

5-2002

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Magic in Modernity

**A study of the Neopagan movement
in contemporary America.**

By
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Dr. John C. McCall
ANTH 499

The room is dark. Brief interludes of illumination birthed from headlights of occasionally passing cars send shadows playing across the room, its furnishings and the silent occupants within. The only points of light in the room are the dull orange glows of lit incense sticks, permeating the air with their sticky-sweet smoke. A truck rumbles by causing the occupants to stir and the passing light that accompanies it highlights the smoke stretching through the air. I watch the trails of smoke as they stretch seemingly beyond possibility, as if they too feel the effects of the tension in the air. The truck passes out of awareness and silent expectancy falls once more over the room.

"Lux"

The word is spoken, a light blooms into existence, and the face and shoulders of a young woman are illuminated as she lights a candle in the middle of darkness. Her long dark hair, held back by a delicate tiara with a silver crescent, cascades past her neck, down her exposed back and breasts. She steps forward saying, "We bring the light of love so that we may share it with the world." With a long black skirt swishing against the floor and ankle bracelets clinking, she continues to stride forward towards one of the other participants, all of which have now gathered around her in a large circle. All of the others in the circle appear to be black robed specters, their faces hidden in the deep shadows of the room. Each holds a candle between their hands in front of their chest.

"The light of love, partake. . . and pass . . .", the young woman whispers as she hold forth her lit candle allowing the robed man before her to light his own. He in turn turns to his right repeats the phrase and lights the candle of the person next to him. This procession continues until all persons with candles have had them lit. The entire room is then bathed in the soft glow of candles, allowing it to be brought out of the murky darkness, and into sharper focus. What were darker areas of shadow playing across the young woman's body can now be seen as a delicate pattern of tattoos winding around her left arm and set just above and between her hips in the small of her back. She makes her way back to the center of the circle of robed individuals, turns to face east and begins to speak again.

"From the winds of the east I call forth the spirits of the sylphs to come into this circle and hold vigil at the watchtower of the power of air."

After speaking these words she picks a stick of incense from off the covered stand in front of her and blows its' smoke towards the east. She then turned toward the south and continued to speak.

"From the flames of the south, I call upon the spirits of the salamanders to come forth and be watchful from the watchtower of flames."

She takes a red candle from the stand and lights it. The candle is then placed slowly back on the southern most section of the table.

"From the mist of the waterfall to the foam of the sea I call to the spirits of the undines, asking that they stand protectively at the watchtower of waves."

The young woman reaches forth and submerges her fingertips in a cup of water on the west side of the table. Raising her hand she flicks water in a westwardly direction. After this semantic she continues her progression to the north.

"From the midst of mountains I summon forth the gnomes of the earth to stand firmly in the watchtower of stone." She finished, and then made her way back to the center of the circle. Once there she turns clockwise three times and states, "We gather here this evening to charge this amulet with the energies of the waning moon. As Diana's pale image fades away, so to will the sickness inside of our beloved sister Catherine." At this point the young woman stretches her arms up toward the ceiling making a triangle with the thumbs and forefingers of her hands. All of the other participants follow her lead and do the same. Again the young woman starts to speak. "The moon wanes, the cancer fades. . . The moon wanes, the cancer fades . . ." The woman repeats the phrase over and over as the others in the room start to chant the same in time with her. As they repeat the phrase they slowly start to lower their arms, keeping hands together in the triangle formation. Their voices drop to an almost inaudible pitch as each person's hands steadily descend through the air towards a long piece of crystal lying on an altar.

