

Hecate Does Harvard: Notes on Academic Criticism of Wiccan Practice

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While working on a project on the historical reception of new religious movements, I had occasion to delve into the abundant scholarship recently produced on the subject of modern witchcraft. I was surprised to discover that, while the rationales had certainly changed, there were significant similarities in the rhetorical tenor between early-modern screeds against witchcraft and the writings of modern academics on the same subject. I was particularly struck by the severe disjuncture between the way in which contemporary witchcraft practitioners characterized themselves and the way they were characterized, or mischaracterized, by the scholars scrutinizing them. In case after case, academic critics took advantage of the ambiguity of these witches' self-descriptions and credos in order to impose false categorizations and seemingly willful misinterpretations, facilitating a series of straw-man attacks on their doctrines and culture.

These modern self-identified witches (or "Wiccans"¹) are now the object of a curious modern "witch-hunt." I say curious because while it might be expected that the customarily liberal scions of academia would be the ones leaping to the defense of an embattled minority, it is precisely these academics who are the most visible critics of modern Wiccan practitioners. The intersections of academia and religion have always been fraught with peril, but perhaps most crucially so when we are discussing a group which is already so marginalized as are Wiccans and Neo-Pagans.

That the members of a fringe religion such as Wicca should be largely ignored might be understandable — that they should be vilified is not. I became intrigued by the unusual vehemence of these attacks, and curious as to what there was about modern witchcraft which inspired a resentment so severe as to cause otherwise temperate and careful scholars to discard their objectivity in their ardor to destroy this pernicious influence. This essay arose out of my efforts to understand both the basis of this antipathy, and the ways in which the Wiccan religion relates to and conflicts with the goals of academia. It is intended as both a corrective to the heretofore

largely one-sided reception of Wicca and Wiccans by academics and educators, and as a spur to more even-handed consideration of the role of new religious movements in the lives of our students, our colleagues, the educational enterprise, and society at large.

I feel that in the interests of full disclosure, I should point out that I am not myself a practitioner of the Wiccan religion. Indeed, I find many of the claims and aims of Wiccans both epistemologically and theologically problematic (in ways which I shall discuss later in this essay). That does not change the fact, however, that most academic critiques of the movement have heretofore displayed an almost personal eagerness to dismiss Wicca on grounds which are either unsupported, insupportable, or inappropriate to their target. Such unwarranted condemnation does no one any good: not the followers of the Wiccan faith, who rightfully perceive such persecution as an injustice, and certainly not the academics, whose intellectual honesty has been thus compromised. The issue is an important one for educators of all levels, inasmuch as such critiques often become the basis for institutional attitudes. It is particularly crucial to secondary and postsecondary educators, since they are the ones most likely to encounter practitioners of Wicca and other growing new religious movements. At the very least, it ill suits the academic community to have their wide variety of views on the subject misrepresented by a disproportionately vocal minority of academics who have brought their own ideological prejudices and anxieties to their scholarship.

Some of the most recurrent criticism of Wiccans centers around their lack of knowledge about the history and traditions which underlie their own practices, perhaps an understandable critique from scholars who highly prize the knowledge which forms the basis for the proverbial “examined life.” However, the critiques of scholars often extend far beyond chiding Wiccans for their lack of antiquarian and archeological accuracy to alleging Wiccan practices as unwholesome, unproductive, or self-deceptive.

In the well-received *The Witch in History*, for example, Diane Purkiss speaks for many critics when she typifies the rituals² of modern witches as “narcissistic rites of self-contemplation,” following closely the rhetorical strategies (and, she implies, the practical uselessness) of pop-psychology.³ She claims such rituals are, “a sad comedown from the dark and powerful rage of early modern love spells,” a comment which places Purkiss in a long tradition of scholars who have sneered at the shortcomings of Wiccans’ understanding of their own self-proclaimed history.⁴ This comment and others illustrate a more pressing motive behind such criticism than the mere one-upsmanship of scholars — they display as well the over-arching concern with the intensity, “rage,” and therefore, supposedly, the sincerity with

which Wiccans approach, or fail to approach, their own religious practices. The practice of spells and rituals may be seen as a particular threat to the academic institution, situated as it seems to be in opposition to scientific, “objective” knowledge, the Baconian and Cartesian rationality which form the foundation of academia and its discourse.

