of Druidy, or by a deliberate attempt to appease fairies, are therefore in the minority, and as such more likely to explicitly state a reason for avoiding ferrous materials. This is not always the case; Sirona Knight, in *Faery Magick*, states simply that, "the athame is a knife without iron or steel that is used to cut the magick Circle,"[i] without being explicit that this non-ferrous requirement comes from the focus she has on fairies, and not a more general rule in witchcraft or magic.

An implication of those traditions that forbid the use of iron, is that they deal differently with fairies, and similar spirits, than do Traditional Wiccans and others who make use of iron. This is plainly true, but where a difference of opinion may arise is in how great this difference is. Those who make use of iron and steel may consider themselves on good terms with fairies, while some who forbid the use of iron may not consider this possible.

An extension of this aversion to anything that could be used as a weapon against fairies, could be an aversion to anything that could be viewed primarily, or at all, as a weapon. Which brings us to the wand. The decision by some to consider the wand as interchangeable with the athamé changes not just the view of the athamé but also the wand. There is a remarkable lack of explanation of what a wand actually is; reading much literature on the topic, it appears to be simply a "magic stick," with no further history than that, except perhaps in the færie-tales and stage magic acts in which wands also appear. The explanation that a wand is a symbol of power, (most often of temporal power, being much the same as a regal sceptre or ceremonial mace), authority and command is rarely given. Rare too, is the probable origin in clubs, maces, and similar concussion weapons. Returning to the quote above, "Some solitary Wiccans don't like using a knife at all; they feel that it is an aggressive weapon with no place in the loving practice of Wicca," it would appear that this is not merely ignored, but completely unknown by at least some Innovative Witches, unless smashing somebody's skull is somehow less aggressive than stabbing them. How this could come to be can only be guessed at. It is true that even in mundane use a wand is a stylised, symbolic weapon rather than an actual one, but this is also true of a dagger which is never actually used, especially if it is deliberately blunted—indeed all the more so; a relatively heavy wand would be just as good as a weapon as any other stick of the same dimensions, as it cannot be rendered less harmful, the same way blunting a blade does. It could perhaps be that viewing the wand as not being a weapon is valued, not only by those who would prefer to avoid weapons, but

i [Knight 2002]

by others as well; perhaps this is seen as a sort of balance. Or they would prefer to downplay all weaponry, and while they cannot do so entirely in the more blatant case of the athamé, and the even more blatant case of the sword, they can in the case of the wand.

Notably, while the term *weapon* for tools, common amongst other magicians, is rare amongst Traditional Wiccans, it is almost entirely absent in the writings of Innovative Witches.

That the wand is made of wood perhaps allows for a connection to be drawn with the view of Wicca as a "nature religion" discussed in a later chapter. Still, in light of the lack of commentary on the matter, just what the wand is viewed as being beyond a "magic stick," can only be a matter of conjecture.

The wand, in turn, naturally leads one to think about another weapon that became a symbol of authority; the scourge. The scourge is quietly omitted from many lists of tools by Innovative Witches, even where the authors mention others for completeness that they don't use themselves, or are otherwise critical of traditions they describe concerning the tool in question.

Since a scourge is also physically a weapon of sorts, we would expect this aversion especially from those Innovative Witches who avoid or downplay athamés and swords. Also, in some cases this could be an aversion to associations with Roman Catholic flagellants, and mortification of the flesh—depending as it does upon an attitude to the body that would generally be rejected by Traditional and Innovative alike, including Gardner.[i] Indeed, it could be that to some Innovative Witches the references in Traditional Wiccan practice to "purification" and the statement that, "one must be prepared to suffer to learn," would sound more reminiscent of such Christian practices, than anything they consider fits well with Wicca.

When Innovative Witches explicitly reject the use of the scourge though, they more often draw analogy to BDSM, than to any religious practice. D J Conway begins a criticism of its use through the reliable trope of claiming that Gardner invented it, and then goes on to explain his supposed motives; "The scourge is not a traditional Witch tool and probably was invented by Gerald Gardner, who seemed to like scourgings," and later "In my opinion, Gardner seems to have been obsessed with nudity, sex, and scourging, traits that may not have appeal to other Witches."[ii] A J Drew, writing not just about the scourge, but including it in a highly speculative psychosexual profile of much Gardnerian practice, that he goes on to denounce, goes so far as to pronounce that Gardner was, "topping from the bottom,"[iii] which is a two-fronted attack, since he brings Gardner in line for condemnation from both those who disapprove of BDSM, and from the many in the BDSM community who have at least a degree of disdain for topping from the bottom. Drew takes care to state that he is not opposed to BDSM itself, though this tolerance seems of minimal value since he has just objected to the same sexual interests in someone upon no evidence apart from the

i [Gardner 1949]

ii [Conway 2001]

iii [Drew 2002]

circular argument that; Gardner must have an interest in BDSM because of the use of the scourge and binding, and that the reason for the scourge and binding must be due to his interest in BDSM.[i]

Such an analysis of the purpose of the scourge can only be justified[ii] if there aren't other plausible reasons. It therefore makes sense to examine the scourge along the same lines that other elements of Wicca have also been regularly examined in books by Innovative Witches, and books by Traditional Wiccans that reached a wide audience.

One popular approach is to look at Palæopagan practices. In doing so, scourging and comparable whippings of various types can be found, of which the flogging of women by men on Lupercalia stands out as a cross-gender fertility rite. Another example, is the evidence, from the Villa of the Mysteries in Popeii, that scourging was used in the Eleusian Mysteries, which clearly stands out as particularly appropriate for an Initiatory Mystery Tradition. Yet another analogy would be to the crook and flail that symbolised pharaonic authority; since the reason for the flail being combined with the crook—which represented the Pharaoh's rôle as provider and hence the merciful side of his authority—was that the Egyptians used flails to hurt prisoners and slaves—and hence representing the severe side of his authority—in which use it is essentially a scourge.

Another popular approach, is to look at contemporary or recent folk practices, especially if they are already held to have pre-Christian origins. An obvious example here would be the the Czech tradition of *pomlázka*, which is popularly[iii] held to originate in Lupercalia.

Another common approach, is to look upon the effects a practice may have upon the minds or bodies of practitioners. While this is one point where BDSM does allow an analogy—in terms of the altered state of mind generally referred to as *sub-space*[iv]—this is nowhere explored by Innovative writings, and an analogy to Wiccan practice would be quite a stretch. However, a much more compelling analogy can be drawn to the long-standing traditional use of the *vihta* in Finnish saunas.

Yet another popular approach, is to compare a practice with those found in other religions. While the use of scourging in mediæval Catholicism may be seen as an inappropriate comparison by

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i Hutton used the more straightforward approach to trying to deduce someone's sexual interests of examining his choice in erotica. The conclusion was that there was no evidence of any such preference ([Hutton 1999]).

ii Robert Cochrane made much the same allegation, ([Cochrane 1966a]), but given his much-stated antipathy towards Wicca he would be motivated to see things in the worse possible light, while those who identify themselves as *Wiccan* should surely be motivated otherwise, which makes the allegations more remarkable in such cases.

iii By which I mean that I can find hundreds of statements of such an association, but nothing authoritative. The association is certainly well-known amongst the Czechs and perhaps more conclusive scholarship on the matter is available in the Czech language.

iv An experience of a severe loss of ego and self-control, in extreme cases combined with physical sensations such as that of flying. While providing independent evidence to the value of scourging as a means to obtain an altered state, most reports involve a greater degree of force being used than any description from Wiccan literature, along with very different psychological settings.

Innovative and Traditional alike, there are plenty of uses of much more painful ordeals than a light scourging to be found throughout the world. The Sundance ceremony stands out as often involving privations that would make even a much more severe scourging than is common in Wicca pale in comparison.

Similarly, comparisons with practices in the wider Western Mystery Tradition are often made. In this case we can look to Crowley's regular mention of the scourge as a magical tool in *Book Four, Part II*, including a chapter entitled, "The Scourge, The Dagger and The Chain"[i] or his listing in *Liber 777* of the magical weapons associated with the number 5 and the Sephirah of Geburah as "The Sword, Spear, Scourge, or Chain."[ii]

A final popular approach, is to look at allegations made during witch-trials. Here scourging is found described in a variety of different tones.[iii]

The above is far from exhaustive, nor is it meant to be; it suffices to demonstrate that, by the very same standards with which features of modern witchcraft are commonly justified in the available literature, very little effort is needed to show the scourge standing as a particularly well-supported tool. How can people who regularly research, and indeed publish, precedents for other features of Wicca, only arrive at a sole explanation of the use of the scourge that depends upon alleged aspects of Gardner's sexuality, for which the only evidence is that same use of the scourge? In light of all the other evidence for its place in witchcraft we must conclude that this was quite deliberate.

Drew's uneasy apology towards practitioners of BDSM perhaps hints at a reason for Innovative Witches to distance themselves, albeit sometimes not too much, from anything that they feel could hint at it; that they are afraid of being tarred by the same brush. Some though, may be equally afraid of being seen as prudish, (Drew feels the need to state outright that he isn't a prude, and points to the fact that one of his friends is a dominatrix to prove it, with shades of the cliché of "some of my best friends are…"), or of exhibiting prejudice counter to current liberal attitudes to what may occur between consenting adults.[iv] As such, they'd much prefer if the whole matter could be swept under the carpet. If this is so, then the fact that claims of an association between the use of the scourge and BDSM never mention *sub-space*, is no surprise; that there could be such a connection between the two, that actually has potential value, would do more harm than good to such an attempt to distance themselves from it.

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i [Crowley 1912]

ii [Crowley 1909]

iii [Cavendish 1967]

iv Of course the prevalence of such attitudes is relatively novel. It may be worth considering the debates that continue within Feminism, on whether and how a politics which rejects uneven power dynamics can tolerate people voluntarily opting to engage in just such an uneven dynamic. While increasing numbers of Feminists will defend BDSM, they are far from representing any sort of consensus, and those opposed to it, or seeing it as at least potentially dangerous, would have had a still stronger voice when Feminism and witchcraft were first influencing each other, as described later. The allegation that the scourge originates in minority sexual preferences could also owe something to this.

Ironically, such a fear of being labelled a pervert by someone else's standard is not far removed from the motivation Gardner gave both for his writing, and for the New Forest Coven giving him permission to do so; "I have been told by witches in England: 'Write and tell people we are not perverts…" and later he argues, "Nor do I think it fair to call witches dissipated perverts."[i]

For Drew this smacks of the lady doth protest too much, but Gardner's statement cannot be read correctly without reference to the context; that he was answering James Pennethorne Hughes having recently accused witches of just that. And for not reading it in this context there is little excuse, since Gardner quotes the allegation, "Some were perhaps dissipated perverts and had shame or guilty pride,"[ii] himself.

So here, we perhaps have the answer to the question. While someone studying Paganism, comparative religion, folklore, magic or ritual technique will inevitably come across countless analogies to the scourge, the same will not hold for cowans, particularly cowan writers and journalists, seeking lurid sensationalism. While some Innovative witches may have dropped the scourge out of fear, or distaste for the scourge itself, (or indeed, out of fear for their own desires if it hit upon repressed associations they personally harboured), a continual pressure towards dropping its use would come from that being easier than explaining to an audience potentially predisposed to believe a more titillating explanation. Even a defender of the scourge is also similarly motivated to avoid such associations being built up in the minds of outsiders. So then, he or she is immediately put on the defensive, and may hence not want to explore the allegation too much, for while it is easily refuted, as above, to do so must still give it expression.

The effect of losing the scourge probably has a more profound effect upon the degree to which Innovative Witchcraft is severed from Traditional Wicca than many may realise; whereas those who abandon the athamé are probably quite aware that they are stepping away from Traditional practice, the scourge has almost been "disappeared." The silent abandonment of one of the eight tools of the Wicca no doubt colours many of the other differences in such matters as initiation, the Five-Fold Kiss and Drawing Down the Moon, along with altering much else of the numerology and other symbolism of the Craft, and removing some of the signposts to the Mysteries. That it stands as one of the most common differences between Traditional and Innovative practice, may seem to be of minor significance to those who have abandoned it, and crucial importance to those who have not.

Initiation

Given the mystery tradition nature of Traditional Wicca, initiation holds a central position in several ways.

1. The initiatory experience in itself offers exposure to the Mysteries.

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i [Gardner 1954]

ii [Pennethorne Hughes 1952], as quoted in [Gardner 1954].

2. The initiatory experience is shared in that every initiate has also experienced it.
3. The initiation marks membership of the tradition. The lineage, as well as defining such membership, can be used, by those who know of it, to ascertain that someone is indeed a member.

Given the third point in particular, it stands as a defining point of Traditional Wicca, not shared by Innovative Witchcraft. At one point, a common position amongst those with Traditional Wiccans was that only such an initiation could make one a witch at all. Now a much more common position is that Traditional Wiccans are witches, but not the only witches. While differences as to what makes one a witch are now less contentious in this regard, if still contentious in the lack of any consensus on exactly what actually does, comparisons between approaches to initiation in Traditional Wicca and Innovative Witchcraft continue to demonstrate the shadow of that earlier controversy.

In Innovative witchcraft initiation may be one of the following:

1. Completely absent.
2. Self-Initiation.
3. Initiation that traces to a self-initiation.
4. Initiation from which places one within a Traditional Wiccan lineage, but where at some point along that lineage Traditional Wiccan practices have been departed from.
5. Initiation in a lineage that traces to a long standing witchcraft tradition that is not Wiccan.

These last three hold in common the quality of marking membership of the Innovative Witchcraft tradition in question, and also mark a shared experience within it. Beyond that it is difficult to comment further. Some may well expose someone to Mysteries, but whether this holds or not, and whether they are comparable to those experience by Traditional Wiccans is impossible to say.[i]

The case of no initiation could entail initiation, of whatever sort, being an ambition or it being merely seen as unimportant. If Innovative Witches simply view themselves as different to Traditional Wiccans, then there will be little in the way of disagreement between them and many Traditional Wiccans. However, deciding that initiation is not important will likely be on the basis of some sort of understanding of just what initiation is. This understanding could indeed be a bone of contention.

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i I can offer a personal experience, having been both initiated into an Alexandrian coven and earlier into an Innovative coven that had Gardnerian lineage, but had broken from Gardnerian practice. I am limited both by what I can express and what I would be prepared to say. All I can really say on the matter is that with the Innovative initiation, there was "something to it," but that it does not much compare to having been initiated into a Traditional Wiccan coven, and that it is most definitely possible to have an elevation that does not have "something to it." This limited anecdotal remark must suffice in a matter where research cannot.

Scott Cunningham argues that, "True initiation isn't a rite performed by one human being upon another."[ii] Now, initiation in general is indeed a rite performed by one human being upon another, or more at a time. This is true not only of Traditional Wicca, and other initiatory traditions of witchcraft, but also of just about every religion or magical order for which there is any concept of initiation. Even the *Shahada* of Islam, while not strictly a rite, and as something one does by oneself, requires the presence of witnesses. The qualifier, "true," implies that Cunningham is writing about something beyond the form of ritual. He continues:

> *Many of the Wicca readily admit that the ritual initiation is the outer form only. True initiation will occur weeks or months later, or prior to, the physical ritual.*
>
> *Since this is so, "real" Wiccan initiation may take place years before the student contacts a Wiccan coven or teacher.*

Here, it is clear that what is being referred to is not the ritual of initiation, and hence not initiation as it would generally be understood by any religion, student of religion, or anthropologist, but rather the spiritual or psychic effects it is held to produce. He goes on to add:

> *Rest assured, it's quite possible to experience a true Wiccan initiation without ever meeting another soul involved in the religion. You may even be unaware of it.*

This is a bit of a stretch. It is indeed held by many in initiatory traditions, that the spiritual or psychic effects can occur out of synch with the initiation, and indeed by some, that it may occur before the actual ritual. This still entails the ritual happening at some point.

Finally though, after some indistinct waxing about what this effect may be, he concludes:

> *When the Old Ways have become a part of your life and your relationship with the Goddess and God is strong, when you have gathered your tools and performed the rites and magic out of joy, you are truly of the spirit and can rightly call yourself "Wiccan."*
>
> *This may be your goal, or you may wish to stretch yourself further, perhaps continuing your search for an instructor.*

In the midst of musing on how such an initiatory effect could affect someone, it has ceased to be an initiatory effect. Cunningham has not actually made an argument that initiation is not necessary. Rather, he has started with a somewhat mystical statement that the effects of initiation may take place before an initiation ritual, then lost this thread of argument amidst talking about other mystical experiences one may have, and so when he then picks up the thread of argument again, he appears on casual reading to have argued that initiation is not important, while in fact he had made no such argument, but merely a rhetorical sleight of hand.

At the same time, he does not make any statement confidently. He argues both that initiation is not necessary, and indeed hints that it doesn't even convey an advantage, but also describes the

ii [Cunningham 1988a]

possibility of obtaining initiation as, "stretching oneself further," which suggests at least a considerable advantage in doing so.

This tension, of both valuing and devaluing initiation, arises often when people try to talk about the question with any degree of neutrality, if they take this approach that the experience of initiation can happen without the ritual. As such, it can be expected to provoke negative reäctions, in both the initiated and the uninitiated, alike.

Self-initiation takes yet a different approach to the position of non-Initiates, by allowing them to perform the rite themselves.

This is a curious blend of two different practices that have always existed in magical practice. There have always been people who have developed magical practices from a mixture of observed folk practice and personal gnosis and always will be. Nor are ceremonial practices solely the work of initiates, as people may work alone from material such as Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* without initiation. Indeed, it is unclear whether it refers to acts performed only by initiates or not.[i] There have also, no doubt, always been people who either claimed to be initiates without any such initiation having actually occurred, or who to some degree falsified, or at least euphemised, the exact nature of genuine initiations they had undergone. Some may well have honestly felt that they did not need another person to initiate them, but saw fudging the matter as a practical tactic in engaging with other initiates, (some of whom they may have suspected were doing the same thing), but they at least saw initiation as having enough communal value as a shibboleth, if nothing else, that it was worth lying about or exaggerating.

Where self-initiation is relatively novel, is in how it blends these two streams. It both values initiation enough to perform a rite of initiation, yet dismisses entirely, or reduces from essential to merely advantageous, the entire concept of initiation as something which is passed, or something which welcomes the postulant into a group. Self-initiation as such, creates an initiatory lineage of one.

The most immediate question, is whether this is actually possible at all. By any Traditional Wiccan definition it cannot be. Adopting Traditional Wiccan initiation for solitary use requires more than a few physical impossibilities, along with abandoning one of the elements of continuity that defines the traditions.

In a more general sense, it depends on what one means by *initiation*. In its being the noun form of *initiate* as in "to begin," then there can indeed be such a thing as a self-initiation. Some purely magical systems make use of self-performed rites explicitly for this, and this alone.[ii] In comparison to how the word *initiation* is meant in the context of any other religion or culture, then a self-initiation is not possible; to initiate is not merely to put in but to bring in, and depends on the people doing so being in a position of already being, "on the inside," themselves.

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i [Hutton 2003]

ii [Barrabbas 2007]

It is perhaps for this reason that the term, *self-initiation*, is losing favour amongst even those Innovative Witches who do not see the need for an initiatory lineage. Rather, *self-dedications*, are becoming more common again as the limit of what introductory rite one may perform on oneself.

Coven Government

Within Traditional Wicca, the governing of any coven is very much in the hands of the High Priestess, with the High Priest in a supporting rôle to that authority. Since, the High Priestess and High Priest would, by necessity, have a certain level of experience, and have been considered by a previous elder to have the demonstrated the ability to fulfil the rôle, this is integral to the mechanism of communication of the traditions themselves.

There are two pressures that may lead to Innovative covens operating differently. The first, is that with some Innovative covens the differential in experience between the most senior and most junior members, that such a system assumes, may not exist. There may hence be no obvious choice for the positions.

The hierarchical nature of the Traditional system of coven government may also be seen as inherently undesirable, with there being a preference for elected, rotated, consensus-based governance, or some other structure that could be deemed more democratic.

A clear incentive towards such democratic models, is with analogy to other contexts for government, particularly national legislatures. Such an analogy can tempt one towards the comparable analogy with dictator-led nations, colouring some outside views of Traditional covens, and those Innovative covens with a similar hierarchical structure, very negatively indeed.

Male–Female Pairings

Traditional Wicca pairs male and female practitioners in several ways; in the coupling of a High Priest and High Priestess, in the alternation between men and women at various points, and in initiation being from man to woman, and woman to man.

Some reasons for some Innovative practitioners deliberately departing from this are explored later in this work. Apart from those reasons, there are practical considerations that may lead to male–female pairings being abandoned or continued. Solitary witches will obviously not be capable of utilising any such male–female pairing. Other groupings may be male-only or, perhaps more often, female-only, not by design, but just by accident of who people manage to meet with a shared interest in witchcraft, given both gender imbalance often remarked upon in those interested, and the tendency of many people to develop more friendships with people of the same sex as themselves.

Contra to this, after solitaries the next most common grouping is probably life-partners who work as a couple. With male–female couples being in the majority generally, this will inevitably lead to a large number of couples working as a male–female pair.

The Five-Fold Kiss

The greeting and valediction, "Blessed Be," is almost as much a signifier of someone's involvement in some form of Post-Gardnerian witchcraft, as pentagram jewelry. While it appears in popular culture, such as in the television shows *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it is not much adopted by, nor preëxistant in, groups who do not identify themselves as witches, which does happen with the pentagram, and so serves as a shibboleth of sorts.

While this valediction comes from the Five-Fold Kiss, the Five-Fold Kiss itself does not have the same degree of prevalence. Solitary use would of course preclude it, and many of the other differences to Traditional Wicca discussed in this section remove context for it.

Even when contexts do exist for it, it may still be departed from. Conway offers the following suggestion:

> *Some individuals and groups may wish to dispense with this part of the ritual and substitute kneeling at the feet of the High Priestess/Priest and simply kissing her/his feet as a sign of respect. However, I am not fond of using the foot-kissing part either, as I feel that this encourages a feeling of class or degree importance that is not appropriate in Wicca. I prefer to simply give a kiss of greeting on the lips.*[i]

This departs in several ways. The first, is that the foot-kissing of the Five-Fold Kiss is not equivalent to the kissing of a foot as an obeisance, as found in other cultures. Removed from the context of the wording that accompanies the Five-Fold Kiss, the meaning is completely changed. Indeed, stripped of such context, it could actually introduce a class-difference, such as Conway complains about here.

This talk of, "class or degree importance," of course touches upon different attitudes to hierarchy, but in this case it is somewhat of a red herring, ignoring as it does the differing contexts in which the Five-Fold Kiss is given. As every Traditional Wiccan initiate will have received the Five-Fold Kiss, it is hardly likely that the, "foot-kissing part," of the Kiss encourages anti-egalitarian feelings —quite the opposite—though the suggested revision of it above could well do so.

Ultimately, a kiss on the lips is just simply not a Five-Fold Kiss, and neither physically nor verbally comparable. A kiss could perhaps stand for the Five-Fold Kiss, but only if those using such a substitution were already familiar with it in full.

Apart from the fact that the male–female polarity behind the Five-Fold Kiss does not suit all groups (in which case why not just remove the male–female polarity of the Kiss as well?), Conway seems sure that many groups may wish to depart from this practice, but does not actually give any reason why. Her work does however show a continual desexualisation of practice, to the point that any kiss one would not give to an elderly maiden aunt while in polite company does not fit into her version of the Craft.

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i [Conway 2001]

Drawing Down the Moon & The Charge of the Goddess

Drawing Down the Moon is a key focal point of Traditional Wiccan rites, making its absence from many published Innovative Rites therefore of particular interest. One influence on this is perhaps the impossibility of performing it in the Traditional Wiccan manner, where the High Priest draws down into the High Priestess, in the case of solitary working. Another could be the difficulty in teaching the technique through textual media. Edain McCoy's *Lady of the Night*[i] makes an attempt at teaching what she labels, "Drawing Down the Moon," that is essentially a solitary meditative technique. With an extent of one paragraph on how to do so, and another warning that anything that feels in any way negative almost certainly can't, in her opinion, be considered a goddess, there is very little focus on it, in a book which specifically about ways for Pagan witches to work with the moon. The text I found with the most to say on the subject was Ann Finnin's avowedly non-Wiccan, *The Forge of Tubal Cain*.[ii] While this book discusses drawing down at some length, it does not provide a how-to, or even attempt to, but describes experiences and difficulties students learning the technique in a coven context may have, and how their teachers will help them to deal with them.

