



4-18-2006

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Who's In Charge? An Examination of Societal Impacts on Gender Roles in American and English Witchcraft

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Received Research Honors April 18th, 2006

I. INTRODUCTION

Since its genesis in the 1970s, American Witchcraft¹ has shown itself to be one of the most forward-looking and tolerant religions in the area of women's roles and gender theory. Women leaders, gay couples, and even polyamorous relationships are all tolerated and encouraged within American Wiccan theology. Although Witchcraft was formed in England in the 1950s, with its move to the U.S. in the 1960s, it was soon appropriated by the growing American feminist movement. With this collation, Witchcraft has become one of the largest and most long-lived new religious movements in America. However, there are many differences between American Witchcraft and English Witchcraft which raise some questions as to the influence of social settings on religious traditions. These differences have led to a differing treatment of gender in both religions. Gender roles and homosexuality are treated very differently in American and English Witchcraft. This raises the natural question: are the different treatments of gender in these two traditions a result of social circumstance, or do they represent a natural theological evolution? Although other possibilities exist which could have influenced the ways in which American and English Witchcraft view gender, such as the private lives of the founders themselves, for the purposes of this paper I will examine the social situations which surrounded the development of these two traditions and the ways in which the interpretations of rituals and sacred texts changed the way the traditions operate.

English Witchcraft has a theology which states that the gender of a practitioner will affect the roles they can assume in a ritual, while American Witchcraft does not. Although homosexuality was eventually accepted in the English tradition, when the time comes for English

¹ While the terms "Neo-Paganism" and "Witchcraft" are sometimes interchangeable, in this paper I would like to point out that Witchcraft is a specific subset of Neo-Paganism. All Witches are Neo-Pagans, but not all Neo-Pagans are Witches. By the same token, "Wicca" and "Witchcraft", while occasionally referring to different groups, will be used synonymously in this paper. The term "Neo-Paganism" should be taken to include both Wiccans and those practicing earth-based religions in America.

rituals to be performed, the tradition dictates that the divine male and female dichotomy be reenacted by male and female practitioners of the appropriate gender, regardless of sexual preference. American Witches do not have any such requirements. Why the drastic difference between traditions?

By employing the use of Weber's theories regarding the formation of religious traditions and by examining the social settings of both English and American Witchcraft, I will show that the social backgrounds of these traditions had a substantial impact on the way they developed. Because of their different developmental processes, both traditions treat gender roles and the idea of sexuality differently. In this section of the paper, I will lay out the theoretical background of my case study, including Weber's theories, the theory of the American religious process, and the feminist theories which were present in the formative stages of American Witchcraft and absent in the formative stages of English Witchcraft. In the next section, I will discuss my case study and explain the ways in which English and American Witchcraft treat gender roles differently. The final section of this paper will consist of closing comments and a description of further work which needs to be done in this area of study.

Weber's Theories

When we examine the theories of Max Weber, we can shed some light on why English Wicca and American Wicca developed in the ways they did. We can also make some predictions as to the directions in which these religious groups are going and perhaps what their next major development will be. When we apply his theories to these groups, we notice that the leaders of English Wicca are, in his terms, a priesthood who rely on traditional authority. American Wicca, on the other hand, is a group of magicians whose leaders rely on charismatic authority.

The leadership of English Wicca is set up as a “priesthood” because it is more formal than American Witchcraft. As Weber writes, a “distinguishing quality of the priest, it is asserted, is his professional equipment of special knowledge, *fixed doctrine*, and vocational qualifications.”² English Wicca has all of these things: its priesthood is privy to esoteric knowledge that the larger group does not possess, they are vocationally qualified to fill this role because they possess said knowledge, and, most importantly, the religion has a “fixed doctrine”. This “fixed doctrine” is quite different from the rather eclectic nature of American Witchcraft.

Weber notes that sometimes “the two contrasted types [of priest and magician] flow into one another.”³ This is quite true when one compares American and English Witchcraft; sometimes the leadership of one group will resemble the other. However, “the crucial feature of the priesthood [is] the specialization of a particular group of persons in the continuous operation of a cultic enterprise, permanently associated with particular norms, places and times, and related to specific social groups.”⁴ This distinction is more noticeable in English Witchcraft than in American Witchcraft. English Witchcraft began with a fixed doctrine when Gerald Brousseau Gardner published his first books on Witchcraft, and its priesthood, while maybe not related to “specific social groups,” became devoted to maintaining the “continuous operation of a cultic enterprise.” We notice that the priesthood of Witchcraft, especially followers of Gardner’s such as Doreen Valiente, has become devoted to promulgating the “myth of Gardner;” that is, they are devoted to legitimizing their religion by canonizing the writings and claims of Gardner.

The motive for this becomes clear when we apply Weber’s theories. Weber writes that “[m]ost, though not all, canonical sacred collections became officially closed against secular or

² Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, translated by Ephraim Fischoff, (Boston: Beacon Press. 1963), 29. Emphasis mine.

³ Weber, 29.

⁴ Weber, 30.

religiously undesirable additions as a consequence of a struggle between various competing groups and prophecies for the control of the community.”⁵ With the formation of the subsequent Alexandrian tradition (led by Alex Sanders), there was a struggle within the Wiccan community. As Weber writes, “the simple interest of the priesthood in securing its own position against possible attack and the necessity of insuring the traditional practices against the scepticism of the laity...produced two phenomena, viz., canonical writings and dogma.”⁶ Because of the popularity the Alexandrian tradition was enjoying, it was necessary for the Gardnerian tradition to formalize its tradition. Weber also notes that “the closing of the canon was generally accounted for by the theory that only a certain epoch in the past history of the religion had been blessed with prophetic charisma.”⁷ We especially notice this in English Witchcraft – its claim to a prehistoric, indigenous European past has been continued in the work of Gardner and Valiente. Without this tie to the “epoch of prophetic charisma,” the religion loses some of its validity.

As a group, English Witches tend to choose their leaders based on traditional authority. Weber says that “traditional authority is bound to the precedents handed down from the past and to this extent is also oriented to rules.”⁸ We can see this idea manifest in the way in which these religions were founded. Gardner claimed that his authority came from an existing tradition and that he was initiated into an ancient religion by Dorothy Clutterbuck. Alex Sanders claimed that Mary Biddy initiated him into a pre-existing tradition. When Sanders died, he wished that his leadership title be passed on to his son. In English Witchcraft, the status of priesthood is earned by completing a set of rules or is handed down to an individual from an already established priest. The writings of Murray and Gardner also lend traditional authority to this religion,

⁵ Weber, 68.

⁶ Weber, 67.

⁷ Weber, 69.