Introduction

We now live during a time in which religion and spirituality are marketed to us along side laundry detergent and Nintendo games. Sunday morning television is rife with religious programs and sales ads. Tele-evangelist must constantly compete with one another, not only to hold the viewers attention, but also to bring in enough money to buy more airtime. Countless religious programs end with a section that seems as if it belonged on the Home Shopping Network. "Show the world that you love Jesus by purchasing this

exquisitely detailed, hand crafted hood ornament of our savior hanging on the cross. By doing this, not only will you be sharing your faith with the world, but you also help to keep this ministry being aired on 32 separate cable networks, being beamed into the homes and hearts of indigenous peoples across the globe. So please, take out your Visa or MasterCard and call the 800 number at the bottom of your screen. . .”. This marketing hasn’t stopped at our television, but has slowly crept into our major department stores. Religious leaders can be seen on the fronts of the books they have written in bookstores everywhere. If you look in one or two of these books written by the same religious authority, you will find that the chapter titles in each are almost interchangeable. Christmas has become the epitome of religious marketing with department stores stocking up on religious literature and yard ornaments. In this spiritually deprived atmosphere, many people have become dissatisfied.

The opening narrative may sound like a scene transcribed from some late night, made-for-T.V. movie, it may seem like a story I heard told around a campfire by adolescent boys. It is, however, neither of these. It is in fact part of a ritual held by a group of practicing witches in Portland, Oregon which I was allowed to witness. It is one example of a myriad of differing practices, performed by a growing number of persons in America, who subscribe to one of the spiritual belief systems which are loosely labeled paganism. “ ‘Pagan’ is a much-used term, both within and without the boundary of the (modern pagan community). To (pagans), the term implies a polytheistic nature religion whose deities are meant to be personifications of nature, often as they were found within the ancient pantheons. Many modern urbanites use the term . . .to describe their religious attitudes to nature and their sense of Judaeo-Christianity’s limitations” (Luhrmann

1989:77). Paganism, or Neo-paganism as it is known today, is now prevalent throughout the United States. While an exact number would be impossible to calculate, conservative estimates suggest that approximately a few hundred thousand individuals participate in Neopaganism (Orion 1995: 1). The Neopagan community is diverse, and immense (Orion 1995:59). Not only does this new movement attract people from all areas of the United States, but the appeal of Neopaganism seems to attract persons from every walk of life. In my own interviews I found that some neopagans worked at local groceries as baggers, while others were working at prestigious universities helping to map the human genome. Over the past three decades we have seen the market for Neo-pagan literature explode. Books on Neo-pagan topics, while starting with Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* and a handful of others in the late 1970s, have grown to take up three and four entire bookshelves at major booksellers across the country. Authors such as Silver Ravenwolf, Scott Cunningham and Raymond Buckland have published numerous titles on the topic in just the last fifteen years. The following of Neo-pagan belief systems has, in fact, grown so common that it has been essentially accepted as a *real* religion in the modern religious landscape. This movement is one the first of its kind. Many other religious movements have come to the United States, but none that have attracted so many followers. The way in which these individuals have reshaped their identities and have networked to create a community is of considerable importance and merits anthropological research.

In this paper I will explore the ways in which Neo-pagans express themselves, examine the way in which the neo-pagan community has interacted with contemporary American culture, and also reveal why so many persons are turning to Neo-pagan belief

systems in recent decades. In conducting my research I implemented three methods of research. Primarily I have relied upon informants in the neo-pagan community and on interviews I have conducted with various individuals practicing some form of 'neo-paganism'. My secondary method of gathering data was through active participation in the practices of neo-paganism with various groups across the United States. Finally, I have relied upon the various scholarly works of those persons who have researched these topics before me, quoting from, and expanding upon that which seems analogous with my own observations, and respectfully disagreeing with those which do not.

After conducting my research, both direct and indirect, I have determined that the majority of persons involved in the Neopagan movement have a strong need to be personally involved with their spirituality and to be more responsible for their own morality. These persons have chosen to practice Neo-paganism because they share a need to explore new identities, free from the restrictions of more dogmatic and structured religions.