Given the lack of Drawing Down of the Moon in many Innovative rites, and the difference between it and the Traditional Wiccan form in many others, it is perhaps a wonder that the Charge of the Goddess remains common throughout Innovative Witchcraft. While many Innovative liturgies lack a place for it, innumerable variants can be found throughout Innovative writings, both in print and online. It would seem that, at least as a written text, it has become a significant piece of Wiccan inheritance, even appearing in popular culture artefacts, such as the sleeve-notes of a musical album.[iii]

Feast Days

While examining many features of Traditional Wicca will find various departures from them amongst Innovative Witchcraft, and some of these are quite remarkable, in the case of the dates of the Sabbats. what is more remarkable is how little departure there is. At most there are some minor differences concerning whether Imbolc should be considered the 1st or the 2nd of February, whether near-by dates of greater significance locally, such as St. John's Day in the case of the Summer Solstice, should be used, and as to the degree of importance ascribed to the astronomical accuracy of equinoxes and solstices. While various theories exist in the wider Neopagan community as to astronomical calculations of the non-astronomical sabbats,[iv] and there is much potential inspiration from folklore holidays and Palæopagan festivals, such as the feast days of particular gods and goddesses, Innovative Witches tend to stick to the eight known to the majority of Traditional

i [McCoy 1996]

ii [Finnin 2008]

iii [O'Connor 1994]

iv e.g. [Druidschool 2006]

Wiccans. Despite the common justification that Gardner may have (or "must have" or plainly stating that he did), invented various features of Wicca, which can therefore be dropped again while still considering oneself to be following Wiccan tradition, four of the eight sabbats are indeed an early innovation of the Gardnerian tradition, according to Frederic Lamond:

> *...I asked Gerald why we celebrated the cross-quarter days instead of the solstices and equinoxes. "You can celebrate these if you want to," said Gerald, "but it would be at odds with the climate in which we live….*
>
> *We* [the Bricket Wood Coven] *liked our feasts, so after Gerald's return to the Isle of Man in the spring 1958 we decided to celebrate both the cross quarter days and the solstices and equinoxes with feasts….*[i]

There is of course considerable differences in how each Sabbat is celebrated, as is to be expected as the Sabbats offer one a framework with which to address the turning seasons, and differing groups with, differing concerns, will inevitably use that framework differently. The most remarkable difference between Traditional and Innovative, is that of names chosen, since again there is a relatively strong consensus within Innovative Witchcraft.

Originally, Traditional Wiccans used names that would be understood in the context of English culture, (*May Day*, *Candlemas*, etc.). The Farrars adopted Irish names, such as *Samhain* and *Lughnasadh*, as they were living in Ireland, and advised that others make similar adoptions, so as to keep one's practice local, to either one's current locale or one's homeland.[ii] Many seem to have ignored their advice, but taken their examples, and so the Irish names are in very common use amongst the Traditional, and even more so amongst the Innovative. As such, the terms have become English loan-words particularly associated with Wicca, and other forms of Paganism.

Yule holds a middle-ground position, being a modern English word, but a relatively obscure one, and hence becoming Pagan linguistic "property." This left the summer solstice and the equinoxes with the same mundane names that everyone else had for them. Of course, outside of a few specialities, everyone else didn't really have call to use them very often, but within Innovative Witchcraft there was widespread adoption of Aidan Kelly's coinages; *Ostara*, *Litha* and *Mabon*.

These last three terms are somewhat conjectural. *Ostara* comes from Bede, via Jacob Grimm, and is based on Bede's theory that *Eostur-monath*, the Anglo-Saxon month roughly coïncident with April in the modern Gregorian calendar, may have been named after a goddess, *Eostre*. Beyond the comment from Bede, it is hard to say anything about this goddess. Grimm has a point when he says, "It would be uncritical to saddle this father of the church, who everywhere keeps heathenism at a distance, and tells us less of it than he knows, with the invention of these goddesses,"[iii] But on

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i [Lamond 2005]

ii [Farrar & Farrar 1981]

iii [Grimm 1888], referring not just to *Eostre* and also *Hrede*, in whose honour Bede claims the preceding month of *Rhedmonath* is named.

the other hand, there is no real evidence to show firmly that he didn't, or that some scholarly misunderstanding didn't lead to a belief amongst the Christian Anglo-Saxons that their recent Pagan ancestors worshipped goddesses of these names, when in fact they did not. Bede may be Venerable, but he is not infallible, and in the absence of any primary source, or even any corroborating secondary source, conclusions cannot be drawn with much confidence.

Litha also comes from Bede's description of the Anglo-Saxon calendar, specifically from *se Ærra Liþa* (June), *se Æfterra Liþa* (July), and the intercalendary *Liþa* that appeared after these on leap years. This suggests that *Litha* may mean "summer," though Bede himself suggests it means calm or mild, (which would make it cognate with the modern English *lithe* as it relates to weather; now almost an obsolete sense), and also to travel, (making it cognate with *lead*):

> *Lida dicitur blandus, sive navigabilis, quod in utroque mense et blanda sit serenitas aurarum, et navigari soleant æquora.*[i]
>
> *Litha means "gentle" or "navigable", because in both those months the calm breezes are gentle and they were wont to sail upon the smooth sea.*[ii]

Finally, *Mabon* was adopted from the Welsh god Mabon ap Modron.

These three names are each relatively rare amongst Traditional Wicca, but probably the most common names in Innovative Witchcraft by a large margin. Beyond that, other names are often adopted or invented to match particular cultures, but each of these are rare. More often, one may find lists of various names for the same holiday, but some of these are rare in witchcraft practice, (e.g. Iolo Morganwg's coinage *Alban Elfed* which is often used in Druidry), and seem to be listed more for inclusiveness, and to encourage the ideology of actively engaging in a high degree of syncretism that is popular amongst some streams of Innovative Witchcraft.

Monetary Reward

It has long since been accepted that Wiccans should not charge money for the Craft. The exact interpretation of this has differed. Some have felt that any attempt to make money from anything associated with witchcraft, such as receiving royalties for a book written as a witch, breaks this rule,[iii] or else drawing the line at any occult or paranormal expertise. Most will not condemn this, after all anyone can write a book on witchcraft; being a witch isn't necessary for this, though it does obviously give you a different perspective on the topic. Most occult techniques are practised by many cowans, including those, such as astrology, tarot reading and scrying, that are most often done for a fee. Even when witches are criticised as being overly concerned with commercial success, this is normally seen as inappropriate because it leads to what the critic considers to be poor choices, rather than as them having broken this rule; it is cupidity rather than commerce that

i [Bede 725]

ii [Wallis 1999]

iii [Adler 1997]

is criticised, much as often happens to artists and others who must balance commercial value against other concerns.

Charging money becomes much more controversial where actual magic is done. To charge for performing a spell for another would be very controversial, even if the method used was borrowed from a tradition that allowed for such charging, while to sell an item that has been consecrated or otherwise, "energised," leads to complicated questions about whether the price is for the item only, or also for the magical work.[i] The question can become more difficult still when we think about the attention and intent that any good craftsman, especially one that also has magical training, will put into any item he or she produces.

Where charging money is much less accepted, is in terms of initiation, training leading directly to initiation, or where some sort of tithing is used. To find Traditional Wiccans doing so is very hard, much easier is to find Traditional Wiccans objecting to the very idea that it might happen, along with often pointing out suspicions about the credentials about those who claim to be charging for Traditional Wiccan initiation.[ii]

This is much the same in many Innovative traditions, though the differences as to what initiation is, if it exists at all, in such practices can muddy this. If, as the forward claims, working with *Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft* can make one "the equivalent to a Third Degree,"[iii] does this mean that charging for the book can be taken as in any way equivalent to charging for initiation. If not, does this mean one could base a tradition on such material, and charge for passing on such instruction before performing an initiation ceremony for the student? The Traditional answer is most likely to start with stating that they don't see working with Buckland's book to be the equivalent of a Third Degree. For that matter, those Traditional Wiccans that write books, teach courses, make videos, and so on, may feel that this can sit with their oaths, precisely because the materials produced are not equivalent to anything that will make one of any degree. To the final question, they're likely to either opine that nothing has made it acceptable to charge for initiation, or else to merely conclude that since they don't see such a tradition as Wicca, it's none of their concern whether it is charged for or not.

Most Innovative opinion is not likely to approve of such charging either. As models for the teaching of witchcraft change though, charging for initiation, or at the very least for the training that leads directly to it, is likely to become more common. This is done by the Correlian Nativist Church, and given the ties it once had to Witch School, it is hard to see how it could have used that model for training and not charge, unless there was a substantial supporting income from another source.

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i [Farrar & Farrar 1984]

ii [Alder Stand 2004]

iii [Buckland 1986]

This issue alone places the Correlians outside of the mainstream of Innovative Witchcraft, but unless they and others that share that model disappear soon, which they show no sign of doing, such a heterodoxy is likely to grow. What is not clear, is whether in the future they will be seen as being very much outside of Innovative Witchcraft, much as Innovative Witchcraft is seen as outside of Traditional Wicca, or whether they will influence Innovative Witchcraft to be increasingly accepting of such monetary charges.

III Books, Books of Shadows and Cultural Transmission

> "Knowing I loved my books, he furnish'd me
> From mine own library with volumes that
> I prize above my dukedom." —William Shakespeare, "The Tempest" Act I, scene ii

> "Actually, they were quite right. You *could* teach yourself witchcraft. But both the teacher and the pupil had to be the right sort of person." —Terry Pratchett, *Lords and Ladies*

There are many ways in which a tradition can be passed from elder to more junior members, including:

1. Formal learning
    1.1. Learning from books and other media
    1.2. Learning from oral instruction
    1.3. Learning from assigned exercises or research
2. Apprenticeship
    2.1. Performing tasks under guidance
    2.2. Induction (picking up elements of tradition from exposure to them)
3. Transmission of mysteries

Beyond learning a tradition, in acquiring knowledge and skills that are deemed to be of use to someone working in the tradition, the rôles of teacher and student could be relatively fixed, with one person permanently in a primarily teaching rôle and another permanently in primarily in that of a student, or fluid in several ways, including collaborative research, study groups, teachers assigning independent research to students, and students bringing prior relevant experience from other traditions or other fields.

Finally, personal gnosis may also bring lessons to individuals, which they may in turn attempt to share.

All of these aspects can be found in all forms of witchcraft, though clearly only learning from texts and personal gnosis can be primary means for solitaries.

Means of communication with witches one does not work with, is therefore of more importance the smaller and more isolated one's group is, and all the more so if that group is only oneself, barring a staunchly isolationist approach. Deborah Lipp places the ongoing rises of public festivals, book publishing, and Internet resources as barometers of change in a sketch of the history of Wicca in the United States,[i] which gives a measure of the importance of each of these to the development of witchcraft there, and drawing analogy to outside of the United States seems reasonable.

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i [Lipp 2007]

In light of this, the description of Wicca as an oral tradition does not hold for many Innovative Witches, since they lack any ongoing oral instruction. While it does not have a scripture, Innovative Witches are very often, if not quite a "people of the book," then at least of the books. The ease and speed in which one can communicate online, means that it is also the forum within which many cultural norms are set within subsections of Innovative Witchcraft. While this has yet to have as much of an impact on liturgy or ritual format,[i] it is of massive importance to the cultural experience of many.

The Book of Shadows

A Traditional Wiccan's Book of Shadows is almost always a hand-copied version of that of his or her initiator, or another coven elder. Its contents are considered secret, and the initiate oathbound not to reveal those contents. Opinions and practices vary as to additions to the Book of Shadows, but these variations agree on ensuring that at the very least the, "core," material that one's initiator received from his or her initiator, is in turn copied *in toto*.

Innovative Witchcraft, as in everything else, varies considerably. However, by far the most common definitions hold that a Book of Shadows is considerably more personal, than in Traditional Wicca. The glossary at ReligiousTolerance.org defines the term *Book of Shadows* as, "A personal diary of a Wiccan or other Neopagan in which she/he records their ritual activities,"[ii] while Scott Cunningham describes the Book of Shadows thus:

> *The Book of Shadows is a Wiccan workbook containing invocations, ritual patterns, spells, runes, rules governing magic, and so on. Some Books of Shadows are passed from one Wiccan to another, usually upon initiation, but the vast majority of Books of Shadows today are composed by each individual Wiccan.*[iii]

The majority of other definitions either repeat that it is a diary, that it is a workbook, or some combination of the two; and this would seem to be by far the most popular view within Innovative Witchcraft.

Hand-writing remains the norm, though perhaps with less justification. While the practice of maintaining a "Disc of Shadows" may go against mandated Traditional Wiccan practice,[iv] once one is no longer maintaining the Book of Shadows as an inheritance within a tradition it seems

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i Entirely virtual rituals do exists.

Also, while not witchcraft, The Open Source Order of the Golden Dawn <http://www.osogd.org/> stands as an effort to use Internet collaboration for the development of rituals similarly to the development of open-source software.

ii [Robinson 1996]

iii [Cunningham 1988a]

iv Arguably though, the injunction that one's book be in one's, "hand of write," assumes no other technological means of transcription, and is hence really an injunction against it being in any other hand, and the risk of exposure that would bring.

reasonable to abandon the holographic practice too, in favour of the advantages of speed, ease of editing and searching, and high-grade encryption, that most of us use routinely in other writing tasks. While there are some who do so, Innovative Witches often argue against it. Cunningham suggests:

> *It is a good idea to copy your spells and rites by hand. Not only does this ensure that you've read the work completely, it also allows easier reading by candlelight.*[i]

The first point has some value, (though I do wonder if my knowledge of basic geology is really any better, for having had a primary-school teacher who insisted upon the same technique), but the last seems doubtful; it is a rare scribe whose hand can compete in legibility in poor light with a large-font printout.

On balance, I think the preference for handwriting within Innovative Witchcraft may be largely an emotional thing; there is always a pleasure to be found in crafting something yourself with the minimal degree of technology, and doing so creates a connection to the result. There may also be the fact that handwriting is seen as old-fashioned, or perhaps simply as a "Wiccan thing."

It is worth noting that Frederic Lamond describes the original practice amongst Gardnerians as closer to the Innovative, quoting Gardner as saying:

> *"The Book of Shadows is not a Bible or Quran. It is a personal cookbook of spells that have worked for the owner. I am giving you mine to copy to get you started: as you gain experience discard those spells that don't work for you and substitute those that you have thought of yourselves."*[ii]

This is quite certainly different to the practices concerning the Book of Shadows, that exist now within Traditional Wicca. Nor can it be explained as a matter of Traditions maintaining a practice, while abandoning the wisdom behind it; the above quote does not well-describe the contents of the Books of Shadows, which while certainly not comparable to the Bible or Qur'ān, is not quite a "cookbook of spells" either. The question of whether the Innovative practice is a concious return to what is believed to be the earlier Traditional practice, or an innovation, (perhaps due to the fact that oaths would prevent a transmission of Books of Shadows out of the Traditions to which they belonged), which happened to repeat Gardner's earlier practice is unclear. Revisionism is likely to muddy the waters and make it less clear as time goes on. In either case, it remains that Traditional and Innovative concepts of the Book of Shadows are very much at odds with each other.

This can become a contentious point in the practices of sharing the Book. Both concepts of the Book of Shadows allow, and indeed in certain circumstances encourage, one to share one's Book with others. The differences between the two are primarily whom one may share it with. Both practices allow one to share the Book with "brethren," but the very differences in opinion as to who is or isn't Wiccan, that this essay explores, means that some Innovative Witches would

i [Cunningham 1988a]

ii [Lamond 2005]

perhaps be prepared to share their Books with either an Innovative Witch or a Traditional Wiccan, while Traditional Wiccans would at most be prepared to share their Books with a Traditional Wiccan, and more likely only with a well-vouched member of the same Tradition. At the same time, while both would consider their Book to be personal, in the case of the Traditional Wiccan the Book itself is personal, while the contents are traditional and identical to that it was copied from (barring perhaps some personal additions not considered "core"), while in the case of the Innovative Witch the contents are also personal, if only in choice of sources. To allow someone to see one's Book, therefore carries a more personal implication of trust and respect, with a refusal therefore suggesting that such a level of trust and respect does not exist.

The result of this, is that an Innovative Witch may to see a Traditional Wiccan's Book of Shadows, which to the Traditional entails a request to break oaths which may cause offence, especially if there is any persistence in the request. The Traditional Wiccan will therefore refuse to do so, which to the Innovative Witch may suggest that he or she is not trusted and respected as much as was thought, and cause offence to him or her in turn.

It's perhaps worth noting, that the most regular mention of a Book of Shadows in popular culture, and hence one that may have an influence upon cowans and some newcomers to witchcraft, is somewhere between the Traditional and Innovative form; the television show *Charmed* features a, "Book of Shadows," that is personal to the three main characters, who are sometimes seen adding to it, but also a traditional inheritance, since the book itself has passed down from their ancestors. Where this differs most from the majority opinion among both the Traditional and Innovative, is in attributing magical power to the Book itself. Of course, this is hardly a novel concept, nor one unused in witchcraft elsewhere, such as in the use of magical alphabets in talismans. The idea of the book as magical artefact can be found in many accounts, including some of suspected witches,[i] and fictions; hence for example, Prospero destroying his book with much the same degree of overkill, as he does his staff:

> *I'll break my staff,*
> *Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,*
> *And deeper than did ever plummet sound*
> *I'll drown my book.*[ii]

While this is not generally held by any form of Pagan witchcraft, exceptions can be found. One magazine account describes a woman getting rid of a troublesome ex-partner, through the use of a magic book. The book in question is not even a Book of Shadows, but a copy of the Farrars' *A Witches' Bible*,[iii] a use which one cannot imagine the Farrars' ever expecting. While such tabloid journalism cannot be taken too seriously, it does speak of the "magic book" persisting today, including by some who identify as witches.

i [Hutton 1999]

ii [Shakespeare 1623], Act V, scene i.

iii [Chat 2008]

Orthopraxies, Orthodoxies and Heterodoxies

Innovative Witchcraft has an ideological position of abandoning ideological positions. Like Traditional Wicca, it lacks a formal orthodoxy. However, it also lacks an orthopraxy. Indeed, the lack of an orthopraxy is perhaps more vocally, and regularly, stated than that of a shared belief, with being able to, "*do* what suits," cited as a virtue. In terms of *self-defining* statements though, it is the lack of doctrine, not lack of liturgy, that is most often directly commented on, and in turn often seen as the basis for the virtue of, "doing what suits."

Perhaps, this reflects Western post-Christian concepts of what makes a religion. In Christianity and Islam, doctrine precedes praxis. Catholicism has the Credo as the core definition of the faith, and the Reformed churches differed more vitally on doctrine than on practice. Islamic scholarship places great importance upon proving the validity of practices with reference to scripture. While Judaism is strongly orthopraxic, the basis of practice in doctrine can be seen with the answers to the Passover questions, which all give a scriptural reason for practices starting with the celebration itself: "Why is this night different from all other nights?", and then individual parts of that celebration.

That this has influenced Christian and post-Christian ideas of what defines a religion, is shown in the use of the word, *faith,* as a synonym for religion. Perhaps though, the assumption goes deeper than what is covered by the purely religious. Thought is seen to precede action, science to precede technology, and so on. Exceptions to this are either, ignored—in practice, technological advance often precedes scientific discovery, but since the principle discovered is still seen as ontologically preceding the technology, the account of the technology will often retroactively give the impression that the discovery was made first—or frowned upon—to act before thinking is viewed as folly in all but a few exceptional cases. Perhaps, this goes back as far as the idealism of Plato, and the degree to which Christianity values doctrine over practice, is part of a Platonic heritage it shared with the rest of Western thought, rather than an aspect of Western thought of Christian origin. A more recent additional philosophical source, could be the Cartesian project of attempting to build a philosophy of both science and metaphysics from first principles, under which praxis must by definition come from doctrine, once the Cartesian project has rebuilt that doctrine.

Traditional Wicca is highly orthopraxic,[i] and it is a commonality in what is done rather than what is believed, that defines the Traditions. Rather than put forth beliefs about the gods and cosmology, and then develop rituals and other practices based on such doctrines, the Traditions teach rituals and other practices, and then individual practitioners may be influenced in their beliefs from such practice, and often influenced in different ways to their coreligionists, or even their coven siblings, though commonality of experience will lead to some commonality of belief. This is not often explicitly stated as such, but it is reflected by the emphasis placed in earlier Wiccan writing upon defining what it is that Wiccans do, rather than what Wiccans believe; consider the very title of

i At least as far as ritualism goes. In regards to other aspects of one's behaviour, particularly outside of circle, there is little orthopraxy, and much individualism.

What Witches Do. Meanwhile Gardner, attempting to address an audience expecting religion to be described primarily in terms of belief, expresses the difficulty in doing so: "Exactly what the present-day witch believes I find it hard to say."[i]

Innovative witchcraft, by its very nature, breaks from this orthopraxy. At the same time, it explicitly does not return to an orthodoxy, holding the lack of dogma in Wicca, and much of Neopaganism, to be a virtue; often claimed to provide for a high degree of tolerance, compared with religions in which differences on doctrine can lead to heated debates, or even bloodshed. With Western thinking generally predisposed to view doctrine as preceding praxis, as described above, then there could similarly be a tendency to view a lack of agreed doctrine as preceding a lack of agreed praxis.

In being an orthopraxic religion, in a society that generally thinks about religion in terms of doctrine, Traditional Wiccans suffer an impedance in explaining their religion to outsiders and newcomers. The effect of this depends on the degree to which the outsider wishes to place Wicca amongst other religions. Ronald Hutton has complained[ii] that people enquiring about his work have often asked whether witches' magic works. While this may not be particularly relevant to his research and publications, his complaint seems misplaced. Since witches claim to be able to work magic, which if accepted both suggests both, that current scientific understanding is seriously incomplete, and also that what witches do should be investigated by much larger numbers of people, on a whole variety of levels, this should surely be the most obvious and most important question for anyone to ask about witches! And so, if we consider again the title of, *What Witches Do*, that work talks to that audience. Yet, when we concentrate on Pagan witchcraft as a religious, rather than operative, craft, the assumptions about what defines a religion lead to the question ceasing to be, "what do witches do?" and becoming, "what do witches believe?"[iii]

Innovative Witchcraft suffers a double impedance. Since it exhibits as much, if not more, variety in practice as in doctrine, practitioners can neither comprehensively answer the question as to what they believe, nor attempt to reframe the question in terms of practice. In actuality, it seems that what they do, is attempt to directly address the question of what they believe, and while there will be abundant caveats as to the degree of variety existing, there is plenty written about their beliefs.

For all such caveats, it would seem that there is a strong, if informal, sense of core beliefs and dogmata that are shared within Innovative Witchcraft—and generally assumed to be shared with Traditional Wicca as well—along with some well-defined denominational differences, such as the focus upon the Goddess to the exclusion of the God that is common amongst Dianic traditions. There are clearly times in which the stated concious ideology of a group is at odds with its own behaviour, and often with widely, if subliminally, acknowledged values. It would seem that this is

i [Gardner 1954]

ii [Hutton 1999] & [Hutton 2003]

iii This is still not of primary importance to Hutton's work on the topic of witchcraft; as he is an historian it might be collectively labelled "what witches did."

the case here; Innovative Witchcraft consciously defines itself as being without doctrine or dogma, but it is commonality, albeit loose and flexible, of doctrine and dogma that is most often taken by its practitioners as being what unites Wicca, as they conceive it. Despite its conscious definition, it would seem that Innovative Witchcraft is not so much free of dogma ,as extremely liberal in its enforcement of it.