⁸ Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, Ed. By S. N. Eisenstadt. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1968), 52.

because they claim that it has ancient roots and was suppressed by Christianity until it was able to resurface again. As we can see, traditional Witchcraft fits into Weber's model of priesthood, and its leaders rely on traditional authority.

This is noticeably different from American Witchcraft. American Witchcraft fits into Weber's definition of magicians. According to Weber, there is a "religious need of the laity for an accessible and tangible familiar religious object which could be brought into relationship with concrete life situations."⁹ He also writes that "the crystallization of developed conceptions of supernatural forces as gods...[produced] the possibility of a dual relationship between men and the supernatural."¹⁰ Thus, according to Weber, magic is the "coercion of the god, and invocation ... the exercise of magical formulae."¹¹ This is different from a religion, where the god has acknowledged power over the practitioner and the practitioner seeks to please the god through worship.¹²

American Witchcraft operates magically because its practitioners utilize the help of deities through rituals. Although it may seem as though certain rituals, such as "raising a cone of power," are only performed for purposes other than coercing a deity, they are actually performed so that the practitioners may give energy back to the deities. Phyllis Curott says that during her instruction, she was told to "return the energy you have received to the earth from whence it came. Give thanks and feel it flowing down your spinal column and back into the ground."¹³ In this sense, the practitioners have power equal to the deities, they just manifest it in different

⁹ Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 25

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Weber, 27.

¹³ Phyllis Curott, *Book of Shadows: A Modern Woman's Journey into the Wisdom of Witchcraft and the Magic of the Goddess*, (New York: Broadway Books. 1999), 86.

ways. Since they perceive themselves as equal to these deities instead of subservient to them, American Witches practice a Weberian form of magic.

When we examine the way in which the American Witchcraft's leadership functions, we see that it fits with Weber's theory regarding charismatic authority. As Weber says, "Charismatic authority...is sharply opposed both to rational, and particularly bureaucratic, authority, and to traditional authority, whether in its patriarchal, patrimonial, or any other form."¹⁴ He also notes that "charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules."¹⁵ However, "this lasts only so long as the belief in its charismatic inspiration remains,"¹⁶ and charismatic authority "cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalized or rationalized or a combination of both."¹⁷ When this traditionalization happens, the charismatic authority can be passed on in a number of ways: either a new leader is found by various methods, including heredity, casting lots, and the vote of an administrative staff, or the group can choose their own leader based on charisma.¹⁸ As Weber puts it, "the recognition by the group becomes the true 'election.' The leader whose legitimacy rested on his personal charisma then becomes leader by the grace of those who follow him."¹⁹ So as we can see, charismatic authority comes as a sharp opposition to the rules initially, but since it cannot sustain itself it either becomes routinized or another charismatic leader is found.

The theology of American Witches is an example of Weber's charismatic theory. The feminist movement influenced the formation and spread of feminist spirituality, and it is not unfair to assume that a large part of the charismatic authority of the feminist spirituality

¹⁴ Weber, *On Charisma*, 52.

¹⁵ Weber, 52.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Weber, 54.

¹⁸ Weber, 55-56.

¹⁹ Weber, 61

movement was contributed by the original feminist movement. The doctrines, rituals, and deities of American Witches are also very eclectic; they are a manifestation of feminist spirituality's charismatic rebellion against established authority. It is interesting to note that Weber says "in traditionally stereotyped periods, charisma is the greatest revolutionary force."²⁰ When we consider the influence of the feminist movement and note that both the New Age movement and the formation of Witchcraft were, in part, a response to the hegemony of the 1950s, we can see how the feminist spirituality movement and subsequently American Witchcraft became based on charismatic authority.

The English Witchcraft tradition does not rely on charismatic authority. It has specific rituals and writings which govern the way its covens act. Gardnerian Witchcraft has specific Books of Shadows and written materials, such as the "161 Laws," for its members to follow. However, American Witchcraft largely has no such doctrine; while they may hold the same books to be good sources of information, they don't hold them to be religious law the way that traditional Wiccans do. Why is this? Gardnerian Witchcraft had a doctrinal split with Alexandrian Witchcraft about ten years after its formation, which led to the need for both traditions to formalize their beliefs.²¹ As Weber notes, "Wherever such a [doctrinal] struggle failed to occur or wherever it did not threaten the content of the tradition, the formal canonization of the scriptures took place very slowly."²² American Witches, because they have no central leader and have no desire to protect a specific doctrine against doctrinal attacks, didn't feel the need to have a canonical text of any sort. This explains the lack of a central written set of beliefs in feminist spirituality groups. While the Gardnerian tradition has its Book of Shadows

²⁰ Weber, 53

²¹ While the Alexandrian tradition is very similar to the Gardnerian tradition (see page 19-20), the addition of some Qabalistic teachings and Alex Sanders' obvious bisexuality set it apart from the Gardnerian tradition.

²² Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 68.

and the Alexandrian tradition even went so far as to publish *A Witches' Bible*, American Witches still do not have a specific "Bible", despite being almost as old as traditional Witchcraft.

However, because of the unstable nature of charismatic authority, we can expect to see such a written authoritative text for feminist spirituality groups sometime in the future. Since both of these groups agree with Weber's models, it is not unreasonable to assume that they will realize his predictions. American Witchcraft, in particular, seems to be following Weber's model and is even now in the process of routinizing its charismatic nature in order to lend greater stability to its groups.

Even though these groups maintain a sense of eclecticism and spontaneity now, routinization and possibly even canonization will play a part in their development, both now and in the near future. As these groups seek to proselytize and to educate new members, they must pick which aspects of their religion are imperative to pass down and which are optional. As this process goes on, we can expect to see a "fixed doctrine" emerging for feminist spirituality in the very near future. Even now, most covens which I have encountered have a "required reading" list or a list of "suggested materials." It is very likely that such lists will play a part in the formation of a sort of biblical tome.²³

From a Weberian standpoint, when we look at the roots of English and American Witchcrafts and the directions in which both religions have gone since their respective inceptions, we notice some fundamental differences between the two. Both groups may be understood by using different theories proposed by Weber, and when we apply these theories to the groups we can make some predictions as to where these religions are going and what they will accomplish in the future. English Wicca appears to have reached Weber's "priesthood" state while American Witchcraft is in the process of formalizing its rituals and practices. In the future,

²³ See the 1974 statement of the American Council of Witches contained in Appendix B.

when there is less of a need for American Witchcraft to maintain its identity through rebellion, it will become an institution with a formal set of doctrines. For now, though, the way in which these groups have operated has affected not only the way they view authority, but also the way they view gender. By applying Weber's theories to the charismatic American Witches and the institution of English Witchcraft, we are able to see how these groups developed to become the separate traditions they are today. But why is there such a sociological difference between English and American Witchcraft?