Later in her critique, Purkiss acknowledges that while there is space in religion for political action, there is none for the ineffective “visualization” which pervades most Wiccan rituals — a curious criticism to bring up, since political action is not the professed aim of the Wiccans she skewers. In addition, Purkiss claims Wiccan rituals ratify myths of “female altruism,” childbearing and naturopathy which only justify “women’s exclusion from politics and society” — that is, one may be a politically effective feminist, or a Wiccan, but not both...and there is no question which side of the equation Purkiss endorses. In this Purkiss’ vision of feminism and its possibilities seems an unusually limited one, restricted to conventional political actions, and entirely dismissive of the growing body of feminist work in other fields such as art, philosophy, or history. Unfortunately, like so many of the critics of the Wiccan movement, Purkiss seems unable to differentiate her own ideological objectives from those of her subjects.

Even in what appears at first to be a somewhat more objective survey of occult practices, Marcello Truzzi claims that occult beliefs “represent not a search for a new spiritual meaning, but only a disenchantment with religious orthodoxy.”⁵ For Truzzi, the “typical” Wiccan practitioner is:

...a young high-school or college-age girl who, for a variety of reasons, self-designates herself as a witch to her peers; because her status is attractive to her friends but elicits fear in her enemies, it produces many social rewards for her. Yet this type of witch is “illegitimate” in terms of the very criteria that she herself may accept for being a witch.⁶

After thus dismissing Wiccan practitioners as inconsistent and motivated only by social pressures, Truzzi goes on to claim that such insincerity accounts for practically all interest in Wicca: “I know that most people show interest in meeting a witch for the novelty rather than for any occult enlightenment. Like astrology, witchcraft also represents a play-function for the major portion of its current popular audience.”⁷ This appraisal of the triviality of Wiccan religious practice is indicative of what has heretofore largely characterized scholarly responses to the Neo-Pagan movement, and Wicca in particular.

Perhaps like Truzzi, my experience has been that the very unorthodox nature of newer religions such as Wicca makes them more attractive to students, particularly high-school and undergraduate students who are often intent upon their newfound self-determination. However, unlike him, I recognize that this initial attraction in no way invalidates the sincerity of either the Neo-Pagan movement, nor its younger enthusiasts. On the contrary, if part of the educational enterprise is to instill in our students a desire for self-exploration, we ought to be doubly pleased if they choose to assay so difficult a task as the renegotiation of their religious beliefs, particularly if doing so illustrates the ability to consider the unconventional, as well as traditional, alternatives.

If Truzzi and other critics wish to censure the Wiccan movement for internal inconsistency or some other theological failure, then they must do so according to the same standards which they would apply to any other religion. Yet, perhaps because of its relative newness, Wicca is summarily dismissed as worthless without evidence, argument, or cause. It is true that there are significant and occasionally troubling contradictions in the Wiccan faith: how, for example, do adherents reconcile their rejection of materialism with their insistence upon the power of wands, crystals, words, and other physical phenomena to bind natural forces? But are such inconsistencies any more severe than those which plague most other religious paradigms, from the Buddhist to the Christian to the secular scientific? That is not a question which most academics have deigned to answer, intent as they are on heaping scorn upon the Wiccan movement.