IV Training, Standards and the Anti-Fluffy Backlash

> "Bunch of wanna blessed-bes. You know, nowadays every girl with a henna tattoo and a spice rack thinks she's a sister to the dark ones." —Josh Whedon, "Hush" in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer.*

Standards & Training

In providing a framework, by which recent initiates can learn from more experienced practitioners, who would generally have been initiates themselves for a few years, if not much longer, Traditional Wiccan covens have the opportunity to provide at least a certain minimum level of training. While the small size of covens, and their often being isolated from each other could work against this—a small group lacking in collective experience has relatively little chance to obtain any more—a degree of caution before someone is either given Third Degree, or allowed to operate a coven at Second, should work to maintain such a standard.

Innovative groups which have developed into an ongoing tradition, have the opportunities of the same benefits. Unless longevity stands as evidence of such a level though, there is little to either demonstrate this to prospective new members, nor to guide the group itself. The idea of some sort of standards by which teaching can be measured, has often been suggested within Innovative Witchcraft, or Neopaganism more generally, and often refuted, with the ultimate reason for such attempts never succeeding being the lack of any means of agreeing on what these standards should be.[i]

For those working alone, or who have not yet attained the benefit of more experienced members that can guide others, the question of standards arises differently. If the primary connection with opinions and experience from outside of their own practices is websites and books, then the quality of that guidance is directly proportional to that of those books. While many books not aimed at a Wiccan audience would be of use, perhaps sometimes of greater use, to such practitioners, the continuing growth in the size of Wiccan sections of bookshops indicates that such books are being used as the basis of quite a lot of practice.

That many find such books disappointing, is indicated by the existence of articles with titles like, "Moving Beyond Wicca 101,"[ii] and New Page Books having a, "Beyond 101" brand. Given that *101* is generally used to mean the very gentlest of introductory levels in any given subject, such a situation would be peculiar, in just about any other field; one would expect there to perhaps be more 101-level volumes than any other given level, as introductory works will inherently have a larger potential audience,[iii] but not to be the in such an overwhelming majority of available works as to make, "Beyond 101," a selling-point.

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i [Roninwolf 2008]

ii [Mitchell 2005]

iii Generally, we'd expect the experience level in any field to follow something like a Zipf, or power-law, distribution; with a vast number of complete beginners, and rapidly diminishing numbers at increasingly high levels of expertise.

It would seem, that there is a market who want Wicca to cease to be an oral tradition that there are some books, *about*, and to become a religion that can be fully taught in books, but that many authors have been either unwilling, or unable, to provide this.

Self-Efficacy

The Dunning-Kruger effect[i] can lead people lacking in experience and skill in a given area, to overestimate their skill, (generally placing themselves "above average"), fail to recognise skill in others, and if they do acknowledge a relative lack of skill, to underestimate this lack. Or as Darwin put it, "ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge."[ii] This effect is offset by the fact that further study and practice leads, not just to greater genuine expertise, but more accurate self-efficacy. With a "101" level being disproportionately catered for by the publishing industry that has grown up around Innovative Witchcraft, one can expect for many practitioners to conclude, that since new books are not bringing new information, they are at an expert level of knowledge. The ability to judge one's level of knowledge and accomplishment, is hence stymied.

What will differentiate any witch, Traditional or Innovative, is partly what he or she will get from informational resources that are not so-marketed at witches, but mainly what is learnt by doing, whether from the apprenticeship that working with more experienced witches offers, or alone. This being more variable than anything any standardisation can hope to provide a metric for, the range of expertise will, not just vary considerably from one witch to another, but do so in a manner that may be very hard for anyone else to judge.

At the same time, the model of doctrine preceding praxis, implying that knowledge precedes skill, described above, devalues the place of training, if we consider training as defined thus:

> *The concept of 'training' has application when (i) there is some specifiable type of performance that has to be mastered, (ii) practice is required for the mastery of it, (iii) little emphasis is placed on the underlying* rationale [emphasis his].[iii]

While the above definition offers a model with which one can frame a standard of training, it also suggests that the concern about standards in training, is at odds to the concern about placing witchcraft onto a consistent intellectual basis. The move away from orthopraxy is at odds with standards in training, not just in removing a consistency in praxis that in itself can form the basis of such standards, but in actively devaluing what *training* ultimately means.

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i [Kruger & Dunning 1999]

ii [Darwin 1871]

iii [Peters 1969]

The Anti-Fluffy Backlash

The emergence of the concept of the, *fluffy*, is sometimes said to have started with the website, *Why Wiccans Suck*,[i] in or before 2001, by an author using the *nom de guerre*, "4 Non Goths," and an earlier resource by the same author on a free hosting service. It made criticisms of various trends of behaviour and ideology it identified as common amongst *soi dissant* Wiccans, and distinguishing them from "Real Wiccans,"[ii] particularly with regard to poor scholarship, an eager willingness to believe in historical opinions now largely debunked, or at least fallen out of favour, a hypocritical contrast between espousing religious liberty and holding bigoted opinions about Christianity, and a combination of a lack of healthy scepticism on the one hand, and a cynical unwillingness to ascribe much efficacy to magic on the other. Perhaps most pointedly, it suggested that those it described as *fluffy*, may be in the majority.

Starting points are rarely as neatly defined as one might like, and a general trend of similar complaints can be found before this time. Even Silver Ravenwolf, often condemned as a paragon of fluffy failings, complains of a correspondent whose practice of witchcraft seemed to consist entirely of making jokes about ,"coming out of the broom-closet," and concludes that, "Wearing a pentacle and cracking jokes about 'closet time' doesn't cut it."[iii]

What is clear, is that by the start of the 21st Century the concept of fluffydom, had taken hold in the psyche of modern witches of all sorts. By 2002, the website, *Wicca: For the Rest of Us*,[iv] was offering itself as a concious vehicle for opposing fluffies.

The strength of the concept can be demonstrated by references, or alleged references, to the perceived fluffy/anti-fluffy divide in works of popular fiction, such as by Terry Pratchett,[v] and Josh Whedon.[vi] There is an irony in this, since the degree to which people may reference or emulate behaviour from fiction—or merely be perceived as doing so—is in itself taken as evidence that they are fluffy, and the reäction to the 1996 film, *The Craft*, kept large in the minds of the Pagan community by the controversy surrounding a Covenant of the Goddess representative acting as a

i [Goths 2001a]

ii While the website points to departure from Gardner's practices as an indicator that one is not a, "Real Wiccan," the distinction does not appear to lie entirely on Traditional/Innovative lines—holding disdain for departures made out of ignorance or squeamishness, rather than departures, per se. There is also no entirely clear position on the importance of initiation or lineage.

iii [Ravenwolf 1999]

iv [Nobel Beyer 2002]

v [Pratchett 1992]. This may however be read as parodying, the Traditional/Innovative divide, the TIW/Wiccan divide, differences on solitary vs. coven training, and other differences within modern witchcraft. Or it may be read as merely reflecting the argumentative nature of witches in Pratchett's previous stories. It could also be taken as considering real witchcraft, from the perspective of such fictional worlds, where witches routinely battle fantasy-fiction monsters. Pratchett is after all writing humour, not polemic, and the more ways he allows an audience to find humour the better.

vi [Whedon 1999]

technical advisor,[i] may in itself have fuelled the backlash. Certainly, attitudes to fictional works were to become a battleground for those seeking to define just what was, and wasn't, fluffy.[ii]

Carrying, as it does, the force of invective, *fluffy*, is less likely to ever be defined to anyone's satisfaction than, *Wicca*. A key concern, is the degree to which someone's behaviour is related more to fashion than to religion, mirroring concerns about hypocritical piety versus genuine devotion that are found in other religions,[iii] but particular ideological or scholastic viewpoints are more often identified as fluffy than others. In particular, Feminist politics, strongly syncretistic practices, especially involving the mixing of pantheons in the same rite, a belief in the Murray hypothesis, or a belief that the death toll of the Burning Times amounted to nine million. Most succinctly, it could perhaps be defined by an inappropriate degree of seriousness; a definition that immediately hits a practical problem, since the degree of seriousness appropriate for any given situation is not something there will be consensus on, in a religious tradition that encourages its practitioners to exhibit both, "reverence and mirth."[iv]

Allegations of fluff do not fall neatly along Traditional/Innovative lines. Many trends more common in Innovative Witchcraft, are commonly cited as fluffy; in particular a high degree of syncretism, and abandonment of whichever aspects of Traditional Wicca a given author or speaker considers particularly important. However, while many of those who hold most closely to believing Gardner's version of how he came to Wicca would be Traditional Wiccans, and those with the greatest degree of scepticism would be Innovative, such a belief is often also perceived as fluffy. To those who work very strictly with a single pantheon, the Traditional pairing of Cernunnos and Aradia as public god names, could also seem highly syncretistic, and hence subject to the view of syncretism as fluffy.

There is a much closer approximation with Traditional/Innovative boundaries, when it comes to writers, with authors and sources most perceived as fluffy being almost entirely Innovative,[v] and with Silver Ravenwolf being the target of particular condemnation,[vi] and those most perceived as not fluffy tending, either to be Traditional, or to have a Traditional background.

Individual authors' prejudices will obviously affect who and what they are inclined to use the label to describe. Arguments that there should be a clearer separation between religious and political matters, often leads not merely to an argument that Feminism should be considered separate to Wicca, but which make outright attacks of Feminism; hence ultimately propagandising a move

i [COG 1995]

ii [Goths 2001b]

iii See, for example; Mathew 6:2, Matthew 6:5, Matthew 6:16, Mark 7:6, Mark 12:41–44, Luke 11:44 & Luke 12:56 for condemnation of "hypocrites," in the Christian New Testament.

iv [Charge]

v [Hautin-Mayer] & [Landstreet]

vi [Perseus 2001], [Kestra 2005], [Nobel Beyer 2006a], [Nobel Beyer 2006b], [Nobel Beyer 2006c] & [Saille 2006]

from a Feminist position to an anti-Feminist, rather than apolitical, one. In particular, such arguments often highlight the nine million figure, unsurprisingly given the shared importance this has had to both Wiccan and Feminist understanding of history, but often in a way which is in itself anachronistic; comparing figures in Feminist or Feminist-witch publications with figures resulting from later research, not available to the writer critiqued at the time.[i] One could expect a similar anachronism in discussing earlier history to be precisely what could earn a text the opprobrium of being denounced as fluffy.

As such, the concept of fluffiness, and the backlash against it, cannot be considered so much a stream of critical thought within witchcraft, as a fashion for the identity of "non-fluffy." A fashion that indeed reduces the degree of critical thought applied to the issues that provoked it, as surface artefacts become referenced with increasing frequency, most notably in often attacking a publishing house more vehemently than the works it publishes. Despite this, it remains a significant motivational concept, in shaping the prejudices and opinions of witches and would-be witches.

While, as stated above, the boundaries are not drawn on Traditional/Innovative lines, they do correlate with them to a large degree. As such, Traditional Wicca may seem to offer the potential to seekers to at least reduce the risk, that one might be engaging in such behaviour, or waste time on authors or training techniques, one might later conclude were in themselves fluffy.

One result, is an increased interest in Traditional Wicca amongst some seekers. Lacking unbiased information about any traditions, the seeker has always been in the dark as to where one should turn. This is itself, part of the process of seeking. There is now a strong theme of criticism within Pagan Witchcraft, which could seem to many to not apply, or at least to apply considerably less, to Traditional Wiccans than to other forms of witchcraft. Such analysis is highly questionable, and from the perspective of a tradition that considers some people natural members, and some not, is a two-edged sword, as anything which encourages people to seek Traditional Wicca would likely encourage both "family," and those best served by another path, alike. Conversely, there is also a move, from the same motives, away from any form of practice using the name *Wicca*, seeing them all as tainted with the same scorn, and hence favouring either forms of witchcraft that do not use the terminology, or other forms of Pagan practice, particularly reconstructionist movements, which tend to place a higher value on scholarly integrity.

What is indisputable, is that in being an insult which apparently has clear definitions, even when, as examined above, the distinctions are vague and impressionistic, the concept of fluffy has become an influence upon the perception, and self-perception, of many within Innovative Witchcraft.

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i [WIK 2007]

V Nature Religions & Fertility Religions

> "Earth comprises distances, great and small; danger and security; open ground and narrow passes; the chances of life and death." —Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Almost all Innovative Witches describe their religion as a nature religion, or with such terms as, *Earth-based spirituality*. Many Neopagans, including Innovative Witches, consider this to be a core feature of all Neopaganism, or indeed all Paganism, as in this definition offered by Edain McCoy:

> *When one defines oneself as Pagan, it means she or he follows an earth or nature religion, one that sees the divine manifest in all creation. The cycles of nature are our holy days, the earth is our temple, its plants and creatures our partners and teachers.… We respect life, cherish the free will of sentient beings, and accept the sacredness of all creation.*[i]

Is this something that Innovative Witchcraft has in common with Traditional Wicca, or somewhere where it differs? To answer that requires that we first examine just what a nature religion is.

The earliest studies of comparative religion by scholars in the West tended to divide all religion between, Christianity, Judaism, Islam and paganism, with *paganism* therefore, acting as a catch-all term for any religion not worshipping the god of Abraham. When 19th and early 20th Century scholars began to study the science of religion—to study religions, not in terms of how they relate to their own, but with an attempt at objective evaluation—differing taxonomies were produced to classify these religions. Most such taxonomies were based on theories of the historical development of religions, and most such theories seem to hold to a particular view of evolution; that changes must generally move from a less to a more, "advanced," state, rather than move to a state more suitable to particular circumstances, and hence those that share characteristics with the primitive, are indeed truly primitive.

In the taxonomy used by C P Tiele, in his article for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*,[ii] based on his own, *Outlines of the History of Religion to the spread of the Universal Religions*, the biggest distinction is between, *Nature Religion*, and, *Ethical Religions*. The nature religions start with such religions as hypothetically arose simultaneously with man's consciousness blossoming into sentience and self-awareness,[iii] and continue until the development of ethical religions, which maintain some form of a doctrine salvation, and absolute measure of morality.

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i [McCoy 2003]

ii [Tiele 1902]

iii Earlier theories, being more influenced by the religious biases of those who put them forth, tended to assume that the earliest people were followers of them "true faith," as God walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden, and so on. Such theories persist among those who hold to the literal truth of revealed scripture, and are reflected by converts to Islam being referred to as, *reverts*, since they are held not to have converted to a new religion, but to have reverted to the natural and original religious stance of humanity.

Each of these taxonomical branches are further divided, with the hypothetical religions of the earliest humans referred to as, "the so-called nature religions (in the narrower sense)."

This hence gives us two different definitions of *nature religion*. The narrower being a hypothetical condition that, according to the same hypothesis that proposes it, no longer exists, and the wider covering much that would still now be labelled pagan, though applying it to Mesopagan and Neopagan religions requires a degree of revisionism, as these were obviously not considered at the time.

Meanwhile, a variety of spiritual attitudes towards nature were emerging. Hutton argues that some such trends in Britain would set the ground for Wicca to emerge into public view;[i] of particular note being attitudes to Pan, that most nature-oriented of the Classical gods. In the Americas, the Transcendentalist Movement, with such figures as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, was to reässess attitudes to nature in a particularly American fashion.

That the Transcendentalists had an influence upon the counterculture of the 1960s and 70s, is reflected by the characters in *Doonesbury* naming a commune "Walden Puddle," and *Walden* being referenced heavily in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.[ii] This emphasis upon nature was to create a fertile ground for both ecological politics, and an interest in the Gaia Hypothesis, which would often extend into a more literal consideration of the goddess from which it takes its name. It would also combine with racial concerns, to create a highly euphemised view of the environmental virtues of the Americas' indigenous peoples, along with indigenous peoples of other regions, creating a new ecological twist on the noble savage. Much Innovative Witchcraft belongs to this countercultural tradition, and many Traditional Wiccans may be sympathetic to some or all of it. While Transcendentalism itself remained a generally Christian form of spirituality, many Transcendentalists had an interest in non-Christian religion,[iii] and this in itself, no doubt, went some way in making such intellectual pursuit of non-Christian religious wisdom acceptable, though does not quite go so far as to accept the Old Gods.

From all of this there are a variety of very different considerations of "nature" in a religious aspect.

Traditional Wicca identifies itself quite firmly with those religious defined as nature religions under the morphological distinctions of the 19th and early 20th Centuries. It differs, of course, with the original morphological concepts, in not holding itself to be inferior, or less advanced, than Christianity or Buddhism; sometimes rejecting the value judgements assigned to the different categories of such ontologies, and sometimes turning them on their head, so that each state is seen as a fall from the previous. In this manner, it shares a self-image with other Mesopagan movements such as Ásatrú, along with many Neopagans.

i [Hutton 1999]

ii [Pirsig 1974]

iii Emerson was influenced by the Vedas, and Thoreau describes his killing a woodchuck with reference to metempsychosis; "…and once I went so far as to slaughter a wood-chuck which ravaged my bean-field—effect his transmigration, as a Tartar would say,—and devour him,…" [Thoreau 1854].

There is also a naturalistic aspect in the Wiccan practice of working outdoors when possible, and a respect for nature can be found in the vast majority of Traditional Wiccan writers, starting with Gardner's writing of his character Olaf, in *High Magic's Aid*, being enraptured while journeying through woods.[i]

Finally, many of the other attitudes that might be variously labelled nature religion, mentioned above, have indeed influenced the thinking of many Traditional Wiccans.

This last, does not necessarily make Traditional Wicca itself a nature religion, in any of these senses. To describe Traditional Wicca as such requires us to either, define nature religion with greater precision, to show that it matches all such senses, or to at the very least show that it matches those of current significance to the present age.

To assess whether it may match with more modern interest in the spiritual value of nature, requires us to not just define, *nature religion*, but to define, *nature*. This is probably harder still than defining *nature religion*, and indeed in this very difficulty lies much of the problem. When we speak of *nature*, do we here mean the entirety of the universe, the entirety of the globe, that which is rural, that which is untouched? Do we mean nature as it is, or an Arcadian vision of nature as some may feel it should be? Does nature include us, exclude us, or are do we stand with one foot in it and one elsewhere? Do the supernatural practices of witches place them quite literally at odds with nature, or should we dismiss the very term *supernatural*, and allow for those phenomena so-labelled, but argue that they are themselves natural? Does a religious appreciation of nature put one at odds with scientific understanding, or agree with such understanding but assign a *value* to nature that goes beyond, rather than against, materialist understanding?

Amongst witches that quite definitely identity their religion as a, "religion of Nature," these questions remain open, as indeed does that of what this should then mean in terms of doctrine and/or practice.[ii]

Leaving such questions to one side, and approaching from an examination of Traditional Wicca itself, the most obvious point of contact between Traditional Wicca and nature, however defined, is that Traditional Wicca is a fertility cult, and fertility has an obvious place in nature.

That Traditional Wicca is a fertility cult may seem so obvious to its practitioners, and to those Innovative Witches that have maintained this aspect, as to not need justifying. However, the distance of some other streams of Innovative Witchcraft from fertility religion, as will be examined below, may make this necessary.

There are two types of practice that we might label *fertility religion*, which may or may not coëxist. One is that of operation; a religion may have rites which, in whole or in part, serve to assist the cycles of fertility, of people, crops, livestock and game. And the other of veneration; those cycles being honoured in religious expression.

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i [Gardner 1949]

ii [Clifton 1998]

The first, is generally a part of both Traditional and Innovative rites, though in neither is it often held to be of as much immediate importance as it would have been, when a single failed harvest could have decimated a tribe. Robert Cochrane argued against the fertility aspect of Wicca on this basis: "there has been no cause for a fertility religion in Europe since the advent of the coultershare plough in the thirteenth century, the discovery of haymaking, selective breeding of animals, etc."[i] Yet concerns about fertility are far from absent today, as is quite readily reflected in the measures couples will go to to overcome personal infertility, with, e.g., an estimated 415million CAD being spent on infertility management in Canada in 1995[ii]. It is also just as well-reflected by the contraceptive efforts of those who do not currently want to conceive. Modern concerns about fertility do not just operate at the level of individuals and couples, as increasing concerning about food supply, both Internationally, and even in affluent countries, shows.[iii]

The other side of fertility religion, the veneration of fertility, is firmly part of Traditional practices. That sexual imagery is used along with the ritual use of food in all Traditional rites, implies a connection being made between sexual coupling and natural bounty, which entails a veneration of fertility. This is also the case for much of Innovative Witchcraft, but only if the two are linked.

That some Innovative rites do not make explicit this connection, as will be examined below, leaves at most a celebration of sexuality, though perhaps merely a nodding acknowledgement of its importance, along with what is possibly a celebration of bounty, though perhaps merely a communal meal, comparable with Communion amongst those Christians that do not believe in Transubstantiation, or with a Jewish Seder. All three of these—celebration of sexuality, celebration of bounty, and a communal meal—are undoubtedly part of Traditional Wiccan worship, but it is the connection between them that makes it a fertility cult, and hence not only must these three be present in an Innovative adaption, but also the connection, for us to consider it as having retained the fertility aspect.

In most writings on Innovative Witchcraft, I have been unable to find all but the vaguest references to Wicca as a fertility cult. Maypoles, for example, or the sexual symbolism of the besom,[iv] may be mentioned, but there is no indication of these being of any greater concern to Wiccans, than any other aspect of folk culture held to reflect Palæopagan or witchcraft practice. Raven Grimassi refers to Gardner's description of Wicca as a fertility cult, very much in the past tense.[v]

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i [Cochrane 1964]

ii [Collins 1997]

iii [Leahy 2006]

iv Conway goes so far as to refer to this symbolism as "notorious," she acknowledges it but rather than examine this in light of the fertility aspects of Wicca, distances herself quite strongly from all such symbolism in her choice of wording.

v [Grimassi 2008]

It would seem, that the fertility aspects of the Craft were once so blatant as to seem not worth stating, and in not being stated have become sometimes absent, or unacknowledged, amongst those influenced by it.

The question of how this fertility aspect fits into the more modern concepts of nature religion, can perhaps be reframed as, how well fertility fits into nature. By some definitions of nature—those that consider it to be the totality of life—it fits so well as to be near identical; the cycles of such nature being the cycles of fertility. So too does it fit well into considerations of agriculture as dealing with nature, for this is where humanity most directly concerns itself with matters of fertility most often; one always sees more harvests in one's lifetime than one has children.

By others it does not. Taking nature to mean all that is in existence, makes fertility a concern only of a small fragment of the cosmos. Taking nature to mean that which is untouched, also doesn't match well, for while fertility is of course the engine of all that happens in the wilderness, it is far from restricted to it, and indeed the fertility of humanity, and the fertility used in our agriculture, are engines of all that threatens it.

As such we may conclude that, there is a compatibility between the fertility religion of Traditional Wicca and the nature religion of Neopaganism, and that one may reasonably consider a practice as being both, but one does not necessarily entail the other. On this basis we can neither have confidence in describing Traditional Wicca as a nature religion, nor confidence in stating that it is not.

VI The Politicisation of the Craft

"The personal is political" —Carol Hanisch[i]

"Magick puts you in touch with wonder and the divine; politics puts you in touch with politicians." —Ed Fitch

Traditional Wicca and Politics

Gerald Gardner's publishing *Witchcraft Today* and *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, and his engaging the media with information about the Craft, can be understood as a political act; he sought to change the public perception of a group of people, with the intention that this would result in making wider society more tolerant of their ways, and as such enable them to live without fear of persecution.

Even this, which is of direct impact upon the Craft, and so arguably allowed within an otherwise apolitical structure, was not done in the name of the Craft. Throughout, his voice is that of an individual witch, and aimed towards the tone of someone who still had one foot outside.

Similarly, the descriptions of, "Operation Cone of Power," offering magical aid to the Battle of Britain, could be understood as apolitical; all citizens were expected to do their bit for the war effort, and this merely extended this into magical work. It is a tale of patriotism, but not politics.