Theories of American Religions

In order to answer this question, we must examine the social setting in which American Witchcraft developed. A substantial cause of their developmental differences lies in the simple fact that American Witchcraft was formed in America, whereas English Witchcraft was not. One naturally wonders if there is an "American" religious process which lends itself to a freer, more eclectic form of religious practice. Although it may seem that such a theory naturally begs the question, there are a few scholars of American religions who have spent a substantial amount of time explaining the "melting pot" of the American religious process. Their theories show a proclivity in the American religious process toward reinvention and the search for new aspects of religion.

Because of certain religious influences such as spiritualism, American religions naturally seek to change aspects of religion in new ways. As Robert Ellwood states, "In [the Western tradition of alternative spirituality's] New World incarnation occult blood mutated novel features little seen in the old grimoires," and "[t]he novelties stemmed from the new setting of Spiritualism, with its ancient theurgy of mediumship and its phalanxes of spirit intermediaries, in

the leveling and expansive culture of the new republic.”²⁴ Likewise, Susan Love Brown says that there is a “tradition of religious emergence in the United States that goes back to the seventeenth century and whose elements have been part of the cultural milieu since that time.”²⁵ All of these elements, which also include the French and American revolutions and the rise of Unitarianism,²⁶ suggest that there is a sort of “American” religious mindset which supports the rise of new religions and adaptations to established religions.

Whitney Cross describes this American mindset on a smaller scale in the book, *The Burned-Over District*. In it, Cross states that “the American tradition has been greatly enriched by the legacies of this kind of radicalism” and that “[c]ourageous nonconformity [in our national history], whatever its purposes, ought of itself to constitute a precious heritage to the twentieth century.”²⁷ Although appealing to an “American tradition” in order to explain certain nuances of American religions may seem like question-begging, the evidence seems to point to the idea that such a tradition does exist and has an effect on the way American religions develop.

Another important factor which must be considered in the discussion of American Witchcraft is the time frame in which American Witchcraft emerged. As Robert Ellwood says, “the early Fifties hegemonies of the spirit were thrown off-balance by the education thrust after 1957, serendipitously mixed as it was with the baby-boom demographic bulge and Galbraith’s affluent society to create megauniversities teeming with restless young.”²⁸ Not only did the American religious tradition affect the development of American Witchcraft, but the countercultural movement which arose in response to the highly modernist period of the 1950s

²⁴ Robert Ellwood, “How New is the New Age?” *Perspectives on the New Age*, Eds. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, (New York: State University of New York Press. 1992), 61

²⁵ Susan Love Brown, “Baby Boomers, American Character, and the New Age: A Synthesis”, *Perspectives on the New Age*. Eds. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton (New York: State University of New York Press. 1992), 87-96. Pages 87-88.

²⁶ See Ellwood, “How New is the New Age?”

²⁷ Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, (New York: Harper & Row. 1950), 356-357.

²⁸ Robert Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 1997), 236.

influenced Witchcraft as well. This attraction to new and exotic religious ideas, specifically those with more mystical connotations, was a repeat of the American search for new religions which took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Brown puts it, “what seemed like a novel affinity was in fact the continuation of an old American tradition. The treatment of this affinity as ‘new’ by some critics...ignores the American cultural and historical context and the continuity of responses to change.”²⁹ Not only did American Witchcraft rise in a sociological context endowed with a natural proclivity toward religious creation, but it arose during a time of particularly high religious and political change.

One of the major influences on American Witchcraft is the feminist movement. By noting the contemporaneous advents of both second-wave feminism and American Witchcraft and by comparing their doctrines, one can easily see how these two movements complemented each other. I will discuss this symbiotic relationship later in the paper; for now, we must first examine some of the important theories of feminism in order to fully understand how they affected American Witchcraft.

Feminist Theory

Some feminists claim that the development of patriarchy was an effect of the development of Western monotheism. The theory states that monotheism’s growing popularity and the obliterations of the goddess traditions, such as the Sophia tradition in Judaism and early Christianity, led to men asserting their authority over women in an echo of the cosmological struggle that was going on.³⁰ According to this theory, goddess traditions were judged as heresy;

²⁹ Brown, 89.

³⁰ For more on this type of behavior, see Peter Berger’s chapter “The Problem of Theodicy” in *The Sacred Canopy*.

as a result women and the female religious sphere came to be considered amoral and even dangerous to the orthodoxy.

According to some feminist scholars, though, this theory has one major flaw in it: monotheism should support an egalitarian society, not cause major disparities in gender roles. As Rita Gross points out, when a God must embody the roles of both warrior and nurturer, this would naturally lead to an increase in women's rights, not an increase in female oppression. Although Gross claims that the Jewish God of the Old Testament could easily be viewed as a strictly male warrior god, there is nothing phallic or especially war-like to easily identify him as such. The issue becomes even more convoluted when one reads about the Christian God of love. According to Gross, a monotheistic worldview should foster an equalization of the sexes, not the other way around. Religion, therefore, must be seen as an effect of patriarchy, not a cause.

While this theory may appear compelling and certainly has played an integral part in the feminist and New Age movements, the scholarship which backs it up is rather spurious at times. Claims to a "matriarchal golden age" before the advent of patriarchy and monotheism are not easily supported, and at times it seems that such an idea was created in order to support political beliefs rather than being the effect of objective research.

However, this theory meshes well with Weber's ideas of sociological development, wherein patriarchy assumes the role of an institution and feminist creativity becomes identified with rebellious charisma. Patriarchy seeks to extinguish the opposition raised to it by feminism. This idea also goes back to Mircea Eliade's theories³¹ regarding the roles of men and women in society, in which men are associated with a structured order and women are associated with

³¹ See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, (New York: Sheed and Ward. 1958), 252-264.

creative chaos.³² As a result, many religious movements which are concurrent with the feminist movement seek to emphasize the female creative role and abolish the institutional patriarchal hierarchy.

Still other feminists call for women to eschew male philosophy entirely. As Andrea Nye says in the conclusion to her book, *Feminist Theories and the Philosophy of Man*, “There must be some design for a feminist history, feminist analysis, feminist projects; and where can this design come from if it is not borrowed from male thought.”³³ Nye claims that any feminist work which is based on the work of men will be inherently flawed. She asks “But what is a feminist theorist to do? Without Athena’s thread, is there only an abyss of nothingness into which she must fall?”³⁴ The search for the metaphorical Athena’s thread (i.e., that feminist theory free from all androcentric and patriarchal taint) is what should drive women in their search for identity in a patriarchal world.