At the heart of Truzzi's and Purkiss' claims is the unstated assumption held by most academic detractors of Neo-Paganism in general, and Wicca in particular, that the practices and rituals of these movements are, essentially, ineffective. Note, this criticism does not necessarily apply to the depiction of Wiccan cosmology (which is censured on entirely different grounds) but is almost universally applied to its rituals. Pivotal, Wiccan rituals differ from the prayers and masses of traditional, "mainstream" religions in their assumption that they are supposed to have actual, real-world, verifiable results. This belief stands at distinct odds with the scientific rationalism which underlies modern scholarship, and scholars (particularly of the humanistic disciplines, who have more reason to fear accusations of illogic and sympathy with mystical "nonsense") are quick to distance themselves from the portrayals of these rituals, usually, as we have seen, by deriding Wiccan practitioners.

Even nominally sympathetic studies, such as T. M. Luhrmann's *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*, distance themselves from their material by concentrating upon the "self-delusions" which practitioners must undergo in order to accept the validity of their ultimately specious faith. Luhrmann's

focus is essentially upon the way in which traditional rules of evidence are suspended or manipulated by magicians in order that they may continue viewing their practice as rational.

How to address this mischaracterization of Wiccan practice and practitioners? I say mischaracterization because such claims must disparagingly assume that Wiccans are either hopelessly unable to realize the inefficacy of their rituals, or perversely masochistic in their adherence to a faith which is doomed to disappoint them. By contrast, I propose that any study of the Wiccan phenomenon must be predicated upon the assumption that practitioners of Wiccan ritual obtain *some* profit from their practices — and that an examination of some common factors and patterns in such magical ceremonies is a useful way to discover just what advantages Wiccans are seeking and, presumably to some degree, attaining.

As previously stated, a large component of Wiccan cosmology and history is the belief in a tie to stone-age antecedents. Wiccan rituals are therefore peppered with appeals to the great age of their tradition. For example, Zsuzsanna Budapest in her influential *Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* invokes her magical circle with an invitation to the Goddess to “Come and be witness at our rite as we perform it according to ancient laws!”⁸ Budapest is also of the sub-type of Wiccan sometimes referred to as “traditional,” inasmuch as she claims that her own rituals are hereditarily obtained from her mother, and through her, an unbroken line of witches extending backwards through history.⁹ Along with such explicit declarations of antiquity, her ceremonies are, like most Wiccan rituals, saturated with references to classical mythology from a variety of cultures — the Goddess is invoked as “Ea, Astarte, Aurora....Esmeralda, Vesta, Heartha....Aphrodite, Marianne, Themis, Tiamat...Demeter, Persephone, Kore, Ceres!”¹⁰ The extraordinarily influential work of modern witch “Starhawk”¹¹ is similarly charged: following a “Sumerian Chant” (for which no citation is given), Starhawk invokes “Isis Astarte Ishtar Aradia Diana Cybele” in a supplication to the Goddess.¹²

Such appeals are by no means unique to Wicca. Indeed, this aspect of Wiccan ritual is one of the most common threads among all religious practices, an appeal to antiquity and continuity which validates the religious experience for the participant. There is a sense that a religion which purports to invoke timeless “eternal” essences and forces must itself be relatively ancient if it is to be taken seriously. However, this appeal has special significance to the Wiccan movement, faced as it has been with such daunting persecution on the grounds of its very youthfulness. It is an issue central to Wiccan self-perceptions, and largely predicated upon the controversy surrounding the claims of one of the fathers of the Wiccan movement, Gerald Gardner.

Gardner's work (first published in 1954) is some of the most influential material in the canon of a religion which strongly resists canonicity. His *Witchcraft Today* and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* revolve around religious syncretism and, most centrally, an ancient tradition of Goddess worship which he claims has persisted through the ages, despite endless persecution (this latter an idea he appropriated from several sources). Although a peculiar majority of Wiccan Web-sites and books fail to acknowledge Gardner explicitly, there is little doubt among scholars that he essentially created (or re-created (or re-discovered)) Wiccan cosmology and practice in all of its fundamentals and most of its particulars. Gardner's claim to pre-eminence is not universally acknowledged, and there are those among scholars and Wiccans, such as T. M. Luhrmann, who claim that the most important tenets of Wiccan ritual were laid out in the nineteenth century by the various Hermetical and Masonic occult societies, such as the Order of the Golden Dawn. This claim is, in turn, disputed by "traditional" witches such as Budapest, who claim ancestral authority behind their "ancient" practices.