Considered this way, this casts light on the similar story, told about witches working to create the weather conditions, that so dashed any hope the Spanish Armada had of invading England. The question isn't so much whether the story is true, but as why the defence of the Elizabethan regime would be seen as a good thing to witches. Modern analysis sometimes questions the logic of such a story, for while perhaps preferable to the prospect of Inquisition, and even more so to that of an Elizabethan English person's image of the Inquisition, the Elizabethan regime would not seem to offer much security to witches. Considered not as a political legend, but as a patriotic one, the conflict disappears.

It's also notable that Gardner was a member of the generally reäctionary, Conservative and Unionist Party, yet with interests that were generally countercultural in origin, impact, or in terms of who were most likely to share them. Any move towards overt political activity, would perhaps have been compromised by tension between those two loyalties, before it began.

For the most part, early Wicca stood in the same traditions as Freemasonry, and the majority of magical orders, in being strongly apolitical. Indeed, someone at the time who held liberal views about religious freedoms, such as those implied by Gardner's plea for tolerance towards the Craft, would almost always also hold a belief that religions should not get involved in politics; a Jeffersonian model of separation of Church and State, that goes beyond disestablishmentarianism, to more explicitly define the two as having distinctly separate spheres of influence, being perhaps the most common expression of this.

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i Variously attributed to others.

Yet, the image of the witch as radical[i] is not absent from Gardner's writings. Most notably, Appendix II of *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, focusses on the insurrection of the Stedingers of Friesland.[ii] Being an insurrection, rather than a declared war between sovereign states, this can be more easily labelled political, than any action by British witches against Axis powers. Also, one of his sources on the Burning Times was the First-wave Feminist, Matilda Joslyn Gage, from whom he took the death toll of nine million, and whose own reason for discussing the period was avowedly political.

None of this goes so far as to make early Wicca political, but it does mean that public representations of Wicca were already touching upon political matters.

The Witch as Radical

Outside of Wicca, the image and history of witchcraft had been politically flavoured since the Romantic era,[iii] and well through to the end of the 19th Century,[iv] and this image was revisited by those with purely political motives.

In 1969, the group, New York Radical Women, split along Radical Feminist and Socialist Feminist lines. The Radical Feminist tendency formed the Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, while the Socialist Feminist tendency became WITCH.

Most often expanded as, "Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell," the acronym WITCH was a name first, and an abbreviation second; allowing it to be adapted for particular actions to, "Women Inspired to Tell their Collective History," "Women Interested in Toppling Consumer Holidays," and so on.

Beginning with an action on Hallowe'en 1969 on Wall Street, their *modus operandi* was street theatre, combining shock with humour. They made much use of traditional negative representations of female witches, and hence of women; referring to their actions as "hexes," and dressing as stereotypical hags with pointed hats. Alongside this, they also deliberately used negative representations of radical politics; using the words, "terrorist," and "conspiracy," in their name.

This is clearly a political use of the power of identifying oneself with the symbol of the witch, though it has no clear relationship to any religious or magical understanding of witchcraft; those aspects of their "hexes" that are found in religious or operative witchcraft, such as circles, chants and labelling cells "covens," are also regularly found in fictional representations of witches and

i [Hutton 1999]

ii [Gardner 1959]

iii [Hutton 1999]

iv ibid. & [Leland 1899]

magic, and would be understood by their audience for this reason. One chant using goddess names includes Bonnie Parker along with Hecate and Isis.[i]

Beyond merely using the image of the witch, it is notable also for their humour. Using humour, even in so far as a group's own name, was far from novel in left-wing politics. Even the "Old Left" would sometimes do so, as demonstrated by the Communist resistance to the Nazi occupation of Denmark changing their name from, *Kommunistiske Partisaner* (Communist Partisans), to *Borgelige Partisaner* (Bourgeois Partisans), in joking reference to accepting a group of relatively privileged students as members.[ii] Humour has had a "respectable" place in subversive thinking, since at least as long as one could reference Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*.[iii] Situationism, which found its greatest expression in the Sorbonne riots of May 1968, featured a particular emphasis on creativity and humour both ideologically and tactically. Abbie Hoffman, upon being convicted at the Chicago Eight/Chicago Seven trial, itself the target of a WITCH action, suggested the judge should try LSD and offered to arrange a meeting with a dealer he knew in New Jersey. In her introduction to *The Artists Joke*, Jennifer Higgie justifies the attention the collection gives to humour:

> *Humour has been central to the cultural politics of movements such as Dada, Surrealism, Situationism, Fluxus, Performance and Feminism, and of course much recent art practice that defies categorization.*[iv]

All of which shows that WITCH were working within norms of New Left behaviour, in their use of humour and playfulness. For all this though, the degree to which they put humour at the centre of their actions still stands out. Generalising from humour, to other enjoyable forms of creative expression, it's worth noting that the place for pleasure and creativity was explicitly noted by Feminists, such as when Germaine Greer argued, "The surest guide to the correctness of the path that women take is joy in the struggle. Revolution is the festival of the oppressed."[v] Emma Goldman, having been "rediscovered" by the Women's Movement, was paraphrased as saying "If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution."

Witchcraft could perhaps provide Goldman's dance. The stereotypes of the witch from the times of witch-trials almost always contain at least some elements that could be considered enjoyable, if only in the most debased ways, and attitudes behind both the accusation, and the reasons given for condemning them, would have chimed with Feminist critiques of Christian sexual morality. WITCH may have found material for transgressive fun in such stereotypes, but Wicca and other forms of Pagan Witchcraft could also provide it; when asked why he practised witchcraft, Gardner

i [Payne 2000]

ii [Schlüter 2007]

iii [Freud 1905]

iv [Higgie 2007]

v [Greer 1970]

replied “because it’s fun”. Simultaneously, it could argue against accusations that participants were detaching themselves from serious concerns; the Charge of the Goddess talks of exhibiting both, “reverence and mirth,” and in demanding both, clearly entails that both can coëxist. Certainly, such playfulness is to feature in later cases of witchcraft meeting political action.

There are also perhaps some hints of magical thinking. Claims that the Yippies, and the SDS, were actually WITCH fronts can be read as an assertion; WITCH may not really be as big as they claim, but claiming it could perhaps make them so. The Dow Jones dropping after the 1969 hex was claimed as a victory, but it was left vague whether this victory was one of political tactics, or magical operation. This cannot be read too directly, both of these statements are clearly further examples of WITCH using humour, but even a humorous suggestion of magic having success in political conflict, could have had an effect upon the thoughts of others. That some politically minded people were willing to ascribe efficacy to ritual magic, is clear from the later history of political witchcraft, and WITCH’s legacy may well include firing the imagination of some such activists.

Another feature of WITCH worth noting, was the degree of independence between different covens. While it has both strategic and ideological precedents, it still corresponds with both, the relatively loose cohesion amongst those political witches who will be touched upon later, and also the Traditional model of “voiding” covens, along with the even more complete independence between different groups of Innovative Witchcraft.

WITCH were short-lived, and their actions ended some time in 1970. They were however, kept alive in the conciousness of New Left and Feminist activists; partly for the very effectiveness at grabbing media attention they attained, partly because some of their members were to remain active in politics, (Robin Morgan remains a well-known Feminist who will be mentioned again in this work and Naomi Jaffe was to become a federal fugitive for her part in the Weatherman bombings[i]), and partly due to it becoming part of the Feminist Movement’s understanding of its own history.[ii] One of the most compelling reasons for their ongoing reputation, was the impact of Robin Morgan’s criticism of patriarchy within the New Left, “Goodbye To All That,”[iii] published by *Rat Subterranean News* during a Feminist takeover and sit-in with WITCH involvement. Its impact is reflected in it being much anthologised,[iv] and being referenced by Morgan herself in choosing to title a defence of Hilary Clinton, against sexist content in criticism during her contest

i [FBI 1976]

ii [Greer 1970]

iii [Morgan 1970] It may be notable that the title is borrowed from Robert Graves’ autobiography [Graves 1957]. This biography is notable to witches for the strong influence his The White Goddess [Graves 1961] had upon many in the Craft, and politically for its strong anti-war themes and its questioning of the rôle of class in British society.

iv E.g.: The web resource given in the bibliographical entry ibid., [Morgan 1994], [Baxandall & Gordon 2001], along with many others, including a large number of underground and “bootleg” publications.

against Barack Obama, for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2008 US presidential election, as a "sequel."[i]

Feminist Histories of Witchcraft

Meanwhile, Andrea Dworkin was working with Ricki Abrams, on an analysis of the position of women in social, political and personal history, that would later be published in her work, *Woman Hating*.[ii] In describing a, "war against women," she put Feminist struggle on the same terms as the increasingly militarised tendencies of Black Power, and national liberation movements such as the Viet Cong. In doing so, she referenced Gage's account of the Burning Times, and so helped bring that First-wave Feminist assessment of the importance of the witch trials into Second-wave Feminism. Mary Daly continued this with *Gyn/Ecology*,[iii] which referred to the persecution as a "gynecide," clearly defining the witch trials as a deliberate genocide enacted against women. In also citing Gage's figure of nine million deaths alongside such accusations of genocide, she enabled comparisons with the holocausts of the Third Reich to be readily made.

Yet notable in Daly's writing, is a playfulness of language and a sense of resistance existing in the very sentence structure of her work. As such, while she repeats Dworkin's positioning of the witch as a victim of patriarchal oppression, she also positions the witch as a hero of resistance. This is even more strikingly so in, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language, Conjured in Cahoots with Jane Caputi*,[iv] to which I give the fullest form of the name, as it in itself indicates the approach taken in its redefining, "Webster," from the name of the dictionary best known in the United States, to reüse that surname's likely origin in referring to a female weaver, its defined scope as, "intergalactic," its having been, "conjured," and the use of, "cahoots," rather than, *collaboration*, to reflect the self-image of subversion and rebellion.

While this imagining of "the witch" is outside of Wicca, or any other tradition of witchcraft, it also stands outside of the purely secular as well. To Daly, the witch is capable of defeating Patriarchy through means which stand outside of anything that Patriarchy can even attach a label to. This is a powerful attraction, and certainly one of the incentives to make use of magic in a political context.

With Zsuzsana Budapest's founding of the Susan B Anthony Coven Number 1,[v] in 1971, we have what is arguably the first case of religious witchcraft being explicitly combined with Feminist politics. Budapest claimed to have learnt her craft from her mother, and as such to be part of a stream of witchcraft quite outside of Traditional Wiccan lineage. She does however, use the term

i [Morgan 2008]

ii [Dworkin 1974]

iii [Daly 1978]

iv [Daly 1987]

v Susan B Anthony was an American suffragette. As such this consciously positions Budapest in a tradition of women's political struggle, and in a way constitutes a sort of ancestor worship along lines of that tradition.

Wiccan, and some features, such as the Sabbats and the tools mentioned in her writing,[i] do indicate a strong influence from Wicca, though other features, most notably the very politics that are being examined here, again set her outside of Wiccan tradition.

Another combination of Feminist politics and witchcraft came from Starhawk. While she first worked without any training, and was later an initiate in the Feri tradition, with several of its techniques such as the Iron Pentacle being adopted into her Reclaiming Tradition, she points to her meeting Wiccans, and hearing the Charge from them, as an important moment in her path's development.[ii]

In light of the various ways in which witchcraft has been addressed in a Feminist context already examined, such combinations arising was perhaps inevitable.

Perhaps the most immediately notable difference between Budapest's and Starhawk's traditions, is their differing takes on membership. The Susan B Anthony Coven was, and remains, women-only and this policy has remained common, though not universal, amongst Dianic witchcraft.[iii] The Reclaiming Tradition was, since its inception, open to both men and women.

Mythological Elements in Feminist Witchcraft

What is shared between both witchcraft and Feminism, that allowed for the two to be combined beyond mere imagery?

I will argue here that what was shared were mythological elements. While claiming that a religious perspective contains mythological elements, will be seen as disparaging only in the case of a religion that maintains the Fundamentalist position that they are based purely upon literal truth, (notably Islam, Fundamentalist Christianity and evangelical forms of Atheism), some colourings of the word, *mythological*, could make it seem as an attack on a political philosophy to examine the mythological nature of views within it. This is not my intention here. Rather, by *mythological* I refer to the value, (not just ideological, but also emotional and poetic—value that Feminist Witch ideology usually allows space for), attached to the narrative in question. Simpler examples of the same, can be seen in looking at the value attached to views of historical figures who undoubtedly existed, or to historical events, about which there can also be no doubt that they occurred, which have acquired a value to those of various political positions, beyond the mere recitation of historical record.[iv] The degree to which any of these mythological views is grounded in fact is not

i [Budapest 2007]

ii [Starhawk 1979]

iii The McFarland Dianic Tradition is a notable mixed-sex political witchcraft tradition, that also uses the label *Dianic*. It is of a separate lineage to Budapest's.

iv Such events as the Peterloo Massacre, The Battle of the Bogside, The Stonewall Riots, The Sorbonne Riots and The March on Washington. Being affected by narrative as well as fact, one could also say that the mythological content of, for example, *The Lower Falls Curfew*, is different to that of *The Rape of the Falls*, even though they are different names for the same event.

of relevance to my point, which I argue will hold, whether these views are entirely accurate, completely bogus, or at any point in between. However, shifting opinions on that degree of accuracy, does indeed impinge upon how well they serve those for whom they are or were important.

The Burning Times

The histories of the Burning Times put forth from the 19th Century until the end of the 20th, are perhaps the most obvious point in which Feminist history and Wiccan prehistory correspond. It was the primary influence upon Dworkin and Daly writing on the topic.

As noted, Dworkin, Daly, and other second-wave Feminist authors, share with Gardner that they used American suffragette, Matilda Joslyn Gage, as a source on the nature and extent of the killings involved.

Gage in turn based her work upon Jules Michelet's *La Sorcière*, which both outlined a concept of witches as subversive, in a manner that could be identified with by contemporary subversives, and arrived at the figure of nine million for the number of people killed in the alleged persecution against their rebellious creed.

Both Michelet and, especially, Gage are clearly political in their motivations. However, the fault for what is now the most oft-commented upon flaw in their work, that they cite a death toll of many millions, where scholars now estimate tens of thousands, most likely does not lie so much in blatant political bias, but in the choice of source records, and in turn in which source records were available to them.

Gardner is the first to use the emotive poetry of the phrase, "burning times," in print,[i] and it was elevated by dint of capitalisation to, "The Burning Times," by Daly.[ii] The enduring emotive impact can be measured to some extent, by the fact that not only did the popular folk singer Christy Moore, who does not publicly identify as a witch, choose to cover Charlie Murphy's song, "The Burning Times," as recently as 2005, but he also chose it as the title for the album on which it appears. Given that the album contains other overtly political songs, amongst others, and is dedicated to an activist who was killed during an action against the IDF destruction of homes in the Gaza Strip, this implies that it is still seen as a term which both describes historical reality with at least some degree of fidelity, and which reflects wider political realities today.[iii]

Michelet extrapolated from the recorded deaths in a particular time and place. Since he worked from records of particularly grievous, and hence particularly notable, trials, his figures inevitably overestimated the toll. Had he extrapolated from a wider range of the data available at the time, he would have arrived at a lower figure. Even so, had he managed the feat of using all known

i [Gardner 1954]

ii [Daly 1978]

iii [Moore 2005]

accounts at the time, he still would have arrived at a higher figure than scholars applying the same technique today, since the larger trials came to notice sooner than smaller trials, or those which resulted in acquittal.[i]

A figure of nine million offers clear parallels for late 20th Century readers with the Shoah, and other massacres of the Second World War. This is a comparison which Daly, in particular, made quite explicit. This offered a bridge between a politics of personal experience, and the sort of large events more readily acknowledged by the histories of the time. It did for witches, for women and for Feminist witches in particular, what Sylvia Plath's, "I began to talk like a Jew / I think I may well be a Jew,"[ii] did more viscerally and intimately for herself; it simultaneously offered an historical analogy for one's own experience, along with a means of connecting to, and coping with, both the unspeakable horrors of the century's history, and the unspeakable horrors the century offered the future, in the potential for nuclear holocaust.[iii]

The most ungenerous view of this, would be to accuse these writers of attempting to make political hay out of other groups' persecution. Avoiding this, would seem to be a reason why Dan Brown's use of the same account of the Burning Times for pulp entertainment, reduces the figure to five million,[iv] resulting in a figure which is not found elsewhere, but compares with the nine million figure, while remaining "decently" below the sort of numbers which immediately bring the Third Reich's genocides to mind.

Such criticism though, ignores not just that all of these authors, whether witches, Feminists, or both, were sincere in their belief in these figures, but that they were considerably more plausible at the time.

Michelet's error is arguably not as large as merely comparing the number he presents, with the numbers now suggested, would imply. Those who built on his work by building on Gage's, were working with those materials available to scholars, especially scholars who were not professional historians, at the time. To argue against such writings, or against the research of those who cite a figure of nine million today, is one thing. To accuse writers writing in the 1970s and earlier of unhistoricality, is in itself unhistorical.

Nor is gender no longer relevant to the history of witch trials. While it may not hold true for all, there was still a clear gender imbalance in some trials, and hence one must question those that suggest they no longer remain a valid area for Feminist research.

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i [Hutton 1999]

ii Plath, Sylvia. "Daddy." 1962. in [Plath 2002]. First anthologised in [Plath 1965].

iii While Plath was not as politicised herself as many of her posthumous admirers, nuclear disarmament was an issue on which she marched, (see [Plath 1998]), and which she wrote about in her earliest poems, (see "Bitter Strawberries" in [Plath 2002]).

iv [Brown 2003a]

It remains though, that the most currently accepted views of the history of the witch trials differs from the accounts used by Feminist witches in turns of the number, religion and gender balance of those killed, a fact that would become important to the anti-fluffy trend within Paganism.

Matriarchal Prehistory

Behind much mythological content of Feminist witchcraft lies the myth of a Matriarchal past. From the earliest suggestions that neolithic cultures were matriarchal, perhaps with Johann Jakob Bachofen's, *Mother Right: An Investigation of the Religious and Juridical Character of Matriarchy in the Ancient World* in 1861, and Lewis H. Morgan's, *Ancient Society*, this has had an influence on a variety of fields. This concept was absorbed into the political with Frederich Engels', *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*,[i] based on notes Marx had made on Morgan's work. Dealing with mythology, it had from inception been part of common understandings of prehistoric religion, but readings of Graves' *The White Goddess*[ii] would have moved it more to the forefront of Mesopagan and Neopagan thought.

The work of Marija Gimbutienė, often semi-Anglicised as Marija Gimbutas, spoke firmly to the intersection of these political and religious concerns. As such, the belief in a matriarchal past was part of a common inheritance of both the Neopagan and Feminist movements. It serves as a Creation Myth, a Golden Age Myth, and also as evidence of what could potentially be achieved, and a mandate from history to attempt this.

The hypothesis remains neither proven nor disproven. It has however, fallen largely in regard, starting in the academy, and spreading from there to other spheres of thought, including both Feminism and witchcraft.[iii]

Sisterhood

This myth of a matriarchal prehistory can be compared with Marxism, (as opposed to Communism more generally), viewing itself as a theory of history first, and of politics second. A similar analogy can be drawn between Marxism's mythologising *The Worker*, and the concept within Feminism of *Sisterhood*.

Definitions, and hence the applicability to this section, vary. Sisterhood, in Feminist terms, can be read as an ideal, as a description of camaraderie as exhibited and experienced by Feminists in political struggle, or in several other ways: "Sisterhood is thought of *sometimes* in feminist discourse as a metaphorical ideal and *sometimes* as a metaphor for the reality of relationships

i [Engles 1884]

ii [Graves 1961]

iii [Hutton 1999]

among women. [emphasis added]."[i] It does though, also have a mythological aspect, in referring to Sisterhood as something both historical and ongoing.[ii]

Traditional Wicca did not offer *brotherhood* of an all-embracing form, in the manner that religions with a sense of *agape* do, but it does offer *a* brotherhood. By extension, a Feminist witchcraft which is women-only, like that of Budapest, could offer *a* sisterhood.

This is at once both more concrete than any wider sense of Sisterhood, along with perhaps offering models for how such a more universal sisterhood could be expressed and developed.

Criticism of Feminist Witchcraft

In combining two elements of philosophy, one gains the advantage of mutual support between the two, at the cost of criticism from opponents to each. The most vocal criticism of Feminist witchcraft within witchcraft has been examined above, in light of the anti-fluffy backlash. Within Feminism, the risk of particularly vocal complaint is to a small degree reduced by the pressure towards pluralism within the movement, and the concept of *Feminisms* in the plural. This pluralism does not, of course, go so far as to deny the right to express opposing opinions, and these can certainly be found.

The concept of Sisterhood has been questioned, particularly in examining it as a borrowing from African-American resistance to slavery and later racism, and in comparing it to other views of sisterhood, and of alternative models such as co-motherhood and friendship, from culture perspectives other than that of white middle-class women.[iii] Taking a different approach, and considering her personal experiences, along with wider considerations, in *The Whole Woman*, Germaine Greer strikingly turns the graffito on its head with, "Sisterhood does not rule and will never rule, OK?."[iv]

Budapest's claim that the Women's Movement, "needed," a spirituality is countered by the existence of pretty much any Feminist who is either happy without a religion, or who works to reconcile their membership in a religion perhaps considered patriarchal, with their Feminist politics.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty with combining Feminism and any form of Wicca-inspired witchcraft, is that Wicca is deeply essentialist in how it treats matters of gender.[v] Budapest's response to this difficulty is to accept such essentialism, albeit in an altered manner, which is often

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i [Lugones & Rosezelle 1995]

ii Compare with the description of myths as simultaneously both in [Armstrong 2006]

iii [Lugones & Rosezelle 1995]

iv [Greer 1999]

v This is not to say that all Traditional Wiccans are necessarily hold to essentialist views, but the rites certainly treat gender as essential.

considered less balanced by some other witches, and which is certainly far removed from those that maintain the male–female polarity of Traditional Wicca.[i] Starhawk seems less convinced, judging from the move away from some of the divisions her cosmology places in human psychology in her first edition of *The Spiral Dance*, in the notes to later editions.[ii]

For the most part, the question of essentialism doesn't seem to be looked at too closely by Feminist witches. To judge how their views might be considered by other streams of Feminism, it is perhaps fruitful to take the example of Hélène Cixous. A Feminist inspired by Derrida, and by existentialist psychology, she has repeatedly distanced herself from essentialism, and yet frequently been accused of it. The debate around alleged essentialism in her work, is an indication of how Feminist witchcraft may not sit comfortably with many in the Feminist movement.

A final criticism is of a very different nature. Nikki Craft, an ally of Andrea Dworkin and avowed atheist, while relatively tolerant of witchcraft in itself,[iii] related to me several ideological criticisms of Feminist witchcraft. Her strongest criticisms though, related to how Feminist witches acted in the field. Giving one action as an example, she described them first claiming leadership of what could have been a powerful symbolic direct action—related perhaps to their own self-perception of providing spiritual leadership to the movement—and then having obtained such leadership, failed in their resolve in the face of heavy police action against them, so destroying the chance of any of the activists involved for tactical success[iv]. Such a lack of resolve, once an action was committed to, could be frowned upon by both activist and witch alike. Whether Craft's account of events is fair or biased, any perception of a group being unable to, "walk the walk," could marginalise them within any larger movement.

The Witch as Environmentalist

As noted above, most Innovative Witches think of themselves as practising a nature religion, and this term is frequently understood in relation to current ecological concerns.

It is not surprising then, to find many witches engaged in some level of environmental protest. In many ways, this can be seen as something that has happened simultaneously amongst the overlapping streams of thought in which many Innovative Witches found themselves.

As coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Ecofeminism*, combined environmental and feminist concerns, and in particular identified patriarchal attitudes as the root source of environmental

i The common criticism of Dianic Witchcraft as, "unbalanced," may be a category error. It is certainly unbalanced if we imagine Dianic practices suddenly transplanted into a Traditional Wiccan circle, and then judge how well it serves in that place, but perhaps the two are simply so different that criticising one from the position of the other is no more reasonable, than for any other religious practice.

ii [Starhawk 1979] (reference is specific to the 20th Anniversary Edition).

iii E.g. She responded to an offer to work magically for her during a period of illness by expressing gratitude, and an understanding of the reason a witch might ask first.

iv Pers. Conv.

mismanagement. Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, mentioned already above, clearly contains an ecological aspect. Starhawk's Reclaiming movement is very much of this strain of Feminism, and much involved in environmental campaigns.

