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The Modern and The Witch: A Genuine Invention of Tradition

By Austin Lawrence (*Presented at the Toronto Pagan Conference 2006*)

I wrote this paper a number of years back for a graduate class in Cultural Anthropology. Thus, while not only being a little out-of-date, it suffers from the usual overzealous pedantry of the aspiring academic.

Witchcraft is a modern religious movement steeped in 'tradition'. This presentation will add theoretical and ethnographic enrichment to the fairly standard thesis that witchcraft is a 'genuine', invented tradition. In this presentation I will provide a number of ruminations on the invention of tradition, the rise of the neo-pagan movement, the 'witch-cult' hypothesis and ideas about the witch-craze, the textured meaning of the word "tradition" among neo-pagans, the mechanics of magical thought, the relation between myth and history, the characteristics of modernity and 'radicalized modernity', and why people join the imagined community of neo-pagans. The goal of weaving together such seemingly disparate subjects is to come to a conclusion regarding the

location of Witchcraft in modernity and its relationship to the discourse of legitimacy surrounding the roots of this recent 'tradition'.

I do not use a very rigorous definition of witchcraft or neo-paganism. These labels are used differently by a great many different groups. Generally, witchcraft refers to a more generalized philosophical attitude of magical spirituality, while neo-paganism (or paganism, as we adherents and practitioners prefer) is an umbrella term for the various denominations or distinct 'paths' that are mainly revivals of pre-Christian European beliefs. The terms themselves are contested ground between groups and individuals vying for power and authority in their respective spiritual communities, with the results that meanings are contextual, positional, and constantly shifting.

Pagan itself was originally an epithet used by modern, Christianized Romans to describe the practices of their backward, country cousins (Russell 1980:40). Certain authors, taking their cue from African studies, have suggested getting away from this disparaging label in favour of the term "European Traditional Religion" (Crowley 1994:30). This is representative of several themes that will arise in this presentation: the conscious manipulation of belief, the tension between modernity and tradition, the remaking of the past for the present, and the meaning of 'tradition' in witchcraft.

The neo-pagan movement itself is exceedingly diverse, covering strands that align themselves with a wide range of magical and

spiritual practices. For the purposes of this seminar the term “neo-pagan” refers to anyone who subscribes to a system of belief, magical or not, which is a model for the pre-Christian religions of Europe and/or the magical practices of the Middle Ages often called “witchcraft”. Witchcraft will be a more specific term used to describe those neo-pagans who self-identify as witches. These individuals are usually connected in some way (through text or oral tradition) to the advent of Wicca around the 1950s.

The arrival of Hobsbawm and Ranger’s book, The Invention of Tradition, among anthropologists and social historians in 1983 crystallized and focused the study of ‘invented tradition’. Since then debate has raged in various academic circles regarding this subject, and it has also spilled into the outside world in the form of the politics of identity, the neo-pagan community being no exception.

The basis for the discussion is Hobsbawm’s (1983: 1) refined version of a common-sense definition of ‘tradition’. Hobsbawm defines traditions as:

‘A set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. ... They normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.’

To Hobsbawm, these types of claims to the past serve three main purposes in a society; they increase social cohesion, they legitimize authority, and they inculcate a certain set of beliefs and values (Hobsbawm 1983: 9). He states that they are also more likely to occur in times of “rapid transformation in society” (Hobsbawm 1983: 4-5).

As a historian, Hobsbawm still insists on making an objectivist judgement regarding the authenticity of traditional versus non-traditional practices. He makes the fine point that it is only when a practice is taken out of its historical context, that it becomes an invented, rather than a true, tradition (Hobsbawm 1983: 8).