Because of ideas such as this and the influence of feminists such as Starhawk and Z. Budapest in the inchoate stages of American Witchcraft, the movement as a religion bears the unmistakable marks of much of the feminist movement. A call for the rejection of bureaucratic hierarchy, an emphasis on the goddess, and a celebration of spontaneous creation which includes religious eclecticism and an almost iconoclastic aversion to standardized sacred texts are all aspects American Witchcraft shares with the feminist movement of the 1970s. As we shall see in the next section of the paper, the influence of the American theological culture and of feminist ideals on American Witchcraft caused it to develop in a substantially different way from English Witchcraft. I will now discuss the ways in which these two histories and theodicies are different.

³² See Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row. 1989).

³³ Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theories and the Philosophies of Man*, (New York: Croom Helm. 1988), 229.

³⁴ Ibid.

II. CASE STUDY

In this section of the paper, I will examine the written theologies of Witchcraft, both English and American, and compare them to the ways in which their respective covens³⁵ behave. I will also examine the American religious landscape at the time of Wicca's introduction to the U.S. and the social roots of English Witchcraft in order to explain why these traditions developed the way they did. By comparing the theology of these groups with the way they acted upon their theologies, I will show that Wiccan gender roles are products of social influences and not wholly generated by Wiccan theology. By examining the differences between American and European Witchcraft, I will show one way in which theological changes in the two Wiccan traditions have been a result of the different social circumstances under which Witchcraft's development took place.

While both traditions define themselves as "Witches", it is important to note that they are not directly tied to each other. Recent scholarship tends to indicate that there is a direct link between English and American Witchcraft, but the tie is not nearly as clear as it initially appears. In order to more fully explain Wiccan theology regarding gender roles and leadership, allow me to give a brief history of Witchcraft.

HISTORY

European Witchcraft

The English religious culture at the time of Witchcraft's formation was greatly influenced by the occult. Around the early 1900s, England was searching for a religion which was rooted in

³⁵ A coven, the simplest social group of Witches, traditionally is comprised of no more than thirteen members. Once a coven reaches a membership of thirteen, tradition dictates that its members start a new coven, usually under the supervision of a high priestess or veteran member. However, the changes in modern Wicca which have come about by its incorporation in the U.S. allow for more members in each coven than traditional Wicca calls for. This is another curious difference between American Witchcraft and the more traditional European Witchcraft.

ancient truths. Societies such as the Order of the Golden Dawn, the Ordo Templi Orientis, (founded in 1905), and other pseudo-Masonic cults such as Co-Masonry (founded in England in 1902), flourished during this time. British colonialism in India and other parts of the world resulted in the importation of new and “exotic” religious ideas from ancient lands. Archaeology, with its emphasis in the new fields of Egyptology and Eastern studies, led the European audience to believe that an ancient, untarnished religion did exist and would provide the answers for which they had been looking. Spiritualism, based on the esoteric writings of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, had had its effect on the English public and was on its way out of style by the late 19th century; the search for a primal, “authentic” tradition began. Whether the European audience tired of searching for truths in distant lands and wanted a religion closer to home or whether the truths being shipped in from other countries were too esoteric is beyond the scope of this paper; the important point remains that the religious effect of English colonialism had run its course, and the search for a pristine, authentic, non-Christian European religion began.

Although Witchcraft claims that it is a pre-historical, pre-Christian, and pre-patriarchal European religion, the evidence which supports this claim cannot be considered definitive by any means.³⁶ A convenient date for the genesis of modern Witchcraft is 1921, the year in which Margaret Murray’s *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* was published. This book laid the groundwork for the so-called “reclamation” of the Wiccan tradition. In this book, “Murray...popularize[s] the idea that Witchcraft is the surviving pre-Christian religion of Europe.”³⁷ She claims that the formation of such institutions as the Inquisition did much to repress the Witchcraft movement, although the Witch Cult survived in secrecy and may have even been an underground religion during the time of her writing. While the book was certainly

³⁶ For evidence of such a religion, see Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row. 1989).

³⁷ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, (New York: Penguin Group. 1979), 46.

compelling at the time of its publication, it has since come under scholarly attack and is no longer considered a valid description of pagan European religion.³⁸ For example, religious historian Mircea Eliade says this work contains “countless and appalling errors which discredit Murray’s reconstruction of European witchcraft.”³⁹

Despite the fact that its scholarship has been severely criticized, this book laid the groundwork for the religion that would become modern Wicca. According to Aidan Kelly, “[Wicca] actually began in September 1939 on the south coast of England, as an attempt to reconstruct the medieval Witchcraft religion described by Margaret Murray.”⁴⁰ Although the founder of Witchcraft, a British civil servant named Gerald Brosseau Gardner, claims that he was initiated into a pre-existing English coven of the “Old Tradition” by Dorothy Clutterbuck (whom he refers to as “Old Dorothy”), this claim proves to be rather flawed. All serious attempts to find Dorothy Clutterbuck as Gardner describes her have failed. One of Gardner’s followers, Doreen Valiente, claims that she found public records for Dorothy Clutterbuck and a marriage record for Dorothy’s parents, but her description of the search is rather subjective and relies on magical inspiration.⁴¹ Again, the idea that antiquity is a necessary condition for a religion’s veracity comes into play here: without the indoctrination of Gardner into the “Old Tradition” by a pre-

³⁸ Other criticisms include the fact that Murray considers the confessions of women given under torture by the Inquisition to be empirical evidence.

³⁹ Mircea Eliade, “Some Observations on European Witchcraft”, *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1976), 73.

⁴⁰ Aidan A. Kelly, “An Update on Neo-Pagan Witchcraft in America”, *Perspectives on the New Age*, Eds. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, (New York: State University of New York Press. 1992), 136.

⁴¹ Doreen Valiente, “The Search for Old Dorothy”, Janet and Stewart Farrar, eds., *A Witches’ Bible*, (Custer, Washington: Phoenix Publishing, Inc. 1996), 284-293. While reading this account, one also wonders about the accuracy of the nickname “Old Dorothy”. If Valiente had indeed found records for *the* Dorothy Clutterbuck, then Dorothy would have been 59 at the time of her 1939 meeting with Gardner, while Gardner would have been 55. Valiente gives “Old Dorothy’s” birth year as 1880, while Gardner himself was born in 1884. It hardly seems accurate that a man would refer to a woman only four years his senior as “old”. Valiente also claims that she had much success in her search because she realized that Dorothy was married in 1937 and thus had her name changed. While the concept of a woman marrying at the age of 57 is certainly feasible, it seems rather unlikely to occur in Victorian England. It is also curious to note that Gardner only refers to Dorothy Clutterbuck by her maiden name, even though she would have been Mrs. Fordham at the time of their meeting.

existing member, Witchcraft as Gardner describes it could not be considered ancient and therefore not a “real” religion.

