

THE ORIGINS OF
MODERN WICCA

By

KRISTA R. SCHNEE

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Southwestern Oklahoma State University

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Thesis Approved:

Joseph F. Byrnes

Thesis Adviser

Lisa A. Feltman

Elizabeth J. Gubel

Timothy A. Pettit

Dean of the Graduate College

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over a decade ago, Margot Adler wrote that "the women's spirituality movement is now so large and indefinable that it is like an ocean whose waves push against all shores."¹ Part of this growing movement, Wicca is the name given by its practitioners to the religion of witchcraft. Within this community, the term "witchcraft" is used in a special sense to mean a pagan mystery religion and nature religion which worships a goddess and god and is open to both men and women.²

These modern witches of the British Isles and the United States have found the origins for their everyday belief in pre-Christian sources, European folklore, and mythology. Considering themselves priests and priestesses of an ancient European nature religion, they look to the past for their pantheons of gods and goddesses. While the names of their deities may vary, Wiccans primarily worship a goddess who is related to the ancient Mother Goddess in her three aspects of Maiden, Mother, and Crone. Some

¹ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 227.

² Vivianne Crowley, "Wicca as Nature Religion," in *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World*, ed. Joanne Pearson, Richard H. Roberts, and Geoffrey Samuel, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), n. 170.

also worship a god, who is related to the ancient Horned God, at various times the lord of the animals, the god of the hunt, the god of death, and the lord of the forests.³

Many witches believe that the term, Wicca, actually derives from the Indo-European roots “wic” and “weik,” meaning to bend or to turn.⁴ Accordingly, a witch would be a person skilled in the use of magic to shape reality according to his or her will. Such magical work requires psychic development and training in magical work.; these disciplines not only train the will but also allow communion with the deities. As a part of their practice of magic, Wiccans also believe in reincarnation and a world-view that incorporates unseen forces that manipulate human lives but can also be manipulated by trained humans like the witch.⁵

Like most other magical traditions in history, Wiccans hold to a code of secrecy, or perhaps privacy. Coven structures and rituals remain private, if not exactly secret, since the publication of much material by leaders in the various traditions. Such leadership, however, does not imply a bureaucracy, as in other religions. There are no central registries for covens, and many covens are still only known to their members alone. Any general estimate of the number of Wiccans in England and America is therefore suspect.⁶ In fact, Susan Roberts, in *Witchcraft, U.S.A.*, states: “Witches don’t know how many of them there are—much less where they are.”⁷ Even with the introduction of internet networking and e-mail lists, statistical estimates of Wiccans produce only a rounded view of modern witchcraft, thus allowing the witches to retain much privacy in their rituals.

³ Melton, J. Gordon, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 6th ed. (London: Gale Research, 1999), p. 167.

⁴ Adler, p. 11.

⁵ Melton, p. 167.

⁶ Adler, p. 107.

Still, there have been attempts, especially among those studying witchcraft in the United States, to create order out of this secrecy. For example, the witch Sybil Leek estimated that there were "several thousand covens in the United States" in 1971.⁸ Marcello Truzzi, a sociologist, has given a lower number, three hundred.⁹ However, Leo Martello, the leader of the Witches International Craft Associates (W.I.C.A.) and follower of the Sicilian Strega tradition, told Adler in 1977 that the number could be as many as thirty thousand. Aidan Kelly, a founder of the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn (NROOGD) and historian of witchcraft, alone has stated that he is personally familiar with at least one hundred covens in the United States.¹⁰ Compiled during the 1990s, Kelly's database of covens, groves, periodicals, and High Priestesses reaches eight hundred entries. Based on his study of the San Francisco Bay area, though, he has estimated that there are at least 3,000 covens in America, and 300,000 practicing neo-pagans. These numbers seem to be confirmed by other statistics, such as the sale of certain occult books; Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon* and Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* had each sold about 50,000 copies by the end of 1985. Kelly goes on to give the total annual attendance at local festivals as between 2,500 and 10,000, leaving a possible total of coven members as 3,333. Factoring in the friends, students, and non-initiates of these witches, he again comes to a possible total of neo-pagans as somewhere between 83,000 and 333,000, depending on how closely one defines Wicca and neo-paganism.¹¹

⁷ Susan Roberts, *Witchcraft, U.S.A.* (New York: Dell, 1971), p. 17; quoted in Adler, p. 107.

⁸ Sybil Leek, *The Complete Art of Witchcraft* (New York: New American Library, 1973), p. 15.

⁹ Marcello Truzzi, "Toward a Sociology of the Occult: Notes on Modern Witchcraft," in *Religious Movements in Contemporary America*, ed. Irving Zaretsky and Mark Leone (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 637; quoted in Adler, p. 107.

¹⁰ Adler, p. 107.

¹¹ Kelly, Aidan A., "An Update on Neopagan Witchcraft in America," in *Perspectives on the New Age*, ed. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), pp. 140-1.

J. Gordon Melton has expanded these more general statistics regarding Wicca in the United States, giving numbers for the membership in each witchcraft tradition as well. While many witchcraft traditions exist—or have quickly reached a defunct status—there are certain traditions and groups whose membership and influence have become strong within neo-pagan circles. Of these groups, there are an estimated 35,000 of these various traditions in the United States; however, there are many more solitary or eclectic witches who do not belong to any organized group or coven or do not follow a certain witchcraft tradition.

Gerald Gardner, a man who did more than any other individual to revive modern witchcraft, publicly came forward as a witch in England after the repeal of the Witchcraft Law in 1951. He composed a book of rituals with the aid of a few others, including Doreen Valiente; these rituals became the source of most rituals used by both witches and neo-pagans. Several members of his British covens revised these rituals to form new witchcraft traditions, such as Alexandrian Wicca. However, the single largest group of Wiccans are those who continue to use those rituals devised by Gardner in the 1960s. Brought to America by members of his English covens during the 1960s, Gardnerian Wicca retains a membership of an estimated several hundred people; however, many more witches not associated with a Gardnerian coven still consider themselves Gardnerian.¹² Alexandrian Wicca, established in the 1960s by the English Alexander Sanders, claims only a few remaining covens here in the United States, and those numbers are decreasing. The majority of his teachings, though, are carried on by the followers of Stewart and Janet Farrar, whose rituals are based in Alexandrian Wicca with a few innovations of their own. Rather than become a distinct tradition, the work of the

Farrars has generally been absorbed by neo-paganism and witchcraft, becoming just another source for ritual.¹³

One of the newer traditions in witchcraft, Dianic Wicca has recently become a powerful source of inspiration for witches in the United States and England. These covens place a strong emphasis on feminism and witchcraft as “wimmin’s” religion. Most Wiccans, of course, recognize the work of Gardner and his role in modern witchcraft, Dianics claim an independent tradition, that based in the worship of the ancient Greek goddess, Diana, from Central Europe. According to Dianic beliefs, this worship of the goddess in a primeval past coincided with a period of peace that was destroyed by the rise of patriarchy. This feminist witchcraft emerged in the United States in 1971 through the work of leaders like Zsuzsanna Budapest, the founder of the Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, and Starhawk, the leader of the Compost Coven and the Reclaiming Tradition of witchcraft. United only in their feminist perspective, Dianic Wicca claims an estimated 20,000 followers in the United States.¹⁴

Regarding the number of pagans in Britain, Anthony Kemp points to a questionnaire, or *The Occult Census*, produced in 1989. The survey originated in the Reachout campaign, an attempt to contradict the supposed connection between witchcraft and child abuse, which has later proved untrue. Chris Bray, the owner of a famous retail and mail order occult supply business in Leeds, *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, distributed the questionnaires through organizations, groups, magazines, and individuals. After examining the results, he came up with a total of 250,000 practicing occultists in Britain. Almost seventy percent of this number, or 200,000, stated that they were witches or

¹² Melton, pp. 818-19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 803.

pagans. The current number would likely be much higher.¹⁵ The spread of Wiccan materials, along with the increasing acceptance of occult and New Age beliefs, would account for the ever upward increase of pagans in the British Isles. Indeed, “coming out of the Broom Closet” has recently become a common occurrence.

Such general statistics tell one very little about witchcraft itself, other than that it is a modern religion with many adherents. One must eventually depart from this base, though, and study the witches themselves, their teachers, and their beliefs. Throughout this work, one will find an expanded understanding of the traditional, rational understanding of magic, one that applies to the views and beliefs of the twentieth-century witch. This larger understanding of magic reveals the fact that modern witches have retained many of the ideas of Western occultism—such as the principles of correspondence and polarity—even as they have adapted these rituals according to their own personal and cultural needs. Due to the often personal views of these witches regarding the nature of witchcraft and magic, the writer has followed their own individual definitions of concepts like “magic,” “witchcraft,” and “occultism,” and used them accordingly.

Chapter II, “The Scholarly Study of Magic and Witchcraft,” provides the reader with a brief overview of the contemporary sociological research on modern Wicca and a historiography of the pertinent literature. In Chapter III, “The Public Creation of the Modern Craft: The Beginnings of Wicca with Gardner and Valiente,” one will see how Gerald Gardner and his followers established a religion based in the historical texts of Western magic while still allowing for creative interpretation and innovation. Chapter

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 815.

¹⁵ Anthony Kemp, *Witchcraft and Paganism Today* (London: Brockhampton Press, 1993), p. 132.

IV, "The Expansion of Wicca: Pickingill, Leek, Cochrane, and Sanders," examines the contributions of these witches and shows how they each adapted Gardner's research and rituals to their own personal desires and the needs of the time. Finally, in Chapter V, "Political Witchcraft in England and America: A New Identity for Modern Feminists," one will see how this tradition of creative innovation was carried to its furthest extent among the counterculture, who rejected formal ritual and hierarchy in favor of a more inclusive spirituality.

CHAPTER II

THE SCHOLARLY STUDY OF MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

Social scientists have looked to the liturgical practices and witchcraft of the past in an attempt to understand the nature of the witch and his or her relation to the larger culture. However, they have also looked to the structures and tensions of contemporary society.

Contemporary Research

Tanya Luhrmann, a contemporary anthropologist at the University of Chicago, studying a neo-pagan movement in England, discovered that "Magicians are ordinary, well-educated, usually middle-class people. They are not psychotically deluded, and they are not driven to practice by socio-economic desperation."¹ Luhrmann wanted to understand the role of magic in contemporary society:

I became interested in modern magic because these particular people seemed to pose difficulties for the standard interpretations of magic. Modern magicians are sophisticated, educated people. They know of a way of explaining nature--science--which has been remarkably successful in its explanation and remarkably antagonistic towards ritualistic magic. They do not come from a background which accepts magic easily and their rites are novel creations; their magic cannot be explained as some burden of the past. They are clearly equipped with the mental equipment to think non-magically.²

In *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, Luhrmann seeks to trace the manner in which magical ideas go from being odd to being accepted.

¹ Luhrmann, p. 7.

She treats magical ritual as part of an interpretive process which acts to both foster and clarify changes in individual experience, rather than as a series of separate, goal-driven acts. The attraction exists, she says, "They find magic fascinating . . . In some manner, the themes and concepts of the practice speak to them. Something in their personal makeup draws them to the practice, though different desires motivate different individuals."³

Margot Adler, a reporter for National Public Radio, explains the attraction to a "religion without converts" from personal experience, "Like most Neo-Pagans, I never converted in the accepted sense--I never adopted any new beliefs. I simply accepted, reaffirmed, and extended a very old experience. I allowed certain kinds of feelings and ways of being back into my life."⁴ In a religion without dogma and proselytizing, novice Pagans generally proclaim, "I've come home."⁵

In her research on witches in England and America, Adler found that most groups were very diverse in class and ethnic background. Indeed, she even states, "My first experiences brought me in touch with a much broader spectrum of people than I had known in the student movements of the 1960s."⁶ There may be socioeconomic diversity, but most of the studies, including Adler's, reflect a majority of Wiccans with a Northern European ancestry, with a smaller percentage of individuals from other ethnic backgrounds.⁷

² Ibid., p. 10.

³ Ibid., p. 86.

⁴ Adler, p. 20.

⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶ Adler, p. 21.

⁷ Dennis D. Carpenter, "Practitioners of Paganism and Wiccan Spirituality in Contemporary Society: A Review of the Literature," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, ed. by James R. Lewis (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 386-7.

Adler's involvement had come through a sort of "Luddite reaction"—an extreme dislike of modern technology—so she thought that this was typical. Most Wiccans have believed that modern society abuses technology; they have often supported "alternative" technologies, like wind and solar power, and held a biological rather than a mechanistic world view. In many of Adler's interviews, however, neo-pagans supported high technologies, scientific research, and space exploration.⁸ In addition, many pagans were employed in technical fields. While some felt that there was no important or striking relationship between witchcraft and computers, some even compared computers to magic, making statements such as "A computer is like a sigil"—a sort of magical symbol—and "They are the new magic of our culture."⁹ Luhrmann also observed this interest in computers; most important for her was that both magic and computer science involve creating a world defined by chosen rules and playing within their limits. Both worlds are, of course, traditionally populated by people who remain on the fringes of society, speaking an esoteric language of their own. Luhrmann states, "Both in magic and in computer science words and symbols have a power which most secular, modern endeavours deny them. Those drawn to the symbol-rich rule-governed world of computer science may be attracted by magic."¹⁰ In fact, though, Adler found that reasons for involvement in Wicca were often novel, but most generally poetic and spiritual in nature. In fact, many stated that their religious views were part of a general visionary quest that included involvement with poetry, art, drama, music, science fiction, and fantasy. For them, religion was part of an overreaching human need for beauty.¹¹

⁸ Adler, p. 21.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 447-9.

¹⁰ Luhrmann, p. 106.

¹¹ Adler, p. 22.

Shelley Rabinovitch also found that many aspiring witches began their magical practices through their participation in poetic and spiritual pastimes, including the Society for Creative Anachronism, science fiction fandom, *StarTrek* fandom, *Dr. Who* fandom, and comic book fandom. All of these hobbies reflect a "future golden age" type of thinking, where Camelot, colonies on other planets, or friendly aliens can exist.¹² For many, reading and collecting curious books was the prime influence in their religious decision. Interestingly, Midwesterners claimed that the recently wide dissemination of occult books had been the main factor in creating the neo-pagan revival. While class and educational level may vary among Wiccans, almost all were avid readers, a characteristic that held true for high-school dropouts as well as Ph.D.s. This naturally fits in with the general search for growth, which involves ritual as well as research. Most pagans saw their lives as a spiral, a process of evolution, change, and understanding. They followed the pagan teachings with the cyclical initiations into the workings of life, death, and rebirth.¹³

The social movements of the 1960s and 1970s brought another factor into the forefront of Wicca, that of politics. Feminism drew many women into involvement. Large numbers of women have been seeking a spiritual framework outside the dominant, organized religions. Many found a spiritual side to their feminism in the goddess worship of Wicca. Witchcraft traditions range from those with a mixture of female and male deities to those that focus on the monotheistic worship of the goddess. The latter group, the Dianics or feminist witches, are among the newest and most outspoken

¹² Shelley TSivia Rabinovitch, "Spells of Transformation: Categorizing Modern Neo-Pagan Witches," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, ed. by James R. Lewis (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 76.

¹³ Adler, pp. 22-3.

members of the revival. In addition, Wicca drew those who are concerned about the abuse of the earth. Almost all pagans emphasized a reverence for nature, which prompted them to protest publicly pollution, nuclear waste, and other forms of destruction.¹⁴

Classical Sociology and Anthropology

Émile Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology* (1912), studied the place of religion and magic in human society.¹⁵ He believed that the study of certain religious beliefs and practices would clarify the meaning of religion for life and the constitution of society as a whole.

For Durkheim, totemism is an example of one of the most "elementary" or "primitive" forms of religion. His explanation of totemism is the religious one, and he takes the Australians as the basis for his study because they, being the most "primitive," are closer to the sources of religious life. He says that religious phenomena must be taken literally, for all primitive religions "hold to reality and express it," and "there are no religions that are false."¹⁶ This is the basis for his objection to the animistic and the nature-worship theories of the origin of religion. Miraculous interventions are simply a part of the natural order. Religion, then, is an "eminently social thing. Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities."¹⁷

Durkheim believes that all religions contain beliefs and rites, and all involve a classification of phenomena in two groups, the sacred and the profane. Durkheim finds the clearest separation of the sacred and the profane in the totemic symbol. He sees

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 22-3.

¹⁵ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, Karen Fields, trans. (New York: The Free Press. 1995).

totemism as an elementary religion, holding the seeds of what would later develop into conceptions of divinities. The members of the Australian tribes described in his book saw the divine as being an impersonal religious force that is immanent in certain people and things, gaining its form in animals and plants. While the totemic object is the symbol of the clan, the individual totem has the same characteristics as the ancestral spirit.

Durkheim found that these Australians credited their ancestors with the tribal culture.

Although this conception is seen to be of an intermediate type between the ancestral genius and the tribal god, it helped to bring about a sense of tribal unity.

Bronislaw Malinowski, too, examines the relationship between magic and religion in his essay, "Magic, Science and Religion."¹⁶ According to Robert Redfield, Malinowski's theory consists "chiefly of clarifying distinctions as to some of the principal recurrent and universal kinds of human social behavior, and of stimulating analysis of the ways in which each of these fills the needs of man and maintains the society."¹⁷ He uses this sort of method, or functionalism, in his study of the beliefs of the Tobriand Islanders. He views magic and religion as not merely a philosophy or a system of opinion, but rather as a pragmatic strategy based on reason and emotion. Indeed, in contrast to previous anthropologists such as Levy-Bruhl, he seems particularly concerned to assert that these "primitive" people are more complex than otherwise believed.

One sign of this complexity is the store of knowledge based on experience and reason. For example, Malinowski describes the gardening practices of these islanders. While they might observe special magical rites to promote growth and abundance, they

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁸ Bronislaw Malinowski, "Magic, Science and Religion," in *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954).

would certainly never rely solely on magic. They have observed natural conditions and cause and effect, and so they know that they must primarily use mental will and physical effort in the building of a garden. However, magic is still indispensable to the garden for the very same reason. The native knows that no matter how much work he or she may do, there may be some sort of disaster to destroy this work. This is where magic is needed; the magician works side by side with the rest of the population in their everyday work.