To anthropologists Handler and Linnekin (1984:273,276) tradition, or any other ‘current’ practice for that matter, must be viewed as a symbolic relationship. Thus “tradition is a model of the past and is inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present” (Handler and Linnekin 1984:276). This means that both the common-sense definition of

tradition, and the judgements of Hobsbawm, are inaccurate. As Handler and Linnekin characterize it:

‘Traditions are neither genuine nor spurious, for if genuine tradition refers to a pristine and immutable heritage of the past, then all genuine traditions are spurious. But if ... tradition is always defined in the present, then all spurious traditions are genuine. Genuine and spurious – terms that have been used to distinguish objective reality from hocus-pocus – are inappropriate when applied to social phenomena, which never exist apart from our interpretations of them’ (Handler and Linnekin 1984:288).

I feel that that the second of these options to be more useful, especially from an insider’s point of view. All traditions are described and accessed through the present, and are thus genuine. But, how is invented tradition construed to be genuine, even when a direct, historic link to the past is known not to exist? How is the relationship between past and present understood? How can it be truly “traditional”? Why has a specific tradition manifested itself, and in what context? It is towards this ‘hocus-pocus’ that I now consider.

PFPC would like to welcome Maryanne Pearce and Austin Lawrence to the PFPC Board. Congratulations! We look forward to their ideas and contributions.

The ideas of the discourse on the invention of tradition has greatly affected writing on neo-paganism. Neo-pagans are a highly literate community, especially when it comes to consuming the writings of anthropologists and social historians. In fact, much of their initial knowledge and expertise is often attributed to this source (Pearce 1998). Thus, as Anthropology’s study of tradition, and pagan spirituality (in both the past and present) becomes more reflexive and sophisticated, so too does the neo-pagan community’s understanding of these topics.

What is termed ‘witchcraft’, also known as Wicca, the Craft, or the Old Religion, is at the centre of the maelstrom of belief that is neo-paganism. The rise of Wicca has been very well-documented (see Crowley 1996; Luhrmann 1989; Adler 1986; Russell 1980). It started

mainly as the undertaking of an English civil servant named Gerald B. Gardner in the 1940s and 1950s (Guiley 1992:412). Whether he intended to create a new religion when he began his study of witchcraft, or whether it spontaneously ‘emerged’ is difficult to say (Guiley 1991:648). At any rate, Gardner, a regular in occult circles and an avid reader of historical and anthropological texts, has been shown to have fashioned, from a great many sources, the system of belief he taught (Russell 1980:152-155; also see Adler 1986, Guiley 1992).

Gardner claimed the mantle of the past with the forging of this new religion. He drew extensively from anthropological and historical books and his occult network of acquaintances to formulate a brand of magico-religious practice that was labeled Wicca (or witchcraft). Gardner stated that he learned much of the religion that he popularized from one he called a ‘traditional witch’ in the New Forest region of England (Russell 1980:152; Valiente 1989).

Gardner, and his early companions, were undoubtedly influenced by Margret A. Murray’s influential ‘witch cult’ hypothesis. This hypothesis held that pagan religion existed as an intact body of beliefs throughout the Christian era in Western Europe, specifically Britain (Russell 1980:41). The execution of thousands of individuals, mostly women, for witchcraft during the times of the Inquisition was the primary example of the persecution of this religion. Her work was supported by flimsy historiography and has since been discredited (Guiley 1992:413; Russell 1980:41-42). While her conclusions and methodology may have been faulty, neo-pagans point out that evidence still supports her thematic assertion that elements of pagan practice existed even through the Christian era (Adler 1986; Crowley 1994; Pearce 1998).

As Adler (1986:47) points out, the dismissal of witchcraft has often hinged upon associating the rise of neo-paganism with dubious scholarship, by extension with a false sense of historical truth, and thus an illegitimate claim to authenticity. Not only Murray’s work but also books such as Charles G. Leland’s romantic *Aradia, or the Gospel of Witches*, Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, and Robert Graves’ *The White Goddess*, all supported a romantic notion of an intact (albeit persecuted) pagan past (see Adler 1986:56 and Russell 1980:41-42). By contradicting or supporting this past, invented or

not, one is making a comment about the neo-pagans of the present.