While Kelly claims that “a local prominent homeowner and socialite, Dorothy Clutterbuck Fordham”⁴² was one of the initial members of Gardner’s 1939 coven, the idea that “Old Dorothy” initiated Gardner into a pre-existing coven under the conditions Gardner describes seems unlikely. However, her involvement as one of the founding members of Gardner’s coven seems plausible. Other members of Gardner’s initial coven included “Dolores North, later known for her regular column in a British occult magazine similar to *Fate*; the occult novelist Louis Wilkinson; and probably others in the occult circles of London and southern England.”⁴³ While claims that Witchcraft was a continuation of an ancient tradition are certainly appealing, the evidence seems to point to the contrary.

Collaboration between Murray and Gardner helped further the myth of the ancient roots of Wicca. Gardner initially wrote historical fiction novels in which the worship of a Goddess figure by a group of Witches was set in ancient times. His publications of *A Goddess Arrives* in 1939 and *High Magic’s Aid* (published under the pseudonym “Scire”) in 1949 both detail the activities of Witch cults set in ancient Cyprus and Europe, respectively. In 1951, England repealed its law against the practice of Witchcraft, which allowed Gardner to openly publish books about and teach Wicca. In that same year, Gardner traveled to the Isle of Man, where he purchased the Museum of Magic and Witchcraft from Cecil Williamson and took up residence. In 1954, Gardner published *Witchcraft Today*, his first openly Wiccan book. Margaret Murray wrote the introduction for the first edition of *Witchcraft Today*, further solidifying the ties between her work and Gardner’s.

⁴² Kelly, 136.

⁴³ Ibid.

Along with Murray and Gardner, a third person was involved in the formation of this new religion. There is evidence that Aleister Crowley, who was involved with a number of quasi-Masonic groups (specifically the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Ordo Templi Orientis), had considerable influence over the formation of Gardnerian Witchcraft. Francis King asserts that Gardner “hired Crowley, at a generous fee, to write elaborate rituals for the new ‘Gardnerian’ witch –cult.”⁴⁴ Mary Nesnick also claims that “Fifty percent of modern Wicca is an invention bought and paid for by Gerald B. Gardner from Aleister Crowley.”⁴⁵ Although Adler maintains that “there has never been a single piece of real proof that Aleister Crowley was hired to write the Gardnerian rituals,” she does admit that “[t]here are elements of Crowley in the rituals.”⁴⁶ Crowley, a contemporary of Gardner’s,⁴⁷ had considerable influence in English occult circles at this time. Although he may not have personally written Gardnerian rituals, it is likely that his claims to ancient magical knowledge, for which he was well-known in Europe,⁴⁸ may have been appropriated by Gardner. The English search for an authentic religion, with its emphasis on ancient religions, heavily influenced Witchcraft’s claim to ancient roots. The idea that Witchcraft was an ancient indigenous religion rather than a fabrication by members of various occult groups made it more appealing to the general public.

Gardner spent the 1950s initiating a number of Witches into his new religion. In 1953, he initiated Doreen Valiente, who would later go on to publish her major contribution to Witchcraft, *The Book of Shadows*.⁴⁹ The 1950s saw the spread of Gardnerian Witchcraft throughout England,

⁴⁴ King, quoted in Adler, 64.

⁴⁵ Nesnick, quoted by Adler, 64.

⁴⁶ Adler, 64

⁴⁷ Crowley was born in 1873, and is Gardner’s senior by only eleven years.

⁴⁸ Crowley is specifically known for his Egyptian-based magical writings and his claim that he perfected the “Abramelin” ritual, a ritual performed by Abraham of the Bible.

⁴⁹ Farrar, 15. See also, Kelly, 137.

and by 1960 both Scotland and Ireland had Gardnerian covens. By the 1960s, however, Gardnerian Witchcraft had splintered.

Alex Sanders, one of Gardner's followers, formed the Alexandrian tradition in the 1960s.⁵⁰ By the time Gardner died in 1964, Alexandrian Witchcraft seems to have been thriving. By 1965, Sanders claimed to have over a hundred covens and over one thousand initiates in his tradition, and took to calling himself "King of the Witches." While the Alexandrian tradition's break from Gardner's Craft seems drastic, in all actuality the traditions are very similar to each other. Margot Adler points out that "many Alexandrian rites are almost identical to Gardnerian ones."⁵¹ The Alexandrian tradition, while still a separate entity, remains based on the religion Gardner describes.⁵²

By the late 1960s, a number of works were available regarding European Witchcraft.

Adler puts it this way:

One cannot really understand the revival of Witchcraft today without first becoming familiar with some of the sources that formed the Wiccan Myth and gave birth to the revival. These sources include the matriarchal theorists, such as J. J. Bachofen and Friedrich Engels; the British folklorists; Margaret Murray's theory of Witchcraft in the Middle Ages; and the books of the revival, in particular Gerald Gardner's writings in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵³

By the 1960s, there were already a number of texts available which described a religion very similar to the one Gardner was currently advocating. In addition to Gardner's publications, Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*, a work which describes a Witch cult similar to the one Murray describes, was published in 1948. More importantly, most of these texts claimed that this

⁵⁰ It is unclear when exactly the Alexandrian tradition was started. Although Sanders tried and failed to start a coven in 1963, it was only when he and his wife made use of English media attention that they began to be recognized as a tradition. The Alexandrian tradition grew mostly due to media coverage and self-publication. For more on this, see the AAR's Encyclopedia of Religions under the heading "Wicca".

⁵¹ Adler, 120.

⁵² For an excellent recounting of the Wiccan Revival in Europe, read Margot Adler's chapter entitled "The Wiccan Revival" in *Drawing Down the Moon*.

⁵³ Adler, 46.

matriarchal, pre-Christian religion was part of an ancient indigenous European tradition. Not only was this religion part of an ancient European heritage, but it also offered a number of alternative viewpoints which appealed to people disillusioned by Christianity and other mainstream religions.

In 1963, Raymond Buckland was initiated into the Gardnerian tradition in Scotland.⁵⁴ After his initiation, he and wife founded the first American Gardnerian coven in New York in 1967.⁵⁵ With this move to America begins the history of Witchcraft in the U.S.