Meanwhile, the wider Neopagan movement contains many activists with a similar interest in environmental action, ranging from the sort of quiet lifestyle politics that encourages reducing one's personal environmental impact, through to protests[i] and direct actions.[ii]

These three points, each indicate that the involvement of witches in environmental politics, is very much part and parcel with other trends often associated with Pagan witchcraft, rather than unique to it.

i [Druidschool 2005]

ii [Hutton 2003]

VII The ID Wars, Teen Witches, and Portrayals

> "The teenager seems to have replaced the Communist as the appropriate target for public controversy and foreboding." —Edgar Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*.
>
> "I find television very educational. Every time someone switches it on I go into another room and read a good book." —Groucho Marx to Leslie Halliwell, *Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion*.

The Identity Warriors

The term, *Identity Politics*, was perhaps first coined by the black Lesbian Feminist group, The Combahee River Collective.[i] While the concept has been traced to the SNCC,[ii] particularly since the involvement of white students declined, and their policies became increasingly not just of black empowerment, but of black self-empowerment, the idea that members of an oppressed group must themselves provide at least some of the leadership in resistance to that oppression, that, "the most profound and potentially radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression,"[iii] is probably as old as political struggle.

Identity Politics placed this concept centrally, and hence makes the act of identifying as a member of a group politicised. Where the Combahee River Collective addressed their position on an intersection of racial, gender and sexual-orientation identities—and in particular aimed to tackle issues, where those with an interest in the liberation of one such group, were still involved in the oppression of another—the approach has been applied to lingual and religious minorities, people with disabilities, and indeed any denominable group, since once it is denominable, whether from within or without, it becomes a locus of identity.

As stated above, the plea for tolerance made by public witches since Gardner is a form of politics that even otherwise apolitical witches will engage in. With the emergence of Identity Politics, witches became yet another religious minority, with an identity from which such politics could emerge. The fact that some witches would have been involved in Identity Politics of another form, would of course influence this. That Stregaria and Gay and Civil Rights activist, Leo Martello, could see a correlation between the position of witches, and those of other minorities, is clear when he wrote, "America's new niggers are minority religious groups, especially the disorganized WICCA."[iv] The identities that exist at the intersection of, Feminist and witch, Lesbian and witch, and Feminist, Lesbian and witch, would be other examples. Accusations, in some cases true, of homophobia within the Craft, and a desire for a witchcraft that would more directly engage with gay identity, would make the intersection of those two identities a source of political thinking that

i [Combahee 1977]

ii [Kauffman 1990]

iii op cit.

iv [Martello 1972a]

would inform both. By the 1990s, comparison with the experience of the Gay community was implicit in the expression, "coming out of the broom-closet."

With its situationist approach, focusing on the experiences of those with a given identity, Identity Politics at first moved away from any element of essentialism. However, essentialism was to become important in the Identity Politics of the Gay Rights Movement, particularly at a grass-roots level; the question of whether, and to what degree, homosexuality is innate becoming not merely a matter of scientific curiosity, but of political struggle. While this question had political impact before,[i] a Gay Identity Politics can use such an essentialism. not merely as a justification, but as a basis for building just such a sense of a "Gay identity," that goes beyond mere choice of sexual partners, and builds a definition of the Gay community from that identity.

Such essentialism need not be argued as scientific. Wicca already had an essentialism of sorts, since Gardner talked of the witches he met as having remembered him from past lives.[ii] Other metaphysical explanations of what brought people to the Craft, whether in terms of past incarnations, a calling, or simply as having always felt that they were a witch, all offer the same identification with one's being a witch as essential; that witches are born rather than made. This counters any sense that other religious minorities have a stronger link to the subcultures that develops around those religions, and a smaller element of volition in their suffering whatever oppression may exist against them, in having been born into that religion, (as the majority of members of the majority of religions have), rather than having converted to it, (as the majority of witches have, especially considering that with Traditional Wicca, and most forms of Innovative Witchcraft, even children raised Pagan are not brought into the Craft, unless they choose that themselves as adults). The various views that one has, "always been a witch," all serve to strengthen witches' association with the identity of the witch, which then has a stronger potential influence on their politics.

Finally, since identity is defined by denomination—to name a group is to create the possibility of identifying either oneself, or another, as part of it—and since media representations will affect how people perceive each other across the boundaries of such denominations, issues concerning representation, in the press, entertainment media, and education particularly, became increasingly importation within Identity Politics. (The related, and sometimes overlapping, matter of *representation*, in the sense of having a voice on different forums will be examined more closely, in a later chapter). Naomi Klein argues this happened to the exclusion of other concerns, writing about her own experience as a self-described, "ID Warrior," during her student days she concludes:

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i Positions on this question can be required to support some views opposed to Gay liberation: a theology that allows for Free Will can only condemn homosexuality in and of itself, as opposed to condemning only homosex, if homosexuality is a choice. Contra to this, if homosexuality is innate, then it is irrational for those who already condemn racism and sexism, to not also condemn homophobia; an argument important to pre-Stonewall "homophile" organisations, and to the debate that preceded the British decriminalisation of homosexuality, in 1963.

ii [Gardner 1959]

> *Over time, campus identity politics became so consumed by personal politics that they all but eclipsed the rest of the world. The slogan "the personal is political" came to replace the economic as political and, in the end, the political as political as well. The more importance we placed on representation issues, the more central a role they seemed to elbow for themselves in our lives….*[i]

Such concerns were always high on the list of concerns within Wicca. Controversies about first Gardner, and later Sanders, the Frosts, and other public witches, within witchcraft were most often about the representations created by their dealings with the media. Controversies about contemporary figures still seems to focus more on concerns about how the Craft or Paganism more generally is being represented, than on the actual words and deeds that the contention arises from. Like, "Coming out of the Closet," the phrase, "Coming out of the Broom Closet," ceased to refer just to the needs and concern of each individual choosing to be more public about an aspect of his or her life, but about the potential for the entire populace of people who share that aspect.

In terms of journalism and statements claiming to be non-fictitious, the Pagan Federation's media officer, the Witches Anti-Defamation League, and others worked an increasingly successful campaign to fight first the most blatant cases of bigotry, and later increasingly subtle statements that portrayed the Craft in a negative light. Fictitious representations were also to become an increasing concern, as they were for other groups engaging in Identity Politics. Since a particular concern of such fictitious representations, is the effect they have on young people, both within and without the groups in question, it may be worth first looking at young people engaging in witchcraft.

Teen Witches

As a priesthood, as a fertility cult that exists in a society where such religions do not inform the general culture, and as a mystery tradition, Traditional Wicca has always been a path for adults with very few exceptions. The position of younger people in Innovative Witchcraft will of course depend on how much any given practice retains those three elements, along with other concerns.

The wider Pagan community though, does not necessarily have any of these elements, and there has always been a place for younger people, especially the children of witches and other Pagans, within it. The main concern about young people in regards to Wicca, begun by focusing on these people. Questions about discrimination in school, and from their peers, of isolation from other Pagan youths, given the small size of the community generally combined with the relative lack of mobility of young people compared to adults, and of how, and to what extent, if at all, children should be involved in rites specifically designed to be, "family orientated," were the main concerns about young people within the Pagan community, until quite recently.

As the degree of public awareness of witchcraft continued to grow, as it had been doing steadily since *Witchcraft Today*, and as the Internet and the easy availability of books, along with an

i [Klein 2001]

affluent period in which children typically had enough disposable income to purchase at least some of them, combined to bring about an increasingly large number of teenagers with a direct interest in the Craft, or other elements of Paganism, themselves, most often not the children of Pagan parents.

The question of how, if at all, to deal with such children, became a difficult question for the Pagan community. Many adult witches can relate directly; either they at least felt drawn to the Craft from a young age, and in retrospect feel that they were already destined to become witches, or they themselves were actively working, or at least researching, some sort of witchcraft or other esoteric subjects. One or two may have managed to make it to covens prior to the age of majority with their parents permission, (or by lying about their age[i]). Many would have read about, and perhaps practised, some form of magic. Experiences of a psychic, religious, mystical, or fey nature, that brought people to their practice would often have started, and been at their most intense, during childhood. Often such experiences could have led to stress, or a sense of isolation.

Such a history could lead one to sympathy with the position of young people interested in the Craft, but not necessarily to the same conclusions as to what should be done about it. Some may feel that the path that led them to the Craft was necessary, and could not have been short-circuited. Traditional Wicca, and many forms of Innovative Witchcraft, simply are adult-only practices, with some hesitant to train even young adults,[ii] and even if practitioners do attempt to help children with such spiritual inclinations, then that would by necessity have to stand outside of their core practices. Others may feel that such children are best helped by themselves or by peers.

The best-known attempt by an adult to directly speak to a teenage audience, is probably Silver Ravenwolf, with *Teen Witch*,[iii] followed by more books and products in its wake. Where it stands in difference to other introductions to witchcraft, including previous works by the same author, as far as witchcraft itself is concerned, is hard to say. There is an attempt to create a young persons version of an existing text, but the text in question, the statement by the American Council of Witches,[iv] is neither difficult in the original, directly educational, (being a terse document intended to explain witchcraft to cowans, rather than holding any liturgical, ritual or Craft purpose), nor of relevance to any witches, other than those who may happen to decide they agree with it. One rewording in particular, stands as an extremely dubious interpretation:

> 11. *As American Witches, we are not threatened by debates on the history of the Craft, the origins of various terms, the origins of various aspects of different traditions. We are concerned with our present and our future.*

i [Adler 1997]

ii [Guerra 2008]

iii [Ravenwolf 1998]

iv [CAW 1974]

> Teen speak: *There is no one right way to practice the Craft. The religion is what you make of it.*

Apart from this, there are attempts to address concerns that teenagers may have in their lives, but they seem primarily to be an attempt to address the concerns that teenagers are somehow *supposed* to have; bullying, an extremely asymmetric form of heterosexual teenage romance, grades, and difficulties with teachers. More difficult problems are wrapped up with the, "just say no," message that roundly failed to make any impact in the drug-use of minors in the late 1980s, and a general suggestion that one should talk to responsible adults about serious problems, that completely fails to address the difficulty teenagers, or indeed, adults, may find in attempting to do so. In all, it's difficult to see this as any attempt to assist any teenagers with an interest in the Craft, but rather as an exercise in market diversification, of the sort that Klein argues absorbed Identity Politics into commercial concerns.

The view on the basic concept amongst adult witches, is unfortunately made difficult to judge by criticism about the contents of the book, particularly in terms of the ethics of using what she describes as, "a double sneak attack," to lie to one's parents, the puritan and sexist sexual morality, and a repeat of the criticisms often levelled at her earlier books. The author seems to have deliberately attempted to present such criticism, as a lack of support for the concerns of teenagers, "you may not care about teens but I do," leading to an even greater polarisation of opinion. The success of this polarising tactic makes it hard to find critiques, that do not either support the book full-heartedly, or which do not handle the more general question of how the question of teen witches should be handled, if at all, in criticism of other aspects of the book. The fact that many criticising the book are themselves teenagers, offers that this is merely a book aimed at them that doesn't succeed in its objectives, but leaves the wider question still open; could there be a *Teen Witch* that meets with greater enthusiasm from other witches? What would such a book, if indeed a book would be the best medium, be like? This would seem to be still unanswered.

Similarly, Oberon Zell's "Grey School of Wizardry,"[i] an online course in magic which accepts both minors and adults, will inevitably provoke the same criticism that is made about other online courses, such as that run by "Witch School,"[ii] along with courting disfavour from many, in its borrowing various items of terminology from the *Harry Potter* series.[iii] There is too much controversy as to how it attempts to teach children, to judge the balance of opinions on doing so in the first place.

The least controversial, though by no means entirely controversy-free, attempts to engage with younger people interested in the Craft, have been those which have given them a voice themselves. The Pagan Federation's "Minor Arcana," and the youth section of Witchvox, are both successful, if

i [Greyschool]

ii [Witchschool]

iii In fairness, if anyone could build something of real spiritual or magical significance from Harry Potter, it would be Zell with his success in having done so with Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

only as measured by the level of interest they have received from members of their target demographic. With the influence of adults being less direct, and less autocratic, with hence less risk of, "power over," that makes many Pagans suspicious wherever it arises, it would seem that this is the model that support networks for younger Pagans and witches will be built on in the future. That same degree of independence means that support for its membership from older Pagans may be less available, particularly as the organising capabilities of the Internet may lead to the next generation of support networks existing without any adult involvement at all. If this is the case, then perhaps the potential problems are no more answered, than they were before.

Bubblegum for the Eyes

The interest in witchcraft amongst teenagers has been frequently associated by commentators, whether within witchcraft, the Christian Right, or the mainstream media, with popular culture portrayals of witchcraft. As seen previously, there is also an interest in such popular culture representations, stemming from the importance placed on such by Identity Politics. This in turn often turns back to issues concerning youth, due to the fact that most popular culture representations of witchcraft, are either in shows and books aimed specifically at youths, or with a large youth audience, and that often the fictional witches of these portrayals are themselves youths.

Earlier representations of youths involved in witchcraft have deliberately contrasted the common representations of witches as inherently evil (à la the "Wicked Witch of the West"), or inherently wise (à la the "Good Witch of the North"), with the acceptable view of teenagers and children as basically good, but inherently given to folly, such as Harvey Comic's, *Wendy the Good Little Witch* (1954), and Archie Comic's, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1962). This trope would probably reach its largest audience with the television series, *Bewitched*,[i] which this time contrasted the conventional stereotype of a "good" housewife, with the mischief apparently inherent to its concept of the witch, while likewise contrasting the power of such witches with a paternalistic view of women. While commonly said to be based on *I Married a Witch*,[ii] or *Bell, Book and Candle*,[iii] the ongoing episodic format doesn't allow the contrasting views of natural and supernatural women to be resolved, as they are in those movies, and so its portrayal of witchcraft, and how it interacts with the mundane world, is closer to *Sabrina* and *Wendy*, than to any other contemporary popular culture representations.

One particularly noteworthy features of all these representations, is that witches are ontologically different to humans, (referred to as "mortals" in both *Bewitched* and *Sabrina*). They are a different species, and are immigrants in our world from planes inaccessible to humanity. As such they are even further removed from reality, than vampires, werewolves and ghosts; the more prevalent stock characters of both horror and horror-comedy. Hence, they offer very little in way of

i [Saks 1964]

ii [Clair 1942]

iii [Quine 1958]

inspiration, or analogy to any real form of witchcraft, beyond tongue-in-cheek references. Even Jack Chick, normally prepared to accuse just about anything of being part of a massive Catholic-Masonic-Satanic-Pagan-Jewish conspiracy, seems to blame *Bewitched* only for culturally opening the doors for later media representations.[i]

Popular culture references to witchcraft and Paganism largely remained entirely distinct from reality, with *The Wicker Man*[ii] standing as an exception in its degree of mundane plausibility; requiring an extraordinary conspiracy, but not any impossible fantastic elements.

This exception aside, any concept of witchcraft as existing in the real world was at most one-off, tongue-in-cheek, episodes of shows like *Knight Rider*[iii], often Hallowe'en specials, which would hint at a witchcraft as existing in the "real" world, or at the efficacy of magic, or both, but do no more than hint.

Towards the end of the 1990s, there were four different changes in the portrayl of witchcraft in popular culture fiction.

The first, is that shows such as *The X-Files*,[iv] in using traditional tropes concerning witchcraft, magic, or Satanism, would explicitly distance the storyline from Wicca. Concerns about perceptions of "Political Correctness," and perhaps awareness of the relatively large number of Pagans amongst science-fiction's audience, could only allow such storylines if they are clearly differentiated from Wicca, either through characters pointedly making statements about the Rede, or describing Wicca as "peaceful," or through the plot eventually showing any characters identified as witches to be innocent of any wrong-doing, or indeed responsible for some heroism. Even *Scooby-Doo* has differentiated Wiccan, "eco-goths," from fairy tale witches,[v] along with associating the accused witches of New England with the former.

The second, was an increased number of plotlines identifying Wicca as a religion whose members' rights deserve protection by the, (particularly US), state, often in legal dramas such as *Judging Amy*.[vi]

The third and fourth interact with each other deeply. Simultaneously, there was increasing influence of artefacts and terminology of Wiccan practice present in the successors to *Sabrina*, (including the televised version of the same), and *Bewitched*, along with an expressed view from just about all quarters, that these were encouraging teenagers to develop an interest in witchcraft, a view that few would argue was held about *Bewitched*.

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i [Chick 2000]

ii [Hardy 1973]

iii [Kolbe 1984]

iv [Manners 1995]

v [Strenstrum 1999] & [Jeralds 2003]

vi [Karon 1999]

These two cannot be easily separated, as they feed into each other. Sony Pictures' *The Craft*[i], was controversial since before shooting was finished, for taking inspiration from actual practice, and at this point even the technical advisor from Covenant of the Goddess seemed to feel it would influence some young people into copycat acts, given her feeling that using a fictional god-name would prevent, "hordes of teenagers running down to the beach or out to the woods invoking anybody real."[ii] Indeed she seems to feel that ultimately this is a positive thing:

> *As you know, Ethical Witches do not proselytize. The Craft was seen by approximately one million people in its first weekend. If one in ten of those people are intrigued enough to look into the subject further, maybe read a book (and now there are shelves full of books!) that's 100,000 people who will at least be more educated about our reality. If one in ten of those people chose to pursue the subject further, that's 10,000 people out of the first weekend.*

Just where the line between proselytising and convincing 1% of an audience, who had expressed no prior interest in practising any form of witchcraft, to do so is, is not stated.

In the end, *The Craft* had only a modest box-office impact,[iii] and seems to be better-known as a theoretical reason for attracting "fluffy" people to witchcraft, than it is outside of this. Perhaps what is really needed, is not anything to debunk the idea that witches regularly change their eye-colour magically, but rather to debunk the idea that many people believe they do.

While outside of the Pagan community, *The Craft* passed by largely unnoticed, much more attention was paid to TV series, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Charmed*,[iv] and increasingly the books, (from 1997[v]), and later the films, (from 2001[vi]), of the *Harry Potter* series.

Like the comic book series on which *Sabrina* was based, the witches in *Sabrina* are not entirely human. Similarly, in *Charmed*, witchcraft is entirely essential, and inherited, and while the differentiation between "mortal" humans and witches is not as extreme as in *Sabrina* and *Bewitched*, it is closer to that than to anything else. Similarly, *Harry Potter* posits witchcraft as essential, (even explicitly mirroring racial discrimination in how some characters behave), to a much greater degree than it is learned, and the degree to which it reflects any real views of magic drops sharply, from the first book mentioning such historical figures as Nicolas Flamel, and various items of occult trivia,[vii] to quickly become much more self-contained.

i [Fleming 1996]

ii [COG 1995]

iii [Box Office Mojo]

iv [Scovell 1996], [Whedon 1997] & [Burge 1998]

v [Rowling 1997]

vi [Columbus 2001]

vii op cit.

Charmed does however make use of some terminology that is associated with Wicca, but not generally part of earlier fictional concepts of witchcraft. In particular the word *Wicca* itself is used; infrequently but prominently, such as the title of the pilot episode, "Something Wicca This Way Comes,"[i] along with the expressions, "Book of Shadows," and "Blessed Be."

As such, there would definitely appear to be an element of dialogue between *Charmed* and the wider Wiccan and Pagan community, albeit a largely unbalanced one; *Charmed* grabs some low-hanging linguistic fruit from the community, while many in the community express irritation with the wider Western society, in how it portrays them, and largely wish to distance themselves from it, even, (especially?) if they end up caught up in the storyline.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a significantly more complicated case though. At first glance, it seems to also be looking to Wicca solely for the same sort of verbal source material, as does *Charmed*. A richer relationship between the witchcraft of *Buffy's* diegesis, and Wicca, quickly emerges however, and this increased as the series progressed, and the main Wiccan character, Willow Rosenberg, learns more about witchcraft, and the writers solidify how witchcraft is constructed within the show.

A first item of significance, is that unlike the majority of such television programs, Willow Rosenberg is not ontologically different to anybody else; she is not a superhero, unlike the series' eponymous character, or a different manner of being to any other human, but rather her witchcraft is something she learned. While her talent eventually makes her comparable with the most powerful supernatural characters on the show, she is a Mozart or a Shakespeare, not a Kal-El or Peter Parker. The potential as an inspiration to a viewer is perhaps accordingly different to that of *Sabrina* or *Charmed*.

The biggest difference is how magic is portrayed in the show. For the most part, a variety of different clichés of fictional magic are used, from the extreme ease of merely needing to know the correct "magic words," (self-satirised when a character causes a fire by reading, "librum incendere," aloud and is chided, "don't speak Latin in front of the books"[ii]) or the infeasibly rare object, (self-satirised in the series' spin-off, when a character fails to obtain a box, "handcrafted by blind Tibetan monks," and substitutes one, "pieced together by mute Chinese nuns"[iii]). The series' own satire of these clichés demonstrate a knowingness about the absurdity they will often reach. Much of Willow's magic though, becomes increasingly visceral and "natural" as the storyline develops. Apart from offering better assistance to the audiences suspension of disbelief, the nature of Willow's relationship with magic grows in some important ways.

First, her identity increasingly becomes that of a witch. The character is introduced as a bookish form of the classic, "rebel without a cause." She is privileged in education, wealth, (while not rich,

i [Kretchmer 1998]

ii [Espenson 2000]

iii [Renshaw 2000]

she is from a comfortable middle-class background, and generally the one to purchase any needed equipment), and ethnicity, (while nominally Jewish, this is something we are occasionally told and never shown, she is firmly assimilated), yet fails to fit in, or to access or acknowledge the benefits of her privilege, (she is constantly at odds with the authorities of her privilege, and her academic success is more often despite, rather than because of her educators). Her relatively privileged position manifests primarily as guilt about such concerns as indigenous rights.[i] As such, she is at war with her own identity, and the identity of a witch allows her to develop her own sense of herself, especially as it comes in conjunction with her identifying as Lesbian, (or perhaps more accurately, as bisexual). While I've argued above that she differs from such fictional witches as Sabrina, in not being inherently different from the fictional cowans of the story, her expressed *self-image* is essentialist, akin to that currently popular in terms of queer identity, and her identity as a witch, as well as that as a Lesbian, are both akin to that of many gay, Lesbian and bisexual people at the turn of the Century.

The connection between her use of magic and her sexuality becomes increasingly pronounced. Both she and her girlfriend will refer to plans to, "experiment," with magic with a clear subtext, both between the characters, and between them and the audience, that they are also planning sexual experimentation, and their responses performing magic are visually ecstatic, nearly orgasmic.[ii] Increasingly, the identity of the two as witches and Lesbians becomes conflated to the point of being one and the same. Yet, this is prevented from allowing one to become a mere cipher for the other, by existing in a storyline where there are other magic workers, along with enough self-satire of this conflation to build up audience resistance to it. Lesbian sexuality is not being conflated with witchcraft by the show itself, but rather that conflation is a personal response made by the character, and her peers, in her search for identity; again, like the degree of essentialism that she seems to feel exists in her identity as a witch, it is the characters themselves which combine those two identities, not the series' writers.

It is also worth noting, that while the portrayal of a homosexual relationship garnered much commentary, both positive and negative, at the time, it is arguably the most normal relationship in the entire series; both parties are fully human, the relationship is moderately and quietly kinky but without overt signs of such kinks causing distress,[iii] there is little tension around gender rôles, and while it ends in an act of violence, both the means and the circumstance—her girlfriend is killed by a stray bullet—makes it the sort of random meaningless horror that can enter into any of our lives, rather than the fantastic impossibilities that are the mainstay of the programme. All of which make it unique in the series. Finally, her subsequent relationship is the only one to make it to the end of the series intact, with a chance for as close for "happily ever after," as one may hope for.