The complex semantics of how, or to what extent, Gardner invented a tradition of witchcraft is not the concern of this presentation. What is of concern is how ‘tradition’ has been conceptualized by modern witches. After first going over how scholars have conceptualized the mythic times of witchcraft, I will begin to address this issue.

There are numerous anthropological, historical, and even psychological theories vying for the definitive position of explaining what went on during the witch-craze; that time of European history which saw the execution of large numbers of individuals charged with the crime of witchcraft. The charge of witchcraft essentially became a specific charge involving certain prescriptive activities (real or imagined) that were said to be symptomatic of worshipping Satan (see Adler 1986; Russell 1980; Guiley 1991).

Norman Cohen theorized the witch-craze from a psychoanalytic perspective. This view is a more sophisticated spin on the pre-nineteenth century opinion that the witch-craze was the result of the ‘delusions of hysterics’ (Adler 1986:49). Jeffery Russell (1972) asserted that the persecution of witches was really mainly the persecution of Christian heretic sects. Another explanation is that the witchcraft persecutions represented a Holocaust of Women, the casualties of a gender-based conflict (see Starhawk 1979). Some scholars have suggested a more simplistic causation; for instance, that the witch-craze was the result of massive ergot poisoning.¹

Many treatments of the subject weave together elements from different arguments, hoping to come to a more balanced conclusion. A middle-of-the-road argument, which seems to be supported by the pagan community and many academics, is that some combination of massive socio-economic upheaval (and perhaps mitigating exceptional historic triggers) lead to the witch-craze. What most do recognize is that widespread and wide-scale witch persecutions took place in Europe during the late Middle Ages up to the early Enlightenment. Aside from merely the time-frame, most also agree that the witch-craze was the symptom of some deeper

¹ Ergot is a parasitic, alkaloid fungus which grows on the ears of damp grain, especially rye.

disturbance in society. We will come back to some of the theoretical implications of these 'deeper disturbances', after introducing some epistemic implication of the neo-pagan use of the word "tradition".

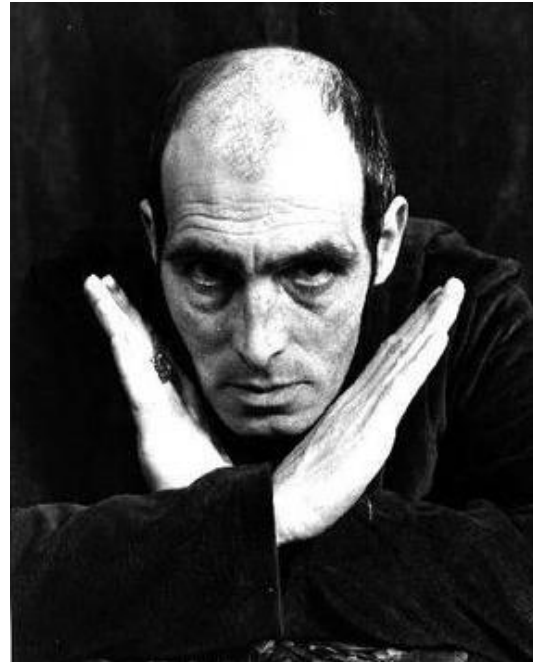
Witches, and neo-pagans in general, hold a dual concept of the word "tradition". On the one hand is a definition which is similar, but perhaps a bit more anthropologically sophisticated, version of the common sense definition, and on the other is a definition intimately constructed as a response to criticism of inauthenticity leveled at neo-paganism, which directly draws upon an 'invention of tradition' discursive foundation.² Far from being mutually exclusive, these two understandings of tradition support one another.

Tradition often serves as a badge of authenticity in neo-paganism. Many witches seek to ground their beliefs in the pre-Christian past. This past is seen as being more spiritually pure, more basic, and thus more true. As Brendan, a Druid, stated in 1998, for many Celtic reconstructionists: "It is really, really important to study history in order to emulate it as closely as possible ... that's authentic – that's real" (Pearce 1998). This is more an idea of tradition in the sense of 'traditional'; something which is time-tested, authentic, solid, and good.