I do not mean to suggest that such pretensions to antiquity must be accepted at face value. The majority of such claims by Wiccan practitioners consist of unverifiable speculation at best (and complete fabrication more often than not). Yet what both scholars such as Purkiss *and* Wiccans such as Budapest fail to acknowledge is the degree to which the Wiccan movement has evolved beyond its earlier concern with "verifiable" antiquity. Margot Adler, interviewing a modern witch on the issue of antiquity asks "How much of the craft is really ancient," and receives the reply "I don't think it matters."¹³ While many practitioners continue to utilize ancient names and mythological constructs when performing rituals, an increasing number of Wiccans admit that their rituals are largely self-authored. Starhawk, for example, describes an equinox ritual undertaken in 1978: "Alan, aided by Guidot and Paul, cast the circle, using beautiful invocations, which I think he improvised on the spot."¹⁴ While describing the principles of correspondence which underlie much of her sympathetic magic, Starhawk admits "...the most powerful spells are often improvised, out of materials that feel right or that simply happen to come to hand."¹⁵ This is a far cry from the charge that Wiccans practice "according to ancient laws" which Budapest demands, and it demonstrates the degree to which Wiccan spellcasting has become less a matter of involvement with ancient traditions, and more an outlet for creativity.

It is this appeal to the creative which Loretta Orion believes to be at the heart of Neo-Pagan rituals, particularly Wiccan ceremonies. "*The Book of Shadows* prescribes a ritual for creating sacred space, 'a fit abode for the

gods to enter in;’ however, I have seen that there is an unstated purpose: creation of a sacred *work space*. In fact, the basic ritual serves as a template for the creative process...”¹⁶ Orion goes on to describe her initiation into a Wiccan coven which demanded of her no knowledge of ritual, history, or occult concepts, merely the display of her artistic talents: “...my artworks served as proof of my aptitude for the craft of witchcraft.”¹⁷ Wiccan rituals, like the Catholic Mass, often involve a surfeit of theatrical elements: props, costumes, staging, scripted dialogue and monologue, dances, and music are common. Unlike the Catholic Mass, however, most of the physical properties are created by the celebrants, and the words of the rituals, their dances and music, are likewise the artistic expressions of the coven members.¹⁸ As Starhawk puts it, “Ritual is partly a matter of performance, of theater.”¹⁹ Witchcraft’s identity as a *craft* is an important part of its allure, and, Orion suggests, accounts for the high percentage of artists in the Wiccan community.²⁰

In addition to providing an opportunity for creative expression, Wiccan rituals are uniquely self-empowering in their rhetoric. Celebrants often associate themselves with natural forces which are seen as powerful, majestic, or immutable:

I am the rush of the waves upon the sea, and the fury of
untamed wind.
I am the power of the earth, and the fires of the stars.
I am the sharpened sword, and the branching oak.
I am the spirit of the wild. I am all things.²¹

By identifying such powerful imagery with the self, the Wiccan gains both a sense of continuity with, and mastery over, the natural world (embodied in the invocation of the four elements: “sea,” “wind,” “earth,” and “fire”).

Skeptics in academia regularly claim that Wiccan identification of the self with powerful supernatural forces is mere self-aggrandizement in the face of the natural adversity of the human condition. According to such critics, occult believers are simply in need of “something to help them cope.”²² More damning still is the contention that occult practices, in their insistence upon the interrelationship between the spiritual and the material world, are “a sort of quasi-religious justification for ‘yuppiedom’ — how to make money and feel ‘really great’ about it at the same time.”²³ Such egotistical, materialistic justifications are precisely the sort of fuzzy pop-psychology criticized so viciously by Purkiss.