Literature Review

In her book *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves*, Sarah Pike of California State University relates to the reader her observations and conclusions concerning field work she conducted on Neopagan festivals between the years of 1991 and 1996. Dr. Pike's research suggest that the Neopagan movement generally, and the festivals in particular, are a response from persons who have somehow become disenchanted with modernity or dissatisfied with mainstream western religions. Through participation in group ritual and

attending festivals these persons who have felt ostracized from the contemporary American religious landscape have found a community of like-minded people with which they can network. It is within the Neopagan community that these persons find greater freedom of expression, and a more diverse palate of colors from which to choose in the painting of their own identity. Pike shows how the Neopagan movement, while drawing from many sources which date back centuries, is in fact a rather recent phenomenon which began to emerge on the American social geography in the late 1960s. While many agree with this, Loretta Orion, in her book *Never Again the Burning Times* (1995), would place the start of the Neopagan movement at 1954 with the release of Gerald Gardner's book *Witchcraft Today*. Sarah Pike, in her book, gives detailed accounts of her contact and participation with and within the Neopagan community. She takes us through some Neopagan issues such as the perception of the persons from outside their group, the problematic borrowing from other cultures and the constant reshaping of personal identity, which often accompanies Neopaganism.

While *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves* gave a very ethnographic view in its approach to Neopaganism, *Never again the Burning Times* gives more demographic statistics and has a more historical context. Orion starts by laying a foundation on which to build her argument. She gives a brief history and statistical and demographic data. The roots of American Neopaganism are then tied to British Wicca. Orion then gives an account of some of the rituals and practices performed by the Neopagan and shows how a majority of Neopagans prefer to use their own healing methods that those of modern western medicine. After this initial framework set up by Orion, she then ties Neopaganism to the radical social movements of the 1960s.

While both Orion and Pike compare the current Neopagan movement with the counterculture of the 1960s, Orion seems to take this a step further by saying that the Neopagan movement grew *out of* the 1960s counterculture. With this I would have to respectfully disagree. While the persons who participate in Neopaganism do share many similarities with the 1960s counterculture, they are distinct in some important ways. One such way is their differing beliefs about the divine and what it represents. Based on these differences and other first-person sources I feel that the evidence shows that the Neopagan movement in contemporary America has evolved independent of the 1960s counterculture. I will explore this evidence more thoroughly in the following parts of this paper.

Body

People and Places

Although no exact date can be put forth, it is apparent that over the past four decades, a growing number of persons have been embracing certain belief systems which are loosely labeled Neopaganism. Regardless of the particulars in each of the different religions associated with Neopaganism, there are certain qualities that seem to be shared by a vast majority of neopagans. Three major personality traits seem to be dominant throughout the neopagan population. Neopagans tend to be very liberal, extremely imaginative, and acutely individualistic. Although this is a generalization it is a reliable model from which to begin understanding the process through which one embraces

neopaganism. The liberal nature of neopagans can be seen by any casual observation. The first thing one would notice is the way in which most neopagans dress. Aside from the few neopagans who dress no differently than non-pagans, most neopagans either dress in a variety of bright colors or garb themselves in black. Many neopagans love natural jewelry and it is common to see neopagans wearing a crystal or some other semi-precious stone. Other ways in which neopagans can be seen as liberal are their political and social views. A great majority of neopagans are registered as democrat, liberal or independent party affiliates, while only 3 percent are registered as republican (Orion 62). Neopagans tend to be left leaning in most all of their political ideologies. As a way of showing their liberal natures neopagan espouse an openness to all belief systems. They hold this aspect of their personalities to be very different from the prejudice world they live in. In my observations it did seem as if neopagans were open to discuss and give credit to any belief system or set of morals presented to them. Even if they chose not to agree with the ideas held by another, it seems that they are always respectfully tolerant of others individual belief systems. There do seem to be exceptions to this rule however. In my fieldwork with Neopagans I found that while most Neopagans speak of openness to, and an acceptance of individual ideologies, this does not extend to those persons who claim to be of a Christian denomination. This discrepancy is important when trying to understand who the Neopagans are. While conducting my interviews with various Neopagans I noticed that many of the stories that were told to me involved their being brought up in a Christian household and feeling that their true selves were repressed. One young man whom I spoke to while attending a pagan festival in Washington, near Portland, Oregon recounted for me his experiences as a child growing up pagan. As a