Malinowski must also consider whether or not this primitive stage of knowledge can be considered as a rudimentary stage of science. If science can be defined as "a body of rules and conceptions, based on experience and derived from it by logical inference, embodied in material achievements and in a fixed form of tradition and carried on by some sort of social organization," then the native knowledge can be thought of as the beginnings of science.²⁰ However, a more rigorous view of science would exclude them, for these people do not have a disinterested search for knowledge as such. For example, they may look to herbalism to solve certain health problems, but they would not study plants out of a simple search for knowledge. Appropriate to Malinowski's method, there must be a purpose for the native's knowledge.

Magic is also purely functional for Malinowski, requiring a clear purpose and directive behind the rites. In contrast, religion has no purpose directed toward a subsequent event. He sees religion as a communal event: "Religion needs the community as a whole so that its members may worship in common its sacred things and its divinities,

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 34

and society needs religion for the maintenance of moral law and order."²¹ It is a stabilizing influence, allowing a large measure of cohesion within the societal group and a conformity to that other important facet of religion, tradition. He also allows for an individual element in religion, for even "primitive" religions have their prophets and personal pilgrimages. Both magic and religion derive from purely mythological sources and gain their power during times of extreme stress in the individual's or society's life. In addition, magic remains in the hands of specialists, while religion is for the people.

More recently, Clifford Geertz, in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, studied religious beliefs as constituting, in part, cultural systems.²² "Ten years ago," Geertz observes, "the proposal that cultural phenomena should be treated as significant systems posing expositive questions was a much more alarming one for social scientists . . . than it is now."²³ As he later states, his approach is the product of "a cast of mind. . . rather entranced with the diversity of things."²⁴ Geertz argues that anthropology entails contextualizing cultural phenomena and explicitly contrasting them with similar phenomena in other cultures; all of this requires an interpretive rather than an explanatory approach.

Throughout this book, Geertz demonstrates that the differences between cultures are intrinsically interesting and worthy of investigation. However, simply pointing out these differences is not a demonstration that this diversity is overwhelmingly significant. Indeed, he even seems to reject the ability to generalize across instances or to predict new outcomes. He apparently advocates the work of conveying, not explaining. As an

²¹ Ibid., p. 54.

²² Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

²³ Ibid., p. 3.

example of his respect for diversity, Geertz states, "The artist works with his audience's capacities . . . And though elements of these capacities are indeed innate-it usually helps not to be color-blind-they are brought into actual existence by the experience of living in the midst of certain sorts of things to look at, listen to, handle, think about, cope with, and react to; particular varieties of cabbages, particular sorts of kings. Art and the equipment to grasp it are made in the same shop."²⁵ In his effort to contextualize, he apparently wants to go beyond the generalizations used by authors like Frazer, moving more toward the pluralism that characterizes current intellectual and cultural thought.

Comparative History

One of the most important--and controversial--publications in the study of religion, and magic in particular, was *Margaret Murray's The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, which was originally published in 1921.²⁶ Although Murray had gained her reputation as an Egyptologist, she was also a folklorist and an anthropologist. She reexamined the trial documents of the Inquisition, arguing in her book that witchcraft could be traced to "pre-Christian times and appears to be the ancient religion of Western Europe" focused on an imminent deity incarnate in the form of a man, a woman, or an animal. One of its forms was the two-faced horned god known as Janus or Dianus. Because Murray found that the feminine form of the name, Diana, was considered throughout Western Europe as the leader of the witches, she named the religion the Dianic Cult, a term that is still used by members of the modern feminist Wicca. Unlike the modern Dianists, however, the followers of the original Dianic Cult, who came from all classes from the peasantry to the nobility, rarely worshipped the female deity, but

²⁴ Ibid., p. 232.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 118.

rather the original horned god.²⁷ Murray concludes that this "organized religion" was primarily a fertility cult, in the tradition described by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. This was the worship of the god who dies and is reborn, an endless cycle that is reflected in the wheel of the year with its turning seasons and growing crops.²⁸ The origin of this cult lay with an aboriginal British race of small people who were the reality behind the fairy faith.²⁹

According to Murray, these witches practiced a joyous religion. They met at the eight great festivals, or sabbats, and at the more general meetings, or esbats, in covens of thirteen. There they feasted and danced and had shamanistic visions. In fact, Murray argues that the trial reports of accused witches describing themselves as flying through the air and changing their shape into animals were "ritual and not actual," a "clear account of the witch herself and her companions believing in the change of form caused by the magical object in exactly the same way that the shamans believe in their own transformation by similar means."³⁰ For Murray, the coven, the sabbat, and all other aspects of the accusations made against witches had a reality behind them. The Inquisition had simply turned the god of the witches into the devil and substituted evil for good.

Murray's theories are now generally rejected by historians. For example, in regard to her use of trial accounts, she took as true stories that may have been fabricated under torture. While she gives evidence of pagan survivals in Britain, she does not give evidence that an organized pagan religion survived, or that this religion was universal, or

²⁶ Margaret Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1996).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-62.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

that covens or sabbats existed before they appeared in Inquisitors' reports. But her focus on the persistence of pagan folk customs in Britain has had continuing influence.

Mircea Eliade, in "Some Observations on European Witchcraft," observes that while Murray's work is filled with errors and unproven assumptions, more recent studies of Indian and Tibetan documents "will convince an unprejudiced reader that European witchcraft cannot be the creation of religious or political persecution or be a demonic sect devoted to Satan and the promotion of evil."³¹ According to Eliade,

As a matter of fact, all the features associated with European witches are—with the exception of Satan and the Sabbath—claimed also by Indo-Tibetan yogis and magicians. They too are supposed to fly through the air, render themselves invisible, kill at a distance, master demons and ghosts, and so on. Moreover, some of these eccentric Indian sectarians boast that they break all the religious taboos and social rules: that they practice human sacrifice, cannibalism, and all manner of orgies, including incestuous intercourse, and that they eat excrement, nauseating animals, and devour human corpses. In other words, they proudly claim all the crimes and horrible ceremonies cited ad nauseam in the Western European witch trials.³²

To support his argument, Eliade looks to the cult of the *benandanti*, a group first revealed by Carlo Ginzburg. These Italian wizards fought regular battles against a group of evil wizards, the *stregoni*. They gathered at these festivals in *spiritu*, while they slept, and their central rite was a ceremonial battle against the *stregoni* to assure the harvest. Eliade writes, "It is probable that this combat between *benandanti* and *stregoni* prolonged an archaic ritual scenario of competitions and contests between two opposing groups,

³⁰ Ibid., p. 233.

³¹ Mircea Eliade, "Some Observations on European Witchcraft," in *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

³² Ibid., p. 71.

designed to stimulate the creative forces of nature and regenerate human society as well."³³ The persecution of the *benandanti* took place in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in most of the trials the accused were charged with belonging to the cult of Diana. As a result of the Inquisition's accusations, the *benandanti* finally acknowledged their identity with the witches, even speaking of the sabbat and pacts with the devil. Although this gives no evidence for Murray's horned god or for her organized system of covens, Eliade argues that it is "a well-documented case of the *processus* through which a popular and archaic secret cult of fertility is transformed into a merely magical, or even black-magical, practice under pressure of the Inquisition."³⁴

In addition to the case of the *benandanti*, Eliade also describes parallels in Romanian studies, which are significant because there was no systematic persecution of witches in Romania and the "archaic popular culture" was therefore under "less rigid ecclesiastical control."³⁵ Like their Western European counterparts, Romanian witches were supposedly able to change their shape, to ride on brooms, and to fight all night at specific festival times until they became reconciled. Also, the Romanian Diana was connected in folklore with the fairies, and the Queen of the Fairies came to be associated in name with Diana, Irodiada, and Aradia, "names famous among Western European witches."³⁶ Eliade concludes that "What medieval authors designated as witchcraft, and what became the witch crazes of the fourteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, had its roots in some archaic mythico-ritual scenarios comparable with those surviving among

³³ Ibid., p. 75.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 78.

³⁶ Ibid., 81.

the Italian *benandanti* and in Romanian folk culture."³⁷

Gerda Lerner, in *The Creation of Patriarchy*, argues that the origins of patriarchy lie in the formation of archaic states in the second millennium B.C.E.³⁸ The rise of patriarchy adversely affected not only gender relations but also human relations in general. According to Lerner, gender dominance facilitated all other forms of social inequality, and the greatest support for this inequality was ideological. In the fall of the goddess and the degradation of women, Lerner locates one of the major foundations of Western society.

Continuing with her belief in the power of idea systems and their effect on society, she studies in the second volume how women have bypassed or redefined or undermined "male thought."³⁹ In the writings of various women from the seventh through the nineteenth centuries, she at least finds the beginnings of feminist consciousness, if not full-blown awareness. For Lerner, feminist consciousness consists of women's awareness that they belong to a subordinated and wronged group, that their oppressed status is not natural, that they must join with other women to effect change, and that they must create an alternative vision of egalitarian gender relations. The subjects of her book rarely identified themselves as "feminist," and Lerner acknowledges that many of them would have rejected such an identification. Many of these women indeed would not have recognized the term, "feminist consciousness," a fact that would seem to put Lerner's application of it in question. However, according to Lerner, women like Hrosvitha of

³⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁸ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

Gandersheim, Margery Kempe, and Emily Dickinson "directly contributed to the development of feminist consciousness, whether they so intended or not."⁴⁰

Patriarchal ideology disempowered women not only by defining women as deviant but also by excluding women from ideological production. Faced with the fact that many women colluded with their own oppression, Lerner concludes that they did so because they lacked the clear authority to speak, adequate education, and a clear tradition of feminist critique. This situation only changed when feminist thinkers developed feminist consciousness and attacked the ideological power of patriarchy. First, women claimed the right to ideological production. While some women found authority for their ideas in divine inspiration and mysticism, others wrote solely on the basis of their creative genius. This might have allowed them to write, but it did not ensure the survival or the spread of their writings. Thus, generation after generation "women's creations sank soundlessly into the sea."⁴¹ Each woman, therefore, "had to argue as though no woman before her had ever thought or written."⁴² Second, from about the seventeenth century, women gained spaces of their own, providing them with female support for their endeavors. For example, women gained access to supportive authors and readers, higher education, spaces where they could think and write unencumbered, and a broad knowledge of women's history. Because of this continuing process, women "can fully think their way out of patriarchy."⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 220.

⁴² Ibid., p. 166.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 246.

European History: Medieval and Early Modern

Keith Thomas examines the decline of witchcraft and associated magical arts in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.⁴⁴ While Thomas is somewhat more specific in that he is only concerned with English witchcraft, he is more concerned with the larger culture that looked at these witches as outsiders, and not the witches themselves. Most people of the time period covered in Thomas' book understood a witch to be "a person of either sex (but more often female) who could mysteriously injure other people."⁴⁵ *Maleficium*, and not the charge of devil worship, was the most common crime associated with witchcraft. While they sometimes did overlap, generally the cunning folk and the maleficent witches were classified into separate categories.

Only in the late Middle Ages did the Church accuse witches of having made a deliberate pact with the devil. In return for her allegiance, the devil gave her the supernatural means of seeking vengeance on her enemies. From the Church's point of view, then, the essence of witchcraft was not *maleficium*—as was its usual associations among the people—but rather its heretical character. As Thomas states, "Witchcraft had become a Christian heresy, the greatest of all sins, because it involved the renunciation of God and deliberate adherence to sins, because it involved the renunciation of God and deliberate adherence to his greatest enemy. *Maleficium* was a purely secondary activity, a by-product of this false religion."⁴⁶

Protestantism only served to confirm and amplify the fear of witchcraft. They were the ones to spread the beliefs of the *Malleus Maleficium* throughout England. As

⁴⁴ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

Thomas states, "it was only the Reformation which disturbed the situation, by drastically reducing the degree of immunity from witchcraft which could be conveyed by religious faith alone."⁴⁷ Protestantism had rejected all of the old protections against witchcraft that were offered by the Catholic Church, and they played down the importance of guardian angels and the intercessionary power of saints. Indeed, they made the people's situation bleaker by emphasizing the reality of the devil and the extent of his earthly dominion. For the Protestant, the faith in god was an infallible protection for men's souls, but it had no similar effect on their bodies and goods. In the face of *maleficium*, the person could only passively endure, for religion offered no help, and counter-magic was prohibited. This bleak outlook provided only one sure way to end *maleficium*--the execution of the witch.

Of the witches themselves, Thomas finds that they were generally outsiders of some sort, non-conforming people within the tightly controlled social structure of the period. Indeed, "if the records of Tudor and Stuart village life leave any single impression, it is that of the tyranny of local opinion and the lack of tolerance displayed towards nonconformity or social deviation."⁴⁸ These same social standards, however, also forced the rest of society to conform to traditional standards of charity and hospitality. Therefore, while these social standards still held, charges of witchcraft were generally only raised when the accuser felt that the witch not only bore a grudge against him or her, but that the grudge was also a justifiable one. This conflict between "neighbourliness" and individualism generated the tensions from which the accusations of witchcraft were most likely to arise.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 493.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 527.

According to Thomas, there were several factors that brought about the decline of witchcraft. Certain philosophers, like Thomas Hobbes and the followers of Descartes, rejected the possibility of the existence of incorporeal substances. Therefore, demons could also not exist, nor could they affect people. Those influenced by these theological currents of thought came to think it improbable that god could have ever allowed witches to exercise supernatural power. Some philosophers viewed the world as an orderly universe unlikely to be upset by god or the devil; also there was the optimistic hope that one day the natural causes underlying supernatural events would become clear. Others, like Reginald Scot, began to become aware of the logical difficulty of proving witchcraft to be at work in any case; Scot publicized his own skepticism regarding witchcraft accusations, especially regarding those who were actually innocent, deluded, or imposters. In addition, by the later seventeenth century the conflict between charity and individualism, which had prompted so many of the witchcraft accusations in the past, was beginning to be resolved. The development of the national Poor Law converted the support of the indigent into a legal obligation. While private charity continued, the poor were no longer solely dependent upon the voluntary help of their neighbors.

Norman Cohn, author of *Europe's Inner Demons*, believes that European witchcraft was a delusion fostered by the Inquisition.⁴⁹ According to Cohn, the stereotype of the witch comes from a specific fantasy that originates in antiquity. This age-old tradition consists of the belief that there exists in the midst of the larger society a small, clandestine group engaged in grotesque practices, including infanticide, incest, cannibalism, bestiality, and orgiastic sex. It was first used by the Romans to characterize Christians, and later by the Christians to characterize Jews as well as heretical Christian

sects such as the Cathars, the Waldensians, the Manichaeans, the Montanists, and groups such as the Knights Templar.

Because Cohn doubts that a sect of witches ever existed, his book is the history of a "fantasy." He argues that the folklorists Jacob Grimm and Girolamo Tartarotti, who were long considered the originators of the view that witchcraft is a pre-Christian religion, simply drew attention to the lasting pre-Christian folk beliefs that contributed to the stereotype of the witch. In 1828, Karl Jarcke wrote that witchcraft, which survived among the common people, was the former pagan religion of Germany. Ten years later, Franz Joseph Mone amplified this statement by describing German witchcraft as an underground esoteric cult. For Cohn, however, neither of these theories is convincing, for neither Jarcke nor Mone could show that the worship of ancient gods was "practised by organized, clandestine groups in the Middle Ages." Cohn next attacks the historian Jules Michelet, whose famous book on witchcraft, *La Sorcière*, appeared in 1862. He describes Michelet as an "aging romantic radical with neither time nor desire for detailed research," and he argues against Michelet's view that witchcraft was a protest by medieval serfs against an oppressive social order. Cohn sees this view as an attempt to rehabilitate the oppressed social classes with no evidence behind it.⁵⁰

He also derides the idea of witchcraft as the survival of a fertility cult. While Cohn blames Frazer for the beginning of this trend, he is completely contemptuous of Murray. Throughout the book, he uses her age at the time of advancing her theory as an excuse to dismiss her and her idea. Along with other scholars, he argues that she does not prove the existence of an organized cult. His main criticism, however, is that she

⁴⁹ Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-9.

eliminates the fantastic features of the witch trial reports and gives a false impression that realistic accounts of the sabbat exists.⁵¹ For Cohn, any parallels between the descriptions of the sabbats and fertility rites are meaningless; the sabbats are a complete delusion, a fiction.

According to Cohn, academics have simply been "grossly underestimating the capacities of human imagination." He believes that the many supernatural powers attributed to witches--including their abilities to practice evil, to change shape and fly through the air--had a long history in folk beliefs but were never significant until new Inquisitorial procedures began to investigate ritual magic. At this time, there were small trials of individuals accused of consorting with demons; these were minor events, and most of the accused were priests. The true witch persecutions could only begin when all parts of the "fantasy" were put together and believed by those in authority. Peasants believed that witches were simply those who harmed by occult means. The more complicated notion of demon worship came from educated Church leaders and Inquisitors when the Inquisitors themselves had become convinced of the reality of the sabbat and nocturnal flights. In the end, he attributes the fear of witches to the subconscious fears of Europeans who unconsciously wished to revolt against a Christianity that was too strict and repressive.⁵²

H.R. Trevor-Roper, on the other hand, sees the witch crazes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries not as a delusion but as a clear product of social and political forces. According to Trevor-Roper, pagan folk beliefs and magical beliefs were widespread among European people, but during the medieval period, the Church used

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 124.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 258-61.

whatever means necessary to rid them of these beliefs. As evidence of this, he looks to Saint Boniface' statement that belief in witches was "unchristian." He also cites Charlemagne's decree that those who burned witches would be put to death. In addition, there is the *Canon Episcopi*, which declared the powers of witches to be illusion. This document provided the basis for official Church policy until it was systematically reversed by the Inquisition. By the end of the fifteenth century, it had become heresy not to believe in witches, and the *Canon Episcopi* became an "inconvenient text of canon law."⁵³

He goes on to argue that European witchcraft was not "the old pre-Christian religion of rural Europe." While he acknowledges that pagan customs did survive and that what came to be called witchcraft did include elements of this belief, he adds that one must not "confuse the scattered fragments of paganism with the grotesque system into which they are only long afterwards arranged." This "grotesque system" was organized when the Church took the older beliefs and fragments and created an "organized, systematic `demonology'," complete with new elements, including the pact with the devil, the coven, and the sabbat.⁵⁴

At first, this stereotype was used by the Church in local struggles against groups it would not assimilate. It might have died at this time; however, it was revived in the century of the Black Death and the Hundred Years War and received new strength from the struggle between Reformation and Counter-Reformation. This last conflict "revived

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 121-23.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 127-8.

as the dying witch-craze just as it had revived so many other obsolescent habits of thought: biblical fundamentalism, theological history, scholastic Aristoteleanism."⁵⁵

Trevor-Roper argues that this new demonology gained new momentum in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from the struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism. He shows that every major outbreak of the witch persecutions in the 1560s and afterwards took place in the areas particularly affected by this conflict. For example, persecution in England was worst in Essex and Lancashire, where Catholicism was strong. In Catholic France most of the witches were Protestant and often came from "Protestant islands" like Orleans and Normandy.