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i [Espenson 1999]

ii [Whedon 2000a]

iii In a fiction that holds normalcy and claims to normalcy as suspect, in both text and subtext, yet also uses more explicit elements of kink to reflect dysfunction in relationships, this could be read as a balanced ideal.

So, witchcraft here is conflated with sex, but rather than doing so entirely in the sensationalist manner, already common in fiction and reportage, it is conflated with expressly healthy sex compared with most other relationships portrayed in the series; with what young people would not only hope for, but arguably should hope for.

Simultaneously to this, Pagan religious elements increasingly move into both the magic performed, (with gods from the Egyptian and Hellenic pantheons being petitioned, but also Aradia[i]), and her everyday thought, (as reflected by using "goddess" in exclamations). Religious views aren't explored beyond such artefacts, but this holds for the series' portrayal of religion generally, where crucifixes abound, but worship does not.

Operative witchcraft, Paganism and Lesbian sexuality, finally come together in a dream sequence[ii] where she is painting Sappho's first fragment, a petition to Aphrodite,[iii] on her lover's back. At this point, we have a fictional Wicca that is religious as well as magical, differentiating it from almost all supernatural portrayals of witchcraft in previous mainstream popular culture, being conflated with as close to a romantic and sexual ideal as the series can allow.

There is however a negative side, as is required by a drama, which in this case manifests itself in first an, "addiction," to magic, and finally a complete loss of her moral compass in the face of grief.

The former could be read as an analogy to drug addiction, or a reflection of the concern parents will have for adolescents and young adults engaging in any sexual activity, no matter how healthy. Increasingly though, the reading most directly offered is that, rather than find authenticity, she has lost herself in her new identity, which is suggested by the finale, where she regains her sense of moral proportion by being reminded not just of this identity, but of how she was as a child in kindergarten.[iv]

Where Identity Politics has led to demands for positive media representation, *Buffy* has responded, not merely with characters that are non-heteronormative witches, but by placing such politicised identities into the questioning of identity that befits its theme of adolescence, and going on to problematise the investment of too much psychic energy into such identities. It doesn't merely respond to the demands of Identity Politics, but addresses them head-on.

While these particular fictions have made the most impact in terms of how much they are perceived to be influencing young people to develop an interest in witchcraft, a large part of this is simply that they are relatively successful and well-known examples of what young people are watching, or are expected to watch. This notoriety owes as much to the fact that they are popular

i [Fury 1999]

ii [Whedon 2000b]

iii "Ποικιλόθρον', ἀθάνατ' Ἀφρόδιτα, παῖ Δίος…"; "Immortal Aphrodite of the broidered throne, daughter of Zeus…" (Wharton's translation, see <http://classicpersuasion.org/pw/sappho/sape01u.htm>).

iv [Fury 2002]

enough amongst an older audience to be known to them, and they are relatively mainstream, than anything else.

Less popular books and comics with magical themes often hold a small but deeply loyal following. Laurel K Hamilton's *Anita Blake*, series beginning with *Guilty Pleasures*,[i] describes magic as deriving from a sort of energy that comes from the protagonist's body. While she quickly moves away from this into more fantastic descriptions, these most basic descriptions of magic are not far removed from what is found in Gardner. The lack of restrictions on her medium, also allows her to mix her descriptions of magic with a much more explicit combination of violence, sexual identity and kink, than Whedon could in *Buffy*, so we should expect it to garner more controversy. Neil Gaiman's comic-book epic *The Sandman*, while one of the best known comic-book series in the English language, is still somewhat outside of the mainstream, even as he himself has broken into it with other media. He has quite explicitly played on the assumption that he would have a large Wiccan and Pagan audience, basing a plot-point on the expectation that he could shock readers who were familiar with Wiccan concepts of Drawing Down the Moon, but not the earlier belief that Thessalian witches could physically take the moon from its orbit.[ii] Conversely, while his later novel, *American Gods*,[iii] garnered more mainstream acclaim while dealing explicitly with a variety of pantheons which are honoured within modern Paganism, it is a large volume with a clear adult audience, and the fact that a large number of teenagers have undoubtedly read it, is pretty much ignored.

Beyond general suspicion of comic books and horror pulp fiction in many quarters, and a general suspicion of almost all media amongst some elements of the Christian Right, these are rarely mentioned as possible influencers of teenage witches. Yet if any of the regular suspects actually do have such an effect, then these should be at least as likely to have as strong, if not a stronger, effect upon their readers. While audience-size is in itself a reason to focus one's attention in particular directions, the irrationally reäctive nature of the scare-mongering suggests a moral panic, rather than any realistic assessment. Similarly, the lack of concern about more respectable novels, if we can take critical acclaim in broadsheets as a measure of such, reflects a degree of snobbery about popular culture. This would probably not apply to those who see witchcraft as inherently evil, but could affect how seriously teenagers are taken by older witches.

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i [Hamilton 2002]

ii [Bender 2000]

iii [Gaiman 2001]

VIII National and Tribal Cultures as Source Text

> "First they came to take our land and water, then our fish and game. Then they wanted our mineral resources and, to get them, they tried to take our governments. Now they want our religions as well." —Janet McCloud, Z Magazine, December 1990.

Building on the work of the Farrars in identifying influences upon Gardner,[i] Hutton has demonstrated that many elements of Traditional Wicca relate to cultural events in the 18th, 19th and early 20th Centuries.[ii] He largely left open the question of what influences from before that period were at work, though has certainly leant more support to the sceptical positions on the question, whether that was his intent or not.

Almost all of the sources are among those to which Gardner could, either as a British person or as a European, make some degree of claim. Similarly, when the Farrars gave an exposition of the manner in which they introduced local, i.e. Irish, elements into their Sabbat celebrations,[iii] they were doing so as residents of Ireland, and as such as people with a claim to the experience it drew on.

Many people feel drawn towards a culture that they cannot make such a direct claim on. Many other such claims are made on different grounds to others making the same claim. Consider that a US-born US citizen with Irish ancestors may feel "Irish," though he not only does not have the same claims as an Irish-born Irish citizen, and further that the claims he does have are not shared by all Irish citizens. Other people feel drawn towards a variety of cultures, or just towards a variety of artefacts of different cultures.

It is notable that Traditional Wiccans will often also work with gods from a variety of cultures, as well as those of the Wicca, and have often explained aspects of their Craft in terms of practices from around the world, (especially, but not exclusively, from Europe), whether claiming they are doing the same, or merely drawing analogy. It is also notable that some have agreed with, or at least paid some respect to, the soft polytheism of Dion Fortune,[iv] with the justification for extreme levels of syncretism this implies. Finally, often referring to other cultures offers a mechanism by which one can talk about aspects of Traditional Wicca, while staying clear from matters that they may feel it would impinge upon their oaths to raise more directly.

Innovative Witchcraft inherits much of this, but often not as much of the original cultural background of Traditional Wicca, especially for practitioners outside of England, and more so outside of Western Europe. Often within these practices what is considered Wicca is taken to be a framework, around which cultural borrowings can be attached, producing a practice that would then be labelled, *Irish Wicca*, *Pictish Wicca*, *Norse Wicca*, or in the case of more deeply

i [Farrar & Farrar 1981] & [Farrar & Farrar 1984]

ii [Hutton 1999]

iii [Farrar & Farrar 1981]

iv "All gods are one God, all goddesses are one Goddess, and there is one Initiator." [Fortune 1938].

syncretistic practices, *Eclectic Wicca*.[i] The tendency for syncretism in the New Age Movement would be another influence, encouraging this latter eclectic use of cultural borrowings from a variety of cultures, though by the same token, the disdain for the New Age Movement that is common within much of Neopaganism, particularly in the wake of the anti-fluffy backlash, serves as a disincentive with growing impact.

That one not only can, but should, combine Wiccan-derived techniques with such cultural borrowings, is so commonly stated as to be part of many of the orthodoxies I have suggested have emerged within Innovative Witchcraft. In introductory books, it is often suggested that deciding upon which culture, or cultures, to borrow from, is the first step in developing a practice. This decision is a key factor in what is seen to define a particular Innovative Tradition.[ii]

With a variety of cultures being so used, there is hence a desire for information not only on Wicca, and on the cultures in question, but on how any particular culture may be combined with Wicca. This creates an automatic market diversification, which perhaps could lead publishers to favour this approach to magic and religion, and has certainly led to criticism that such practice treats cultures as little more than consumer choices. Certainly the similarity between the two following quotes, the first pertaining to explain Celtic magic, the second Norse, seems to indicate no difference more profound than branding:

Carry the burner around the circle clockwise, beginning in the east. Return it to the altar.

Go to the eastern quarter of the circle. Light the red (yellow) candle[iii] *and hold your hand up in greeting. You may also salute the Element with your dagger, sword or wand instead of your hand:*

> I call upon you, Powers of Air, to witness this rite and to guard this circle.

In the southern quarter, light the white (red) candle and greet the Element:

> I call upon you, Powers of Fire, to witness this rite and to guard this circle.

Move to the west; light the grey (blue) candle

Carry the burner around the circle clockwise, beginning in the east. Return it to the altar.

Go to the eastern quarter of the circle. Light the yellow candle and hold your hand up in greeting. You may also salute the Element with your dagger, sword or wand instead of your hand:

> I call upon you, Powers of Air, to witness this rite and to guard this circle.

Move to the south; light the red candle and greet the Element:

> I call upon you, Powers of Fire, to witness this rite and to guard this circle.

In the western quarter you light the blue

i As noted in the introduction, *Eclectic* is often used within Traditional Wicca to describe all Innovative Witchcraft. The disparity between that use, and how it is used within Innovative Witchcraft, being my reason for coining the latter term.

ii [Grimassi 2008]

iii Earlier in this text she had described associations between colours and directions in which yellow, red, blue and dark green (deosil, starting from the East) were "Wiccan" and red, white, grey and black were "Celtic."

and hold your hand in greeting:

I call upon you, Powers of Water, to witness this rite and to guard this circle.

End by going to the north; light the black (green) candle and greet the Element:

I call upon you, Powers of Earth, to witness this rite and to guard this circle.

Move back to the central altar, and stand facing east. Raise your arms in greeting:

This circle is bound,
With power all around.
Between the worlds, I stand
With protection at hand.

Proceed with your planned spellworking or ceremony. When everything is completed, hold you hand or dagger over the altar and say:

By the powers of the ancient Gods,
I bind all power within this circle
Into this spell. So mote it be.

When you are ready to end the ritual, go to the east and extinguish the red(yellow) candle. Say:

Depart in peace, O Powers of Air.
My thanks and blessings.

Go to the south, extinguish the white (red) candle. Say:

Depart in peace, O Powers of Fire.
My thanks and blessings.

Go to the west and put out the grey (blue) candle. Say:

Depart in peace, O Powers of Water.
My thanks and blessings.

Finish by going to the north and extinguishing the black (green) candle. Say:

candle and hold your hand in greeting:

I call upon you, Powers of Water, to witness this rite and to guard this circle.

End by going to the north; light the green candle and greet the Element:

I call upon you, Powers of Earth, to witness this rite and to guard this circle.

Move back to the central altar, and stand facing east. Raise your arms in greeting:

This circle is bound,
With power all around.
Within it I stand
With protection at hand.

Proceed with your planned spellworking or ceremony. When everything is completed, hold you hand or ritual tool over the altar and say:

By the powers of the ancient Gods,
I bind all power within this circle
Into this spell. So mote it be!

When you are ready to end the ritual, go to the east and extinguish the yellow candle. Say:

Depart in peace, O Powers of Air.
My thanks and blessings.

Go to the south, extinguish the red candle. Say:

Depart in peace, O Powers of Fire.
My thanks and blessings.

Go to the west and put out the blue candle. Say:

Depart in peace, O Powers of Water.
My thanks and blessings.

Finish by going to the north and extinguishing the green candle. Say:

Depart in peace, O Powers of Earth.
My thanks and blessings.

Return to the altar in the center and say:

To all beings and powers of the visible and invisible, depart in peace.

May there always be harmony between us.

My thanks and blessings.

Cut the circle with a backwards movement of your dagger or sword to release all remaining traces of power for manifestation. Say:

The circle is open, yet ever it remains a circle.
Around and through me always flows its magical power.

Put away all magical tools and clear the altar. Leave any candles or object which must remain either to burn out or be empowered for a stated period of time.

You have completed a ritual. Practice will make the power flow easier and more freely. You will become more self-confident. Soon you will be looking forward to the time you spend between the worlds with the Ancient Ones.[i]

Depart in peace, O Powers of Earth.
My thanks and blessings.

Return to the center to stand before the altar. Raise your arms and say:

To all beings and powers of the visible and invisible, depart in peace.

May there always be harmony between us.

My thanks and blessings.

Cut the circle with a backwards movement of your dagger or sword to release all remaining traces of power for manifestation. Say:

The circle is open, yet ever it remains a circle.
Around and through me always flows its magical power.

Put away all magical tools and clear the altar. Leave any candles or object which must remain either to burn out or be empowered for a stated period of time.

You have completed a ritual. Practice will make the power flow easier and more freely. You will become more self-confident. Soon you will be looking forward to ritual and spellworking.[ii]

This could be viewed as a cynical exercise on the part of the author, but it is also quite possible that she genuinely views culture in this way, and considers this to be completely valid and useful, and to truly reflect something of the culture in each book's title.

Those with different attachments to the culture in question may see things differently. One major point of criticism, is the cultural and historical material presented is often of questionable accuracy to begin with. Joanna Hautin-Mayer's critique, "When is a Celt not a Celt?"[iii] examines six works examining Celtic history and culture in different ways, and her verdict of four of them is rather

i [Conway 1990a]

ii [Conway 1990b]

iii [Hautin-Mayer]

condemnatory. Of these four, all could be considered to be Neopagan in some manner, and two of them, *Witta*,[i] and *Faery Wicca*,[ii] describe forms of post-Gardnerian witchcraft. Hautin-Mayer's critique pretty firmly established that these books were of little value in terms of what they portrayed themselves as providing. The essay being widely circulated help fuel several debates, not just about cultural borrowing, but the state of scholarship in Pagan publications, the value of syncretism generally, the anti-fluffy backlash, and the general quality of works published by Llewellyn Worldwide, (which published both those volumes, and some of the others Hautin-Mayer examined).

Within Neopaganism, the strongest criticisms tend to come from reconstructionist religions, like Celtic Reconstructionism, and Hellenicism. Since cultures which have continued unbroken into the current age, particularly the cultures indigenous to the Americas, have also been used in this manner, and given that the people belonging to these cultures have often experienced very severe oppression from people of the white Anglo ethnicity from which Wicca came, that continues to this day, much of the harshest criticism has been from those quarters. Other cultures that have not received as much attention from Innovative Witches are often of interest to the New Age Movement, which makes it likely to cross along overlap between the New Age Movement and Innovative Witchcraft in the near future.

The more extreme cases of, "plastic shamans," whose statements can be demonstrated to be factually incorrect in much the same the manner that Hautin-Mayer did with *Witta* and *Faery Wicca* are one thing. More contentious are arguments that indigenous culture, or at least some aspects of it, should not be used in this manner at all.

Between these two complaints, lies that which argues that the form of adoption of such cultural elements is not wrong in itself, but not possible with the frameworks that they are being used in: All of the New Age Moment, and much of Innovative Witchcraft, places a high regard on personal development, to the extent that this is seen as the very point of such practice. Traditional Wicca, and much of the rest of Innovative Witchcraft, does not place such personal development in the position of a goal in itself, though Traditional Wiccans will still often talk of the personally transformative effect that working Wicca can bring about.[iii] The larger religions with global reach also contain elements of personal importance, in regards to their own concepts of Salvation (Christianity), or Enlightenment (Buddhism). While such traditions as vision quests are promoted as similarly of personal benefit to the participant, originally, "the context was a belief that the person's individual life and calling was a gift for the whole group, and their connection to the spirit world would bring them into deeper connection with the community, bringing life to the community."[iv] Here, the criticism does not necessarily go so far as to criticise all borrowings, nor

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i [McCoy 1993]

ii [Stepanich 1994] & [Stepanich 1998]

iii [Crowley 1989b]

iv [Johnson 1995]

complain that the borrowing is necessarily inaccurate, but rather that the context it has been borrowed into brings inaccuracies and disrespect for the original.

A final stream of criticism, rests upon the degree of effort taken to approach the culture in question on its terms. Lora O'Brien's advice to those with an interest in Irish forms of witchcraft, starts with suggesting that people learn at least the modern form of the Irish language.[i] While she does not insist that this would be absolutely necessary, the difference in the degree of effort required, and the level of understanding of the culture that any practice would then be rooted in, stands in stark contrast to the works mentioned so far.

The debates on this matter will probably never be resolved. The motives of those involved on both sides can be earnest, the more extreme cases aside. There is no absolute means by which cultural boundaries can be drawn to allow for any absolute resolution, unless extreme forms of segregation become the norm, leading to members of some cultures viewing as "theirs" what members of another see as having been appropriated, including from one indigenous tribe to another, such as the Hopi have accused the Navajo of doing.[ii]

It is hard to imagine Italian cuisine today existing without tomatoes or pasta, though the use of both as foods are cultural borrowings, from the Americas and the Middle East, with the latter in turn being an Arab borrowing from further East. While such simple borrowings may seem trivial and obvious, (one doesn't often care much about the ethnobotany of one's ragu, though the ethnobotany of possibly patentable medicines is a much more contentious issue[iii]), the lines of "trivial" and "obvious" can be difficult to draw, since such matters as culinary use of plants and other technological developments with obvious advantages, (especially to people now sharing the environment in which they developed), can be of great cultural significance. Indeed, borrowings can develop great cultural significance in the cultures into which they were borrowed. The national and regional cuisines, for example, of Europe are more heavily defined by differences in adoptions from the New World, than any earlier distinctions. While claims that potatoes were used in ancient Irish rites is one of the grounds on which Hautin-Mayer criticised both *Witta* and *Faery Wicca*, the fact remains that it has been a staple of the Irish diet for centuries; more than long enough to establish a place in the culture, as well as the diet, not least in the wake of the Great Hunger of the 1840s. Similarly cultures are not static, colcannon may be attested no earlier than late 18th Century,[iv] which makes claims of it being used for divination in ancient times infeasible, but its use in a divination game, albeit one not taken very seriously,[v] is certainly an Irish tradition today.

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i [O'Brien 2004]

ii [Brown 2003b]

iii ibid.

iv [Brewer 1899]

v Any man growing up with the tradition will have had a life as a spinster foretold at some point, and any woman a life as a bachelor, so neither are likely to pay it much heed.

Such a place of an American crop in Irish culture, stands at a considerable distance from claims to be able to represent a spiritual inheritance from either Ireland or the Americas, but as long as nits are their to pick, they will be picked. Are moccasins part of Native American culture, (and if so, which tribes), or are they merely a comfortable way to make shoes from soft leather? Is wearing them to a powwow different to wearing them to the office? If borrowing moccasins is okay, then is it okay to borrow dreamcatchers, if your culture lacks any alternative metaphysical technology for preventing bad dreams? If dreamcatchers are okay, then why not medicine drums? If one determines that use of sweatlodges outside of their American context crosses the line, what of looking to them for possible insight into what may have been once part of the Northern European use of sweating, such as evolved into the saunas of Scandinavia? And if that is acceptable, precisely how can such insights be used without insult either or both cultures?

Michael F Brown discusses approaches based on adapting existing concepts of Intellectual Property laws to better deal with such issues,[i] but notes many potential problems which suggest that such an approach could perhaps cause more harm than good. One immediate problem with an IP-based approach, is that such Intellectual Property cannot be defended unless it is identified. To keep the details of ceremonies and religious practice secret, remains the best guarantee that such practices are not used in ways the originating community would not approve, but to do so means that false claims cannot be easily refuted, and leaks are harder to deal with after the fact. Brown also notes that Lawrence Lessig, and others, have criticised the extent of existing Intellectual Property laws, as most use of information is, "nonrivalrous"; my use of Einstein's Theory of Relativity does not deplete your ability to use it too. Given that such opposition to current concepts of Intellectual Property is common amongst young people with liberal views today, it is likely that many people that will be forming the Innovative practices of the near-future, would see such an approach analogously to media corporations that they view as stymieing their own culture, through copyright and patent laws. Certainly the rhetoric that Intellectual Property should be shared has been borrowed into defences of the most controversial marketers of Native American spirituality.[ii] However, some in the hacker subculture, probably the group most strongly at odds with existing Intellectual Property practices, have come to view their own approach to informational resources as based on innate concepts of ownership,[iii] an insight which may reduce the degree of absolutism in any such position.

These issues will continue to affect both Traditional and Innovative practices. As well as their importance in themselves, they provide strong rhetorical ammunition to the anti-fluffy backlash, that if nothing else will make raising these issues an easy means of scoring points. Unease about the ethics of borrowing from cultures other than one's own, especially living cultures, may narrow the cultural sources that are frequently use by many witches. Meanwhile, those Traditional

i [Brown 2003b]

ii [Red Road 1993]

iii [Raymond 2001]

Wiccans who are critical of Innovative Witchcraft, may find parallels between their experience of having their practice used as the basis for an identically-named practice they consider foreign, and the experiences of these cultures; even viewing the very existence of post-Gardnerian witchcraft outside of Traditional practice, to in itself be a form of cultural appropriation.

IX Sex and Sexual Politics

"Physics is like sex. Sure, it may give some practical results, but that's not why we do it" —Richard Feynman.

As a fertility cult, Traditional Wicca makes use of symbolism of sexuality as a generative force. Most obviously in the Great Rite, and the blessing of cakes and ale, though also in its use of male–female polarity in ritual interactions, the blessing of generative organs during the Five-Fold Kiss, and the use of a kiss as the Wiccan salute.

Every one of these aspects has made it into some Innovative Witchcraft practice, but all have been omitted or altered in some as well.

Anything which requires a male–female polarity is obviously going to be dropped by single-sex groups, such as those Dianic witches which work in female-only groups. The Traditional male–female creative polarity has also been seen by some as homophobic.

In defining the terms Palæopaganism, Mesopaganism and Neopaganism, Isaac Bonewits includes:

> *Some Paleopagan belief systems may be racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.…*
>
> *Examples of Mesopagan belief systems would include… most orthodox (aka "British Traditionalist") denominations of Wicca.…*
>
> *Some Mesopagan belief systems may be racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.…*
>
> *Neopagan belief systems are* not [emphasis his] *racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.… Examples of Neopaganism would include… most heterodox Wiccan traditions,…*[i]

It is notable in itself that, "most orthodox (aka 'British Traditionalist') denominations of Wicca," are categorised so differently to, "most heterodox Wiccan traditions," since this presumably corresponds closely with the distinction between what I label *Traditional Wicca* and *Innovative Witchcraft* in this work.

Bonewits' inclusion of the claim that Palæopaganism and Mesopaganism, "may be racist, sexist, homophobic, etc." would seem to mainly be to contrast it with Neopaganism; "are not" could be a definition, "may be" at most an observation. The wording is hence not very conclusive as far as Traditional Wicca goes; it could after all be just as non-homophobic as he claims Neopagan Witchcraft is, while still belonging to a category that contained other religions that, "may be… homophobic". But, it is quite emphatic when it comes to the Neopagan category, in which he includes "most heterodox Wiccan traditions."

While this probably is not intended to imply that nobody that identifies as Neopagan could ever be homophobic, (or for that matter racist),[ii] it does still strongly suggest that a lack of such discriminatory views is not just common in Neopaganism, but typical of it. Even if significant degrees of homophobia were to be found in Neopaganism, whether explicit in a tradition or merely

i [Bonewits 1979]

ii If it is, I can sadly attest that he is wrong on both counts, from the example of some Neopagans I have met.

found amongst individual practitioners, such a statement by a well-known Neopagan stands, at the very least, as a firm statement of what Neopaganism should be, that we could expect to find expressed throughout Neopaganism.