This idea of a direct connection to the past is expressed by the number of claims to 'traditional' or 'hereditary' witch status in the neo-pagan community. This assertion is commonly held to be empirically true, even when neo-pagans believe that witchcraft has not existed unbroken through the ages. In this common pattern, the neo-pagan follows a cultural-genetic link to the pagan past through their ancestors. People who claim such a link have been handed down beliefs and practices from relatives (usually elderly female ones) that they consider to be of pagan origin. While most pagans do not possess such backgrounds, they do often connect their practice to the past by

² This confluence and melding of ideas regarding the nature of meanings of tradition may be due, in some regard to academic writing on the subject, since many witches do keep up with, and contribute to, the debate. As Giddens (1990:45) observed: "Knowledge claimed by expert observers (in some part, and in many varying ways) rejoins its subject matter, thus (in principle, but also normally in practice) altering it." This statement will be doubly ironic should this essay be read by a neo-pagan.

claiming mentors who are hereditary witches. For instance, Gardener learned from 'Old Dorthy' Clutterbuck of the New Forrest area in Britain (Russell 1980:152-153) and a modern Canadian pagan, Thunder Raven, learned from "an Arch Druid whose lineage goes back about ten thousand years" (Pearce 1998).



Tradition can also be consciously designed. Each denomination, or 'path', of neo-paganism is considered to be a "tradition". To what extent this is a personal construction becomes obvious when neo-pagans ask one another to which tradition the other belongs. A proper response might be that they are Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Alexandrian-Gardnerian, Asatru, Norse Wicca, a Dianic witch, an eclectic solitary, a Celtic Shaman, British Traditional, a hereditary witch, or even some hyphenated combination of any of the above. Richard James, a High Priest and founder of the Wiccan Church of Canada, experimented extensively with many neo-pagan practices and came up with the "Odyssean Tradition" (Pearce 1998). The name itself reflects the self-made, experiential nature of tradition with its conscious allusion to Homer's *Odyssey* (Tamara James in Pearce 1998). When it came time to name the spiritual path his coven had developed through research and practice with a diverse array of teachers Richard James stated that: "we realized that, in fact, we had created a new tradition and

then we rummaged around for a name until we found one” (Pearce 1998). The point is that when asked what their tradition is the neo-pagan knows that the questioner is seeking to know their spiritual label. Though this label is often referenced to historic roots, the functionally-indistinct use of the term “tradition” to cover any polyglot belief of personal construction is linguistically indicative of the cultural reality amongst neo-pagan witches that their spiritual “traditions” are actually modern inventions.

Neo-pagans mine the historical past and anthropological present to create a personalized system of belief (Adler 1986; Russell 1980; Guiley 1991; Pearce 1998). Like much work in cross-cultural comparison in anthropology (where neo-pagans often obtain much of their information) cultural traits are often essentialized and reified apart from their historical context. Cultural traits, in this model, achieve a “continuity and boundedness ... analogous to that of a natural object” (Handler and Linnekin 1984:273). As Luhrmann characterizes it, to the neo-pagan “real truths are not tied to any particular religion or mythology. Historical and cultural circumstances is but an ephemeral stain upon a deeper substrate” (Luhrmann 1989: 241). In the words of Douglas, a Druidic Shaman, “when you sit there and boil it down, all religion espouses pretty much the same thing” (Pearce 1998).

What many neo-pagans seek is a purity of spiritual vision, one both personal and transcendent. They not believe that ‘a tradition’, an intact core set of cultural traits, will live on throughout the ages, but they are very willing to believe that the ‘traditional’ can survive, albeit in an cloaked, encoded, or protected form.

Most neo-pagans accept that their religion did not exist in its current form since time began. Many patently reject such claims as ridiculous (Pearce 1998). However, they do often believe that for most people it is a “reinvention” or a “rebirth” (Dales in Pearce 1998; Starhawk 1979). By using elements of the past and present neo-pagans are “recreating” witchcraft (Dales in Pearce 1998). Unlike science, magic works through “mimesis – not by progressively distancing itself from the object” (Bovenschen 1978: 87). The distinction between invention and reinvention is thus an important one to make, for it divides the linear rationality of much social science from the cyclic, magical viewpoint of modern paganism.