child he remembered his mother taking him on long walks in the forest, and showing him mushrooms and hollow trees. She would crouch in the fallen leaves with him and point to each one saying, “...faeries live there.” For him the world had been made a magical place where anything was possible. He talked of feeling at home in the forest and believing in magic. This all ended, he said, when his mother fell upon hard financial times and they both had to move in with his grandmother. He described his grandmother as a fundamental Christian who believed that all persons who are not Protestant are going to spend an eternity in hell. This young man went on to describe how any and all ideas of magic and faeries he had, his grandmother vehemently tried to suppress. He said to me, “I remember once, when I was around thirteen my grandmother found all my books on paganism and druidism under the clothes in my dresser. She demanded to know where I had gotten them, but I just looked at her like I didn’t understand, or didn’t know anything about the books. I got good at acting dumb while living with my grandma. I just kinda looked past her like this, and mumbled things like, ‘huh’ or ‘wha’. She ended up burning the books in the front yard while I watched. I never have owned a book on paganism since, because, I still live with my grandma. My mom left and moved in with some other guy a few years ago. There wasn’t enough room in his house for me I guess. Anyway, I remember when I was in high school and we watched a documentary on World War II and there was this scene of Hitler burning all of these books in an open courtyard. It reminded me of my grandmother...and all Christians really.” This young man went on to explain to me how truly frightened he was of his grandmother because she was abusive. “She’s kinda, not all there,” he said, “I’m never gonna let her know that I’m a pagan...I don’t care who else knows. And if she ever does find out, I’m not gonna be

the one there telling her. I don't wanna be the one who gets the wrath." When I asked what had convinced him to attend pagan festivals he said that it was his way of looking for, and finding, other people with similar experiences and beliefs. "I'm really just looking for a family", he said.

Stories like these seem to dominate the pasts of many Neopagans and for those who do not speak of overly oppressive family members, there always seems to be a backdrop of a conservative disapproving community. Many neopagans refer to this outside, conservative world they live in 'Mundania'. Mundania is a term meant to imply the mundane way of life. All those outside of the neopagan and magical community are often called mundanes; those lacking in magical or creative ability. Mundania is usually cast as the antithesis to the magical and imaginative world of the neopagan community (Pike 21). Especially the neopagan festivals held throughout the year. Growing up in 'Mundania' or in a household of strict and conservative parents seems to be a recurring theme in many neopagan childhoods. Because of this, Christianity has come to symbolize an oppressive and painful past for a majority in the neopagan community. This anti-Christian, anti-conservative sentiment seems to be central in the construction of new identities for many neopagans. "It is faulted", by many neopagans, "for being monotheistic, male-dominated, and uncritically oriented to positivist science and production" (Orion 143).

Another thing most pagans share is an extremely vivid and developed imagination. A major component of neopagan practices and rituals require what is referred to as creative visualization. This is explained as a process in which a person first imagines 'something', and then focuses on visualizing that 'something' with eyes open.

A person tries to keep this imagined image in the minds eye, and with imaginative powers, make it as 'real' as possible. The more 'real' or 'solid' a person can envision their imagined creation, the more powerful, or potent the persons effect on their internal and external world. It would appear then, that neopagans use their imagination and creativity to exert control over their worlds; worlds that had been, until their discovery of 'magic', out of their control. When asked what made them turn to neopaganism, most of the persons I interviewed said that they had been introduced by a friend or relative, or had themselves been drawn to science fiction and fantasy literature at a young age.

Neopagans are avid readers and out of the 148 people I interviewed, 84 stated that fantasy fiction was their favorite genre. Another pastime that a great many neopagans are involved in is role-playing games. Many in fact point to role-playing games when speaking of their first introduction to magic and neopagan ideas. While in Denver, Colorado I started speaking to a neopagan who referred to himself as Grimmel. He told me that he had been introduced to the role-playing game Dungeon and Dragons, by his older brother, when he had been 8 years old. He went on to say "I started out just playing the Dungeon and Dragons board game with my brother, but by the time I was 12 I was deep into the actual role-playing game. I had a subscription to Dragon magazine, and I used to look through it all the time and being, well, consumed really by the artwork. I loved the idea of a time long ago when dragons and magic existed. It seemed a hell of a lot more interesting than where I lived. Anyway I started playing all the time, probably an average of 6 hours a day. If I had ant spare time, I was with my friend exploring dungeons and learning spells. I got involved in the Society for Creative Anachronism and found that to be exhilarating. I remember wishing that I could go to sleep and wake the