But are such mental re-imaginings of the self so inadequate and distracting from true political action and effect as Purkiss contends? Most

Wiccan ritual magic consists (at least in part) of visualization exercises which are intended to depict the transfer of supernatural energy from the cosmos, through the practitioner, into some desired target. That is, the visualizations of ritual magic are indeed intended to alter self-perception, but in a manner that is consistent with consequent action. Magic is seen as an active process of involvement with the community and the external universe at large, and there is a great amount of stress on the *consequences* of magical activity. This attention to the dynamic, effectual nature of magic is precisely opposed to Purkiss' and other academics' accusations of ineffectual "narcissism."

Yes, the theme of self-determination is a constant in many rituals, and in general there is a rejection of the notion of external cause, or providence, and an emphasis upon personal power, self-reliance, and self-responsibility. The personal pronoun "I" seems to occur to a much greater extent than it does in other religious rites, as one might expect in a religion so focused upon personal fulfillment. Yet this self-indulgence is by no means untempered by an attention to consequences in the external world (both mundane and transcendent). While Wiccan magic is widely variant, one of the few recurrent rules is the so-called "threefold law," which states that whatever magic is invoked during a spell revisits the caster three times over.²⁴ A healing spell heals the caster more than the nominal recipient, and a curse visits thrice as much misery upon the caster as its target, severely modifying the extent to which selfish aims can be considered effective grounds for spellcasting.

The "threefold law" is informed by the other widespread notion commonly referred to as the "Wiccan Rede:" "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. Love is the Law, love under will."²⁵ This modification of Aleister Crowley's egocentric philosophy underlies the magical principle of enlightened self-interest which typifies Wiccan politics as they are expressed in ritual. As Starhawk states, unlike many religions, Wicca encourages practitioners to indulge in some degree of selfishness, both as an expression of natural human desire and as a refutation of gnosticism: "In Witchcraft we do not fight self-interest; we follow it, but with an awareness that transmutes it into something sacred."²⁶

It is also important to note that this self-indulgent aspect of Wiccan practice is balanced by another motif common to many religions, the importance of community. Wiccan practitioners, it has been noted, are often social misfits, and it is in Wiccan practice that many of them may find their first initiation into a nurturing, non-judgmental fellowship.²⁷ "The coven structure makes it possible for rabid individualists to experience a deep sense of community without losing their independence of spirit."²⁸ It may be that the

position of Wicca as a fringe religion induces a subsequently higher degree of supportiveness between practitioners who feel persecuted by society. Starhawk suggests that the structure of Wicca itself, in which small bands of equals are the defining unit, may bring about this communal feeling: "The coven is a Witch's support group, consciousness-raising group, psychic study center, clergy-training program, College of Mysteries, surrogate clan, and religious congregation all rolled into one."²⁹ This "deep sense of community" is constantly reinforced during ceremonies, which generally open with ritual greetings ("merry meet") and close with ritual dismissals ("blessed be"). More importantly, the rhetoric of the working magical group is often one of merging identities during 'work.'

This appeal to community has an extended consequence which I have already noted. In addition to recognizing local community, Wiccans often involve the rhetoric of a global community in their rituals, and, as the invocation of the goddesses demonstrates, there is also a definite appeal to multiculturalism. One Web-site devoted to healing rituals lists appropriate incarnations for the Goddess derived from at least twenty different cultures.³⁰ These Goddesses are not perceived as corresponding to different religions, but are instead supposedly manifestations of the one true Goddess who transcends cultural and historical barriers. When Starhawk writes that "A historical and/or cross-cultural overview of the Goddess and her symbols would itself require several volumes," she is making the critical assumption that all aspects of the Goddess *are* merely aspects of a single tradition.³¹ This could be interpreted as an extension of the religious and cultural syncretism which characterized Gardner's early work, but it is also an important and attractive political statement for modern practitioners.