American Witchcraft

Around the same time as Buckland's immigration to America's East Coast, two other self-proclaimed Witches were having an impact on America's West Coast. The first coven of American Witchcraft was formed in California four years after the first Gardnerian coven was established in New York.⁵⁶ Jone Salomonsen dates the advent of American Witchcraft as such:

Six Los Angeles women in 1971 formed the first feminist Witchcraft coven in the US, called 'Susan B. Anthony Coven no. 1', under the guidance of their then lesbian-separatist high priestess, Zuzanna Budapest. Eight years later, in 1979, another branch of feminist Witchcraft was established in San Francisco, 'supervised' by Starhawk [who was part of the initial Susan B. Anthony coven]: the Reclaiming tradition.⁵⁷

Witchcraft as it was formed in America came about largely by the efforts of two women: Zuzanna Budapest and Starhawk.

⁵⁴ Kelly, 137.

⁵⁵ Joanne E. Pearson, "Wicca", *Encyclopedia of Religions*, 2nd edition. Editor-in-chief, Lindsay Jones. 2005. However, there are other sources, such as Judika Illes' *The Element Encyclopedia of Witchcraft*, published by HarperElement (2005), which claim that Buckland immigrated to the U.S. in 1962 and then traveled back to England to be initiated into Gardnerian Wicca. Although they disagree on the date of Buckland's immigration, they both claim 1967 is the year in which the first American Gardnerian coven was founded.

⁵⁶ Although it is possible that the writings of Gardner may have influenced the development of this coven, I have been able to find no direct link between the first truly American coven and Gardner's coven in New York.

⁵⁷ Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism: The Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco*, (New York: Routledge. 2002), 6.

Zuzanna Budapest (born Zsuzsanna Ernese Moukesay) was born in 1940 in Budapest, Hungary, and immigrated to the U.S. in 1959. She started the Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, an all-women coven, in either 1971 or 1970 and self-published her first book, entitled *The Feminist Book of Light and Shadows*, in 1975. She claims that her mother was a witch who practiced Hungarian folk magic, and much of her writings are allegedly derived from this source. While initially part of the lesbian separatist movement, she has since changed her political views and now runs covens which include both men and women.⁵⁸

Starhawk (also known as Miriam Simos) was born in 1951 in St. Paul, Minnesota. She studied Witchcraft under Victor Anderson, who practiced a type of folk magic completely independent of Gardner, and later under Budapest. She was a member of Budapest's initial coven, but went on to form her own coven (called Compost) in 1979. She is perhaps best known for her book, *The Spiral Dance*, which was published in 1979. Although Starhawk was a firm believer in Witchcraft, she has since rediscovered her Jewish roots and has recently taken to calling herself "Jewitch."⁵⁹ She now writes online as part of her environmental campaign.⁶⁰

While most scholarship done on Witchcraft tends to treat American Witchcraft as an offshoot of Gardnerian Witchcraft, that is simply not the case. Many scholars treat the advent of American Witchcraft as an inevitable result of Gardner's influence because it is chronologically convenient to do so; however, there are a number of other factors to take into consideration. While "enough information on the theory and praxis of Gardnerian-style Witchcraft has been available [since the late 1960s] that any small group who wanted to could train themselves as a coven,"⁶¹ the idea that American Witchcraft is a subset of English Witchcraft is not feasible.

⁵⁸ Z Budapest's homepage can be found online at www.zbudapest.com

⁵⁹ Pearson, "Wicca"

⁶⁰ Her activist writings can be found at <http://www.starhawk.org/activism/activism-writings/activism-writings.html>.

⁶¹ Kelly, 137.

That is not to say that Gardner had no influence in the U.S.; on the contrary, Gardnerian Witchcraft was the main Neo-Pagan religion in the U.S. until the 1970s. However, “[m]ost American Witches, being spiritually akin to anarchists...regard the Gardnerian concept of ‘orthodox Witchcraft’ as an oxymoron and practice the Craft much more flexibly, using whatever they like.”⁶² The American Council of Witches even went so far as to state that “We do not recognize any authoritarian hierarchy” in their Principles of Witchcraft.⁶³ In order to understand this, it is important to note that Witchcraft’s appearance in the U.S. was concurrent with two important American social movements: second-wave feminism, and the New Age movement.

Second-wave feminism and feminist spirituality

While Witchcraft in England was formed during a period of modernist thinking, American Witchcraft was formed during a period of socio-religious innovation. According to Jone Salomonsen, “[t]o religious women, who had responded enthusiastically to the second wave of feminism from 1967 onward...Witchcraft offered itself as an exciting alternative.”⁶⁴ Second-wave feminism had had its effect on the American public: it pointed out the natural patriarchy of many mainstream religions; it appropriated the works of writers such as Marx and Engels to support its argument that the current bureaucratic, patriarchal system was faulty; it showed a new interest in the counterculture; and it emphasized the idea that women were not only equal to men but needed a separate space of their own, apart from men and the current patriarchal society. Women who were previously involved with patriarchal religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, were seeking new ways to express themselves religiously while still maintaining their

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See Appendix B, “Principles”, number VI.

⁶⁴ Salomonsen, 6.

feminist ideals. Many found this impossible to do in mainstream religions, and broke away from them entirely. In this social setting, American Witchcraft became merely one aspect of a larger religious movement: the feminist spirituality movement.

Feminist spirituality overlaps a large part of the new religions in the American 1970s. Feminist spirituality groups are many and varied, and they range from secular Consciousness-Raising groups to religious Witchcraft groups. American Witchcraft's ideology began to differ greatly from Gardnerian Wicca's, mostly as a result of the feminist movement of the 1960s in America. As women became more involved with this movement, the patriarchal nature of socially accepted religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, became apparent. Women began seeking ways in which to express themselves religiously which fell outside of what they perceived to be a patriarchal society. These included the formations of all-female Consciousness-Raising groups, modified versions of Judaism and Christianity, a new interest in Gnosticism, and a surge of interest in Wicca. As Eller notes, "[w]hen feminists made their way toward an alternative religion for women, their initial point of contact was with neopaganism or Witchcraft."⁶⁵

While the feminist spirituality movement in America affected a number of mainstream religions,⁶⁶ feminist spirituality has perhaps had its greatest impact in new religious movements, particularly Witchcraft. Although much was done to reform mainstream religions, "[t]here was considerable overlap between feminist interests and countercultural ones, in part because many of the individuals who made up the developing feminist spirituality movement already had a

⁶⁵ Cynthia Eller, "The Roots of Feminist Spirituality", *Daughters of the Goddess*, Ed. By Wendy Griffin, (Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press), 2000. 25-41. Page 31.

⁶⁶ For more on this, read Rita Gross' chapter entitled "No Girls Allowed?" in Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion*, (Boston: Beacon Press), 1996.

charter membership in the counterculture.”⁶⁷ While some feminists chose to reform preexisting patriarchal religions, others chose to abandon them entirely. Witchcraft was one alternative offered to women who were dissatisfied with the way in which women were treated in mainstream religions.