next morning in the Dungeon and dragons world.” Many in the neopagan community seem to be trying to reclaim a way of life that exists in the imagination as long ago and far away, where elves and faeries lived in deep primeval forest. Pike states that “typical of this quest for the past was ‘romantic neo-medievalism’ exemplified by the popularity of Tolkien and of Lerner-Loewe’s *Camelot* and fascination with ancient worlds and supernatural events . . . (2001:171). As Pike points out, it seems that the attraction to fantasy literature and fantasy role-playing starts younger people on a path towards neopaganism. “If fantasy books introduce children to Neopagan beliefs, then interest in medieval reenactment and popular role-playing games such as Dungeon and Dragons carries potential Neopagans deeper into the fold” (Pike 171). For persons truly unhappy and disenchanted with our modern society, and who use fiction novels and fantasy role-playing as a type of escapism, neopaganism is very attractive. Neopagan ritual groups and festivals must seem for some people the next logical step to make their fiction their reality (Pike 2001:171) The neopagan Grimmel later told me that after being introduced to neopaganism, he no longer had as much time to comment to Dungeon and Dragons or any of those other things, but he didn’t miss it much because now he lived the life he had always dreamed about. In the neopagan community, “role-playing takes place in real space and time” (Pike 172).

Another way in which neopagans show their imaginative nature is through their artistic ability. In my observations of the Neopagan community it was apparent that nearly everyone involved was talented at some form of art. This seems to be an inherent quality in the persons attracted to Neopaganism. When questioned about the beginning of their artistic ability, most neopagans that I spoke to claimed that they had artistic talent as

long as they can recall. One older man named Cecil said, “ I still remember being back in school, my teacher would be going over arithmetic on the blackboard, but my eyes were always drifting out the window or concentrating on some sketch I was doodling on paper. It infuriated my teacher, and I was reprimanded for it regularly. I suppose I was even upsetting authority figures way back then.” As I walked along the trail which let through the main village of one pagan festival, I saw that at any time of the day you see neopagans involved in some art project, whether it be the designing and creating of a dress to the construction of a new staff or wand. I watched fascinated as one festival participant in one hour, turned an old pool cue and a handful of clay into a beautiful golden Egyptian scepter.

Although many neopagans enjoy sharing their beliefs with each other and having a sense of community, they are at heart a very individualistic group. This is one of the aspects of the neopagan movement which differentiates it from other new age movements and cults. Many in the new age movement are likely to be the sort of people who follow others, or have a need to be led. Neopagans as a group are not followers. Even though many neopagans adhere to a belief system called Wicca, and the Wicca religion is usually set up into covens which have leaders, neopagans are more likely to listen to their own intuition than a coven leader. While talking to the High Priestess of a Wiccan coven in Portland, Oregon I was told that she had accepted the title of High Priestess only recently, and that it had been the source of much stress in her life. She had no intentions of “ruling peoples lives or telling them when and what to do.” She told me that she “ hoped that the rest of the coven understood that she was not going to try and push her own agenda on the group. Everyone in my coven is an individual with their own path and their own

emotional battles ahead of them. My position and role as High Priestess is not to tell them which roads to walk, or tell them how to fight their battles. I am here as an experienced witch, who will offer advice to those who seek it. I don't think they would have selected me as the new High Priestess if they had thought I would do otherwise." She went on to inform me that as a probationary member of her coven, she had learned how far one's opinion would go with other coven members, and how important self-determinism was to practitioners of Wicca.