This new mythology of witchcraft became part of the structure of society and thought. Even the best minds of the time believed it. It "was the social consequence of renewed ideological war and the accompanying climate of fear," a statement that combines Trevor-Roper's observations with the previous social emphasis of academics like Durkheim.⁵⁶ For Trevor-Roper, this is the real reason that the confessions at the trials were so similar, even in places where judicial torture was not used. Just as not all confessions were obtained through torture, the beliefs expressed in them were not merely delusion, "detached or detachable from the social and intellectual structure of the time."⁵⁷ They were indeed the creation of social and political struggles. Only when the social structure of the society changed could the myth be destroyed.

Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft

Even with a new religious movement like Wicca, religious beliefs and rites rise out of social relationships, expressing a collective vision shared by adherents to modern

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 131-2.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 140.

witchcraft. Durkheim's view of religion shares with it this societal base and the perception of an immanent divine observed by Durkheim among certain Australian tribes. This communal basis can also be seen in Malinowski's view of religion, where worship is a group event, one that binds the group together. However, Wicca also includes magic, something that is not included in Malinowski's definition of religion. Like the Tobriand Islanders, though, modern Wiccans use magic for purely individual reasons, such as prosperity or divination. Modern witchcraft does not rely solely on magic or ritual; its followers find inspiration in a mythologized history of their beliefs, one that greatly relies on Murray's description of an ancient fertility religion. While her account has largely been discounted for its lack of historical proof, one does find intimations of scattered folk beliefs, as in Cohn's study of the witch trials. Looking back over all of these studies, however, one again returns to Luhrmann's and Rabinovitch's examinations, for these previous works center on older societies, ones without modern scientific and technological knowledge. For Luhrmann and Rabinovitch, witchcraft is an interpretive process, a very personal means for understanding the modern world.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

CHAPTER III

THE PUBLIC CREATION OF THE MODERN CRAFT: THE BEGINNINGS OF WICCA WITH GARDNER AND VALIENTE

Until 1951, witchcraft remained a crime punishable in the English courts, and so its adherents stayed in the shadows, cloaked in their own traditions and beliefs. After the withdrawal of the witchcraft law, a man named Gerald Gardner publicly announced that he was an exponent of authentic witchcraft. Studying Western occult traditions, he formed modern Wicca. No one truly knows whether or not Wicca is more ancient than the early 1900s, but most agree that its known foundation began with Gerald Gardner.

Gardner's Involvement In Occultism

Gardner indeed has become a legendary figure in the world of Wicca. His adult life began as a relatively uneventful one, working first as the owner or manager of tea and rubber plantations in Ceylon, North Borneo, and Malaya, and then as an inspector in the Malay customs service. Unlike others in the colonial service, though, he had a tireless interest in the supernatural and antiquities, an interest that brought him to a close contact with both Western and Eastern mystical practices. Gardner read widely on the subjects of religion and the occult and discussed them with like-minded people; he also gained during this time experience of Freemasonry, Spiritualism, Buddhism, and tribal magical practices. As a part of his anthropological interests, he pioneered studies in Malay archaeology, maritime history, and folklore. Bracelin observes in his biography of

Gardner that his isolation from Western Christian society allowed him a more objective and open view of world religions; in addition, he had adopted the Eastern belief in the "naturalness of the occult, had come to take for granted as they had some contact with those who had died, the possibility of developing faculties of concentration, mind and energy which in the West had fallen into general disuse."¹

At the age of fifty-two, Gardner retired to England and immediately became involved in archaeology there, finally noticing the ancient history behind his home.² He thus further acquainted himself with the history and stories of Britain; this knowledge would allow him to adapt the tenets of high magic to the English people. He also joined the Folk-Lore Society, cooperating with Margaret Murray to present a paper upon a set of apparent witchcraft relics in 1939. Witchcraft was also a theme in his first novel; *A Goddess Arrives*; published in 1940, this novel was based on a series of dreams that revealed what he believed to be a past-life knowledge of ancient Cyprus. In addition, he became a prominent member of the Ancient Order of Druids during this period. These activities prepared him for a deeper involvement in the occult and openness to its beliefs. Most importantly, however, came in 1938 when he settled at Highcliffe on the Hampshire coast. During one of his patrols for civil defense, he encountered the Rosicrucian Theatre in Christchurch, an occurrence that led to his recruitment into modern witchcraft.³ After extensive inquiries among local residents as to the nature of this group, he only learned, "They are a queer lot, the ones running the theatre."⁴

¹ J.L. Bracelin, *Gerald Gardner: Witch*, (London: Octagon Press, 1960), p. 54.

² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Gardner joined their society, the Fellowship of Crotona. Among their members was the daughter of Annie Besant, the Theosophist and founder of Co-Masonry, a masonic movement for women.⁵ Two others were Charles Seymour and Christine Hartley, disciples of Dion Fortune, an occult novelist and practicing ritual magician. Another was Louis Wilkinson, a longtime friend of Aleister Crowley, the black occultist and member of magical societies such as the Golden Dawn.⁶ After attending several meetings of this group, Gardner noticed a group of people set apart from the rest.

Bracelin describes these people:

They seemed rather browbeaten by the others, kept themselves to themselves. They were the most interesting element, however. Unlike many of the others, they had to earn their livings, were cheerful and optimistic and had a real interest in the occult. They had carefully read many books on the subject: Unlike the general mass, who were supposed to have read all but seemed to know nothing.⁷

In 1939, they revealed to him that they had connections to traditional witchcraft, a practice that they claimed to be a survival from a pagan fertility religion. He was initiated into their New Forest coven in 1939 in the house of "Old Dorothy," a wealthy lady who functioned as its priestess. It was she who would call up a Great Circle in 1940 after the fall of Holland, Belgium, and France; she and the other witches involved believed that they could—and did—direct Hitler psychically away from English shores. As soon as Gardner heard the name "Wica" from the witches in Christchurch, he knew that magic came from within the body of the believer, a mystical belief held by many in occult and

⁵ Doreen Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 153.

⁶ Davis, Philip. *Goddess Unmasked: The Rise of Neopagan Feminist Spirituality*. Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1998, p. 332.

⁷ Bracelin, pp. 164-5.

magical circles. If he could only make this known, he felt, all objections to witchcraft would cease.⁸

Gardner related to Bracelin that he visited Aleister Crowley, "the Beast," in 1946 and discussed his growing interest in witchcraft. Gardner felt his magnetic personality but believed him to be a charlatan; Crowley admitted that he disliked both the feminism and the lack of financial potential of the witchcraft religion. While Crowley initiated Gardner into his own Ordo Templi Orientis, Gardner did not wish to become involved in it until after Crowley's death in 1947. Gardner might not have developed his membership in the O.T.O until later, but the witches allowed him to describe some of their practices in the form of fiction, which would be published as the novel *High Magic's Aid* in 1949. The next year, adherents to modern witchcraft opened the first museum of British witchcraft in the Isle of Man, which later passed into Gardner's management. And in 1951, the 1736 Witchcraft Act was repealed, thus allowing witches to practice publicly their religion without fear of prosecution. These events made it possible for Gardner to reveal what he thought to be the survival of the religion in 1954 through the publication of *Witchcraft Today*.⁹

Gardner's life in colonial service and his interest in the supernatural gave him the resources that he needed in order to gather together the elements of modern Wicca. Through his involvement in Western and Eastern mysticism, along with his anthropological research, Gardner gained a general background in the history of religious practices, knowledge that would aid him when he would write about the ancient history of witchcraft. In addition, this research also brought him into contact with Murray

⁸ Ibid., pp. 166-7.

through his membership in the Folk-Lore Society; her work on witchcraft as a prehistoric fertility religion provided him with many of the details for his own history of Wicca and ideas for Wiccan rituals. Gardner also became involved in English occult groups, such as the O.T.O. and the Golden Dawn, at this time. A more structured experience of modern occultism—but especially his relationship with people like Fortune and Crowley—would be invaluable as he formed rituals and gathered together the belief system that would become Wicca.

Core Beliefs Of Wicca Developed

In this book, *Witchcraft Today*, Gardner describes witchcraft as a religion, nothing less. While he poses as a disinterested anthropologist researching the "witch cult," he does admit that he believes that there is "something in the witches' belief."¹⁰ While not entirely objective, Gardner describes many of Wicca's most important beliefs, most of which are still core tenets of the various traditions of modern witchcraft. This religion was called "Wica," from the Anglo-Saxon term for a male witch. Most importantly, though, witchcraft was said to be the survival of a Stone Age cult of matriarchal times, for, as Gardner states, "There have been witches in all ages and countries."¹¹ Gardner relates how the witches celebrate the turning of the seasons, honoring the god and goddess on the four traditional quarter days which opened the seasons, described as the great witches' sabbats by Margaret Murray. As a part of their reverence of nature, their rites consist largely of dances intended to promote fertility, and of feasting upon consecrated food and drink. While dance is an important means to raise power, trance and

⁹ Ronald Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 44.

¹⁰ Gerald B. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, (Lake Toxaway, NC: Mercury Publishing, 1999), p. 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

ecstasy are also used to honor the deities and allow the witches to embody the god and the goddess.¹² They celebrate nude, in the belief that this allowed magical power to be released from the body.¹³ This celebration takes place in a circle, which has been cast by a consecrated sword or a knife; the north was the most sacred of the four cardinal points.¹⁴ The witches organize themselves into covens, led by a high priestess and supported by a high priest; within the coven, they were subdivided into couples for training purposes, for training, like initiation, always takes place between the sexes. As a part of this concept of polarity—a concept common to many occult and high magic traditions—they revere the life-force within the world and regard acts of love and pleasure as sacred.¹⁵

As Ronald Hutton observes in his history of witchcraft in the twentieth century, no academic historian has ever taken seriously Gardner's claim to have discovered an actual survival of an ancient religion, and it was even dismissed in 1955 by the journal of Gardner's own Folk-Lore Society. In fact, since 1970, the complete denial of support for the Murray thesis has robbed Wicca of the historical context upon which it was based; as much of the ancient "history" of modern witchcraft was based on her theories, one can only trace Wicca's roots back to the mid-twentieth century. This makes Wicca very much a part of modern history.¹⁶ Until recently, however, the only research into the true nature of Gardner's claim has been carried out by the witches themselves. Between 1979 and 1984, Janet and Stewart Farrar worked with Doreen Valiente to produce the first textual analysis of Gardner's "Book of Shadows," the standard collection of Wiccan rituals.

¹² Ibid., pp. 22-5.

¹³ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 26-7.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 114-7.

Aidan Kelly continued this work in his study of Gardner's own papers. Because Valiente was a major figure in her own right in the formation of the Wiccan religion, her research is a primary source of information for the modern movement; her work can often be corroborated by the testimony of a well-known witch known as "Robert."¹⁷

Hutton points out that Gardner's claim to have been initiated by Old Dorothy is not fantastic.¹⁸ The description in the biography of his earlier life is careful and modest; in his interviews with Bracelin, the author of the biography, Gardner omits some of the more unbelievable statements that he made verbally, such as his possession of two university degrees. In addition, he does not say that he had discovered a group of witches hidden in a rural community led by a traditional cunning woman, ordinarily one said to be trained in folk healing and magic but with very little formal education. Gardner instead describes a coven composed partially of Rosicrucians and led by a wealthy lady, or Dorothy. In view of the membership of past occult groups such as Mathers' Golden Dawn, whose membership consisted of such societal notaries as William Butler Yeats and Maud Gonne, one would expect a modern pagan revival to come from a more educated group like Dorothy's, thus lending more credence to Gardner's description of the coven into which he was initiated.¹⁹ The results of Valiente's search, then, seem much more certain and less likely to have been fabricated because Wicca's ideal origins would have lain with someone more rooted in traditional folklore than a wealthy lady, one who would have had few connections with the people whom Gardner wished to attract to modern witchcraft.

¹⁶ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 45; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, p. 206.

¹⁷ Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, (Custer, WA: Phoenix Publishing, 1989), pp. 41-2.

¹⁸ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 45; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 206-7.

After looking at the elements of Wiccan beliefs, the most prominent idea behind them is the view of witchcraft as the survival of a Stone Age cult of matriarchal times. It is here that this mythologized history first gains importance, providing Wicca with a history—and thus an authenticity. The influence of Murray's thesis is obvious when one considers this history and the rites described by Gardner. For example, like Murray's witches, Gardner's Wiccans honor both a god and a goddess and celebrate the witches' sabbats as part of the turning of the seasons. In addition to that derived from Murray's work, there can also be found fragments from traditional occultism, such as the use of ritual weapons and the sacred circle. One would expect the inclusion of occultist practices, though, from someone like Gardner, who had experience in several traditions, and also "Old Dorothy," the woman who supposedly initiated Gardner into modern witchcraft. The similarity of her background with other members of groups like the Golden Dawn or the Rosicrucians—middle class and highly educated—makes the existence of such a group seem a likelihood. The questionable identity of this woman, however, provides Wicca with an element of mystery, allowing its adherents to believe in a lasting tradition, one that has survived from generation to generation since the Stone Age.

The Witches' Search For Origins

The search for "Old Dorothy," as she was known by her followers, began with a suitably magical means, leaving the more traditional methods of investigation until later. Although Valiente began her research through the mundane request for a death certificate, she and two other witches met in a wood in southern England on Halloween night, 1980. One of the Great Sabbats of the witches' year, Halloween is believed to be

¹⁹ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 45.

the modern version of the old Celtic festival of *Samhain*, or summer's end. For witches, Samhain is the time when the gates open between the two worlds, allowing the dead who have gone into the Land of Faerie to return to this world and communicate with the living. And so, at the time of a waning moon—an appropriate time for such a spell, according to the witchcraft rules of correspondence—Valiente, along with Fiona and Dusio, gathered in the forest to contact Dorothy. After invoking the old gods, Valiente called upon Old Dorothy, and the lantern standing at the south quarter suddenly turned over, breaking the glass; they considered this to be a sign of the spell's success and the presence of the invoked spirit. Valiente also heard a voice calling to her from the southern quarter; calling her name plainly, it sounded to her like the voice of Gerald Gardner. Taking this as a supernatural occurrence, Valiente felt heartened in her search.²⁰

Old Dorothy had been identified in the 1950s by Gardner as Dorothy Clutterbuck. In her research during the 1980s, Valiente discovered that "Old Dorothy" was actually better known by her married name of Dorothy Fordham, who had lived at Highcliffe in the 1930s and 1940s, and died in 1951 at the age of seventy.²¹ From his study of her family documents at Somerset House, the family graves in Highcliffe churchyard, and local newspapers, Hutton uncovered a picture of a fanatically Tory and Anglican matron, who was outwardly, at least, a personally devout Christian and friend and patron of the local vicar and who lent her time and money to conservative causes like the British Legion, the Girl Guides, and the Seamen's Mission. In addition, she also contributed to the Horticultural and Bee-Keepers' Associations, organizations built around local social

²⁰ Janet and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft*, (Custer, WA: Phoenix Publishing, 1984), pp. 284-5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 282-93.

respectability.²² For most of the 1930's, she was married to a Tory JP and landed gentleman. When he died in May 1939, she, the grieving widow, remained locked in a legal battle with his relatives for his estate until 1941, when she finally lost the court case. Her personal diaries from the 1940's went on display during the mid-1980's, but there was nothing in them about witchcraft.²³

While it would be impossible to prove definitely that Dorothy Fordham was not a witch, consideration of the available documents puts Gardner's story in doubt. Indeed, her personal diaries, which were uncovered in 1986, reveal a woman who was simple, kindly, and conventional, not a hidden occultist. Indeed, this view of Dorothy Clutterbuck has been confirmed by Ian Stevenson, who grew up in the Highcliffe of Dorothy and Gardner; according to Stevenson, their social groups never mixed.²⁴ There is one person, however, who provides a certain link between the Rosicrucian Theatre and Fellowship of Crotona in 1938 and the Wicca that appeared at the end of the 1940s. This is "Dafo," the woman who served as Gardner's high priestess in 1950. Unlike Dorothy, she was a music teacher with long-established interests in occultism and mysticism. A member of both the Rosicrucian Theatre and the Fellowship of Crotona, she was also part of the inner group that provided Gardner with his first initiation into witchcraft. Valiente met her in 1952, and two other members of Gardner's coven did so in 1958.²⁵ Beyond her very general acknowledgements of her membership in Co-Masonry and the Rosicrucian Theatre, she seems to have said very little regarding her further occult interests.²⁶ She and Gardner shared an interest in purchasing a plot of land adjacent to a naturist club near St. Albans

²² Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, p. 210.

²³ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," pp. 45-6.

²⁴ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, p. 211.