Wicca is often undertaken as a political exercise, and does not seem to betray the ideological incongruity which Purkiss claims (which accusations, I suspect, reveal more about Purkiss' desire for a particular brand of feminist polemic than any inconsistency on the part of Wiccans). Certainly Wicca performs a political function in its very presentation of an alternative to traditional religions, which are often harshly characterized by Neo-Pagans as stultifying, judgmental, and even genocidal.³² Some Wiccan practitioners make the political side of their faith even more explicit. Budapest, for example, explicitly identifies her Wicca as part of the "feminist-spirituality" movement. As such, Budapest includes chapters on "Women's Festivals," "Politics of Women's Religions," and "Herstory." The work of Mary Daly might also be germane to this consideration, as she portrays Wicca and feminism as inextricably bound together through patterns of language. For Daly, language itself is a form of spellcasting, and can be used for revolutionary purposes to overthrow the dominant patriarchy.³³ In addition

to the anti-Christian and feminist agendas, Wiccan rituals often include implicit and explicit appeals for ecological sensitivity and concerns.³⁴

This is, ultimately, the basis of spellcasting, and the element that distinguishes Wiccan ritual from that of so many other religious traditions: it *is* intended to achieve *practical* results. Internet sites boast of healings, telepathic communications, and clairvoyance achieved through spells, and similar achievements.³⁵ Budapest (with her typical appeal to feminism) advances a spell meant to eradicate rapists (who represent to her the ultimate extension of patriarchal oppression): “This spell has good feedback. Several wimmin [sic] have performed it and the rapists were caught and put in jail; one died. Take your pick.”³⁶ Starhawk provides spells to gain wealth, to gain love, and to heal, as well as a variety of psychologically manipulative spells. She goes on to defend the necessity of practical spellcasting in Wiccan practice:

Many people who are attracted to the spiritual path of Witchcraft find themselves uneasy with the idea of using magic for practical ends or towards material goals. Somehow it seems wrong to work for oneself, to want things and to get things. But this attitude is a holdover of the world view that sees spirit and matter as separate and that identifies matter with evil and corruption. In Witchcraft, the flesh and the material world are not sundered from the Goddess; they are the manifestation of the divine.³⁷

Wiccan spellcasting, then, is meant to achieve practical results on the order of wish fulfillment, a very different aim from the philosophies of resignation from the material world which underlie mainstream religions such as Christianity or Buddhism. Both the psychologically intensive visualization exercises and these “practical” magics are intended to break down the division between internal desire or self-imagining and the external, “real” world. This is a particularly attractive goal to practitioners who live in our uncertain *fin-de-siecle* era, and it is no coincidence that Wicca has so much in common with the magical practices of the end of the previous century.

This aspect of wish-fulfillment may also explain the appeal of Wicca (and other Neo-Pagan sects) to readers of science-fiction and fantasy literature, as well as to members of the Society for Creative Anachronism, devotees of role-playing games such as Dungeons-and-Dragons, and other “escapist” recreational groups.³⁸ Ringel also notes the frequency and insistence with which many Neo-Pagans adopt self-created personas as part of their religious practice (“Starhawk” for example). This in turn suggests

that the imagery of re-birth which is so central to Wiccan ritual may denote the desires of participants to similarly re-create themselves, discarding parts of their personae which they deem unsatisfactory or “inauthentic.” All of these practices represent an escape from this sometimes unsatisfactory world into another, which is more self-determined, or which at least contains the potential for self-determination. This romanticism is supported by Graham Harvey’s suggestion that Wicca and Neo-Paganism owe a large debt to the fantasy and science-fiction genres, not merely in terms of parallel cosmologies and ideological stances, but for entire rites and religious schisms.³⁹