Another piece of evidence that shows the independent nature of neopagans is the absence of a guiding prophet (Orion 1995:6). This lack of a central prophet, or any real sense of an omniscient and omnipotent deity, is a testament to the self-determining, self-empowering ideology of neopaganism. The closest thing to a central deity in neopaganism is what the Wiccans refer to as 'the Goddess'. However, this divinity is not recognized by all neopagans, and even those that do worship the Goddess see her as a universal force rather than an actual entity. This force, the Goddess makes itself manifest in a multitude of different forms and faces. Therefore, most neopagans worship a variety of gods and spirits, all of whom are aspects of the Goddess or universal force. Even the way neopagans choose to practice their spirituality is personalized. They tend to be eclectic in their belief systems and use only that which suits them as an individual. Promotion of the self is a central theme in many neopagan groups. While the method of promotion may vary from group to group the underlying current of self-empowerment is ever-present. Orion points out that, "Neopagans are distinctive in their belief that individuals can and should be powerful. . . Their goal is to 'reclaim' powers of the mind, meaning not only the intellect, but also the imagination, will, intuition, and other mental faculties with which

they may control their own lives . . .” This comment by Orion brings to my mind the conversation I had in Washington with the young man about his grandmother. Not only this persons story, but countless others who spoke to me recounted childhood experiences which were similar in nature. This young man who spoke to me had lost control of his life after moving in with his grandmother. It seems that as adults these individuals who have had their beliefs stifled and their sense of self-control stolen, are finding in neopaganism a way of ‘reclaiming’ control over their spiritual lives. As Sarah Pike states, “Because they feel embattled from without, (neopagans) are more likely to insist on controlling . . .from within (1995:85). It appears then that a large number of persons have found in neopaganism a way in which they can control their social and spiritual life, that was not afforded them in their previous belief systems or social circles.

Besides these, there are certain other demographic similarities between various Neopagans. Education level seems to be one of these similarities. Neopagans have a higher level of education than the average American. According to Orion, only 4.7 percent of neopagans have less than a high school education, while a full 71.3 percent have had education past a high school diploma. 28.1 percent have graduate degrees (Orion 1995:67). The college majors chosen by neopagans also seems to set them apart. When comparing the college major neopagans enrolled in to those majors enrolled in by college freshman as a whole, Orion came up with these statistics. Thirty-five percent of the neopagans polled chose Arts and Humanities as a college major and eighteen percent chose social sciences. As a whole only nine percent of college freshman chose Arts and Humanities as a major and eight percent chose Social Sciences (Orion 1995:69). However, although neopagans on average have a higher level of education than other

Americans, they are below average in financial earnings. Seventy-nine percent of neopagans annual income is under \$25,000 and thirty percent make under \$7,000 yearly.

Through my interviews and study I have found that, although there may not be an exact formula for the adoption of neopaganism, certain character traits and experiences can combine to make a person more likely to adopt neopaganism as their belief system. The neopagans are group of persons who have, for various reasons, become disenchanted and dissatisfied with the world they live in and as a result have chosen to seek out others of a like mind and construct a community that holds beliefs and promotes a lifestyle of imagination and self determination. The way they interact and the identities they adopt, especially while at rituals or festivals are “rehearsals for a hoped-for real future” (Orion 262).

Stories and Spaces

As I have already put forth, neopagans often relate stories of oppressive and traumatic childhoods. While conducting my interviews with neopagans I began to notice that when talking of themselves, many of the neopagans that I talked to started relating their past in a very story-like manner. The stories they told of their pasts were always extremely dramatic and full of vivid description. As they told the story it was as if they became actors on their own stage, reciting lines for some invisible audience. Most of the neopagans I interviewed adopted this manner of communication when relating stories about themselves. After noticing this tendency among neopagans I started asking questions about it. I asked one of the neopagans I met, who I will refer to as Cassandra, if she was conscious of the fact that she seemed to talk about her past as though she were

reading a book. “Oh, Yes” she answered, “a lot of us pagans do that. I really don’t know why but I think it has something to do with the fact that we are always creating stories. To tell the truth, I spent the formative years of my life pretending I was someone else, somewhere else. I think maybe its because as neopagans we become something new. When we think back on who we used to be, it just seems like someone else . . .so maybe that explains the ‘story-like’ quality you hear when pagans talk about their past.”