As Luhrmann’s ethnographic work observes: “Magic is said to work through the imagination, and the more intensely you can imagine something, the more likely, it is said, that the magic will work” (Luhrmann 1989: 241). Reality is not strictly the construction of past events, but of a fusion of present imagination and will. The symbolic relations between personally-relevant elements is of primary importance. “The theory which legitimizes their syncretistic mythology also grants freedom to their use of history, because evocation is always more important than truth-tested fact. The past is treated as myth and, genuine or invented, it becomes the crude ore for symbolic creativity” (Luhrmann 1989: 242).

While witches may make claims to the authenticity of the past, to the essential ‘truth’ of the traditional, the symbolic value of such assertions are what truly count. In the end historic authenticity does not matter. In the words of Thunder Raven: “the reality [of] whether a religion started today or started five thousand years ago is relatively moot. What matters most of all is what you do with it” (Thunder Raven in Pearce 1998). It is more a matter of using the past, rather than living in the past (Crowley 1994:18). Brendan, a Druid, summarizes by stating: “I really do feel that the study of the folklore and the history is a preparatory stage. I really feel that when you want to practice religion, all you have is the phenomena of the experience” (Pearce 1998).

“Invented history is satisfying myth” (Luhrmann 1989: 243). But it is not a myth in the sense of being untrue because to the neo-pagan myths themselves are the vehicles through which wisdom is transmitted. Rejecting all Rankian views of the past, the neo-pagan views history, myth, and legend as a field where the logic of magic is the grammar by which the truth of the inter-sphere and the outer-sphere communicate. In a way, rationalist attempts to corral the imagination in object and event are a totalitarian effort to extinguish the utility of magical symbols, to erode the technology of accessing the Divine. Luhrmann has a representative anecdote of how such a situation is played out in everyday life.

“The high priest of the coven I joined wrote many of the group’s seasonal rituals himself. As soon as he did so, he told me, he ‘buried’ his authorship: if you want the tradition to persist, he said, you must deny your intervention. ‘That’s good magic’” (Luhrmann 1989: 243).

One of the functions of invented history or tradition in witchcraft is to protect neo-paganism from the criticisms of a society obsessed with the genuineness of history and “the authoritative canon of apparently objective science” (Luhrmann 1989: 24). The invented history of tradition serves modern symbolic, political, and magical ends, but, should it be accepted by the mainstream, also provides a space for these beliefs to exist in a hostile contemporary world.



In popular culture, embedded in the English language, and in academic writing, is an assumption that contrasts the “modern” to the “traditional”. Since at least the time of the Enlightenment, it has become impossible to conceptualize one without the other. The two terms operate in tension with one another. As Kolakowski puts it: “The clash between the ancient and the modern is probably everlasting and we will never get rid of it, as it expresses the natural tension between structure and evolution ... it is, we may believe, an essential characteristic of life” (Kolakowski 1990: 4). But this disjunction is largely a chimera, since what is current in each age *is* modern, *is* structured, and tradition *is* a current adaptation, a symbolically-arranged present, but stated in the vocabulary of the past.

Modernity is the sociological label given to the contemporary age. What time period this span covers is itself the subject of a fair degree of contention. But what is generally agreed is that modernity represents a shift in the European way of conceptualizing the world that, either as a cause or as a result, was related to deep sociological and institutional changes. The roots of this shift is often placed in the late Middle Ages (Giddens 1990).

An influential social theorist Anthony Giddens (1990, 1994) has written extensively on modernity. Modernity’s key characteristics include the “separation of time and space”, the “disembedding of social systems”, and the “reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations” (Giddens 1990: 16-17). Modernity is also “*phantasmagoric*: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them” (Giddens 1990: 19).