Like English Witchcraft, American Witchcraft emphasizes its ancient roots. However, the motivation for this claim differs between the two traditions; while English Witchcraft claims a pre-Christian past in order to justify its claim to authenticity, American Witchcraft claims a pre-historic past because, for many American feminists, a pre-historic past denotes a pre-patriarchal past. As Eller says, “prehistorical matriarchies are the keystone of feminist spirituality’s sacred history.”⁶⁸ The idea that the original human societies were egalitarian, if not matriarchal, is an important tenet of the feminist spirituality movement. Eller explains further:

What feminists require is a way of understanding the long history of patriarchal rule that does not make this rule normative but leaves the path clear to establish societies in which women share or control social power. For this the sacred history of the feminist spirituality movement is ideally suited; in fact, it is for this purpose that it was made.⁶⁹

By explaining patriarchy as an exception rather than the rule, feminist spirituality was able to strengthen its feminist claims. If society had not always been patriarchal, and if, in fact, patriarchy was only a recent development in human culture, then a stronger case for abolishing this institution could be made. This idea was promoted so that “feminists [could be] freed from the onus of demanding a social order that is utterly unprecedented in human history and granted the much easier task of working for a return to a former, historically tested, and supposedly quite

⁶⁷Cynthia Eller, “Affinities and Appropriations in Feminist Spirituality” , *Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America*, Elizabeth Reis, ed. (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc. 1998), 221-245. 222.

⁶⁸Cynthia Eller, “Relativizing the Patriarchy: The Sacred History of the Feminist Spirituality Movement,” *History of Religions*, Vol, 30, No. 3 (Feb., 1991), 279-295. 282.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

successful pattern of social organization.”⁷⁰

This is substantially different from the way in which English Witchcraft views the cultural evolution of patriarchy. While English Witchcraft views its matriarchal, indigenous roots as a past which has continued in secrecy throughout the Dark Ages and the coming of Christianity, and which must be recreated in order to continue this tradition, American Witchcraft views the matriarchal prehistory as a sort of “golden age” that was completely obliterated by the advent of patriarchy. This differing view places them more firmly into Weber’s role of a charismatic magic group, and allows them to create their Goddess religion as they see fit. The American Council of Witches says in their 1974 statement that, “As American Witches, we are not threatened by debates on the history of the Craft, the origins of various terms, the legitimacy of various aspects of different traditions. We are concerned with our present and our future.”⁷¹ The emphasis is not on creating “the” Goddess religion which survived antiquity; the emphasis is on creating “a” Goddess religion. Because of this viewpoint, American Witchcraft has a more natural bent toward eclecticism and spontaneity.

As a result, in their attempt to escape patriarchal religions, feminist spirituality groups began to change certain aspects of English Wicca. Eller describes it as such:

[T]he meeting of feminists and neopagans was not one big happy family reunion...The neopagan movement was small, and feminists entered in numbers large enough to make a real impact. Moreover, they did not usually enter humbly and meekly, asking if they might please be initiated into the wise ways of the Witches. Quite the contrary, they flung open the doors, squared their shoulders, and swaggered in, ready to rearrange the furniture.⁷²

For example, the Goddess increased in importance, almost to the point of excluding a masculine divine figure of any kind. Traditions such as the Dianic tradition began worshiping the Goddess

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See Appendix B, number XI in the American Council of Witches’ “Principles of Witchcraft”.

⁷² Eller, “The Roots of Feminist Spirituality”, 37.

exclusively and ignoring the God. Some groups became exclusively female. Feminism drastically changed the Gardnerian tradition's high emphasis on fixed gender roles.

The way in which feminist spirituality groups worship is quite different from what Gardner originally intended. While Gardner focused on an equal treatment and participation of the genders, feminist spirituality groups tend to give the Goddess more prominence in their rituals. As Eller says, feminist spirituality groups "wanted to worship a Goddess – a big one, bigger than the God of patriarchy – and they wanted to worship themselves through her."⁷³ Because of the feminist movement's interest in Wicca and other neopagan religions, the emphasis of Wicca began to change. Instead of focusing equally on both genders, the masculine divine figure was slowly eclipsed in an effort to focus on the femininity of the divine. Due to the influence of second-wave feminism, a separate religious place for women was created which excluded male involvement of any kind.

While feminist spirituality and feminism had a strong influence on the way American Witchcraft was formed, the social atmosphere at the time of Wicca's formation in the U.S. also affected its evolution as a religion.

The New Age Movement

The New Age movement was contemporary with the formation of American Witchcraft. According to J. Gordon Melton, the New Age movement "developed in the late 1960s and emerged as a self-conscious movement in the early 1970s."⁷⁴ The contemporaneous development of both American Witchcraft and the New Age movement is indicative of the American spiritual mindset at the time of American Witchcraft's development. Both the New Age and feminist

⁷³ Ibid., 38

⁷⁴ J. Gordon Melton, "New Thought and the New Age," *Perspectives on the New Age*, Eds. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, (New York: State University of New York Press. 1992), 15-29. 18.

spirituality movements critique established Western traditions and claim that self-knowledge is the key to spiritual happiness.⁷⁵

While it may initially seem that the New Age movement affected the development of feminist spirituality, it is hard to make this claim. Given the fact that there is no set date for the formation of the New Age movement, the claim that it predates the advent of feminist spirituality is not easily supported. Instead, it seems more likely that both the New Age movement and American Witchcraft reflect a greater change in the American religious tradition. Susan Love Brown says the following about the New Age movement:

(1) [the] New Age religion is part of a tradition of religious emergence in the United States that goes back to the seventeenth century and whose elements have been part of the cultural milieu since that time; (2) [there] is a generational aspect to New Age religion in the United States without which the extent of its influence and the nature of societal change cannot be understood; (3) [the] New Age religion is one manifestation of a change in American character that began in the Sixties and is now reaching fruition; (4) [the] change beginning in the Sixties involved a shift from a societal view of self to a psychological view of self, but now implies a further shift from a psychological model to a spiritual model.⁷⁶

If one simply adds the influence of second-wave feminism to Brown's claims, the same can be said about American Witchcraft.

American Witchcraft emerged in the same social setting as the New Age movement. However, because its involvement with the feminist movement adds another condition to its development, American Witchcraft is slightly different from the New Age movement. Although it is not logical to claim that one caused the other, the fact that they both emerged as self-contained religions in the early 1970s shows that they are both part of a larger change in

⁷⁵ For more on the similarities between feminist spirituality and the New Age movement, see Mary Farrell Bednarowski, "The New Age Movement and Feminist Spirituality," *Perspectives on the New Age*, Eds. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, (New York: State University of New York Press. 1992), 167-178.