Returning to the male–female polarity used in Traditional Wicca, this heterofocal aspect could be seen by some, both inside and outside, as heterosexist or outright homophobic. Gardner's fears for acts which could perhaps induce sexual feelings occurring between members of the same sex is now quite widely condemned as homophobic, even by many Traditional Wiccans. The Farrars' statement that they do not feel qualified to write about homosexuals in the Craft has also been seen my many as homophobic, (though those who prefer that people qualified by identity speak on such matters, may well have quite the opposite view), and their suggestion that two men would be unlikely to work well together as witches, even more so. Even their declaring that they had no problem with gay or Lesbian practitioners, would raise objections for the wording, "assume the rôle of their actual gender," conflating gender identity with sexual orientation.[i]

Counter to this, the emphasis on fertility is not exclusive to any other expression of sexuality in a practitioners life. The rôle of fertility as source of crops, livestock, game and children is celebrated, but this is not given as the sole context in which one may, "make music and love, all in my praise."[ii] There is perhaps, a colouring added by the much publicised decrees of Christian denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, on issues of contraception, fertility treatments and homosexuality. Their condemnation of contraception, in particular, allows for sexual intercourse, solely in a manner that is, at least theoretically, open to being part of the mechanism of fertility. Since few people in the Western world would be entirely ignorant of their position on such issues, this would create knowledge of a particular conflation of sexuality, fertility and religion, that does indeed condemn homosexuality, and which could colour assumptions about how any religion holding fertility to be important, would also view homosexuality.

Of course, the Roman Catholic Church does not generally consider itself to be a fertility cult! The manner in which it comes to value fertility is quite different from a hearty celebration of it, but rather a concession to its necessity, within an Augustine context that otherwise limits all sexual experience.

Another heterofocal aspect of Traditional Wicca, is the advantage seen in the High Priest and High Priestess being lovers or life-partners. Since that is not often possible for a gay High Priest or Lesbian High Priestess, and would seem to devalue the homosexual attractions a bisexual High Priest or High Priestess may experience, this too could be viewed as homophobic. Ultimately though, it is seen as advantageous but not as necessary, and only advantageous for quite specific reasons. It is not appropriate for all straight High Priests and High Priestesses either, (including Gardner), and has not impeded a very large number of gay, Lesbian, and bisexual people, along with straight people in monogamous relationships with people outside the Craft, from fulfilling

i [Farrar & Farrar 1984]

ii [Charge]

those rôles. That some in the Craft did see homosexuality among priests as problematic, does necessitate an examination of whether this is inherent to Traditional Wiccan practice, or depended merely upon prevalent homophobia in the wider culture. Leo Martello's account of a public disagreement, between himself and the editor of *The Wiccan* magazine, (now *Pagan Dawn*), points sharply towards the latter. While both engage the question of the gay and Lesbians being involved in a fertility cult examined, and dismissed, above, much of the commentary in *The Wiccan* is nonsensities, like stating that their contact service for seekers should not be used by homosexuals because, "we are NOT a queer's contact service [original emphasis]",[i] a statement that is clearly much more of a jeer, than of any theological position.

This advantage in working couples also being lovers, does though stand as one reason why gay or Lesbian couples may wish to work witchcraft together. While that would stand outside of much Traditional Wiccan practice, some of the advantages of working with one's lover and life-partner would still pertain to homosexual working couples. Further, while the compatibility of gay men and Lesbians working in a fertility cult has been defended above, this does not mean that some gay men and Lesbians may not personally feel to be placed outside of the mechanisms of fertility by their sexuality, (for that matter, straight people may also feel their relationship to their own sexuality does not relate much to how they perceive the cycles of fertility as operating). For this reason alone, the development of a witchcraft which does not relate to fertility as Traditional Wicca does, is perhaps inevitable. Finally, there has long been religious and mystical expressions of homosex as having its own mysteries, which would be an obvious attraction to some gay, Lesbian, and bisexual witches, along with other non-heteronormative rôles in other cultures such as that of the two-spirits and hijras.

The women-only nature of much Dianic practice, makes it an obvious basis for the development of a Lesbian stream of witchcraft, (if anything this is overstated, given that Dianics, and other Feminist witches, often find it necessary to point out that they are not a Lesbian-only tradition[ii]). Radical Fairies,[iii] and the Minoan Brotherhood,[iv] both stand as examples of traditions for gay men.

Perhaps more influential on the development of Innovative Witchcraft as a whole though, are streams which attempt to more comprehensively deal with the sexuality of both straight and gay practitioners. Feri's ecstatic nature has always enabled it to do so, and as seen above, the influence of Reclaiming on much Innovative Witchcraft has brought Feri elements into the meme-pool from which Innovative Witchcraft operates.

Feri is not a fertility cult though. Standing on its own quite separate from Wicca, it simply is what it is, and homosexual expression is not at odds with any heterofocal elements. Where people take a

i [Martello 1972b]

ii [Buckland 1986]

iii [Adler 1997]

iv [Minoan]

large Wiccan influence, along with such moves to accommodate homosexual expression, matters can get more complex.

One such attempt used rites which alter the Traditional pairing of athamé and cup, to allow for a pairing of two athamés, or two cups. To do so though, retroactively reïnterprets the original pairing, so that it is not a procreative pairing, but purely a sexual one. As well as removing much of the original symbolism, it could also lead to those traditions, including much Innovative practice, that allows only for the pairing of athamé and cup, to be misunderstood in the newly created context; a misunderstanding where it would be unfairly seen as homophobic, when it is really operating with a different meaning.

An easier way to deal with any such concerns though, is to simply downplay all sexual aspects until the potential issues no longer exist. Many Innovative publications simply omit all reference to sexuality, fertility-based or otherwise. D J Conway stands as quite remarkable in the degree to which she, not only actively moves away from any sexual aspects, but assumes that such attitudes will find many like minds. As noted above she states, "In my opinion, Gardner seems to have been obsessed with nudity, sex, and scourging, traits that may not have appeal to other Witches." Leaving aside the issue of scourging, as already examined, the two matters left are nudity and sex. Nudity is very much not highlighted in pretty much any form of Wicca or witchcraft that I have come across. To highlight nudity, one would need to place it in a context where others are dressed.[i] This is not the norm of any form of skyclad ritual, where if anything one person might be made a focus by being temporarily robed, rather than the other way around. At most, such an unbalance is rarely used in initiatory experiences. Considerations of Conway's statement about nudity can therefore, probably be folded into what her statement says about sex. It is here that we find the strangest accusation. Compared with such fertility traditions as copulating amongst growing corn, Wicca's use of sexual symbolism is relatively restrained. An accusation of obsession with something needs more justification than it merely being referenced. At most, we can detect not an obsession with sex, but merely an interest. I would suggest that such an interest is shared by the majority of people, indeed the majority of higher animals. Even if fertility aspects are abandoned, to suggest that many people would not still have an interest in sexual matters, seems to require a much greater defence. A further reflection of much the same attitude comes when she describes the well-known sexual symbolism of the besom as, "notorious."[ii]

Where does this suggestion of *notoriety* come from? While Conway may perhaps be atypically prudish amongst Innovative Witches, it seems unlikely that talk of notoriety can be merely a case of false consensus bias on her part and nothing else. Again, concern about sexual elements of

i Hence when nudity is fetishised, it is generally in a context such as, public exposure, forced nudity, nude male/clothed female, naked servants, etc., which all highlight it by putting it in an unbalanced situation. Even the most vanilla sexual representations of nudity reflect this, with stripteases involving people becoming naked, rather than being naked, and soft-pornographic nudes, of the kind found in British tabloids, capitalising on the relative rarity of nakedness in our culture.

ii [Conway 2001]

Wicca being viewed negatively, has been expressed in Wiccan writing since Gardner's, "I have been told by witches in England: 'Write and tell people we are not perverts'…." The difference is not in perceiving that there could be a problem, but in the solution found. Explaining the sexual elements of the Craft dispels some unfair accusations, as will describing policies of propriety that individual practitioners may have, such as Stewart Farrar's reportage did for Alex Sanders.[i] Apart from those who will quite simply refuse to believe what is said in any case, there is also the simple fact that even the element of sexuality that does exist in the Craft, will meet disapproval in some quarters. With sufficiently high emphasis on making the Craft acceptable, there can enter a desire to remove what sexual elements do exist.

Another motivation can exist in the fear that people may use sexual elements as a tool in seduction or coërcion. This is both a genuine concern from the inside, and a fear of how the Craft may be perceived from the outside.

From the outside, the image of the magician unscrupulously seeking to use the arts to seduce women, has been with us since before Dr. Faustus first set eyes on Gretchen. In creating a story of a malicious magic-worker, whether for propaganda, or merely as entertainment, one needs believable motives for wrong-doing, and lust has always been up there with greed and ambition as such motives go. In such manner, the motives of the likes of Faust are no different than villains from an Agatha Christie whodunit, but their means introduces an uncanny element to their crimes; while a mundane criminal may commit rape, or be motivated to murder by the consequences of their own adultery, the supernatural rapist, whether a magician like Faust or a præternatural creature like Dracula, has the ability to control their victims at the level of their own psyche, reflecting fears of lacking control in one's life to circumstance, or to unvoiced desires. The fear therefore strikes a deeper nerve.

Outside of the realm of fantasy, there have long existed cults whose leaders exercised an extreme degree of sexual control over practitioners. The 1990s saw considerable interest paid to such abuse occurring within the larger established Christian Churches, or criticism against the sexual control they maintained, in what they prevented practitioners from engaging in, rather than insisted upon. For the most part though, history has seen allegations made against new or small groups, ranging from the absurd, (the classic allegation of the orgy following the rite and feast made by the Roman authorities against Christians, and later forming a central theme in the mediæval story of the witches' Sabbath), to the clearly demonstrable; State of Utah v. Warren Steed Jeffs,[ii] being that receiving most media attention at the time of writing. This has a twin effect upon the Craft. The first, is that it colours assumptions people are wont to make in relation to any religious grouping, especially if small. The second, is that the Craft's self-perception of itself as valuing freedom, and hence as having a smaller degree of internal control, leads its practitioners to view themselves, not just as being completely removed from the cults which sporadically grab media attention, but as

i [Farrar 1971]

ii [Utah 2008]

even further removed from them, than are most other religions. The effect therefore is both on public perception of the Craft, and internal perception of what that public perception is. This cannot help but influence how both Traditional and Innovative alike, write and speak about their Craft, and hence they would inevitably preëmpt possible accusations of the Craft being used for sexual exploitation, which in turn would influence how successors were to write, and so on.

Meanwhile, Feminists in the Craft would also have had an influence. Such examples of sexism as Stokely Carmichael's statement that, "Women's position within the SNCC is on their backs,"[i] the survival of conservative gender rôles into radical politics complained of by Marge Piercy in, "In the Men's Rooms,"[ii] and the sort of gender issues within the New Left highlighted in Robin Morgan's, "Goodbye to All That,"[iii] all taught Feminists, that when it came to other movements they were involved with, they would not be able to assume freedom from sexual harassment and exploitation, but must work to ensure this was so themselves. It would have been foolish to assume that any form of Paganism would not contain much the same problems, without an active pressure to ensure it didn't.

And finally, as numbers involved in Pagan witchcraft specifically, and Neopaganism generally, grew, the chances that there would indeed be sexual predators within the community naturally increased. The self-selecting nature, all the more pronounced the wider the definitions one is using, meant that there was nothing in the way of formal sanctions to prevent such behaviour taking place. The only real weapons available to those who would ensure that it did not, is to work to establish an intolerance for such behaviour as a cultural norm within the communities, and to warn members, especially newcomers, to be on their guard for the possibility.

In such a context, even the most oblique reference to sexuality could seem inappropriate to someone developing or adapting their own practice of witchcraft, and even more so should it come to be published in a description, or in a how-to guide on how others could make use of that same practice. Statements would be made with one eye on a hypothetical hostile critic, one eye on a hypothetical potential victim of abuse, while struggling also to discourage a hypothetical reader who would indeed be inclined to take just such an opportunity to abuse. A tendency to downplay the sexual aspects of the religious rites, (and even more so the possibility of using sex-magic), would be natural, since any attempt to convey a genuine impression of the reality of the Craft must consider possible preconceptions on the part of the audience, and downplaying such aspects could indeed result in a more accurate portrayal overall.

Just how real the danger of such abuses is, is hard to say. Human nature being as it is, the idea that almost nobody has ever expressly attempted to use pagan or occult interests as a front to allow sexual conquests or worse, is pretty hard to defend. The fact that sexual relationships do develop

i His exact words were "the position of women in SNCC is prone," but most commentators seem to assume he meant "supine" rather than "prone."

ii Piercy, Marge, "In The Men's Rooms" in [Piercy 1972]

iii [Morgan 1970]

within both within the Craft, and the wider Pagan community, from brief flings to long-lasting marriages, also brings with it the risk for abuse that occurs within relationships that start consensually, and of heavy-handed attempts to form them, that happen in the wider community.

While there are some well-documented cases, the majority of claims of such instances are very much anecdotal. More than a few contain a fair degree of mocking comedy. One example from a web-based discussion group aimed at mocking aspects of Pagan culture,[i] aside from deriving humour from the incompetence of the attempt at seduction, contains several classic elements of the "foolish fluffy" story; goth sub-culture style of dress, use of the *Necronomicon* as a source, mispronunciation of *athamé*, and a naïf pretending to expertise. In this case the point is as much to condemn such folly, as any sexual misconduct, but such elements often appear in such stories; they are tales of the naïve preying on the even more naïve, rather than of cunning Svengali-like manipulators.

Does this mean that these stories are repeated or perhaps even created, purely for comic effect? It could be that such comic versions of the story are safer to repeat; we can laugh at the culprit and so reduce the fear of him. It could also reflect a moral philosophy where wrongdoing is seen as always foolish, and so the tale must demonstrate this. As such, the choice of evidence people choose to use in describing the potential for abuse, is itself coloured by a desire to downplay it.

Since works build on those works prior, this downplaying of the sexual aspects of the Craft will inevitably increase as time goes on, as later generations of writers are not just downplaying, but were introduced to witchcraft by resources which had already downplayed them. The stage is set for the uneasy descriptions of sexual symbolism in Conway, or for Ravenwolf's infamously sexist and puritan description of loss of virginity, or the physical evidence of it, as impure; "… the traditional colors for Mayday are red and white, representing the blood that flows from the woman when her purity is taken."[ii]

The development of a public face of witchcraft aimed at children and teenagers, increases the desire for a form of witchcraft without any overt expression of sexuality, neither in terms of its rôle in fertility, nor the ecstatic, nor any other.

In the meantime, while it may be pressure to be more acceptable to a wider community, that has led to sexuality being de-emphasised in representations of witchcraft, that same increase in acceptance has given witches access to areas of the media that already have their own sexual mores. Fiona Horne's *Magickal Sex: A Witches' Guide to Beds, Knobs and Broomsticks* and *Bewitch a Man: How to Find Him and Keep Him Under Your Spell*, Stella Damiana's *Sex Spells: the Magical Path to Erotic Bliss*, Stacey Demarco's *Witch in the Bedroom: Proven Sensual Magic* and LaSara Firefox's *Sexy Witch*,[iii] each take slightly different approaches to the intersection of sex

i [Peregrine 2007]

ii [Ravenwolf 1993]

iii [Horne 2002], [Horne 2006], [Damiana 2005], [Demarco 2006] & [Firefox 2006]

and witchcraft, but are all marketed rather similarly. Ironically, this may not so much be a backlash, as the filling of a vacuum; the desexualisation of Wicca has left a *tabla rasa*, onto which commercialised sex can more easily be projected.

X Churches, Incorporation and Ministries

> "I did not see why the schoolmaster should be taxed to support the priest, and not the priest the schoolmaster."
> —Henry David Thoreau, "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience"

While Traditional Wicca has no laity, its priests and priestesses do often serve ministerial rôles to fellow priests, in such regards as performing nuptial and funereal rites, as well as some performing these rôles for cowans. Innovative Witches have not only followed suit, but are probably leading the trend in this regard.

The legal implications of doing so, varies considerably from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Some jurisdictions allow people of any religion to register to be able to perform weddings, that are also recognised as state weddings, some allow for no such overlap between religious and state authority, and require all weddings to be registered separately to any religious ceremony, some jurisdictions have a state religion which has precedence over others, and some allow the ministers of the largest religions in their jurisdiction to register legal marriages, as a matter of logistical convenience.

The political implications of being allowed or denied to do so, necessarily depends on which of these cases is in effect. To not be allowed to where no other religious figure can, clearly involves no discrimination, whereas being denied this in a jurisdiction where other religious figures can, at the very least requires some further explanation from the authorities.

In serving people outside of one's coven, witches are acting in the same manner as ministers serving a laity. Just as the circumstances of solitary practitioners leads them to abandon the coven model, so too can there be a desire to go in the opposite direction, and move away from small tight groups of priests, which are at least nominally or potentially secret, towards completely adopting the model of a lay congregation being served by priests acting as ministers. If nothing else, the fact that having such a model of ministers serving a congregation is common in other religions, could suffice to make adoption of this model attractive to those familiar with them.

Such models increase the advantages, or at the very least the perceived advantages, in obtaining whatever legal status other Churches have, in a given jurisdiction. Again, difficulty in doing so could be due to an instance of discrimination. However, even in the absence of any such difficulty, or in a jurisdiction where such difficulties could arise for other reasons, obtaining legal status, (of just about any sort), for organisations, for individual officers of an organisation, or for independently-operating ministers, is seen has having political value to the Pagan community.

While the examination of Identity Politics above focused on the question of *representations* of a given group, in the sense of how it is portrayed, two other focii of Identity-based analysis are *representation*, in the sense of the community in question being able to bring its concerns to various forums, and that of recognition.

> *Recognition is at the heart of the matter.... Identity turns on the interrelated problems of self-recognition and recognition by others. Recognition is vital to any*

> *reflexivity, for example, any capacity to look at oneself, to choose one's actions and see their consequences, and to hope to make oneself something more or better than one is. This component of recognition may be the aspect of identity made most problematic by the social changes of modernity.*[i]

As such, a license to perform a wedding isn't solely of value because one can then perform a wedding, and obtaining a non-profit status for a religious organisation isn't solely of value because one need then pay less tax. It is as important, if not even more important, in first requiring recognition from the authorities in question, and then standing as evidence of such recognition, that can be used in further battles for recognition.

Books aimed at beginners will often mention US Code 26 § 501(c)(3), the provision in the US Internal Revenue Code that exempts certain non-profit organisations from federal income taxes. The practical advantage of this is, of course, related to how much federal income tax an organisation is paying, in turn related to how much income the organisation has. For a small group where there is no tithing, and costs are met without the offices of a treasurer, (for example, by people merely topping up any supplies they realise are low, or by round-robin, or pot-luck approaches), the advantage is nil. Yet beginners are being presented with such details of federal taxation of Churches, with Amber K's *Covencraft*[ii] even detailing questions her group had to deal with, in applying for 501(c)(3) status, from which one can only deduce, and expect the readers to deduce, that applying for such status is being encouraged, or at least suggested as likely to be of value.

Applying the same approach in other jurisdictions means doing so in a different context, where the value may differ. The Aquarian Tabernacle Church states that its Irish chapter, "received governmental recognition there as the first (and only) officially Wiccan/Pagan church in Ireland."[iii] While there is such a recognised organisation in Ireland, how much can a state be said to recognise a religion when its constitution states, "The State guarantees not to endow any religion,"[iv] and in particular had removed previous statements recognising particular religions:

> *44.1.2 The State recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens.*
>
> *44.1.3 The State also recognises the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland,*

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i [Calhoun 1994]

ii [K 1998]

iii [ATC]

iv Article 44.2.2 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*.

> *as well as the Jewish Congregations and the other religious denominations existing in Ireland at the date of the coming into operation of this Constitution.*[v]

In light of this, the removal of recognition of certain religions, by the Fifth Amendment, stands as an important step in bringing the Irish state to a position that is likely more comfortable for Pagans, than prior to 1972, and attempts to seek *recognition* from the state are perhaps a step backwards. American witches have sought to acquire artefacts of recognition that other religions enjoy, it does not follow that witches elsewhere should necessarily follow suit, given that the artefacts of such status will differ.

v Articles 44.1.2 & 3 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* prior to their removal by the Fifth Amendment, 1972.

XI Conclusion

"How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" —E M Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*

I was reminded very quickly into beginning this work that the word, *essay*, originally meant an attempt and came from *essayer*, "to try." The act of writing it, of trying to manage my tendency to parenthetical diversions in my thinking, (the quotes at the start of each main chapter are there originally, to give voice to some of my more irrelevant thoughts, so they would let me get back to my point), led to some surprises, and quite a different result than what I expected the attempt to bring.

Initially, I was motivated by my experience of having had some great, as well as some poor, experiences with Innovative Witchcraft, before committing to Traditional Wicca. I wanted to look back at why I, both found value in some Innovative practices, and did not in others, from my current perspective, and see if I could find anything that could be extended to something more widely applicable, than to just my own experience. To do so though, is probably not possible through any analytical approach; what is most important in any form of witchcraft, is that which cannot be explained or expressed so directly, but which at most can only be conveyed by what Joyce Carol Oates calls, "the prism of technique."[i] It needs artistry rather than exposition, and at the cost of inevitably involving more bad poetry emerging from the Pagan community, attempts at this are certainly worth making, but this is not the place for it. At the very least, it needs a more emotional approach than taken here.

Another difficulty with taking this approach to such a question, is that much Innovative Witchcraft practice is entirely intuitive in its basis; its core features do not come from, or end up in any book, or other textual resource. In some cases, such an approach can be used as an excuse to avoid study, but it also covers some particularly impressive witches. Alas, by its very nature, such a very intuitive way of working does not leave much behind in the form of textual resources, that can be examined by the sort of approach taken here, and are inevitably excluded, as unfair as that may be.

By the time I came to draft an outline, my original goal was already abandoned. The essay I then envisioned at that point, was in turn rapidly destroyed the moment I started actually writing.

One goal at that stage, that remained, was to highlight features of both trends, that may be missed when examining them together. It makes sense that, while speaking about witchcraft in the wider context of Western society, one would highlight those features that are outside of the norms of experience of post-Christian society—our worshipping a goddess as well as a god and our use of magic being two obvious examples—while examining them in relation to each other, should highlight different perspectives in either case, that will be of value to people with an interest in either, or in both. Hopefully, I have achieved that, for some readers at least.

One continual problem throughout is that in each area of consideration, my method has resulted in my considering points of contrast, which despite continual attempts to indicate otherwise, (at the

i [Oates 1992]

cost of resulting in mealy-mouthed phrasing), there is a risk of implying that those points of contrast represent the entirety of Innovative Witchcraft. Since my perspective is that of a Traditional Wiccan, the result may be less balanced than I may wish for, particularly on those points where, either my previous practice was closer to the Traditional, (and hence the other approach described is foreign to all that I have personally experienced), or even more so if I did experience the point of difference in question as an Innovative Witch, and found it unsatisfying, (and hence, while being able to claim a good position to judge its value in one way, in another I could be held to have a double bias against it). Throughout this, I have striven to avoid bias, yet whether I genuinely succeeded in this or not, (and it is impossible for me to judge my success here), the work as a whole reads to me as having a harsher view of Innovative Witchcraft than I actually hold to. Whether I should consider this to be a failure on my part, or an indication of finding something in the act of writing, or indeed if this harshness is really there at all—what reads to me as describing a difference where some forms of Innovative Witchcraft compares unfavourably to Traditional Wicca, may read to such Innovative witches as describing them more favourably in the comparison—I cannot opine on.

Another problem with this work, is a tendency to focus upon the US, all the more problematic since I have no first-hand experience of that country. To a large degree, this is appropriate; much of the trends within Innovative Witchcraft originate in the US, and were reïmported into Europe in time to have a considerable influence on European witches of my generation. Another reason though, is that the easiest manner to tell that a form of witchcraft that isn't Traditional Wiccan, has at least a degree of post-Gardnerian influence, is the very use of the word *Wicca* that prompted this work. The influence of forms of witchcraft completely outside of Wicca in England, and the interest in local traditions in the Celtic Fringe countries, including my native Ireland, mean that the word is not as much used outside of its original sense here, and hence detecting post-Gardnerian influence outside of Traditional Wicca, is not as straightforward. In all, while it is inevitable that forms of witchcraft influenced by Traditional Wicca, but outside of it, existed outside of the US for the period examined, the practice of actually identifying these streams as *Wicca*, would seem to be an American one. There is still undoubtedly much that would inform this work that could be found outside of the Americas, particularly in England.