Of course, such associations might be read as supportive the contentions of Purkiss and other academic critics that Wicca is essentially an escapist fantasy, divorced from political and material truths and thus ineffective, or even injurious to its adherents. However, the work of Mary Daly and Zsuzsanna Budapest display the degree to which Wiccans are eminently aware of political realities, and undertake their work as a response to perceived oppression. If “dark and powerful rage” is the measure of sincerity, as Purkiss implies, then she has little cause to fault Budapest, Daly, or any of their feminist Wiccan associates. And even the “milder” forms of Wiccan practice, those which focus on visualization, self-determination and self-imagination, are almost universally seen as the precursors to real-world changes, both personal and political. In effect, in terms of the abnegation of personal responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions, Wicca may be the *least* guilty of modern religions, and the one *least* deserving of the censure of the academic left.

What does all of this mean to educators? Certainly we must remain attentive to the need for tolerance in our responses to unconventional religious choices, as well as more familiar spiritual traditions. Indeed, perhaps the more unorthodox, the more careful we must be not to let our cultural and ideological preconceptions intrude upon our consideration of religious issues. As Truzzi and Luhrmann suggest, and as my own experiences bear out, the very novelty of new religious movements such as Wicca make them attractive to students who are often in the process of redefining their most central paradigms. Therefore, as educators, the likelihood that we will encounter converts to unconventional philosophies is disproportionately great, and it behooves us to treat their religion as cautiously and objectively as we would any similar paradigmatic shift. If the rhetoric of pluralism and diversity has made any inroad into Western academia, then it certainly suggests that we must respond to the Wiccan movement, like any other religion, with respectful attention, and sincere encouragement that students apply their own burgeoning critical skills to all aspects of their self-development.

Yet, by the same token, the academic reception of Wicca may provide a painful indicator of just how uncertain some academics are about the prominence of the Baconian and Cartesian models of critical thought which form the foundation of academia. If the Wiccan religion is as foolish as its detractors claim, then why are its converts unable to recognize its inconsistency and ineffectiveness? Perhaps such critics are betraying the fear that, despite Western education's pervasive emphasis on critical thinking skills, students (and society at large) remain unable to apply those analytical abilities to the most central elements of their own lives. Whether such a charge is true or not is not a question which can be answered until more serious consideration is given to all religious movements, rather than merely those with the political and historical authority to avoid unwarranted attacks from the ranks of academia.

Notes

1. A number of sources (Luhmann & Orion, for example) point out the term 'Wiccan' is by no means universally adopted or acknowledged by modern witchcraft practitioners, who occasionally associate the term with the rather formalized tradition originated (or rediscovered) by Gerald Gardner in the 1950's. However, for convenience I shall refer to "Wicca" and "Wiccans" throughout this essay as though the terms described a rather more monolithic tradition than actually exists. I distinguish the term "Wiccan" from "Neo-Pagan," which I use as Orion does to denote the multiplicity of counter-traditional, post-Christian traditions of which Wicca is a particular branch.
2. Throughout this paper I use the word "rituals" to denote my particular concern with the regular ceremonial *practices* of Wiccan practitioners, as opposed to their cosmological *beliefs* or dogma, which are outside the scope of this essay. "Rituals" refers to both "high magic" which constitutes worship services and "low magic" which denotes the casting of "practical" spells intended to benefit the caster in the mundane sphere. I occasionally substitute the term "spellcasting" for the latter practice.
3. Purkiss, D. *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representations*. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 45.
4. Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 47.
5. Truzzi makes this statement referring to Satanism, particularly of the brand practiced by members of Anton La Vey's Church of Satan. However, despite occasional disclaimers, Truzzi largely conflates witchcraft with Satanism by association, a relationship almost entirely repudiated by latter-day Wiccans. Throughout, Truzzi's opinions of the sincerity and legitimacy

of Wiccan practitioners are thoroughly dismissive, as illustrated by the quotation from page 25. Truzzi, M. "The Occult Revival as Popular Culture: Some Random Observations on the Old and the Nouveau Witch," *The Sociological Quarterly* 13 (Winter 1972):28.