²⁵ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, pp. 38-9.

in Hertfordshire, a club in which Gardner was a member. It was here that Ancient Crafts, Ltd., would build the witch's cottage, which had been owned and designed by a friend of Gardner, J.S.M. Ward. This area provided a perfect setting for Gardner's future coven in that it provided a secluded site for magical activities.²⁷

The Development Of the Book Of Shadows

In addition to the background of Gardner's initiation, Wiccans and scholars have studied his private papers, especially the manuscript named "Ye Bok of ye Art Magical." It began as a collection of notes that Gardner took from various systems, such as the Cabbala and the Tarot; the first known Wiccan rituals, the initiation rites for three progressive degrees, were later added. Because these were written in a large, clear script, it is believed that these rites were supposed to be read by candlelight during actual rituals. After several corrections, a group of ceremonies were copied into the first Wiccan "Book of Shadows," which had been retired from use by 1953. Later drafts and additional ceremonies were added to the second such book, the one that came into use during that year.²⁸

While the earliest rites, the initiations and the ritual blessing of cakes and wine, presume that only a man and a woman would be present, the later ones consist of ceremonies for the main seasonal sabbats and the consecration of tools, rites clearly designed for a group. Revisions set in the second Book of Shadows are far more concerned to set these rituals within the historical context of the needs of a mystery religion operating under persecution throughout several centuries. Unlike other groups that have been studied by anthropologists, such as the Trobriand Islanders, modern

²⁶ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 46.

²⁷ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, p. 214.

Wiccans do not draw from a "collective mythological corpus." Their writings instead seem to be part of a conscious attempt to provide a mythology for their practice in a myth-impooverished world, and so they freely borrow from the myths of other times and cultures. T.M. Luhrmann observes that their magical practice becomes a "loosely syncretic, freely inventive symbolism which uses the historical depth of myth and legend for its evocation, but freely adapts the myths to personal ends." For the Wiccan, history becomes the "raw material out of which to craft a personal vision, and the role of tradition is to forge it anew, to suit your own particular symbolic needs." History can thus play the role of myth and is more effective in this regard because it carries an apparent validity that complete invention lacks.²⁹

This gathering of sources included both older high magic texts and modern research; this blend gave Gardnerian witchcraft a magical "tradition" that was appropriate to the English society of the time. They include large, direct quotations from Charles Godfrey Leland's *Aradia*, which purported to print the gospel of the Italian branch of the old pagan witch religion, the famous grimoire called *The Greater Key of Solomon*, with one borrowing from Kipling, and uses of the practices of Margaret Murray's "witch cult" for the Sabbats and of Freemasonry and the Golden Dawn for the initiations. The use of these source materials is confirmed by Valiente in her book, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*.³⁰ The most controversial borrowings, however, have been those from Aleister Crowley, a man with a close association to the Golden Dawn, along with the darker side of magical practice; the initial recognition of these quotes by Valiente caused "discomfiture" in

²⁸ Aidan Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1991), pp. 37-94.

²⁹ T.M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 240-1.

Gardner. According to Gardner, he had borrowed certain passages from Crowley because they "breathed the very spirit of paganism and were expressed in splendid poetry." His followers, though, disliked Crowley's association with their religion due to his close link with black magic. Some, including Gerald Yorke, a friend of Crowley's for many years, have even asserted that Gardner paid Crowley about £300 to write the entire Book of Shadows. Most, however, agree with Valiente that Gardner only borrowed certain passages from Crowley and benefited from his association with the "Great Beast" through the latter's opening up the "treasure chest" in which the Order of the Golden Dawn had locked up the secret knowledge of the Western Mystery Tradition.³¹ E.W. Liddell makes some more fantastic claims regarding Crowley's relationship to Wicca. For example, one claim is that Crowley used "magical recall" to remember the exact rites used by one of the original covens begun by the nineteenth-century witch George Pickingill. This would, of course, give modern Wicca a direct, historical link to traditional witchcraft. However, Liddell also cites the similarities between Gardnerian rituals and those of the Golden Dawn and the O.T.O.³² Such cultural and literary borrowings gave Wicca a particularly personalized and British feel while rooting it in magical tradition.

From the textual analysis of the various copies of the Gardnerian Book of Shadows, one finds the development of a particular vision. Beginning with a collection of notes from various mystical practices, such as the Cabbala and the Tarot, Gardner went on to describe basic rituals and holiday celebrations. Later drafts show much more of a preoccupation with providing Wicca with a historical context, thus giving it a validity

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 50-8.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 57-62.

³² E. W. Liddell, *The Pickingill Papers: George Pickingill & the Origins of Modern Wicca*, ed. by M.A. Howard, (Chieveley: Capall Bann, 1994), pp. 15-30; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 216-26.

lacked by direct creation. This historical basis would only be increased by Gardner's use of works like Leland's *Aradia* and grimoires; these borrowings added to the apparent authenticity of Wiccan rituals, along with rooting them in the more general practice of magic. The use of Crowley's works were the most controversial, however, for while they needed other texts for the creation of their myth, Wiccans did not want to be associated with the darker magic practiced by Crowley.

The Legacy Of Gardnerian Wicca

After all of his textual analysis, Kelly concludes that Gardner's distinctive contribution to these rites was a set of observances designed to induce sexual excitement by flagellation; this was his own highly idiosyncratic way of attaining an ecstatic trance, only one of eight methods for obtaining trance.³³ Hutton is more positive, saying that Gardner would have thereby attracted only a small number of "asthmatic mystics." He sees in Gardner's work the outline of a radical system of religious belief and practice. His combining of paganism with the figure of the witch in the Leland and Murray tradition put Wiccans on the societal fringe, for it precluded any easy reconciliation with Christianity or traditional social mores. This was only increased by the fact that Gardnerian Wiccans revered not a Great Spirit, who might be equated with Jehovah, but the goddess and the horned god who had arisen out of the romantic counter-culture of the nineteenth century. Unlike the rituals of the Golden Dawn and Co-Masonry, the Wiccan rites were conducted by groups led by a high priestess and a high priest, with the role of the priestess being slightly more important. In addition, while British Freemasonry shunned the north as the place of darkness, following the Christian tradition, Wicca made

³³ Kelly, pp. 80-2, 91-3, 88-90.

its invocations to that direction. In its feminism, its unqualified paganism, its counter-cultural deities, its insistence on nudity during the rites, and its respect for darkness, Wicca challenged many cultural norms. Yet, like the magical secret societies of the seventeenth century, it concealed its revolutionary aspects beneath a language of continuity, even as it attempted to alter the limits of spirituality in the present.³⁴

Wicca was not merely a form of revolutionary protest, however. If it were, its continuance would have been questionable, probably lasting only as long as the political movements of the later 1960s. Luhrmann observes in her study of modern witchcraft that it is more than simply a form of magic, a way of gaining power. Most witches, including Gardner and his followers, came to treat their magic as a religion, usually after some period of practice. While most anthropologists have treated magic both as religion's precursor and as the individualistic result of collective religious ecstasy, Clifford Geertz's definition of religion could also apply to Wicca:

system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the rituals and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Placing their beliefs within the context of a mythical past had given their beliefs legitimacy; defining these beliefs as a religion only helped to increase this. The rites, of course, had helped to elicit spiritual feelings in them. It became not merely a form of educated mysticism, a way to set the witch off from the world and its conventions. Wicca had become a system of beliefs without a theology or a dogma, thus allowing a creative freedom within a religious context unknown in the more established religions. While

³⁴ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," pp 50-1; Hutton. *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 234-6.

maintaining the spiritual attraction of these other beliefs, Wicca offered its adherents the possibility of innovation, albeit within the long tradition of Western occultism.³⁵

Valiente's Initiation Into Witchcraft

Gardner could not attract possible initiates simply by offering them a different way of seeing the world, though. From the beginning, Gardner and his followers knew that if Wicca were to survive then there would have to be enough younger people who were willing to carry it on. He, therefore, took the position that it would be necessary to publicize Wicca in order to attract these possible initiates. The danger in this was that negative publicity might destroy them; part of this threat lay within Gardner himself, in his love of the limelight that many of his followers later observed.³⁶ Another friend, Gerald Yorke, remarked about Gardner that he was "totally lacking in the Fourth Power of the Sphinx," that is, the power of silence. He did not see the absurdity in swearing new initiates to secrecy and then having them read in the newspapers some foolish interview he had given earlier. Nor could he seem to realize the true motives of the reporters of Fleet Street, who were more interested in selling sensational stories about modern-day witches than honestly observing these rites.³⁷

In the beginning, though, Gardner's initial interviews with newspaper reporters, arising from the interest created by the Isle of Man museum during 1951-2, attracted Doreen Valiente to witchcraft. Already extremely interested in the occult and with some experience of Spiritualism and Theosophy, Valiente had found information on her favorite subject, magic, extremely hard to find. She had been fortunate to discover a copy of Aleister Crowley's privately printed and rare book, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, in

³⁵ Luhrmann, pp. 176-9.

³⁶ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 54.

a local library, for occultists at that time held such writings in utmost secrecy. Books can only take one so far in magical practice, however; most of the authors of these books were dead. It was in 1952 that the weekly *Illustrated* ran an article entitled "Witchcraft in Britain" by Allen Andrews. In addition to the opening of the museum on the Isle of Man, Andrews also mentioned the "Southern Coven of British Witches," which met in the New Forest, not far from Valiente's home in Bournemouth. Valiente read in this article about Gardnerian witchcraft, a belief system that had adherents throughout Britain. Curious, she wrote Cecil Williamson, who had opened the Museum of Magic and Witchcraft, telling him of her occult studies so far and asking if she could contact the witches. He passed her letter on to Gerald Gardner, who exchanged a few letters with her before inviting her to meet a friend of his, Dafo. A year later, Gardner initiated her into his coven; he later invited her to his London flat to meet the rest of his coven. There were about eight or ten of them then, mostly those who were fellow members with Gardner of a naturist club. Valiente felt that "a whole new life had opened up" before her.³⁸

Through Gardner's insistence on the publicization of Wicca in order to attract possible initiates, his own love of the limelight and the amount of control that he wanted over the shape of Wicca. This avid search for publicity led him to break his vow of silence in the attempt to gain an interview. Initially, though, the newspaper coverage and the opening of the Museum of Magic and Witchcraft gained Gardner important initiates like Valiente, who would add her own personal talents and vision to the formation of modern witchcraft rituals. Her reading of Crowley's book and other occult texts led her

³⁷ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, pp. 65-6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-47.

to Gardner's coven, where she would gain her first true experience of modern mysticism like Wicca.

Valiente's Poetic Revision Of the Rituals

During the time that Valiente participated in his coven--even serving as high priestess after Dafo's retirement--Gardner continued to revise the rituals. While his earlier changes had taken in material from external and literary sources, the later revisions mainly consisted of responses to practical needs of working the rites, training initiates, and regulating relationships among coven members, between covens, and between Wicca and the wider world. In addition, he also began to respond to suggestions from his coven members. The first two copies of the Book of Shadows had provided rituals only for the quarter days identified as the witches' sabbats by Murray at the beginning of February, May, August, and November.³⁹ By December 1953, Gardner was already informally celebrating the winter solstice.⁴⁰ Robert has said that in 1958 his principal coven asked him if the solstices and equinoxes could be fully incorporated into the Wiccan calendar of rituals. Gardner agreed, forming the eight-fold pattern of the ritual year that became standard in Wicca and virtually all of paganism.⁴¹

Certainly the most important--and significant--source of additions to the Book of Shadows was Valiente. She brought to Wicca her gift for poetry, a gift first exploited by Gardner six months after her initiation when he asked her to compose an invocation, at a few hours' notice, for their first winter solstice celebration. Taking her inspiration from the Hebridean folklore collection, *Carmina Gadelica*, Valiente composed the poem

³⁹ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," pp. 52-3.

⁴⁰ Janet and Stewart Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches and rites for Birth Marriage and Death*, (Custer, WA: Phoenix Publishing, 1981), p. 148.

⁴¹ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 53.

"Queen of the Moon, Queen of the Stars"; this was immediately published as a traditional witches' seasonal ceremony in Gardner's *Witchcraft Today*, which is what it soon became.⁴² Valiente also worked with Gardner to write the standard rhyme for round dances, "The Witches' Rune." Witches usually use this chant to begin an evening's ritual:

...

Earth and water, air and fire,
Wand and pentacle and sword,
Work ye unto our desire,
Hearken ye unto our word!
Cords and censer, scourge and knife,
Powers of the witch's blade—
Waken all ye unto life,
Come ye as the charm is made!
Queen of Heaven, Queen of Hell,
Horned hunter of the night—
Lend your power unto the spell,
And work our will by magic rite!
By all the power of land and sea,
By all the might of moon and sun—
As we do will, so mote it be;
Chant the spell, and be it done!

⁴³

...

This poem reveals much of modern witchcraft, including the special "weapons" with special powers, the earthly power and goddess power used within the spell, and the dependence of the spell upon the witches' will.⁴⁴ In addition, in the mid-1950s, after urging Gardner to remove the Crowleyanity from the *Book of Shadows*, Valiente proceeded to rewrite "The Charge," the most familiar form of which became her later prose version. While retaining much of the wording from Leland's *Aradia*, Valiente eliminated most of Crowley's elaborate phraseology, thus further separating Wicca from

⁴² Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, p. 148.

⁴³ Stewart Farrar, *What Witches Do: A Modern Coven Revealed*, (Blaine, WA: Phoenix Publishing, 1991), p. 13.

⁴⁴ Luhrmann, p. 52.

his tainted reputation. Valiente encapsulated the spirit of Wicca in this latest version of "The Charge," the last portion of which is as follows:

I who am the beauty of the green earth, and the white Moon among the stars, and the mystery of the waters, and the desire of the heart of man, call unto thy soul. Arise, and come unto me. For I am the soul of nature, who gives life to the universe. From me all things proceed, and unto me all things must return; and before my face, beloved of Gods and of men, let thine innermost divine self be enfolded in the rapture of the infinite. Let my worship be within the heart that rejoiceth; for behold, all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals. And therefore let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honour and humility, mirth and reverence within you. And thou who thinkest to seek for me, know thy seeking and yearning shall avail thee not unless thou knowest the mystery; that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee. For behold, I have been with thee from the beginning; and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.⁴⁵

Spoken by the High Priestess during the ritual of the Drawing Down of the Moon, these are the words of the goddess, who is said to speak through the High Priestess. In these words, one finds the nature imagery, the romantic poetry, and the freedom that are common to many witchcraft rituals. Through this ritual and the words themselves, the witch—whether man or woman—learns to find the divine within herself, all according to her belief in an immanent, and not a transcendent, deity.⁴⁶ Valiente's words have evidently become part of the store of the modern witches' common knowledge, for she even found a work obviously based on the verse version of "The Charge" that was printed in an American book on witchcraft, in which they were attributed to another English witch, Sybil Leek.⁴⁷ While she wrote the modern forms of many witchcraft rituals--and even the Gardnerian Book of Shadows, at least according to her--Valiente claims that her work was based on "old material, and upon what I have learned in my

⁴⁵ Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, p. 43.

⁴⁶ Luhrmann, p. 51.

⁴⁷ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 62.

years of practice as a witch."⁴⁸ This claim to an older tradition is, of course, common among Wiccans and their historicization of witchcraft.

Through her own additions to the Book of Shadows, Valiente created rituals even more British and yet personalized in nature. For example, many of her poems and chants were inspired by folklore from the British Isles, the *Carmina Gadelica* being just one resource. Valiente acknowledges her debt to these works; yet she still refers to "older material" that provided a basis for her work, a reference that adds to the myth of the ancient tradition of witchcraft, one that has been handed down orally over the years. In addition to this historicization, Valiente helped Gardner to further shape Wicca according to the needs of their coven when she wrote rituals for the newly added sabbats.

The Dangers and the Divisiveness Of Publicity

Valiente might have added her own particular genius to the Book of Shadows, but she could not save her coven from their encounter with the reporters of Fleet Street. She, and others among Gardner's friends, warned him that he would quickly encounter trouble if he were not more discreet. Valiente herself was beginning to believe the opinion of Dafo, who had retired from the coven mainly for this reason. Gardner may have claimed to be more interested in the continuance of Wicca; he appeared, though, to be satisfying his own personal vanity.⁴⁹

According to Valiente, the real trouble hit them in the summer of 1955. The *Sunday Pictorial*, then a popular tabloid, started a series attacking witchcraft and linking it with Devil-worship. Promising "The shocking inside story of Black Magic in Britain,"

⁴⁸ Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, p. 21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

they had found a Birmingham woman who claimed that she was an ex-witch who now wanted to confess "in the hope of saving others." The paper continued:

Because devil worship is practised in secret, because its followers look no different from the man or woman next door, this investigation has taken many months . . . enough has been discovered to prove to you that devil worship can wreck the health, corrupt the mind and degrade the body of those it ensnares.

Its crimes--as we will show--include blasphemy, desecration, moral perversion.

Our investigators have found the evidence of a nation-wide chain of witchcraft groups called Covens.

Its members are sincere in a satanic belief that theirs is the ancient religion of Britain. They claim it is older than, and superior to, Christianity.