In this final section of conclusions, I shall indulge in not attempting for objectivity, as I have done earlier, but allow my own opinions greater voice.

Identity Politics and Teens

My first surprise, is that I found myself writing more on politics that I imagined, something I have mixed feelings about as a former, (and rather ineffectual), activist, who has quite consciously abandoned explicit activism. Yet, the position of Identity Politics in how modern witchcraft is discussed, and how modern witches, particularly young people developing an interest in the Craft, view their position cannot be ignored. The important question, is whether and in what way this politics feeds back into their witchcraft. Certainly, the view exists that a motivation for "fluffies"

is, "to make a political statement,"[i] but that polarised position is not a promising source for a balanced view of just how this may operate in practice. Indeed, the very concept of fluffydom can be a way of policing an identity. Since the rejection of any concept of initiatory lineage allows for no formal means of determining who is, or is not, considered Wiccan within Innovative Witchcraft, those who are seen as claiming to be "us," but as not, or as "us," but of letting "us" down will be rejected by other means. Compare this with labels like, *Uncle Tom*, *CHuDWah*, and so on, along with some such as *Lipstick Lesbian*, that later became identities people would actively associate themselves with. The anti-fluffy concept therefore, itself fits into an Identity Politics. That it does so in a negative manner, in defining what it is against, more clearly than what it is for, has probably removed much of the impact of each individual argument made.

In looking at the portrayals that are of such great concern to the Identity Political analysis, along with generating interest even in the mainstream press, I have to conclude that there is no doubt something of real impact here, but more red herrings than insight is on offer. That one popular culture representation can be read as commenting on this very Identity Politics, makes that series seem particularly rich in subtext, and worth another view generally, but the question it raises about whether such attachment to a politicised identity can lead to a loss of authenticity, rather than a gain, aren't really answered. The safest prediction for where the teen witches of today will be, some ten years or so from now, is that some will still be engaging in some sort of Craft, and very accomplished at what they are doing, while others will indeed find that witchcraft gave them an identity they could hide themselves in, rather than find anything of true value in. Alas, stating this is little more than an exercise in spouting truisms, unless a means to determine who is likely to be which can be developed.

The question of how, if at all, adult witches can help these teen witches is also something I cannot come to any firm conclusions on. I certainly find little of much value in the resources marketed at them. Informationally, there is nothing here that is not already easily available elsewhere, and I feel pretty confident in saying, that the tone would have greatly irritated me at that age. Finally, they lack guts when it comes to anything that addresses the situations that teenagers find themselves having to cope with.

The resources teenagers provide for themselves, are much more promising in many ways. They may often read as naïve, but I am inclined suggest that it is better to give young people the opportunities for creativity; there may not be many Shelleys, Brontës, Ribauds, or Mozarts in the world, but there are enough that dismissing what teenagers may have to bring out of hand, may be unwise.

At the same time there seems to be a strong incentive to avoid stating one particular observation; teenagers' judgement sucks. Whether it's from some sort of political correctness,[ii] or an

i [Nobel Beyer 2002]

ii An ever-problematic term, but here I need not deal with the question of the value of *political correctness*, or even if it really exists, just that the concept exists in some form, and influences public behaviour of many.

understanding that young people are likely to resent such an opinion, and hence not listen to anything else one has to say, after they hear one express it, or maybe people just don't want to make their own judgements fair game for comment,[iii] this is rarely expressed outright. Yet in traditions that value wisdom and honour the Crone, is it really inappropriate, just to point out that teenagers do not, as a rule, make very good judgements? To attempt to grow in a manner appropriate for a witch, would young people not perhaps be best advised to examine the ways in which they, and their peers, tend to make judgements. Can something be done that assists them in this, while at the same time not descending to the patronising tone of existing resources?

When young people have ambitions to any other endeavour, whether vocational or avocational, that requires an ongoing commitment, and also is generally an adult pursuit, then whether they can engage in it at that time, or have to wait until an older age, there is most often quite a bit of ground work that can, or must, be done beforehand. Considering that any youths interested in the Craft, are presumably intending that they would continue with it long into their adult life, perhaps this groundwork should focus on what will aid them best in later pursuit of the Craft, than presently.

Thinking back to my own teenage years, (I did not have an interest in Wicca then, though given my range of interests at the time, it sometimes seems strange that I never did research it more), what I feel I could have done then, that would be of most benefit to my practice now, would include paying better attention to learning in foreign languages in school. This is not something to be found in any book on witchcraft, but it was something offered to me at the tax-payers expense, and with stronger adult encouragement that I would have liked at the time! Developing better ability at memorising verse, already going out of fashion in my day, but still present to some extent in the English Literature curriculum, would also have helped. Better habits regarding physical fitness would also have been of benefit, indeed I probably retain a bias against acknowledging just how much, considering how long it is since I've been to the gym.

The first thing I think of, that moves out of what was already offered by my grammar-school education, is basic meditative technique; something I did work on at the time, but not with much resolution. Another would be some sort of martial art, especially one with a concept of *chi* or similar. Even with this, the curriculum suggested here, is still some way away from anything that is making it into the teen-marketed resources on witchcraft. Similarly, if I come to think about what did stand me in stead, from that part of my life, it is not the limited occult and mystical research I engaged in at the time. Perhaps a curriculum of suggested training could be developed, that would benefit future witches in later practice, while also working well with their formal education. Such a curriculum would also be general enough to have benefits for those who no longer feel called to practice witchcraft when they get older, be relatively uncontroversial with parents, and the lack of surface sparkle may well be reassuring to some.

Moving back to politics, I was surprised at how much attention I found myself paying to WITCH, as I must admit I previously thought of them as little more than a footnote, in both witchcraft and

iii And teenagers are often annoyingly good at finding ways that adults' judgements also suck, at the best of times.

Feminist history, due to how short-lived they were. Apart from learning that Robin Morgan's influential, "Goodbye To All That," was written during the period, there are many points of similarity with future Feminist witchcraft. Many seem superficial, but they may have been very powerful in planting memes, that later grew into a Feminist use of witchcraft that took that witchcraft more seriously.

Apolitical Traditions Revisited

One criticism that is made of politicised witchcraft is their previous, and in some cases, persisting, belief in a matriarchal prehistory, and in the account of the Burning Times popularised by Matilda Joslyn Gage. Such criticism attacks both the religious and political theory, at the same time.

Both Feminists and witches have been able to absorb the changes to how academically acceptable these theories have become. Continuing belief, or at least continuing *uncritical* belief, in them, is now rare, and articles critical of them are as often found in publications explicitly favouring Feminist or Wiccan views.[i] The two combined though, seem to have a harder time absorbing such changes in scholarly opinion. Starhawk's notes to her latest addition of The Spiral Dance, notes that the death toll of the Burning Times was, "probably," much lower than the 9million cited, but falls a great deal short from accepting the latest research in this regard.

An analogy could perhaps be made, with the preference of engineers for, "loosely coupling," very separate devices, and that of marketers for integrating them tightly. If you combine several useful or desirable items together, it is easier to convince other people of their value, but if you keep everything separate, and interacting only at particular points of contact, then it is easier to fix, improve, replace or discard, any one of them, without damage to the rest of the system.

A great many Traditional Wiccans have been involved in a great many political causes, including Feminist and environmental causes, and do not seem to have the same difficulties in adapting to change of historical opinion, in either their religious or political life. It could be that perhaps, the traditional apolitical stance of the old magical orders is actually an advantage, rather than an impediment, to those who feel called to political action. An ideology that ties witchcraft to political thought could be seen as providing a single point of failure for both.

John Rowan criticised Wicca and witchcraft by arguing, "…the Craft was not designed to overthrow patriarchy, it was designed to ignore patriarchy."[ii] Politicised witches, whether Traditional, Innovative, or non-Wiccan, may feel otherwise, but perhaps his criticism points to a strength, rather than a weakness, for those who feel called to both Pagan witchcraft, and political action against patriarchy. While a religious perspective that ignores patriarchy will not entail support for such action, and mean that one cannot necessarily count upon one's coreligionists and

i To have cowans singing about the historical oppression of witches, while witches write articles on witchvox about this being both exaggerated, and unrelated to witches, must stand one of the more amusing ironies in Identity Politics.

ii [Rowan 1987]

coven siblings as comrades, nor is it in direct opposition to such politics, as many would argue many other religions are.

As such, if we accept Rowan's criticism of the Craft, there is still arguably less conflict in reconciling Feminist, or ecological politics, and other political positions besides, and Traditional Wicca, or forms of witchcraft that share its apolitical position, than in reconciling them with those religions that Feminists have criticised as perpetuating patriarchy, and radical ecologists have criticised for supporting a view of natural resources that justifies unrestrained exploitation.

Some politically motivated Innovative Witches may therefore find greater value in emulating Traditional Wicca's lack of explicit politics, than in emulating the joined-up philosophy of Starhawk or Budapest. Such an approach will never satisfy everyone for whom political, religious, and magical expression, are each important, but it may become a more common combination, as understandings of ideas that have been important to political witches change, (whether the changes come from the academy or elsewhere), and these changes must be either resisted or absorbed, in both the political and religious sphere.

The criticism of much politicised witchcraft as "fluffy," will probably be both an encouragement and impediment to such a move; an encouragement in altering the cultural landscape of Paganism, so as to be more critical of some of the views behind politicised witchcraft, but an impediment in this leading to a staunchly anti-Feminist, and a less common but still present anti-environmentalist, stream in Pagan thinking, which could create a faultline that divides Pagan culture quite sharply, and lead to a degree of polarised insularity on both sides.

The Value of Lip Service

More than once, I came to the conclusion that the reason for a piece of terminology or a practice being used in Innovative Witchcraft, is that it is seen as a "Wiccan word," or a "Wiccan thing." While to some Innovative Witches this may seem disparaging, especially if, as I have argued above that many do, they place doctrine in a position where it precedes praxis. However, I see considerable value in such artefacts; this is what tradition is, in one sense. There is also a certain regard for the poetry of such phrases, and the beauty of practices, that I feel is important. Of course, Innovative Witchcraft is also developing its own nomenclature that contains other words and expressions, such as *solitaire,* for a solitary practitioner, and *Book of Mirrors,* for a book solely for recording dreams and experiences, rather than techniques, or other knowledge acquired elsewhere. Opinions will of course differ in each case, (personally I find *solitaire* hopelessly inaccurate, in historically implying reclusiveness, but *Book of Mirrors*, I find lovely in its evocative phrasing), and some will die out while others thrive.

For Innovative Witches that wish to benefit from what is public about Traditional Wicca, perhaps what is needed is not less lip-service, like some argue in the face of activities they see as superficial, but more. Thinking of the abandonment of the scourge in much Innovative Witchcraft, I wonder if perhaps merely placing it on the altar unused, would be better than removing it

entirely. If a given practitioner sees no value in it, is it necessarily wise to prevent it from remaining part of a downline's practice?

This would still radically downplay the scourge's position, but to de-emphasise a tool has a precedent in Traditional Wicca:

> *At first I was puzzled by the absence of the Cup from the witches' working tools and the inclusion of the unimportant pentacle,….*
>
> *The answer I get is: In the burning times this was done deliberately. Any mention of the Cup led to an orgy of torture, their persecutors saying that it was a parody of the Mass; also the riding or dancing pole ('broomstick') was cut out. Censer and pentacle were substituted and explanations made to fit what their persecutors expected. If all told more or less the same story of what they were taught—because it was actually true and it agreed with the story of others—why bother to continue the torture?*[i]

How different is this to removing the cup entirely! Furthermore, such witches knew that they were deëmphasising the cup, which does not apply to someone studying their Craft from books that have either silently omitted the scourge, or explained it away as nothing more than an artefact of one man's sexual peccadilloes. The most essential difference, remains that the manner in which Gardner tells us the cup was removed from one place it could have been mentioned, potentially reduced information only to cowans, or newcomers who would be expected to learn more about it soon, whereas the manner in which so many Innovative writers have removed the scourge from the Craft, reduces information from would-be practitioners. At this point, the lack of the scourge in much Innovative Witchcraft is now a persistent legacy of those who rejected it, and it is simply not much considered, or often even known of, by those who follow in their wake.

But then, what value the scourge has for any Innovative practice will depend on that practice, and it is not my place to comment. Having done so, I may as well go on to opine that a greater attention to non-Wiccan streams of witchcraft could also perhaps benefit many. I can see Ann Finnin's *The Forge of Tubal Cain*,[ii] (mentioned first in this work when defining what I would exclude, and then ironically once more despite that), for example inspiring many that are defining their own practice.

Sexuality

The explanation of the scourge's use existing purely out of a sadomasochistic desire, is one I find hard to buy. As BDSM becomes more openly expressed in our society, I believe the argument will become harder to justify still, unless the scourge proves more popular within it than I suspect it will; scourges simply aren't terribly popular in constructing scenes. Even if a sexual interest did

i [Gardner 1954]

ii [Finnin 2008]

form a motivation as the allegation says, it doesn't suffice to explain the use of a scourge, rather than a switch or birch, or much of the way in which scourge is used; it is the cane and the birch that informed the English sadomasochism of that era. With the popularity of floggers being more recent, the closest thing to a scourge in domestic mundane use at the time, would be the martinet; very much a French implement. To persuade people that any given English gentleman of Gardner's generation, was engaging in "the English vice" has been an easy task, due to how it fitted with late 20th Century stereotypes of Victorian-era sexuality, and of BDSM itself, despite his non-institutional educational background probably insulating him from much of the alleged causes; but to accuse him of a French version of it seems to stretch plausibility too much.

There is currently a fashion of reäppraising attitudes towards the Victorian era generally, and I feel that this, combined with changes in the image of BDSM, will soon make the allegations seem not just unsupportable, but quaintly naïve.

The prudishness of Conway in particular, I honestly find quite shocking. It is rather extreme though, and perhaps it is unfair to Innovative witchcraft generally to pay her example too much attention. If we ignore her example as a misleading datum, the question of the place of sexuality in witchcraft points to large questions of just what is witchcraft meant to be, and how it should present itself.

Expectations

The first question, is perhaps the ultimate engine behind much change that happens within Innovative Witchcraft, and the one that I have the least insight into their views on. If anything, I feel I have less of an idea here, than when I began. Things would get even more confusing if I were to include traditions and trends that I deliberately excluded. In the introduction I gave some reasons for excluding some such trends, such as those who consider themselves "Wiccan" but not witches. Returning to the boundaries I drew at the time, I have to question my own motives. While I had to have some criteria for inclusion or exclusion, and stand by the restriction to forms of witchcraft, I also realise that part of my motivation was simply that I have too great a difficulty in seeing such people as even vaguely related to anything I would label *Wicca*.

Such decisions being made by other people, can perhaps be detected by what they find humorous. The first I ever heard about the Correlian Nativist Church, was from Wiccans who found them funny, yet such things as the robes, school, and organisational structure that will strike some as strange, wouldn't necessarily do so if they were a Druid order or a Christian denomination; it is the contrast with what people expect from Wicca, that causes them to find humour in the incongruity. Much the same may be true of Innovative Witches who value their view of Wicca as being free-form and spontaneous, and cannot reconcile that view with descriptions of Traditional Wicca, so similarly finding humour there.

This humour is found in incongruity, when the clash between expectation and result happens immediately, and sharply. When the disparity takes longer to surface the reäctions can be more

unpleasant. It is said that, "expectations are premeditated resentments"[i]. Of course expectations proving incorrect may merely illicit humour, as above, or indeed delight, depending on the circumstance. It is when expectations are allowed to grow or otherwise be invested in, that their being dashed can result in resentment. Differences between different forms of witchcraft, whether across Traditional/Innovative lines, or otherwise, can bring a mixture of considered criticism and debate, insight and inspiration, or merely be interesting to learn about. But someone shaken by an expectation being suddenly exploded, in whichever direction, is wont to cause resentments that could encourage, not discussion, but mere sectarianism.

Expectations can collapse on both sides simultaneously, and in different ways. I witnessed an online discussion on aspects of Wicca, which started with one person making Traditional assumptions, and arguing in terms of Wicca being a fertility cult. One respondent indignantly retorted, "since when has Wicca been a fertility cult?" To some this response seemed as absurd as, "since when has water been wet?" To others he seemed to have hit upon the *mot juste* to counter nonsense, written by someone who clearly knew nothing about Wicca! Perhaps, depending on how they viewed the idea of a "fertility cult," some even saw the opening statements as anti-Wicca. Expectations were clearly departed from on both sides, and resentment did indeed emerge in the participants' tone.

With Traditional Wicca being in the exalted position of being the elder of Innovated Witchcraft, and in many ways its progenitor, but Innovative Witchcraft being in the likewise exalted position as the larger, more visible, and more diverse, of the two, neither is ever going to be able completely ignore the other. With interaction being inevitable, such interaction can only be conducive to anything other than discord, if expectations of the other are realistic. Neither can either expect the other to fit their definition of *Wicca*, and must be prepared for surprises in just how far departures from their own practice can be, but neither can either expect the other to fit comfortable stereotypes that reflect details of those differences.

The second question of how witchcraft should present itself, seems often a point of more vocal disagreement than the core differences underneath. Apart from influencing the concern about fictional representations and reportage, it also heavily influences the view within witchcraft of anyone who allows themselves to be so reported, or makes any public statements. Any such act potentially alters the interface between the Craft and the public, but so does deliberately avoiding such publicity.

This question then becomes reified, into the question of whether paying any attention to how outsiders may view something, could place one's focus other than where it should be; that focusing on the values of outsiders removes focus from one's own values. With the only absolute position possible being that of strict isolationism, and all other positions by necessity being differences in degree, it is inevitably going to remain fraught. Underscoring all of this is the growing position of

i This saying seems popular within Alcoholics Anonymous. The source may be [Peck 2002].

the Pagan community as a market, with the potential both for increasing commercialisation and increasing suspicion of commercial motives.

Nature

After the eight Sabbats, Earth Day is probably the most mentioned date on witchvox and other forums of Wiccan discussion. That Wicca is a nature religion, seems to be treated as self-evident by many Innovative Witches.

In examining the question of whether this is true of Traditional Wicca, I eventually concluded that the very question is pretty much a red herring. One can certainly define nature religion in such a way as to include all, or almost all, Traditional Wiccans, so somebody may find it useful in a descriptive manner. Where people seek to start from *nature religion* in determining what Wicca is, or what it "should" be, then this not only repeats the act of assuming doctrine precedes praxis, that I hold to be of little value with Traditional Wicca, but also allows one to define *nature religion* as one wants. In the end, I could not only find no final answer to the question, but no value in answering it.

The W–Word

The question that started all of this work, is that around the use of the word *Wicca* by Innovative witches. At the end of it, I find myself less inclined to be tolerant of such usage, than I was before. I started this work as a Traditional Wiccan, who uses *Wicca* and *The Wicca* as they are used within its Traditions. Before that, I had been an Innovative Witch, who used the word *witch*, and preferred it over *Wiccan* in quite a few ways.[i] Yet despite this I was inclined, due to a general inclination towards taking a descriptive rather than prescriptive view of the English language generally, to consider this a valid usage, albeit not one that I would ever share.

A descriptive view of language can only go so far though. If taken to extremes it descends into meaninglessness. If the word *wicca* is to be of any use, it must mean something, and the degree of variety within post-Gardnerian practice generally, means that outside of its original usage it tends to end up meaning anything, and hence meaning nothing. Added to this, is a perception on my part that those forms of witchcraft, post-Gardnerian or otherwise, that do not use the word *Wicca* tend, ironically, to have more in common with Wicca as I understand it, than those that do.

In considering the question of when cultural borrowing crosses into cultural theft, I suggested that much of Innovative Witchcraft could be considered from a Traditional Wiccan perspective in much the same way. When considering this, I find it hard to logically argue any other way about the use of the label *Wicca* for something outside of the lineages from which it came, but nor can I say

i I can't claim too much in the way of foresight in this regard, part of my reason for avoiding *Wicca*, is that I had the mistaken belief that those using the word, considered it an unbroken continuation from the Anglo-Saxon *wiċċa*.

emotionally that I find this offensive, in the way that I do find *Witta*[i] and *Faery Wicca*[ii] offensive as an Irishman. Partly I suspect this is because it does not come on top of a prior colonial experience, but mostly for all of our increasing visibility, the Wicca are still the hidden children, and as such complaining loudly about a practice by outsiders, that is not active persecution, is perhaps not an appropriate stance.

Where I do find it problematic is in terms of the effect it has upon seekers, whether those seekers are seeking Traditional Wicca, Innovative Witchcraft, another form of witchcraft, or are unsure which they are called to, if indeed they are called to any at all. Strangely enough, I find it more disparaging to Innovative Witchcraft, (remembering that when I practised such myself, I did not use the term *Wicca*), to borrow the clothes of another practice carries an implication that it cannot stand on its own merits. This on its own would seem a strong reason not to extend the term in the manner in which it has been extended.

As a word that means anything ends up meaning nothing, and our culture does not tolerate meaningless words[iii], I do not think continually straining *Wicca* to cover an increasingly wide range of practices can continue until it becomes a metasyntactic term for people to apply definition to as they wish can, but eventually it must implode into a new, firmer, definition. Still, it seems that the word is too engrained in general usage outside of Britain and Ireland, and increasingly even there, for it to revert to its original meaning. Rather, I suspect that the term will be influenced by the existence of implicit orthodoxies I have pointed to in Innovative Witchcraft, and so it will come to be narrowed down to fit those orthodoxies, as they become strengthened by repetition and continuation. Ironically, this will likely result in the most popular definition of *Wicca* actually excluding those Traditional Wiccan practitioners who do not fit these orthodoxies. While the idea of a definition of *Wicca* that actually excludes Gardnerians, Alexandrians, Mohsians, and so on may seem absurd, perhaps the greater severance between Traditional and Innovative practices this would entail, would lead to there being less disagreement between them; we tend to have greater grudges with closer neighbours. The overlap in the definitions is a key to the source of potential confusion. As such, in being a contentious signifier it seeds contention between the identities it signifies, with each feeling they are being silenced by the other. With two definitions that are not only separate, but seen as separate by both, and understood as separate by outsiders, then neither definition would entail this silencing.

Wicca itself is not the only term that is understood differently by both groups. In looking at differences around the *Book of Shadows*, it was clear that the concepts differ considerably even

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i [McCoy 1993]

ii [Stepanich 1994] & [Stepanich 1998]

iii Consider that words coined without meaning for nonsense verse, such as *chortle* from Lewis Carol's "Jabberwocky," and *runcible* from Edward Lear's "The Owl and the Pussycat," and "The Pobble Who Has No Toes," have since acquired quite precise definitions.

though the same term is used. *Tradition*, also, has overlapping meanings between the two trends, only some of which agree with the common dictionary senses.

Even words which don't have specific meaning to either trend are often used differently. Innovative criticisms of Traditional practices often refer to them as *dogmatic*, but strictly, dogmata are only tenets and beliefs, not practices, so it is not technically possible for anyone to be dogmatic in any practice, only in their beliefs about it. With a lack of dogma valued throughout much of modern Paganism generally, this ceases to be a mere lexical pedantry, and acquires significance and the potential for emotional impact. So too differences in understanding of the terms *rede*, *initiation*, *training*, and *nature religion*, in their general senses will impact upon differences in attitudes to what they signify specifically within Pagan witchcraft. While the differences aren't solely across the line between Traditional and Innovative, they frequently are. Given the way in which language shapes assumptions and expectations these differences, especially if unacknowledged, are wont to lead to misunderstandings. As much as anything else, Traditional Wicca and Innovative Witchcraft are perhaps divided by a common language.

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