Although what Cassandra said seems to be congruent with the way neopagans behave, I feel that there is more to this story-telling nature. Neopagans have told me that a vast majority of them were avid readers of fantasy literature, and many claimed that they had a longing to live in that mythical time period. It follows then that neopagans talk about themselves and their past in the form of dramatic story-telling in order to give their lives that mythical and magical quality. It is done to set them apart as different. ‘Once ago in a small town, I was a young lad curious about the world. But I had a wicked stepfather . . .’

All of this fits the mold that has been made thus far. It allows the neopagans to put themselves into a story, much the way role-playing games and fantasy fiction do. It allows individuals to play with their past, mixing fantasy with fact to make a more desirable history. Pike states that, “Neopagans draw from the landscape of childhood-the places, people, events, and feelings that compose memories of personal pasts-in order to create stories about their lives that make sense in a Neopagan context (157). These stories indicate that the relationship between Neopagan’s current identities and their remembered childhood is complex and dynamic” (155). These stories neopagans tell each other are not merely a way to pass time. The construction and sharing of these stories carries with it an enormous importance to the individual. “ Personal stories are not merely a way of telling

someone about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned" (Rosenwald 1992:1).

After the creation of one's personal story it becomes important to find others to share that story with. Once you have found a few other people who share in your neopagan beliefs it becomes possible to make the world you had always lived through books and role-playing a real thing. It is this stage in many neopagans life where the creation of 'space' evolves from an internal mechanism of imagination, to an external reality. It is this need for the creation of space that causes the formation of covens and other small-scale neopagan groups. Central to the neopagan way of life is magic and ritual. Neopagans feel that the creation of this space will allow them to go deeper into themselves (Pike 24) The creation of this space, for neopagans, allows for the lives they had secretly lived in their imaginations to be brought outside of themselves and have a tangible reality. Neopagans create circles and perform rituals together so that each may, as stated earlier, rehearse for a hoped-for real future (Orion 262). This created space follows the story-telling nature of neopagans perfectly. The space created at ritual, and through larger groups at festivals, creates a liminal space in which to construct a new life and new identity. Liminal space, as described by Victor Turner, is a "place in-between" or at the "threshold". As the participants start to enter a ritual or festival they "enter a 'liminal' period where their characteristics become ambiguous, and they pass through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past . . ." (Turner 1969:94). This blurring of past and present identity makes a space in which neopagans are capable of recreating themselves. The presence of other persons at these rituals and festivals is important to the neopagan individual because they stand as witnesses to this

transformation. Although rituals can and are done alone, this form of identity creation is too much like imagination for many neopagan. As one festival participant told me, “Yeah, I do rituals at home, but it’s nothing like coming to a festival like this and actually being around other people who do the same thing. To actually see other people doing and believing the same thing you makes your experience more real. . . I guess that when you don’t have other people around, it’s like its still in your head. When there are other people and other pagans, and you all do a ritual and talk about it afterwards, its like you’re actually living the magic.” As can be seen by this narrative, the presence of other neopagans, and a space in which to perform, is essential in the validation and solidification of individual experiences. Turner states that liminal spaces can be likened to a womb (Turner 95). I feel that this is an excellent analogy for the creation of space in a neopagan gathering. The space created by neopagans becomes, in a sense, the womb of self-recreation where the new identities are formed and nourished, yet protected from an external world.

Some of the problems neopagans have had in the construction of ‘space’ is the public view of neopaganism. Many neopagans I talked to complained that the spaces they create, whether it be during ritual or festival, usually draws attention from the outside community. “This is more the case with festivals really.” Said one neopagan, “We come together here to share an experience and leave the outside world for a few days. But the outside world doesn’t seem to want to let us do that. It’s not like were trying to upset people or anything. We come out here to the woods where we hope no one will notice us, but they do, and they don’t like it.” Because many neopagan festivals are held on public property that has been rented, such as state parks, the news that a group of neopagans is