Their confessor told a very sensational tale of joining what appears to have been a sort of Voodoo circle, which held meetings involving the sacrifice of chickens and the drinking of their blood, which was said to be "the blood of the devil." The emotions of the meetings seem to have been augmented by plenty of alcohol and frenzied dancing. The word of this one woman was the entire basis for this series, which easily conflated the witchcraft with the public's fear of Satanism.⁵⁰

A group of clergymen, including the Bishop of Exeter, the Rev. F. Amphlett Micklewright, the Rev. Gordon P. Owen, and Mr. Stanley Maxted, associated themselves with the *Sunday Pictorial's* expose and congratulated that newspaper on publicly exposing such evil. The series ran for five weeks; during this time, the journalist who was mainly responsible for the stories, Peter Hawkins, went up to the Isle of Man to ask Gerald Gardner to comment on them. Gardner expressed skepticism about the more lurid tales of their confessor and informed Hawkins that witches did not drink blood or

⁵⁰ Gerald Gardner, *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, (Lake Toxaway, NC: Mercury Publishing, 1999), pp. 216-24.

worship the devil. Hawkins responded by writing a personal attack on Gardner under the headline, "NO WITCHCRAFT IS FUN." He continued by calling Gardner a "whitewasher of witchcraft" and describing his novel *High Magic's Aid* as "foul bait" to lure people into joining covens.⁵¹

Gardner suffered personally after this coverage; he and his wife, Donna, lost many friends during this time. In addition, people who had recently joined his coven were panicked. In response to rumors about telephone tapping and the interference with letters, Valiente advised Gardner to destroy any of his letters and papers that he would not wish to be seen by unfriendly eyes. He acted on her advice, clearing out his London flat as well. Their purpose was to prevent any general roundup of coven members. While the police could question Gardner, Donna, and Valiente, they could not contact the others if no list of names and addresses existed.⁵²

No general roundup took place, and Valiente hoped that Gardner had learned his lesson regarding the media. In the next year, 1956, the witch-hunting within the press continued, running headlines such as "BLACK MAGIC KILLER-WOMAN TALKS," "MURDER AT BLACK MASS, SAYS WOMAN," "BLACK WITCHERY CAN LEAD TO MURDER," "WITCHCRAFT GROWING, WARNS DEAN," and "WITCHCRAFT FIRES ON PAGAN HILLTOP." The reporters even attempted to link witches with the unsolved murder of Charles Walton in Warwickshire in 1945. The papers suggested that this was a case of ritual murder that had been committed by witches, who might well murder again.⁵³ In the hope of combating press sensationalism--and the possible

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 225-7.

⁵² Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 67.

⁵³ Gardner, *Meaning of Witchcraft*, pp. 231-56.

reinstatement of the old Witchcraft Act--Valiente and Gardner worked together on his book, *The Meaning of Witchcraft*. In this book, they provided a detailed analysis of the press sensationalism and systematically debunked the stories, showing how lacking in evidence they really were.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the press onslaught continued through the year 1959, and the Gardnerian Wiccans faced a split within their main coven, which was holding most of its meetings on the land near St. Albans upon which Gardner had re-erected the "witch's cottage" that he had purchased from J.S.M. Ward. One faction, that led by Jack Braceln and his girlfriend, favored the continuing publicity in the papers. The others, led by Valiente and the older members of the coven, were against Gardner's ongoing interviews with the press. They were particularly incensed by one interview with a popular magazine in which Gardner had posed for a ludicrous picture which showed him "sitting cross-legged in the magic circle and pointing a magic sword at what the caption called a 'weird image' of a bat-winged demon."⁵⁵ In a last attempt to save the coven, Valiente's group drew up a set of proposals, entitled "Proposed Rules for the Craft," the main purpose of which was to ensure the secrecy to which they had been sworn when they were initiated. Gardner, who was then in the Isle of Man, responded by sending them a long document, the "Laws of the Craft," supposedly the ancient, authoritative laws governing witchcraft. Valiente and her faction did not accept this document as legitimate. They recognized the artificial archaisms within this document that set out the relationships between Wiccans and providing for common rules of action within a

⁵⁴ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 68.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

framework of autonomous covens. Valiente particularly disliked one section which was particularly sexist, including statements like "The Gods love the brethren of Wicca as a man loveth a woman, by mastering her," and "And the greatest virtue of a High Priestess be that she recognize that youth is necessary to the representative of the Goddess. So will she gracefully retire in favour of a younger woman, should the coven so decide in council."⁵⁶

The result of this continuing press coverage and Gardner's insistence upon his own authority was that Valiente and her group "hived off" in the summer of 1957 to form a sister coven. Gardner himself remained as the high priest of his own coven. He generally profited from the press exposure, for it attracted an increasing number of willing initiates to contact him at his home in the Isle of Man. Along with introductions made through existing friends, this meant that during the last five years of his life, from 1959 to 1964, he initiated several new high priestesses who would be responsible for most of the new traditions in witchcraft, all of which would have their basis in Gardner's. Patricia Crowther became well known during the early 1960s as a spokeswoman for witchcraft on radio and television; she established covens throughout the north of England. Monique Wilson brought the main line of Gardnerian Wicca to America. Also Ray Bone's initiates spread throughout Britain to create most of its present-day Gardnerians. Gardner's last book, *The Meaning of Witchcraft*--in addition to answering the press attacks--attempted to establish the historical legitimacy of Wicca by relating it to a long line of ancient religious texts and images, and later occult groups. He died at the age of seventy-nine, safely leaving Wicca in the hands of others.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 69-71.

⁵⁷ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," pp. 54-5.

Gardner's love of publicity—and his own flare for drama—obviously created problems for his coven even as it attracted attention to the growth of modern witchcraft in Britain. Refusing to see the true motives behind the reporters, he gave them what they wanted, only adding to a negative view of Wicca, one that often portrayed witches as Satanists, or, at the very least, foolish naturists. Gardner's growing authoritarianism led to the fragmentation of his coven into various factions, and thus the growth of further Wiccan traditions. As his followers gained confidence in their own understanding of witchcraft and their vision of its future, they felt ready to move away from the strict following of the Gardnerian Book of Shadows. His indifference to their concerns and opinions only cemented this separation and gave them reason to “hive off” and form their own covens and their own rituals.

While Gerald Gardner was obviously a “loveable rogue,” as Doreen Valiente has described him, he brought to occultism his own voice and vision. This man, who pioneered research in Malaysian antiquities and was versed in many different occult traditions, designed the rituals of Wicca in the form in which they were first revealed to the general public, and to history. Although his last years—years admittedly dedicated to witchcraft—left a somewhat taint upon his character, his work grounded Wicca in certain historical texts of Western magic, such as Leland's *Aradia* and the rituals of the Golden Dawn. While his version of modern witchcraft is now considered to be rather ceremonial and stilted, he brought witchcraft to a new audience, allowing innovations and rites to develop.

CHAPTER IV

THE EXPANSION OF WICCA: PICKINGILL, LEEK, COCHRANE, AND SANDERS

There were, of course, witches who followed other magical traditions, some of whom claimed longer lineages than that of Gardnerian witchcraft. It would be difficult to prove the existence of covens throughout time, but as Ronald Hutton states, there are a number of claims for the continuous presence of certain covens from before 1950. Their existence can be found in the oral histories of these covens, which have been passed down from the elders of the groups concerned to the next generation of witches. Others, such as Rhiannon Ryall, a contributor to the pagan magazine, *The Cauldron*, described their initiation into long-established covens in the 1940s. Due to the secretive nature of these covens and the destruction of their documents to prevent arrest under the witchcraft laws, there is very little evidence to prove their claims, but this absence does not necessarily invalidate them. Other Wiccan traditions could have evolved independently of Gardnerian Wicca by drawing on the same cultural images and impulses.¹

George Pickingill: The Importance and Dubiousness Of Witch Blood and Lineage

Bill Liddell, who was part of this new generation, publicly described what his elders' had said was a nationwide network of traditional covens formed by George Pickingill. The Pickingills of East Anglia originated in Saxon times. Julia, the first

¹ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," pp. 55-6; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 287-8.

historically documented Pickingill, was the witch of Brandon in Suffolk who was killed in 1701. Each subsequent generation retained their allegiance to the horned god and served as priests of their religion. A combination of Danish and French practices, the rites of Pickingill covens stipulated the worship of the goddess and affirmed the centrality of the priestess to the rituals, two tenants that are the basis of modern, twentieth-century witchcraft. To further the hereditary nature of his covens, Pickingill insisted that each coven leader must substantiate "witch blood" in his own family. These leaders received his "Craft authority" and his family rituals, thus allowing the coven members to boast a continuous and unbroken magical lineage of eight centuries.² Most people, including witches and historians, doubt the truth of this authority, however. Leonora James, an editor of *The Wiccan*, the magazine in which this information was first published, and Doreen Valiente were both initially receptive to the material but became more skeptical of it. Despite all of this, it has produced an actual living tradition in Australia and the United States.³

Like others in Wicca, Liddell describes a historical tradition of witchcraft, one that in this case goes back to Saxon times. Such claims, if historically documented, would undoubtedly have given witchcraft—but particularly Pickingill's tradition—certain legitimacy. While these claims were never fully substantiated, Pickingill continued to maintain his hereditary status. He even insisted that his followers must also have a similar family line. This produced a sort of witch's papal lineage, one in which a form of historical witchcraft was handed down over the generations; Pickingill, therefore, retained an enormous amount of control over this tradition because it was entirely based

² E. W. Liddell, *The Pickingill Papers: George Pickingill & the Origins of Modern Wicca* (Chieveley: Capall Bann Publishing, 1994), pp. 24-7.
³ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 289-90.

on his own family's rituals and beliefs. The resulting "Craft authority" was eventually put into question, however, for historians and even other witches doubted the truth behind Pickingill's claims.

Sybil Leek: A Public Priestess In Her Own Right

Although Pickingill--and Gardner--may have encouraged pagan beliefs, very few women spoke publicly of witchcraft. Men wrote most of the books about neo-paganism, founded the witchcraft museums, and formed new traditions. As two witches, Margo and Lee, observe in an article for *The New Broom*:

When a Witch steps into the consecrated Circle, she steps beyond time. Within that circle, the High Priestess assumes Woman's rightful role as a leader with power equal to and sometimes greater than man's. The women of Wicca, like the women of the matriarchies of old, are proud, free, confident, and fulfilled. . . within the Circle.⁴

One exception to this rule, however, is Sybil Leek, a New Forest witch who emerged in the 1960s to become a well-known media personality and advocate of modern witchcraft. She also supervised a coven of her own according to what she asserted were the beliefs and teachings of an international network of old covens into which she had been initiated many years ago.⁵

In an attempt to give the public a true portrayal of a woman who leads a sophisticated and fulfilling life in the twentieth century and accepts scientific research, Leek wrote her *Diary of a Witch*, which was published in 1968.⁶ Beginning with the simple statement, "I am a witch," Leek describes in this book her involvement with today's witchcraft. While she confronted prejudice against her beliefs, Leek also found in these precepts something that would sustain her through very difficult times. Indeed, she

⁴ Adler, p. 214.

⁵ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," pp. 55-6.

⁶ Sybil Leek, *The Complete Art of Witchcraft* (New York: Signet, 1971), p. 11.

states that witchcraft has "worked for me, has led me to freedom, to ancient truths, and to laughter. It has not been a bad way to live."⁷

Claiming one of the longest lineages in witch history, Leek states in her *Diary* that she can trace her ancestors back to 1134 C.E.⁸ With such a background, Leek's childhood would surely be charmed; her stories often appear too magical, too fey, but fantastical witch childhoods are common in Wiccan lore, a further attempt to mythologize history. As such, her birthplace was apparently magical, occurring at a crossroads where three rivers also met in Staffordshire, a place of great power according to pagan beliefs. Born with a witchmark into a family of witches—as Leek continues her story—she began absorbing occult knowledge from the beginning. During her long walks with her father, she learned herbalism and Eastern philosophy. Her grandmother taught her astrology by drawing astrological symbols on the pastries that she baked in enormous amounts. This grandmother also tended to the children when they were sick; according to Leek, she even saved Leek from a case of diphtheria by magically transferring the illness to Leek's pet owl.⁹ Her childhood was also enlivened by the many visitors to their household, but especially Aleister Crowley, who showed her the beauty of poetry and occultism. Most importantly, though, Crowley made a prediction regarding Leek that would follow her throughout her life. Speaking to her grandmother, he explained,

This is the one who will take up where I leave off. You'd better remember that, young lady. You'll hear all sorts of things said about me and they'll say the same things about you, but I shall have broken the ground for you. She is the one who will survive. She'll live to see occultism almost being understood. That will be the day, won't it, old lady?¹⁰

⁷ Sybil Leek, *Diary of a Witch* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968).

⁸ Leek, *Diary*, p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-22.

Her early association with Crowley, already an experienced occultist, associated her with the basics of high magic, as it was followed by Crowley, of course. Also, his statement to her grandmother justified her high place in witchcraft to later generations.

After such an unusual upbringing, Leek was not prepared for the public school system, which tried to contain her interests to what was "acceptable" and discouraged her growing psychic talents. Calling the wild birds to her in the courtyard and "astral projecting" herself out of mathematics class only earned her demerits.¹¹ She felt that this more conventional knowledge did nothing to aid her in her life, unlike the knowledge gained through her initiation into a French coven, an initiation that gives her a greater aura of respectability due to the older folk knowledge associated with continental Europe. She was slowly realizing that "time is artificial and that layers of consciousness can be explored as easily as walking down a country lane."¹²

After her return from France, Leek's family established a new home in the New Forest. She quickly discovered, though, that her mother planned to make her into a socialite. To escape this fate, Leek apparently left home to live with the Romanies, or the local gypsies, another group associated with folk knowledge. Feeling that she could learn much from them, she lived and traveled with their tribe for a year. They, in turn, supposedly respected her own knowledge and called her "The Lady." During this year, she gained a more extensive understanding of the uses of the various herbs growing everywhere in the New Forest, along with more practical information, such as the intricacies of horse trading and the techniques of "tickling trout," which allowed her to simply pluck the hypnotized trout out of the stream with her hands. Among the gypsies, Leek experienced their generosity and true joy in life. Before she left them, they made

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 30-1.

¹² Ibid., pp. 46-9.

her a member of their tribe through the mixing of blood. According to Leek, gypsies have been highly romanticized, but she was impressed by their "honesty, their obedience to their tribal laws, and the complete acceptance of ancient witchcraft as part of their lives."¹³ Despite her claims to an unromantic view of the gypsies and life in general, her attachments to the French coven and the gypsies give her great respectability among Wiccans, for these groups are believed to hold onto a living tradition of folk knowledge, making them appear much closer to ancient beliefs than the rest of the population.

From her home in the New Forest, Leek freely offered psychic healing and cures to those who asked for her help. The local people accepted her "eccentricities"; this encouraged her to become more open about her magical status once the witchcraft laws had been repealed. She used her position as a journalist to become a public advocate for her beliefs.¹⁴ Because she encountered many misconceptions regarding witchcraft, she published her *Diary* and *The Complete Art of Witchcraft* and began a series of lecture tours across Britain and America. This reeducation of the public regarding witchcraft fostered more interest in paganism and allowed more people to examine themselves and their religions, which often provided little comfort in the modern world. While she never meant to go about "preaching," Leek did come to think of witchcraft as a solution to the tension and trouble of the world.¹⁵ She also worked with Hans Holzer in his many ghost hunts in America and Europe; for Leek, each successful ghost hunt provided proof for the belief in life after death and the possible truth behind reincarnation.¹⁶ Remaining true to herself and to her oaths taken during initiation, however, was not always easy. Throughout her life, she battled the temptations of materialism and an easier way of life.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 51-73.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 75-179.

¹⁵ Leek, *Complete Art of Witchcraft*, p. 11.

¹⁶ Leek, *Complete Art of Witchcraft*, p. 11.

She had to learn that her religion must always come before her own wishes and her family. Because of this, she faced moments of intense loneliness as she progressed further in her spiritual understanding.¹⁷ As her grandmother had always taught her, though:

It is not good for all your wishes to be fulfilled. Through sickness you recognize the value of good health. Through evil the value of good, through hunger, satisfaction, through exertion the value of rest.¹⁸

Such dualities can be seen in traditional occultism, where an observance of dualities like good and evil become a central tenet of belief. In the end, all must be balanced, though.

Like Pickingill, Leek too claimed an unbroken line of hereditary witchcraft; she, though, based her teachings in those of an international network of covens into which she had been initiated. Gardner's initiation into an established witch coven was never fully substantiated and neither was Leek's. The mere association with tales of an ancient lineage, however, is often enough, and so Leek's authority among modern witches grew. And, like so many others in Wicca, Leek describes a particularly magical childhood. Such stories also tend to lend authenticity to a witch's teachings, just as the myth of Wicca adds to the genuineness of a religious movement gathered from so many various sources. In addition to her charmed childhood, Leek became involved with the gypsies, ones that possibly retained folk teachings lost to the public in general. While adding to her authority, this relationship gave her form a witchcraft a particular flair, one especially linked with the region of the New Forest and the gypsies who lived there. Leek did not exercise the control over her teachings as others did; rather than control and "Craft authority," Leek wanted to further the spiritual understanding of others, eventually lending her support to the least authoritarian form of witchcraft, Dianic witchcraft.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 182-3.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 102.

is not paganism, though it retains the memory of ancient faiths." He goes on to claim that witchcraft is "the last real mystery cult to survive, with a very complex and evolved philosophy that has strong affinities with many Christian beliefs. The concept of a sacrificial god was not new to the ancient world; it is not new to a witch." He goes on to claim, "I come from an old witch family. My mother told me of things that had been told to her grandmother by her grandmother. I have two ancestors who died by hanging for the practice of witchcraft." According to Valiente, this is typical of Cochrane's "love of mystification" and that he could be an even more devious person than Gerald Gardner. Others, like one acquaintance of his, described Cochrane as "an expert on everything and the biggest liar in town."²²

Like Leek and other hereditary practitioners, he rejected Gardner's use of nudity and the scourge. Cochrane's rituals were more distinctive, however. He laid a much greater emphasis on the witch's relationship to nature.²³ Cochrane and his clan worshipped the power of primordial nature. He once described his first truly spiritual experience as a boyhood epiphany, a numinous illumination gained during a moonlight night. His picture of the god as the ruler of death later appeared obsessive in the eyes of other witches, giving his rituals a more ominous and brooding feeling.²⁴ In addition, he also used a different set of correspondences between the cardinal points and the elements—that generally used by Western occultism—and his groups were called "clans" and were led by a male "magister" rather than a high priestess, mainly to separate himself from the Gardnerian tradition.

²¹ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 57.

²² Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, pp. 120-1

²³ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 57.

²⁴ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 118.