Giddens also argues that as we enter late modernity the modern process of reflection has itself become an object of reflection (Sim 1998: 258), which is part of how modernity is becoming “more radicalized and universalized than before” (Giddens 1990:3). It is how modernity is coming to understand itself, entering a hyper-modern situation (Giddens 1990:48). This epoch of hyper-modernity is often called “post-modern”. However, for some theorists calling what is actually über-modern, post-modern may be due in part to there being “no clear idea of what modernity is” (Kolakowski 199:6). Some characteristics of this radicalized modernity as identified by Giddens (1990:52) include the dissolution of evolutionism, the disappearance of historical teleology, a thoroughgoing, constitutive reflexivity, and an evaporation of the privileged position of the West.

Witchcraft has intimately been associated with modernity throughout its course, from the rise of modernity to the present radicalization of modernity. This has been a result of both historical and symbolic processes.

The witch persecutions of the late Middle Ages occurred just at the time of modernity’s rise. The end of the witch-craze may have actually been a result of the “advance of science and industry”, essentially the blooming of modernity (Guiley 1991:648). The ordering of society along new institutional lines, the rise of radicalized Christianity, increased urbanization, shifts in relationships of

production, the rise of the nation-state, philosophies of modernization, and the increased technological mastery of nature, various wars, plagues and famines, are all symptomatic of the times, the time of modernity's emergence (see also Hunter 1998). This time of social upheaval was also the 'Burning Times',³ a time of persecution and death of many charged with witchcraft, the mythic chalk with which many modern witches draw their identity.

This presentation does not allow for a complete understanding of the nuances of how social and economic relations were related to charges of witchcraft. There is an entire literature dedicated to the discussion of such points (see Russell 1980 for a preliminary overview). What can be extrapolated from such a picture is that the complexities and changes that have since been called the hallmarks of the shift into modernity; the witch-craze was a symptom of this shift.

Vivianne Crowley, a respected leader in the neo-pagan community, has explained this shift in a mystico-astrological vocabulary. She talks about the elements which have commonly characterized modernity – central authority, established Churches, hierarchies, the “scientific age”, following “the thought of others” – as the “Piscean Age” (Crowley 1994:26-27). She feels that we are now entering the “Aquarian Age”. The characteristics Crowley (1994:27-29) describes for this age – individuality, debate of the truth, male and female gender-blurring, “power and authority” residing “within the individual and not ... [imposed] from outside”, a “re-rooting in the past ... with modern ideas” – are those of the recent radicalization of modernity, or what some might call post-modernism. In this magical description of history the pre-modern age is ascribed female status, the modern stage is designated as male, and the present/future age is a fusion of the two, the androgyne. In this neo-pagan model the sociological and ideological shifts of the Western past and present are given religio-social immanence through the symbolism of astrology and magic. In magical terms, it expresses the ‘reinvention of tradition’ in a new epoch, a quasi-evolutionary view of history’s impact on the future.

³ The ‘Burning Times’ is a term used by neo-pagans to describe the persecutions of the witch-craze. It has connotations not unlike those held by Jews with regards to the Holocaust.

The contemporary age has many of the characteristics of Giddens radicalized modernity, and also Hobsbawm’s ‘rapid transformation of society’. There are many sociological reasons that have been given for the rise in neo-paganism. Women and those with feminist leanings may find neo-paganism’s Goddess-based spirituality and a matrifocal mythic past appealing (Guiley 1992; Russell 1990; Pearce: personal communication, see also Carson 1992). To associate oneself with the witches of the Middle Ages under the context of the witch cult myth is to take up the word ‘witch’ and use it as badge of group solidarity and taboo power in the face of current oppression, much as the words ‘queer’ and ‘proletarian’ have been (Bovenschen 1978:86). Environmentalists and opponents of cultures of consumption have also been drawn to the neo-pagan movement. Its earth-based spirituality and symbolic proximity to nature is a spiritual connection with an entity that is very remote in our world of physical and psychological disassociation. Even those who have just felt like loners, eccentrics and outsiders, the “freaks” (Pearce: personal communication), feel a kinship with the witches of the mythic past. They too have had to hide themselves, their thoughts, identities and spiritual feelings, for fear of censure. And the magical world-view is a very appealing way of understanding a present where information flies like ghosts, mere thoughts and ideas very obviously manipulate our fate, the effects of space and time have begun to shift their moorings, the individual is a creature of fissiparous identity, and to paraphrase Arthur C. Clarke, magic is part of everyday life in the guise of advanced technology (see Russell 1980:161).