gathering spreads rather quickly in the local areas surrounding festivals. Authorities usually send in patrols during the festival to make sure no illegal activities are taking place. These things are done in response to the great prejudice that hangs over neopaganism by conservatives. Pike states that many conservative people and groups feel that “neopagans are to blame for a host of social problems such as teen violence; fear of captivity, which suggest Neopagans are to be feared because they will catch you or your children; and apocalypticism, which results in the belief that neopagans both signify and will cause the coming apocalypse described in the Book of Revelation” (Pike 90). “Ignorance and fear of the unknown cause some contemporary Americans to identify Neopagans as enemies of society who are responsible a set of social problems. Scholars of new religions are quick to point out that this kind of scapegoating has been a constant theme in American religious history” (Pike 93). This constant battle between the neopagans within the festival space, and the local community from without, seems to be a continuation of the battles many neopagans spoke of when describing oppressive characters in their childhoods. When I asked one man what he would say to others outside of the neopagan community, who don’t understand the rituals and festivals, that might defuse some of the misconceptions and hatred between the groups he answered, “I would tell them that . . . they’re probably right. This sort of thing is not for them. But at the same time the stuff that goes on here at festivals or during rituals isn’t hurting anybody. So, I would guess I would have to say that although they would probably disagree with what goes on out here, that doesn’t necessarily mean that they need to come out and try to change it, because, it’s really our business and no one else’s.” Another neopagan I spoke to at the same gathering had a different opinion. He said, “I feel like if

someone's gonna judge us for what we do out here, without ever coming out and seeing it for themselves . . .well, that's just hypocritical. It's stupid. Come out and see what we're all about, talk to some of us, and then if you don't like us or what we do . . .fine."

As can be seen Neopagans have differing ideas on how to cope with a world that still seems to want to suppress them. All, however, that I talked to spoke in a way that made it obvious that they didn't care what the outside world thought. Their true families were at the festival and rituals. "Reality", for the neopagan, is created through the stories they tell in a liminal space and time, wedged between one plunge back into 'Mundania' and another.

Conclusions

Neopaganism is a relatively new religious movement on the American social scene. As such it is difficult to make hard statements about its cultural significance or its eventual effect in American culture. There are, however, certain questions that can be answered. The first question concerns the reason neopaganism has grown so much in the past few decades. This is the result of two things. Firstly, that a growing number of persons are becoming dissatisfied with the lack of control in their spiritual lives. They are exasperated over the seemingly non-existent line between religious faith and the marketing of products. Many people today find themselves spiritually empty, and all main-stream religions seem void of this feeling some people are seeking. Many people complain that religious communities throughout the United States have lost a feeling of connectedness, not only to each other, but to anything greater than themselves. Another large group of individuals feel that the major religions of our contemporary society do not

approve of them, or welcome them into their fold. These feelings usually apply to the gay community and the women's rights movement. Many people today feel that Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are men's religions. Due to this fact, a number of individuals feel that the identity they have internally, is somehow unsuitable for the religious community around them, and learn from a young age to hide themselves. When these people find neopaganism, it is like a breath of fresh air. It allows for them to express themselves in ways not possible in other more conservative and dogmatic religions. Neopaganism also allows individuals to feel connected to nature and community in a way that many people feel is missing in the modernity of American life. Neopaganism is growing because more and more people are finding it necessary to have a greater involvement with, and control of, their spiritual lives than is presently afforded in mainstream religions. I feel that another, more functional reason neopaganism has grown in the past three decades is because of its growing exposure and availability. As I mentioned in my introduction, the literature available on neopaganism has exploded in the last fifteen years. It has become more acceptable as a religion. Due to these factors it should be expected that neopaganism should grow.

Where the neopagan movement is going is open to debate. One thing is apparent however. Neopaganism is still growing. Every year the number of neopagan festivals around the country grows, as does the number of persons attending these festivals. More authors are publishing books on Wicca and magic than ever before. Neopaganism is here for the duration. While talking to one young woman who was attending her first festival in Georgia I was told, "next year I'm gonna bring two of my friends. They were unsure about coming with me this time and backed out, but I know they would love this and I'm

sure they'll be here next year." This statement is similar to many I heard while conducting my field research.

Neopaganism is a growing and evolving religion. It is no longer a 'movement' as such, but rather a thriving and expanding belief system.

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