Doreen Valiente, who had been working with witches in Sussex since her separation from Gardner and had established herself as a priestess and ritualist in her own right, lent Cochrane her support in 1964. Like Gardner, she had now become a writer upon witchcraft, similarly posing as an objective scholar observing a new phenomenon. Because his tradition appeared to be ancient and independent of Gardner, Valiente aided Cochrane with her skills as priestess and poet. Near the end of that year, his followers established the first national body for pagan witches, the Witchcraft Research Association—a futile attempt to unite the various factions of witchcraft in Britain—and the first national periodical for them, *Pentagram*. These activities drew the attention of a journalist, Justine Glass, who published a book in 1965, *Witchcraft, the Sixth Sense--and Us*, which gives a sympathetic account of Cochrane's tradition, portraying it as if it were that of the majority.

While apparently well meaning, Cochrane opened up his own group for criticism in that he and his followers attempted not only to become the guiding force in British witchcraft, but also to guide it in their own ways. Cochrane's attack upon the Gardnerians led to the collapse of both his organization and its magazine during 1965, along with the estrangement of Valiente. Valiente had begun to suspect the antiquity of his tradition, eventually discovering enough inconsistencies to demonstrate his part in forming the tradition.²⁵ In addition, she had become disillusioned by his increasing authoritarianism and his tendency to threaten anyone who opposed him. According to Valiente, his clan broke up not only for these reasons but also for his liaison with a new initiate, an infidelity that broke up his marriage along with his magical relationship with his High Priestess.²⁶

²⁵ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 57.

²⁶ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 129.

As his personal life collapsed along with his ambitions, he committed suicide at midsummer of 1966, leaving behind devoted followers who still continue his practices and teachings. If he had survived, perhaps his teachings would have taken their place alongside Gardnerian Wicca; his followers instead use the terms "Traditional" or "Old" witchcraft.²⁷ His followers would later return at midsummer to the place on the Sussex Downs where he used to hold the sabbats. There they gathered at the foot of an oak tree—a tree sacred in modern paganism—and lit a candle in his memory. Valiente believed that he could have changed the history of modern witchcraft. Like him, though, she too believed in reincarnation, and so she thinks that he will one day return to finish his work.²⁸ Despite this, Cochrane left behind a tradition of passionate involvement in his beliefs; he brought to occult tenets his knowledge of English folklore and ritual, along with an emphasis on the mystery aspects of paganism.

Another witch with claims to a hereditary line, Cochrane described the handing down of rituals from his grandmother to his mother to him; he goes on to reiterate the Wiccan myth, describing modern witchcraft as the "last real mystery cult to survive." Such statements are obviously not unusual among Wiccans. Cochrane, though, added his own personal elements to Wiccan lore, such as his use of English folklore—but particularly his associations with smithcraft—and his emphasis on the power of nature. His teachings attracted many Englishmen, and even a practiced witch like Valiente; his own growing authoritarianism and ruthlessness in his dealings with other witchcraft traditions led to his alienating of his followers and the eventual collapse of his efforts. Passionate and talented, Cochrane retained his admirers even after his death. It is obvious, though, that Wiccans were becoming less and less able to deal with control like

²⁷ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 58.

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that exercised by Cochrane, wanting instead a more independent spirituality that would evolve later on among Wiccans.

Alexander Sanders: The Further Expansion and Adaptation Of Wicca

With the death of Robert Cochrane, many witches mourned, and his faithful followers continued his teachings. His death also allowed the rise of another leader, and another form of Wicca. Until this time, modern witchcraft had been dominated by those in the South like Gardner, Valiente, and Leek. The major representative of the religion in the North was the Gardnerian high priestess Patricia Crowther, who supervised covens in Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Nottinghamshire. She eventually publicly revealed her identity as a witch, offering various lectures and media interviews, and publishing a book with her husband Arnold. This media coverage, especially their appearance on the television show, *People and Places*, gained the attention of another witch; in November 1961, she received a letter from a man in his mid-thirties by the name of Alex Sanders.²⁹ In this letter, Sanders states that he is writing them because "To be a witch is something that I have always wanted--and yet I have never been able to contact anybody who could help me."³⁰

He made this appeal for someone to teach him witchcraft, and yet he made subsequent claims to have been initiated in his boyhood by his witch grandmother, a woman called Mary Bibby from Bethesda in North Wales. According to his later story, at the age of seven he had no idea that his grandmother was a witch. However, according to him, he entered her house one day, seeking his afternoon tea. Walking in through the back door, he found her in the kitchen working witchcraft in a magic circle. The young Alex was apparently surprised by the scene before him:

²⁸ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 58.

²⁹ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 58.

An old, old woman, with wrinkled belly and match-stick thighs, stood in the centre of the room surrounded by a cloth circle on which curious objects had been placed. Only when she spoke did he recognize his grandmother . . . "Don't look so scared lad"--she realized suddenly that he was white and shaking--"you'll live to thank me for this. I'll teach you things you never heard of, how to make magic and see the future."³¹

Under her guidance, Alex developed his abilities. In accordance with their tradition, he copied her book of rituals in his own handwriting, destroying the original upon her death.

Valiente doubts the truth of this tale, however. An article in the *Manchester Comet* of June 23, 1965, entitled "WITCHES DANCE PAGAN RITES UNDER MOON," described a ceremony led by Sanders. Reading the various quotes from the rituals in the article, Valiente realized that these supposed words from Sanders' rituals had actually been written by herself in collaboration with Gardner during the 1950's. Valiente later obtained a copy of Sanders' rituals; she quickly discovered that it was almost identical with that used by Gerald Gardner. Yet Sanders suggested to his biographer, June Johns, that witches like himself, who had supposedly learned their rituals from hereditary sources, considered Gardnerian witches as mere novices.³²

As a result of his letter, Patricia Crowther invited Sanders to come and see her so that she might determine his suitability for initiation into her coven. Unfortunately for him, he did not impress her, and so she refused his admission. This slight he could never forgive. Not to be deterred, Sanders discovered her daughter coven in Nottinghamshire, the high priestess of which was Pat Kopinski. After his initiation into this coven, he visited Gardner in the Isle of Man, where he could have obtained his own copy of the Gardnerian Book of Shadows.³³ Sanders gained public attention in September 1962 when

³⁰ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, pp. 165-6.

³¹ June Johns, *King of the Witches; The World of Alex Sanders* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1969), pp. 12-13.

³² Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 165.

³³ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 58.

he staged an elaborate initiation ceremony--one which was reminiscent of Freemasonry and Egyptian mysteries--for the *Manchester Evening Chronicle*. The article stated that he was an employee in a Manchester library; his employers at the prestigious John Rylands Library were not amused, for they soon discovered that the famous grimoire, *The Key of Solomon*—a source of high magic for his rituals and celebrations—was missing. As a result, he was dismissed from his job, and Kopinski abandoned him soon after that.³⁴ Kopinski would later give an interview to the *News of the World* of April, 9, 1967, in which she described her break with Sanders: "I got fed up, it was so theatrical and the coven was disbanded. It was a waste of time."³⁵

By 1965, it seems that Sanders had already founded three covens in and around Manchester. While the traditional number of members for a coven is thirteen, his biographer claims that he received an invitation in this year from one of the 1,623 witches then attached to his covens.³⁶ A party was to be held in his honor; when he arrived, he supposedly found five full covens awaiting him. The elders told him:

We have been in conference with all the other covens We have come to the conclusion that since you are our founder, the only one amongst us directly descended from witches, and equipped with knowledge that outstrips ours, we want to crown you "King of the Witches" and acknowledge you formally as the foremost authority on witchcraft.

According to Johns, he had no interest in this title, which would have required extra work and responsibility. Sanders was apparently content in passing on the teachings of witchcraft and trying to help those in need.³⁷ Valiente doubts the truth of this story, pointing instead to an explanation he gave in an interview published in the first issue of a magazine called *Witch*: "When the *News of the World* got on to me--trying to do an

³⁴ Johns, pp. 61-7.

³⁵ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, pp. 169-70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³⁷ Johns, pp. 96-7.

expose--my boast of power suddenly started to work. And in actual fact I became the King of the Witches. I started to think of myself as the King of the Witches. And I thought if I'm going to get persecuted then I might as well *die* like a king. And I've kept that image in my mind."³⁸ Nevertheless, this appellation annoyed others, for one of the main traits of modern Wiccans is the suspicion of all hierarchies, which are seen as patriarchal in nature. The followers of Wicca also dislike the self-aggrandizing quality of such theatricality; they prefer instead to serve their religion and its deities.

In addition his covens and his new title, Sanders had also gained Maxine Morris, who was then eighteen, as his new high priestess. She and Sanders were handfasted to each other then, in what was probably the first Wiccan wedding ritual to be featured in the press. While Morris had been brought up as a Roman Catholic and educated in a convent, her mother was interested in different spiritual paths, and so Morris came to meet Sanders during one of her mother's tea parties. She eventually left home--much to the disappointment of her mother--and became totally involved in the newly formed "Alexandrian movement." She was soon advanced to the degree of "High Priestess and Witch Queen" and began to preside over the rituals that Sanders organized outdoors at Alderley Edge, his old meeting place.³⁹

This form of modern witchcraft, Alexandrian Wicca, partly referred to its founder, Sanders, but also alluded to the great city of the ancient world in which the religious and magical traditions of so many cultures had met. Sanders brought into his rites much of the traditional learned magic of the Cabbala, the Tarot, and the Golden Dawn, along with numerous Egyptian elements; this gave his rituals a strong basis in the sources of high

³⁸ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 164.

³⁹ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, pp. 168-9.

magic.⁴⁰ His was not a pure paganism, though, despite the supposed hereditary nature of his tradition. He imported much from Judaeo-Christian sources. Sanders asserted that Christians were welcome in his covens as long as they recognized that his god was also theirs.⁴¹

Valiente points to some of the limitations of Sanders' knowledge of occultism, which meant that he probably had to extend his rites with other elements. For example, he was often depicted with a wax or clay image, something that he described as a "fithfath." According to Valiente, the real meaning of this term is a kind of enchantment, whereby someone's eyesight is deceived in some manner, including the projection of an illusion or invisibility. Scottish witches apparently used such means to bewitch others, thus allowing the witches to move about freely. The true Gaelic term for an image of a person as used by witches to cast a spell upon them is a *corp creidh*, literally "clay body."⁴²

In 1967, Sanders and Morris moved to the capital, where they remained for six years. Here they benefited from the decade's progressive impulses, those that had prompted the Wiccan revival: "nostalgia for the natural and rural world, feminism, sexual liberation, dissatisfaction with established religious institutions and social norms, and a desire for a greater individual self-expression and self-fulfillment." During these years, they worked to spread their teachings, including lecturing, training and initiating, and also providing spiritual healing and counseling. Drug addicts sought them out in their search for sobriety.⁴³ Valiente describes his powers of healing and clairvoyance as

⁴⁰ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 59-60.

⁴¹ Johns, p. 121.

⁴² Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 170.

⁴³ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 59.

genuine, based on the testimonies of those they helped.⁴⁴ In addition to this community outreach, they also remained prominent in the media, and by the early 1970's, their initiates outnumbered those of any other pagan witch tradition in Britain.⁴⁵

Their combined dedication to witchcraft ended in 1973, when they separated and Alex moved from London to Sussex. Morris remained in London, where she continued to practice Wicca actively until the end of the decade, when she also began to withdraw. In 1982, she shocked all Wiccans when she joined the Liberal Catholic Church, an organization associated with the Theosophical Society. Charles Webster Leadbeater, a co-worker with Annie Besant, was then a leading member of the Church, which apparently promotes a mystical form of Christianity. Although Morris joined the Church, she did not entirely give up her original beliefs; however, she seems to have become more of an occultist than a witch, retaining her beliefs in parapsychological phenomena without the practice of magic.⁴⁶

Sanders, despite his move away from the capital and his semi-retirement, remained active in Wicca. His relationship with the media was less overt, and yet followers still came to him. During this time, he began to develop a pagan witchcraft that was more accessible to gay and bisexual men, thus breaking down the hostility toward homosexuality that Gardner had brought to witchcraft.⁴⁷ Sanders, himself bisexual, stated in the magazine *Men Only* that "Bisexuality is the norm," a view that would later become dominant among feminist and gay witches in America and artists such as Monica Sjöö.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 172.

⁴⁵ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 59.

⁴⁶ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, pp. 174-5.

⁴⁷ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 60.

⁴⁸ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 176.

In addition, he was also training initiates from continental Europe; Alexandrian Wicca thus gained hold in several countries by the time he died in 1988.⁴⁹

Indeed, Sanders' real legacy lies in the many people whom he introduced to Wicca. The real dedication of these people to their beliefs cannot be denied. For example, it was through him that Janet and Stewart Ferrar joined Wicca and went on to found their own coven. Stewart Ferrar described the details of Alexandrian Wicca in his book *What Witches Do*, which was first published in 1971.⁵⁰ Looking back on his association with Sanders, Stewart Ferrar states, "He was an excellent teacher, and a genuine clairvoyant and healer. He introduced us and hundreds of others to Wicca, and it was up to us what we made of it."⁵¹ This, above all, seems to be the final word on Sanders. Despite his claims to a hereditary tradition--and the subsequent proof of its falsehood--the real test lies in the sincerity and the integrity of his followers. Gathering together more remnants of witchcraft and the occult traditions, Sanders encouraged people to find "rebirth" and a genuine spiritual experience. In the process, they also learned to break away from leaders like Sanders, who often sought self-aggrandizement over spirituality. While he opened witchcraft to more and more people, he often taught them through his own mistakes, ones that revealed a darker side of witchcraft's association with the modern world.

Through their personal interpretations of magical traditions and their use of occult practices, people such as Robert Cochrane and Alexander Sanders provided others with the information and the opportunity to explore witchcraft for themselves, and adapt it as they chose. For in Wicca, the spiritual experience is supreme. As the needs of society

⁴⁹ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 60.

⁵⁰ Valiente, *Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 177

⁵¹ Stewart Ferrar, *What Witches Do: A Modern Coven Revealed* (Blaine, WA: Phoenix Publishing, 1991), p. viii.

change, so must the forms of religion. In the varied religion of Wicca, each person may adapt the basic magical forms so that their spiritual growth may continue.

CHAPTER V

POLITICAL WITCHCRAFT IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA: A NEW IDENTITY FOR MODERN FEMINISTS

By the 1950s and 1960s, Americans had encountered Wicca through the travels and writings of British witches like Leek and Crowther. Even as they reinterpreted modern witchcraft according to American sensibilities, the sexual politics and social awareness of the time brought further changes. The counterculture's experimentation and dissatisfaction with conventional religion encouraged a further revision of Wiccan beliefs and rituals, thus bringing more people into the practice of witchcraft. The new witches eschewed hierarchy and formalized ritual, replacing these with a more inclusive spirituality. Indeed, the personal became the political, producing a more politicized, more modern belief system.

WITCH: A Movement

Looking forward to the creative self-empowerment emphasized in today's feminist witchcraft, the women who gathered in New York on All Hallows Eve 1968 sought to find a new way to blend feminist politics with spirituality. They planned to engage in political and surrealist protest actions, and so they formed WITCH, or Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, a name that irritated many conservative members of Wicca.¹ Within a few weeks, covens materialized in such

¹ Adler, p. 179.

diverse spots as Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, North Carolina, Portland, Austin, and Tokyo. Many of the qualities of modern feminist witches, as opposed to those of traditional witchcraft, appear in their leaflets. WITCH believed that any group of women can form their own coven and declare themselves witches by simply making the decision to do so and enforcing it magically.

If you are a woman and dare to look within yourself, you are a Witch. You make your own rules. You are free and beautiful. You can be invisible or evident in how you choose to make your witch-self known. You can form your own Coven of sister Witches (thirteen is a cozy number for a group) and do your own actions .

Your power comes from your own self as a woman, and it is activated by working in concert with your sisters

You are a Witch by saying aloud, "I am a Witch" three times, and *thinking about that*. You are a Witch by being female, untamed, angry, joyous, and immortal.²

Obviously, these ideas do not accord with established Wiccan notions of formal training, priesthoods, and hierarchical structures. WITCH also believed that witchcraft is inseparable from politics.

Witchcraft was the pagan religion of all of Europe for centuries prior to the rise of Christianity, and the religion of the peasantry for hundreds of years after Catholicism prevailed among the ruling classes of Western society. The witchcraft purges were the political suppression of an alternative culture, and of a social and economic structure

Even as the religion of witchcraft became suppressed, women fought hard to retain their former freedom

Thus, the witch was chosen as a revolutionary image for women because they did fight hard and in their fight they refused to accept the level of struggle which society deemed acceptable for their sex.³

WITCH also saw the necessity to create new rituals, "festivals of life, instead of death."⁴

Modern feminist witches continue to follow this path, the wellsprings of which often placing them in opposition to members of mainstream Wicca.

² Spretnak, "WITCH: Spooking the Patriarchy during the Late Sixties," pp. 428-9

³ Ibid.