Scholars of African witchcraft have long felt that witchcraft is intimately connected with the condition of modernity, and is responsible for its great resurgence (Eglund 1996). In the West neo-pagans, and those who they define their belief against, use the past – the images and myths of the witch – to understand and describe the present. As Luhrman notes: “Invented history makes excellent mythology in a skeptical modernity” (Luhrmann 1989: 24). The witch needs to define their past in terms that the modern non-witch can understand. But the modern witch must also find room for their magical world-view.

Imagined communities are the new power blocs of the post-modern age (Crook, Pakulski, and Waters 1992: 132-134). They

represent a politics not based on nation, kin, or production. They are forged outwardly as non-political identities, yet they act in a complex network of power and subordination, of past, present and future. Perhaps, as the true representatives of a radicalized modernity they only pretend to exist outside of previous sociological molds. What neo-paganism represents sociologically is a modified politics of position, a new ground for the struggle against hegemonies, and a marshalling of the past in favour of a desired spiritual future.

The neo-pagan individual is a conscious manipulator of tradition, they have created a pastiche spirituality, through a “sophisticated, self-conscious bricolage” (Luhmann 1989: 244). But this spiritual vision is not nihilistic, it is reflexive but not without direction. Through the use of a magical world-view myth and history become equally relevant to provide meaning in the present, and community can invent itself with authenticity and meaning.

The neo-paganism of today is an exemplary child of a radicalized modernity – or post-modernity, if you will - despite its trappings of ancient wisdom and a vocabulary of sorcery. The invention of tradition and the magical view that symbols, will, and ritual can effect reality, are empirical cognates of Giddens’s “separation of time and space”, “disembedding of social systems”, and “reflexive reordering of social relations” (Giddens 1990: 19). Giddens’s (1990:19) very term “phantasmagoric” can be used equally to describe late modernity in a theoretical sense and the magical creation of a mythic tradition in a literal sense. The general neo-pagan disregard for historical evolutionism, fundamental spiritual reflexivity, adoration of the non-modern, and rejection of historical teleology all fulfil various characteristics of Giddens’s (1990:52) radicalized modernity.

Neo-pagan spirituality, the reinvention of witchcraft in particular, is a product of our era of radicalized modernity. As witchcraft unfolded into conceptual view at the initial transformation of a ‘pre-modern’ into a modern phase of history, so to is witchcraft unfolding as a coherent system of belief in the shifting sands of late modernity. A magical and mythic epistemology mediates the rational contradictions inherent in simultaneously up-holding the authenticity of the past and of the invention of a tradition. The ‘reinvention’ of neo-paganism is an expression of our sociological times and historical circumstances that wrestles with many of the

contradictions of what is termed ‘postmodernity’ without resorting to nihilism.

PFPC would like to thank both Austin Lawrence and Maryanne Pearce for allowing PFPC to print their papers.

Catechism For A Witch’s Child

(author unknown)

When they ask to see your Gods
Your book of prayers
Show them lines
Drawn delicately with veins
On the underside of a bird’s wing
Tell them you believe
In giant sycamores mottled
And stark against a winter sky
And in nights so frozen
Stars crack open spilling streams of
Molten ice to earth
And tell them how you drank
The holy wine of honeysuckle
On a warm spring day
And of the softness
Of your mother
Who never taught you that
Death was life’s reward
But who believed in the earth
And the sun
And a million ,million light years
Of being.



PFPC is always looking for articles for the newsletter. Submission date for the Spring 2007 issue is March 21, 2007