6. Truzzi, M. "The Occult Revival as Popular Culture," 25.

7. Ibid., 26.

8. Budapest, Z. *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*. (Oakland, California: Susan B. Anthony Coven, 1982), 27.

9. Ibid., 7, 131.

10. Ibid., 27.

11. Those few elements of Wiccan tradition which are not directly traceable to Gerald Gardner are usually attributable to Starhawk's best-selling *The Spiral Dance* and the author's other texts on Neo-Pagan spiritualism. Although Starhawk's work is, like Budapest's, self-identified as part of the "feminist spirituality" movement, its cosmology is lifted wholesale from Gardner's depiction of a primeval Goddess and her Horned God consort — although Gardner himself is disingenuously relegated to only two references, both minor. More significantly, Starhawk's work represents the Wicca as a division of the New Age movement: most of the spells in the book are visualization exercises, and, as Purkiss notes, intent on addressing the practitioner's state-of-mind as much as the external world. However, this very immediacy and "personalize-able" quality has made Starhawk easily the most cited source in the Wiccan community, based upon web-site reading lists, and it is her brand of Wicca which is essentially described in many of the studies of Neo-Paganism.

12. Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, 10th ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 101.

13. Adler, M. *Drawing Down the Moon*. rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 144.

14. Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance*, 52.

15. Ibid., 124.

16. Orion, L. *Never Again the Burning Times/Paganism Revived*. (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1995), 29.

17. Ibid., 30.

18. Ibid., 121-2.

19. Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance*, 62.

20. Orion, *Never Again the Burning Times*, 66, 69.

21. This particular invocation is from a healing ritual written by Dustin Crewell in 1996, obtained from the author's Web-site, <<http://www.rpi.edu/~crewed/aow/ceremony.html>>. The Web is a hotbed of Neo-Pagan activity, and several sub-networks and web-rings exist to support the Neo-Pagan com-

munity. Participants trade rituals, discuss doctrine, offer reading lists, publish schedules of coven activities, and, in general, undertake all of the community-maintaining functions undertaken by traditional churches.

22. MacDonald, W. L. "The Popularity of Paranormal Experiences in the United States," *Journal of American Culture* 17:3 (Fall 1994): 35.

23. Grimmer, M. R. "Searching for Security in the Mystical: The Function of Paranormal Beliefs," *Skeptical Inquirer* 16:2 (1992): 173.

24. Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 112. Orion, *Never Again the Burning Times*, 34.

25. Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 140.

26. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 124.

27. Harvey, G. *Contemporary Paganism Listening People, Speaking Earth*. (Washington Square, New York: New York University Press, 1997), 96.

28. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 49.

29. *Ibid.*, 49.

30. <<http://open-sesame.com/healing.html>>

31. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 91.

32. *Ibid.*, 19-21.

33. Daly, M. *Webster's First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*. (San Francisco, California: Harper Collins, 1987), 13-8.

34. Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism*, 126-41.

35. Graham Harvey has forwarded the intriguing notion that, for some Neo-Pagan practitioners, involvement in the communities of the Internet and World-Wide-Web may itself constitute a religious experience. By surfing through Web-sites "technoshamans" achieve a mystical state of unity with other users and, presumably, some form of global consciousness (122-4). This strategy is by no means adopted by all Neo-Pagans, much less all Wiccans, but may go somewhere in explaining the extensive and enthusiastic advocacy of the Web by Neo-Pagans.

36. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 63-4.

37. *Ibid.*, 124.

38. Ringel, F. "New England Neo-Pagans: Medievalism, Fantasy, Religion," *Journal of American Culture* 17:3 (Fall 1994): 65-8. Luhrmann, T. M. *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft/ Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989): 106-7.

39. Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism*, 182-6.