As part of the growing self-empowerment movements of the 1960s, WITCH offered women a new way of looking at themselves, one in which they held great power that had formerly been suppressed. This necessarily put them in direct conflict with many traditional beliefs and systems, including that of Wicca. Unlike the initiation and learning of modern witchcraft, WITCH required nothing but being an “untamed” woman. Such an approach contradicted Wicca’s traditional training, priesthood, and hierarchy, along with its inclusion of both men and men in its religion. It did have one thing in common with Wicca, however. WITCH too portrayed witchcraft as the ancient pagan religion of Europe. The women of WITCH added one additional aspect to this conception; the witchcraft purges of the 16th and 17th centuries mirrored modern society’s oppression of women. Like those witches of older times, the women of WITCH fought against such strictures. In this way, the witch became a revolutionary symbol for both feminists and pagans

Zsuzsanna Budapest: A New Feminist Spirituality

While some women simply looked to the witch as a symbol of the independence and power of the growing feminist movement, others also searched for a new spirituality, one that would combine their growing awareness as women and their desire to worship the feminine divine. This feminist spirituality was an effort to develop and refine the self, identify who one is, and how one can grow in positive directions.⁵ The development of this spirituality began with Zsuzsanna Budapest who had observed her Hungarian mother, Masika, talking to the dead and watched as she created ceramics based on ancient motifs,

⁴ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, p. 341.

including the tree of life and flowers. Apparently a "woman of power," Masika could tell fortunes and "still the wind." When Budapest was sixteen, the Hungarian uprising occurred, and she became a political exile in the West. She discovered that New York offered its own forms of oppression, including the restrictions of the traditional female role of wife and mother. During a subsequent suicide attempt, she had a vision in which she died and found the afterlife to be not fearful. "After this vision, I regained my true perspective of a Witch, how a Witch looks at life-as a challenge."⁶

As Bird proclaims in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*,

I'm trying to say that this, this livingness we're all in and of, has something in it that reaches for freedom. Maybe that quality isn't first or most central. It could be just like a single thin thread buried in a whole carpet. But it's there. The outstretched hand is there. If you reach for it, it'll grab you back.⁷

Budapest followed her vision along the highway to Los Angeles. There she attended a women's liberation celebration, where she discovered that other women had "wounds" similar to her own.⁸ Joan Ludeke affirms this statement when she describes the network of feminist Wiccans, rather than a structured organization. The women's gatherings, like that attended by Budapest, offered them opportunities for information exchange and the informal enlargement of this web of relationships.⁹ While Budapest was already familiar with the pagan customs of her own country, she began to read about Dianic witchcraft and talk about the goddess. A year later, she and several other women began to celebrate the sabbats.¹⁰ During these celebrations, the witch ritually enacts her identification with

⁵ Eller, p. 104.

⁶ Adler, pp. 76-7

⁷ Starhawk, p. 215.

⁸ Adler, p. 77.

⁹ Joan Carole Ludeke, "Wicca as a Revitalization Movement Among Post-Industrial Urban. American Women," Ph.D. diss., University of Denver, 1989.

¹⁰ Adler, p. 77.

the goddess and the worshippers of old, experiencing "a succession of eternities." For in the sabbats, they say,

the sacred dimension of life is recovered, the participants experience the sanctity of human existence as a divine creation. At all other times there is always the danger of forgetting what is fundamental-that existence is not given by what modern men call Nature but a creation of *Others*, the gods or semi-divine beings. But in festivals the participants recover the sacred dimension of existence . . .¹¹

Winter Solstice, December 21, 1971 was a "herstorical" day. Six women joined Budapest at sundown in her first effort at holding a public gathering of women to celebrate the growing light and to blend witchcraft and feminism together.¹² Revealing this sacred space, they would be able to "found the world" and "live in a real sense."¹³ As yet the only one who claimed any knowledge of witchcraft, Budapest was still not an experienced high priestess, the "conductor of the orchestra of women souls who worship the Goddess in circles." The small hibachi that substituted for a cauldron smoked a little too much, and the women sang women's liberation songs in the circle because there were no goddess chants. Despite these problems, these women agreed that their liberation must begin from within, that liberation must be getting past the fears of taking their own power¹⁴ For the feminist witch, the goddess represents a political consciousness that may overcome the evil of patriarchy; she has become the symbol of liberation from the male principle.¹⁵ So that they would remember the usefulness of this combination of religion and politics, they named the newly formed coven Susan B. Anthony Coven Number 1, for they knew that others would follow in this new wave of feminism, which Gloria

¹¹ Eliade, pp. 88-90

¹² Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Grandmother of Time: A Woman's Book of Celebrations, Spells, and Sacred Objects for Every Month of the Year* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 14.

¹³ Eliade, p.23.

¹⁴ Budapest, pp. 15-9.

Steinem calls the "psycho/spiritual wave." In the face of feminist concerns about their movement, Budapest would calmly remark, "The women who will develop spirituality for themselves will be stronger for it. They will not burn out. They will stop and smell the roses on their way to liberation."¹⁶ Indeed, they did not disappear. This handful of friends later grew to a group of between twenty and one hundred twenty women. While mainstream Wicca generally opposed their all-female groves and creative approach to spirituality, these witches spread out their vigorous pagan practices throughout the hills of California, for "A witch bows to no man."¹⁷

Budapest's all-female groups drew criticism from more traditional witches, who maintained the importance of the god, who is the son and lover of the goddess. Feminist witchcraft, or Dianic witchcraft, however, upholds the female as the ultimate manifestation of the sacred.¹⁸ Feminist witches conflicted with mainstream Wicca not only on the worship of a feminine divine, but also on their refusal to share their circles with men, their openness about magic and ritual, their denying the need for long periods of training, and their dislike of most neo-pagans' sexism.¹⁹ Through this evolving tradition, women sought to gain power over their own souls, fight patriarchal oppression, and restore the lost golden age of prehistoric matriarchy. With this, radical feminism had become feminist religion.²⁰ Healing of these societal wounds begins in the circle, where the witches affirm each others' worth and pleasure each other sensually in the Great Rite, a ritual usually involving the merging of the god and the goddess through the sexual

¹⁵ Susan Greenwood, "The British Occult Subculture: Beyond Good and Evil?", *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, ed. by James Lewis (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 291.

¹⁶ Budapest, pp. 15-9

¹⁷ Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries: Feminist Witchcraft, Goddess Rituals, Spellcasting, & Other Womanly Arts...* (Oakland: Wingbow Press, 1989), pp. xi, xxi.

¹⁸ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 344-5.

¹⁹ Eller, pp. 58-9.

consummation of the relationship between the priest and priestess. In Dianic Wicca—where the goddess incorporates both aspects of the divine, the goddess and the god—each woman is beautiful, for

Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely; thy temples are like a piece of pomegranate within thy locks. The roof of thy mouth like the best wine that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.²¹

Looking at each other as manifestations of the goddess, the witches begin a ritual that begins with communal pleasuring, finally ending in lovemaking between previously selected partners. In this affirmation of the goddess in every woman, they oppose the traditional view of the Great Rite as the uniting of the male and female principles, or the god and the goddess. The Dianic witches empower themselves through this rite and realize their own self worth. As Budapest states, this "ritual goes beyond personalities, beauty requirements or any other externally opposed considerations. Here, sex is a spiritual experience."²² As a part of this, Budapest experimented sexually as a young woman while working in a women's center. After several love affairs with her fellow revolutionaries, Budapest maintained a long, seventeen-year relationship with Kirstin; traditional Wiccans opposed--and some continue to do so--homosexual relations because they went against the principle of fertility inherent in witchcraft, and in the world. Women like Budapest simply redefined fertility to include the power of creativity, of work, of gardening, of relationships, and other human activities. Budapest, however, did not abandon her relationship in response to this criticism; she still keeps Kirstin's

²⁰ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 344-5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xx.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 102-7.

tambourine, for it is "her joyous woman spirit that lingers in its bells, and the memories, the treasures of our youth."²³

Budapest soon encountered a more official opposition to the spread of witchcraft. In the spring of 1975, she decided to incorporate feminist spirituality as a regular legal church, calling it "The Sisterhood of the Wicca." A feminist lawyer helped her draw up the papers; they thought that "that was that." Three weeks later--enough time for someone in Sacramento to have received the papers and begin making inquiries--a plainclothes policewoman entered the small candle shop in Venice, California, which was called "The Feminist Wicca," and made an appointment for a Tarot reading.

This in and of itself was not unusual. Budapest regularly spread the cards out on her table, seeing the futures of various students, writers, dancers, and even a judge. This time, however, she had a feeling that she should not continue with the reading. The woman's first card increased Budapest's suspicions; it was the Devil, which holds the meaning of bondage, among other things. After the reading had finished, the woman paid Budapest for her services and left. Two plainclothes policemen then entered the shop and informed her that she would be arrested for violating the MC 43-30, a Los Angeles statute against fortune-telling.²⁴ Ostensibly, such vague anti-occult laws exist to prevent fraud, but they ban divination of all kinds, not merely divination for money. Budapest was brought to trial, convicted, and fined.

Looking back on her trial, Budapest believes that she was singled out among the many fortune-tellers in Los Angeles because of her feminist politics and the visibility of

²³ Budapest, *Grandmother of Time*, pp. 106-12.

²⁴ Budapest, *The Grandmother of Time*, pp. 225-7.

her small shop, The Feminist Wicca, as a center for women and witchcraft. Some of her fellow Pagans opposed the slogan of the trial, "Hands off Wimmin's Religion," and felt that losing was a dangerous precedent. Budapest, however, sees it as irrelevant. She feels that the publicity surrounding this trial had awakened the community to the links between politics, religion, and women; it had also established the right of women to define their own spirituality and to practice their own talents independent of men's religious and behavioral codes.²⁵

Most witches use their power to bind enemies and prevent them from doing harm. They believe in the Wiccan Threefold Law, and so this binding spell is the extent of their actions, a form of defense rather than attack.²⁶ Witches like Budapest, however, and certain other witchcraft traditions promote hexing in certain situations; according to the Law, hexing the innocent returns tenfold, so it must be done carefully.²⁷ In her book, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*, Budapest says that there is no divine retribution for women who hex rapists or others who commit "crimes of patriarchy." She gives instructions on how to perform a "Righteous Hex" for the witch who is certain that someone has harmed her.²⁸ This darker side of feminist witchcraft complements the general concern with women's issues, including that of physical defense; this acceptance of both the dark and the light reveals the continuation of high magic's emphasis on polarity in modern Wicca. For, according to Budapest, the witch who cannot hex cannot heal; the basic purpose of a circle is to support members emotionally and spiritually, and to perform rituals to that end. This concern is extended outside the circle to all women in

²⁵ Adler, pp. 186-7.

²⁶ The Threefold Law is the belief that any energy sent out, either good or bad, will return to the sender three times over. This "karmic" law ensures that witches keep their spells entirely harm free; Edain McCoy, *Wicca: An Irish Pagan Tradition*, St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1998, p. 24

need. A member may ask to have a ritual performed for a friend who is ill, looking for an apartment, or seeking new employment. She is never refused.²⁹

Developing the vision of WITCH even more fully, Budapest brought to the women's liberation meetings a wider knowledge of paganism than they had formerly encountered. Like Leek, Budapest too describes a childhood in which her days were spent learning magic from her mother. Budapest retained these teachings and shared them with the other women at the meetings. Even as she followed many of the beliefs of modern witchcraft, Budapest conflicted with Wicca in many ways. For example, feminist witches worship a feminine divine—rather than the god and goddess of modern Wicca. Their structure was much more open than that of other covens, lacking the traditional priest and priestess—and thus the control exercised by enthusiastic leaders like Gardner and Sanders. They also refused to require of prospective members long initiations and oaths of secrecy. In this way, Budapest feminized witchcraft, forming a religion for modern women, one in which they could free themselves from the constraints of mainstream society.

Starhawk: Blending Witchcraft With Psychology and Politics

During the summer of 1968, a young Miriam Simos hitchhiked down the California coast, truly encountering nature for the first time. Simos carried this new awareness back to UCLA, where she and a friend taught a class on witchcraft, despite their lack of knowledge of witchcraft when they began. After forming a coven of like-minded people, they met real Wiccans who introduced Simos to the *Charge of the Goddess*, written by Valiente. Listening to those words, she had the feeling described by

²⁷ Greenwood, p. 288.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1, 43.

so many Wiccans, that of "coming home"; she had a feeling of "finding names and a framework for understanding the experiences I had already had." Incapable at the time of regular disciplined study and meditation, she drifted away from the religion, only to return many years later.

In the early seventies, Simos lived in Venice, California, where she had become involved with the women's movement, identifying herself as a feminist. Her entrance into The Feminist Wicca and meeting with Z. Budapest marked the beginning of a process of change and transformation, "working in the way magic often does: by making everything fall apart." After a period of disappointment and rejection, she received a vision of a hawk flying across the sky: "the universe shimmered and split to reveal some underlying shining pattern of things. The hawk swooped down and turned into an old woman. I felt that I was under her protection." Back in the Bay Area, Simos again became involved in women's spirituality and began teaching classes in ritual; she took the name of Starhawk and formed the Compost coven, a name that revealed her growing interest in ecology. She quickly met Pagans of other traditions. Two witches named Victor and Cora Anderson initiated her into the Faery tradition, a homegrown American witch tradition.³⁰

In a letter to Margot Adler, Doreen Valiente, described a premonition regarding the future of modern witchcraft. "Some years ago," she writes, "I did some scrying at a Sabbat, in the course of which I predicted that a new young priestess would arise who would do a great deal for the Craft in the future. When I read Starhawk's book I felt that my prediction was coming true."³¹ This book was *The Spiral Dance*, a formative

²⁹ Ludeke, p. 45; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, p. 344.

³⁰ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 1-5.

³¹ Adler, p. 86.

influence on political witchcraft. Until its publication in 1979, there was a natural tension between a concept of witchcraft as something inherent in women and released in them by consciousness-raising, and one of it as a close, hierarchical and initiatory mystery religion. While she did not yet support the more eclectic and solitary forms of witchcraft, she showed how the coven could be used to liberate women, reeducate men, and explore alternative human relationships.³² As Martha Courot states, "We tell you this: We are doing the impossible. We are teaching ourselves to be human."³³

A thorough goddess worshipper, Starhawk opposes the social effects of conventional religion. She agrees with Mary Daly, who states, "The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting."³⁴ Starhawk does not simply want to reject this symbol system, however; she wants to replace it. For witches like Starhawk, the goddess does not rule the world; she is the world. The goddess is for them a means of re-introduction to the self and the world.

Manifest in each of us, She can be known internally by every individual, in all her magnificent diversity. She does not legitimize the rule of either sex by the other and lends no authority to rulers of temporal hierarchies. In Witchcraft, each of us must reveal our own truth Religion is a matter of relinking, with the divine within and with her outer manifestations in all of the human and natural world.³⁵

According to Starhawk, in the future, the photograph of the earth from space will serve as the new religious mandala, a means to re-member the interconnectedness of all things.³⁶

³² Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 62.

³³ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 199.

³⁴ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 13.

³⁵ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

Unlike the god of patriarchal religions, they feel that the goddess encourages respect for the sacredness of all living things and the interdependence of all life. Indeed, Starhawk describes witchcraft as a "religion of ecology. "Its goal is harmony with nature, so that life may not just Survive, but thrive."³⁷

Starhawk encourages living in harmony with *Tierra Madre*, experiencing the life of all things, but gives equal to awareness of self. Starhawk describes witchcraft in psychological terms, unlike others in mainstream witchcraft. She presents witchcraft as an "elaborated metaphor," through which women can "identify [themselves] and connect with larger forces."³⁸ The witch uses tools such as trance, meditation, and ritual as methods to experience the "starlight vision," or a perception of the unconscious.³⁹ Unlike traditional witches, who use these tools to gather magical power, Starhawk reinterprets magic, including its various disciplines, as a set of techniques for self-fulfillment and the realization of human potential, linking witchcraft to poetry and creative play.⁴⁰ As such, this new adaptation of Wicca followed closely the changes of modern society, which had seen the development of social and psychological empowerment in recent years.

If, as Starhawk believes, that magic can alter the psyche, it can also transform the physical world, producing a different understanding of the possibilities for change. While Budapest believes that magic can be used to liberate women from patriarchal oppression, Starhawk amplifies this description so that magic--when invoked by a network of covens--could be used to bring about radical reform. For Starhawk, magic is "the art of

³⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 204-5.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 32-5.

⁴⁰ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 62; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, p. 346-7.

changing consciousness at will." The witch, then, uses her magic for political change.⁴¹

Similarly, Mary Daly describes her own form of empowerment, which means

learning to hear and respond to the call of the wild, learning ways of encouraging and en-spiriting the Self and other Spinsters, learning conquering, learning methods of dispossession, specifically of dis-possessing the Self of possession by the past and possession by the future. It means a-mazing the modern witchcraze, developing skills for unpainting the Painted Birds possessed through the device of tokenism, exposing the Thoroughly Therapeutic Society.⁴²

As Reaganite politics of the 1980s pushed American attitudes into a more conservative position, Starhawk devoted her writing toward the specific ends of a left-wing agenda.

Yet she still wove her politics with the language and the historical mythology of feminist witchcraft.⁴³ Speaking of her fellow Wiccans, Starhawk describes the gradual movement of witchcraft into the political sphere as beginning in 1976.

I have always thought being a witch is political in the broad sense. But over the past three or four years the people I work with magically have gotten very much involved with doing more direct political action. They are especially involved in environmental issues, in anti-nuclear work, anti-weapons work That's involved a lot of civil disobedience at different places. . . . I think that ultimately the effect of the kind of bridging of spirituality and politics is something that is very, very long range. I think we're very effective in planting the seeds.⁴⁴

Looking at the world, Starhawk sees a lot of insecurity born of a culture of enemies, weapons, and death. For her, this world is dominated by the principle of "power-over," or domination. Sometimes, though, one becomes aware of a power deeper than that of the bomb and the gun. A seed, or the growth of a child, contains "power-from-within," which is essentially the goddess, or "immanence." While the culture of "estrangement"--perceiving the world as made up of separate, isolated,

⁴¹ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex, and Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), p. 13.

⁴² Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p. 318.

⁴³ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 62.

nonliving parts that have no inherent value--currently holds sway, the awareness of immanence struggles up through the muck, viewing everything as "living being, a weaving dance." The awareness of immanence opposes the emptiness that allows exploitation and isolation. Witches like Starhawk believe that "Consciousness shapes reality; Reality shapes consciousness."⁴⁵ Like Mary Daly, they must learn "to live now the future we are fighting for, rather than compromising in vain hope of a future that is always deferred, always unreal. This creative leap implies a kind of recklessness born out of the death of false hope."⁴⁶ Accordingly, the current political issues are problems of the spirit, for they are based in the conflicts between these underlying principles of estrangement and immanence; with such a view, the witch calls upon her magic to change her own consciousness and that of society.⁴⁷ Changing themselves through spiritual knowledge and practices thus changes the world. Development of the self becomes a political act. Living as a changed individual has an impact on the world, encouraging it in the directions the feminists desired.⁴⁸

Maya, the heroine of *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, asserts:

Many years ago, the poet Diane di Prima wrote a line that comes back to me now: "The only war that counts is the war against the imagination." . . . All war is first waged in the imagination, first conducted to limit our dreams and visions, to make us accept within ourselves its terms, to believe that our only choices are those that it lays before us. If we let the terms of force describe the terrain of our battle, we will lose.⁴⁹

Because the battle is too big for any one person to fight alone, Starhawk calls all people, whatever their spiritual beliefs, to group political action. In accordance with her own

⁴⁴ Ludeke, p. 47.

⁴⁵ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, pp. 2-14.

⁴⁶ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 138.

⁴⁷ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 4; Hutton, pp. 347-9.

⁴⁸ Eller, p. 202.

⁴⁹ Starhawk, p. 238.

beliefs, this struggle must be fought with the weapons of non-violence, of immanence. Among other protests, Starhawk and her circle have participated in actions to save the Headwaters forest from the Maxxam Corporation in 1997 and to support gay and lesbian rights in the March on Washington, D.C. in 1987.⁵⁰ They also took part in the protest against the Livermore Weapons Laboratory in California. On a certain day, countless women gathered to encircle the plant, where they raised energy to oppose the production of nuclear arms. Starhawk states that this ritualistic and symbolic action lowered morale in the plant, and many employees, when interviewed later, expressed their concern over the work going on in the laboratory. Also the director of public relations resigned from his job and took up anti-nuclear work. While the facility continues to function, the collective energy focused on the consciousness of the employees had its effect.⁵¹ Envisioning a life based on immanence, witches like Starhawk use their magic to produce changes in ordinary reality, thus making consciousness manifest. Encouraging others to act, Starhawk speaks of this vision.

The vision rises with that power, forms in the dark and appears in that moment when the splits are healed. Yes, say our bodies, our hearts, that is what could be. We could make a culture based on this power, this union . . . From that strength and that closeness, we could weave something healing.⁵²

Part of a younger generation of women, Starhawk attended meetings at The Feminist Wicca and learned much about modern feminism and paganism from these older women. She too had absorbed many of the concepts of the women's liberation movement and rejected the social effects of conventional

⁵⁰ Starhawk, "Magical Action for Headwaters Forest," accessed 11 February 2000, available from <http://www.wcbcom.com/cauldron/starhawk/headwaters.html>; Ludeke, p. 48.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵² Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 17.

religion. After a mystical vision—one that was bound to the earth, as would befit someone so concerned about the environment—Starhawk began to form her own concept of witchcraft. While Budapest continued to see modern witchcraft as the survival of an ancient fertility religion, Starhawk instead portrayed the history of witchcraft as an elaborated metaphor, the basis of a belief system that provides the means for spiritual enlightenment. Modern people, as she believed, could not accept the concepts of magic and spirituality proposed by mainstream Wicca, and so she reinterpreted their teachings, using her knowledge of psychology and science to make them more palatable for people living today. In addition, Starhawk's interest in politics and ecology fully influenced her religion; the search for self-fulfillment was only the beginning of a wider revolution. Starhawk's tradition of witchcraft, therefore, necessarily involves its members in many political protests. Through the Reclaiming tradition, development of the self becomes a political act, preparing the witch to create political change in the physical world.

The Spreading Of The Vision: The Expansion Of Feminist Wicca

This new view of pagan witchcraft would soon affect the European counter-culture, but especially the women already active in pagan circles. Surpassing *Witchcraft Today* as the model text for novice witches, *The Spiral Dance* became the best-selling book on modern witchcraft yet written, and all over Europe and America in the 1980's feminists read her work, which influenced their own beliefs regarding spirituality as an active, political force. Also in the 1970's, the number of pagans grew to the point at which large conventions became possible. It was at these gatherings that Americans

composed new-style pagan songs and chants that would be used by witches in America and in Europe.⁵³ At the Pan-Pagan Festival held in Indiana in 1980, the chant, "We All Come from the Goddess," became widely known.⁵⁴ Also in that year, Charlie Murphy wrote a folk song, "The Burning Times," which both summed up and added to the radical feminist notion of the early modern trials. As these influences made themselves felt among British witches, they gave witches of both nations a sense of solidarity as an international resistance movement.⁵⁵ This feeling was only enhanced in 1982 when the Wiccan high priestess Marion Zimmer Bradley published a historical novel, *The Mists of Avalon*, which interwove the feminist myth of witchcraft and the traditional Arthurian cycle.⁵⁶ This new interpretation of the King Arthur tales focused on the figure of Morgaine, whom Bradley portrayed as empowering, rather than evil. Throughout the story, Morgaine matures into the wise priestess of Avalon, and at the end she must finally come to see the core of her own pagan beliefs in the worship of Mary at Glastonbury.

Feminist Wicca In England: From Valiente To Jayran

Wicca began to adapt to these changing views in its homeland, England. During the 1970s, Valiente went public as a witch. Because she was now outside the established system of coven leaders, she revolted against it, promoting an open system. During this decade, she published several books that taught readers how to initiate themselves, work their own rituals and magic, and found their own groups.⁵⁷ Valiente does acknowledge the importance of a formal initiation and a sincere teacher, citing the example of Carlos Castaneda's apprenticeship to the Yaqui Indian, Don Juan, as told in his trilogy of books.

⁵³ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 62.

⁵⁴ Adler, pp. 346-7.

⁵⁵ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, p. 366.

⁵⁶ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," pp. 62-3.

However, she does ask the simple question, "who initiated the first witch?" For Valiente, and many who followed her, the decision of whether or not to join a traditional coven should be an individual one. As support for her statement, "You have a right to be a pagan if you want to be," she quotes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as published by the United Nations:

Article No. 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.⁵⁷

This trend toward solitary worship further individuated what was an intensely communal belief and allowed multiple adaptations through the different visions of so many priests and priestesses. After the publication of *The Spiral Dance*, several independent covens, loosely identifying themselves as Wiccan, sprung up during the 1980s. This trend toward radical individualism became even more intense towards the end of this decade when several witches, including Scott Cunningham and Marion Green, encouraged solitary worship. Rae Beth became the most famous solitary witch in England. Describing herself as a "hedge witch," she tells a student that

some witches prefer to be a lone priest or priestess of natural magic, open to requests for healing spells or for advice or divination from the people who live near them. Modern wisemen or wisewoman. And so they may take the name 'hedge witch', being outside the mainstream of modern witchcraft, outside all covens. It is, in fact, a different archetype to that of coven witch. Both are witches, but the hedge witch is a solitary being. She or he works alone, from and often for a particular town or village. Such people have always existed.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp 382-4.

⁵⁸ Doreen Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 22.

⁵⁹ Rae Beth, *The Wiccan Path: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1990), p. 18.

In this way, she inculcated in her readers a sense of them as models of a rural and traditional England.

The independence of the American feminist witches changed not only the influence of the coven structure in England but also the English view of witchcraft. Influenced by Stewart and Janet Farrar, who accepted the literal existence of a prehistoric matriarchy and emphasized the goddess in their faith, Valiente became a feminist witch after reading the American works. She had come to an awareness of the restrictions of Gardnerian witchcraft, which stated that "You may not be a witch alone." As she tells her reader, women "started of playing the role that men such as Gerald Gardner designed for them. We were allowed to call ourselves High Priestesses, Witch Queens and similar fancy titles; but we were still in the position of having men running things and women doing as the men directed. As soon as the women started seeking real power, trouble was brewing."⁶⁰ Generally, at this time Wiccans described their tradition as a "feminist religion par excellence," whereas in the 1970s they had primarily emphasized it as a means of expressing psychic powers.⁶¹

Rooting itself in England, feminist witchcraft quickly began to grow. Valiente describes its "magico-political" effects in the women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common, established in 1981 to protest at the presence there of American nuclear weapons. Their protest was often a magical one, supported by feminist witches from the United States.⁶² It was controversial enough that the women decided to exclude men from their camp and their actions. As time passed, though, the camp became increasingly mystical and spiritual. The women named the entrances to the base New Age Gate and

⁶⁰ Doreen Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (Custer, WA: Phoenix Publishing, 1989), p. 182.

⁶¹ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 63.

Forgotten Gate, later referred to rainbow colors, or the colors of the chakras. Talk of witches and goddesses became almost as frequent as talk of flyers and protests. Soon, rituals, symbols, and incantations assumed an important role in the camp's survival. Dr. Lynne Jones, who had seen how effective theatricality had been at the Women's Pentagon Action, visited the camp in the winter of 1982; she recalls,

A woman walked up carrying a large puppet; an enormous woman's head with long red hair and brightly coloured hand-painted robes. 'This is the Goddess,' she said.

'Right,' said Helen [John], 'let's walk to Newbury.'

We set off, the Goddess in the lead, bright against snow-laden branches and clear sky.

This spiritual aspect helped strengthen the women's resolve, prompting others to form peace camps at various missile sites throughout England.⁶³ Through grassroots efforts, the women called supporters to join in the Embrace the Base on December 12, 1982, in which 30,000 women joined hands around the base, forming a living barrier. Chris Mulvey traveled from Dublin, Ireland for "the earth, for the children, for the Greenham women, for peace and for the Spirit that had overtaken me." On that day, the women decorated the fence surrounding the base with various pictures, poetry, and symbols of life. As the women linked hands for the nine miles around the base, Mulvey felt,

... we will meet your violence with a loving embrace, for it is the surest way of defusing it. How strong I felt when I joined my voice to the waves of voices shouting Freedom and when the echoes from so far away drifted across the base to my ears. I took my seeds and wrapped them in mud and with all the love and strength I felt threw them inside the fence: Take root and grow. Tell them that life will prevail and that in the midst of ugliness beauty can flourish.

I saw again the web, the symbol of the Greenham women, woven in wool, into the fence and on to the grass, drawn on posters and on garments. Everywhere the web, and questions of its meaning were stilled

⁶² Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 191.

⁶³ Jill Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820* (London: Virago, 1989), p. 236.

as somehow from within the understanding grew. We are all interdependent, we are all responsible for each other, how delicate the strands, how strong the web. The ancient spider goddess weaving tirelessly the web of life, again and again and again, as often as it is needed.⁶⁴

The web became a symbol of the camp and a means of protest. On October 31, 1983, the women celebrated Halloween with a de-fencing action. Dressed as witches with pointed hats and faces painted as spiders' webs, over one thousand women danced around campfires and then cut down the fence with bolt-cutters.⁶⁵ Similarly, Mary Daly called on "Spinsters" to break the "spell of male obscenity" by looking at the complex web of the spider. Daly quotes Helen Diner, who writes: "Knitting, knotting, inter-lacing, and entwining belong to the female realm in Nature, but so does entanglement in a magic plot . . . and the unraveling of anything that is completed."⁶⁶ Through their imaginative and "magico-political" protests, the women of Greenham Common made their unique impact, attempting to change the people's views of these weapons. If—as Wiccans believe—that consciousness truly determines reality, then the women's efforts succeeded, for the United States Air Force left Greenham Common on September 30, 1992.⁶⁷

Extending the web further, English witches have become involved with feminist witchcraft in a different fashion. Shan Jayran, a Dianic witch inspired by Z. Budapest, established The House of the Goddess in London, a temple firmly dedicated to feminist witchcraft, and most definitely outside the more traditional Wiccan networks. Jayran developed Britain's first national contact service for pagans--Paganlink--and organized the first national pagan festival at Battersea Town Hall, London, on Halloween 1987,

⁶⁴ Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins, eds, *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), p. 92.

⁶⁵ Liddington, p. 270.

⁶⁶ Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, pp. 400-2.

which was attended by 1,350 celebrants.⁶⁸ This gathering included a "Drumout" with bongos, rattles, and bodhrans. Witches supposedly gathered for this sabbat in greater numbers than had been known since the days of the persecutions, but not a single unpleasant incident took place.

Born in 1949, Jayran is a former hippy and computer expert. She founded her home, The House of the Goddess, "to provide clear, public information about Paganism and the Craft in Britain today." There she is the "Clan Mother" and works as a healer, counselor, and Tarot-reader. She also welcomes people into the House for outdoor Sabbat gatherings open to guests, lectures, and workshops. Also Jayran has organized a network of pagan people called "Weaving the Web," in addition to the periodical, *Craft Circular*. To promote witchcraft even further, she has published two books, *Which Craft?* and *Circlework*.⁶⁹ According to Valiente, she seems to point toward the way in which feminist witchcraft is developing--"free, creative and much more open than it ever was before."⁷⁰

Influenced by the political trends of modern society and the growing spiritual emphasis on the self, Wicca had become much more of a solitary religion, further separating it from the constraints of the old hierarchies and teachings. With only a minimal amount of reading, one could perform his or her own rituals and ceremonies. The writings of modern witches like Starhawk and Budapest prepared British witches for the concepts and beliefs of feminist Wicca. While many witches in England were loyal

⁶⁷ "Greenham Common Millennium Initiative: Towards the Year 2000 Without Nuclear Weapons," accessed 24 March 2000, available from <http://www.web13.co.uk/greenhamVpledge99.html>, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Hutton, "Modern Pagan Witchcraft," p. 64

⁶⁹ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 365-6.

⁷⁰ Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 194.

to the structure of the ceremonial covens, women like Valiente and Leek had experienced the prejudice inherent in mainstream Wicca and wished to move beyond it. Their influence, and the involvement of witches from the United States, helped to introduce the beliefs of Dianic Wicca to the women of Britain through protests like Greenham Common or networks like those of Jayran. Modern witchcraft had indeed come full circle, returning to the home of its first incarnation.

Born of the many social changes of the 1950s and 1960s in America, modern Dianic and political Wiccans found in witchcraft an empowering and magical tradition, and yet they threw off the heavily formalized ritual and structure in favor of a more liberating spiritual experience. Indeed, they have carried Gardner's innovation to the socially marginalized. Acknowledging the scientific advances and political awareness of the time, Wicca has not only managed to adapt but also to grow in influence, even in today's globalized, digital society.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In an effort to form a belief system more open to their own awareness of the divine, witches like Gardner and Valiente gathered together information from sources of high magic, literature, history, and mythology, creating the first of various incarnations of today's Wicca. Through the rituals and doctrine of high magic, along with the belief in a historical tradition of witchcraft, they found an "ancient" basis for their spirituality; their view of witchcraft as the survival of a prehistoric fertility religion became a core tenet of Gardnerian Wicca. On the basis of this mythologized history, they felt free to improvise, adding their own particular local beliefs and mores. While Gardner brought Wicca out into the public, he attempted to exercise a control over his creation that contradicted the freedom on which it was based. As Valiente gained confidence in her own knowledge of witchcraft, she—and witches like her—broke away from Gardner so that she could add her own personal vision and talents to Wicca and its rituals.

Independence like that of Valiente led inevitably to the emergence of new traditions and leaders, thus allowing more people to become involved, people who might not have been attracted to Gardnerian witchcraft. Later witches, such as Leek and Cochrane and Sanders, contributed their own personal talents to this mix. The emergence of more traditions allowed the "history" of witchcraft to recede somewhat, even as the

new additions of local mythology and occult rituals became more important.

Unfortunately, enthusiastic leaders still remained, causing further schisms in Wicca. For example, despite his short life, Robert Cochrane developed a tradition of witchcraft based on formal occultism that continues to live on in Australia. Alexander Sanders added his own experience with the Cabbala and the Tarot, along with his willingness to include gay men and even Christians within the realm of Wicca. While his teachings have receded—partly because of his own lack of veracity and his often unwise love of the limelight—they live on in the writings of the Farrars, his most famous students. In addition, the growing power of female witches like Valiente and Leek created the foundation for the feminist witchcraft that was to later develop through their prominent leadership and their willingness to contradict the teachings of men like Gardner and Sanders.

These women, along with Crowther, spread the teachings of Wicca during their travels in America. This theoretical foundation and the consciousness-raising movements of the 1960s provided an atmosphere accepting to the rise of a new tradition, that of Dianic witchcraft. This openness not only extended to their rituals, which were often spontaneous, but also to their coven structure, now free of the old hierarchy and priesthood. This progression led to the general acceptance of the history of witchcraft as a myth, albeit one that holds power for the believer. In the first years of Dianic witchcraft, Budapest promoted a purely feminist spirituality, one in which women could regain their own power, and even allowing the use of hexes in extreme cases. Her store, The Feminist Wicca, provided a common meeting place for future adherent, including the Starhawk. It was through Starhawk that Wicca gained its truest politicization, for she promoted the witch's active involvement in causes such as ecology and civil rights

Political witchcraft, of course, did eventually return to Britain, where women there formed their own covens and involved themselves in various protests, the most famous of which was Greenham Common. In this way, Wicca returned to the home of its first incarnation, having proven Gardner's belief that people were ready the mysticism of witchcraft.

Such adaptations—and the various witchcraft traditions that resulted—produced a system of belief that was both traditional and intensely personal. As society grew and evolved, so did Wicca, a characteristic that has allowed it to extend its influence from that first gathering of witches in Britain. While many of the more conventional religions have held fast to customs and attitudes, Wicca has become inclusive, reflecting the accepting and more global nature of much of modern society. Indeed, Wicca provides adherents with a setting in which to express their spiritual creativity; it allows them to seek their own sources of inspiration, rather than forcing them to find it in historical rituals and dogmas.

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VITA

Krista R. Schnee

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: THE ORIGINS OF MODERN WICCA

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Oklahoma City, on March 1, 1973, the daughter of Ron and Sharon Schnee.

Education: Graduated from Hinton High School, Hinton, Oklahoma, in May 1991; received Bachelor of Arts degree in English and History from Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford, Oklahoma, in May 1998. Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts degree with a major in European History at Oklahoma State University in December, 2001.

Experience: Tutored English at Southwestern Oklahoma State University from 1994 to 1998; employed by Oklahoma State University, Department of History, as a teaching assistant from 1998 to 2000; employed by the Oklahoma State University Library as a library assistant from 2000 to present; employed by Ladan's Hair Salon and Day Spa, Stillwater, Oklahoma, as a massage therapist from August, 2001, to present.

Professional Memberships: Phi Alpha Theta, Sigma Tau Delta.