⁷⁶ Susan Love Brown, "Baby Boomers, American Character, and the New Age: A Synthesis," *Perspectives on the New Age*, Eds. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, (New York: State University of New York Press. 1992), 87-96. 87-88.

American religious thought. While the New Age movement and feminist spirituality may share a similar background, claiming that they are the same movement would be analogous to claiming that an apple tree and a pear tree are the same plant because they grow in the same soil: what is important to note is that both of these “trees” are growing in the same “soil.”

Because of their similar background, the New Age movement and feminist spirituality share a number of beliefs: a belief in a consciousness or force which permeates through all life; a belief in the eclectic use of various traditions in order to further one’s knowledge; a belief in the self as part of the divine or as the key to happiness, etc. Bednarowski points out the similarities between the two movements in the following paragraph:

They [American Neo-Paganism and the New Age movement] attribute various kinds of cultural malaise – desecralization, ecological and nuclear disaster, class, race, and gender warfare – to the same cause: the dualisms between spirit and matter, male and female, science and religion, thinking and feeling, that they see as having been fostered by Newtonian science and the established religions. Both have obvious ties to the nineteenth-century alternative spiritualities that Robert Ellwood describes in many of his writings⁷⁷...Both movements, likewise, tend to turn for inspiration more to the ancient past – to the goddess matriarchies, the first several centuries of the Common Era, the Renaissance – than to the recent past.⁷⁸

Both movements eschew mainstream religions, and they both emphasize the development and empowerment of the self rather than the sacrifice of one’s desires to the “greater good.” By examining the New Age movement and comparing it to American Witchcraft, we can better understand the social setting in which American Witchcraft emerged.

Specifically, American Witchcraft entails most of the aspects of the New Age movement, but with the added influence of feminism, it becomes something else entirely. Because of feminism’s influence, American Witchcraft does not employ any sort of hierarchy; indeed, any attempts to formalize the American Wiccan tradition have met with strong resistance from its

⁷⁷ See especially Robert Ellwood, “How New is the New Age?” *Perspectives on the New Age*, Eds. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, (New York: State University of New York Press. 1992), 59-67.

⁷⁸ Bednarowski, 177-178.

practitioners. Since the feminist movement has influenced American Witchcraft to perceive any kind of formalized hierarchy as patriarchal, American Witches have no real main structure. However, the need for group structure has led to the formation of a few Wiccan organizations.

Wiccan Organizations

The short-lived American Council of Witches, which was formed in 1974, formalized its “Principles of Witchcraft” in 1974, and disbanded later in 1974, is perhaps the first example of a group trying to fulfill the need for an overarching structure to American Witchcraft. Its thirteen points are ambiguous enough to let in almost anyone who would claim to be a Witch,⁷⁹ yet the fact that these points were formalized by a council threatened the way in which American Witches had operated. The brevity of its existence is testimony to the unwillingness of the American Wiccan community to accept any sort of leaders.

The most successful American Witchcraft group, the Covenant of the Goddess (or CoG), was formed in 1975, and is still the largest national group for Wiccans. Kelly says that “it is able to function because its structure is based on the principle of the autonomy of local congregations.”⁸⁰ According to CoG’s website, it was “founded in 1975 to increase cooperation among Witches and to secure for Witches and covens the legal protection enjoyed by members of other religions.”⁸¹ Requirements for membership into CoG are sufficiently vague, and as long as one practices something similar to Witchcraft, one can be admitted as part of CoG. Although the formation of this organization may seem to contradict Witchcraft’s natural disinclination toward a formalized hierarchy, CoG respects the autonomy of every individual coven and requires minimal adherence to a standardized set of rules for membership. The legal protection

⁷⁹ See Appendix B

⁸⁰ Kelly, 142.

⁸¹ <http://cog.org/aboutcog.html>

offered by a large religious organization is appealing to many Witches who would otherwise be without it, and the fact that they can join this group without sacrificing their personal beliefs is one of the reasons for the longevity of CoG.

However, the most important influence on American Witchcraft occurred in the late 80s and early 90s: the Internet. The Internet provides a much more favorable alternative for any Neo-Pagans who wish to have a community experience but for whatever reason, be it geographical or financial, cannot attend any event a larger group would hold. The Internet serves the Neo-Pagan community by providing a virtual meeting place where they can interact and share ideas. Because of the advances made in technology, Neo-Pagans are able to experience the same interaction they would experience at a real-life gathering, although without the physical presence of bodies, without having to deal with the problems which come from participating in a religion that vigorously avoids any kind of administrative body but which from time to time seeks a community experience.⁸²

With the appropriation of the Internet by American Witchcraft came an entirely new brand of religious groups. Instead of the large, “parachurch” organizations, such as CoG and the American Council of Witches, American Witches began to be involved in online religious groups. One such group, witchvox.net, has been operating since 1997. Witchvox serves as an online forum for essays, poetry, and theological insights offered by the site’s founders, Wren Walker and Fritz Jung. While Witchvox does not offer online meetings or rituals, it does post a good deal of material about American Witchcraft. Given the fact that the website generates over 100,000 hits a week, it is fair to say that this material is reaching about 14,000 people every

⁸² The definitive book on Neo-Paganism and the Internet remains Douglas E. Cowan’s *Cyberhenge*, (New York: Routledge. 2005).

week.⁸³ Although it is not as an administrative body of any kind, Witchvox still publishes theological material which is read by a fairly large audience. Witchvox is one example of how the Internet has afforded Wiccans who want nothing to do with a formal hierarchy the option to network with other Witches and read different viewpoints.

The Internet has affected Witchcraft in the same way it has affected much of America: while some of the Wiccan material found online is valid, much of it is unfounded, ill-researched, or blatantly stolen from pre-existing authors. Because of the relative ease with which material can be copied and pasted with minor modifications from other sources, the online religion⁸⁴ of American Witchcraft has started to retrograde into something akin to an ancient oral tradition, where each author modifies the text to suit her or his own needs and the influence of the author depends on their audience.

With the combined influence of feminism, the New Age movement, and the technological advances of the Internet, the theology and practices of American Witchcraft differ greatly from those originally intended by Gardner. By examining these practices, we can see how the social settings of both American and English Witchcraft have affected the way in which these religions developed.

THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

European Wiccan Theology and Practices

Gardnerian Witchcraft, founded in 1950s England, has a more stringent theology and stricter rules regarding gender roles and leadership. Among the most important tenets of

⁸³ http://www.witchvox.com/va/dt_va.html?a=&c=twv&id=2142. It should be noted that although the site does record more than 100,000 hits a week, according to Walker and Jung the average user visits about seven pages every time they view the web page, which means that an average of 14,000 people visit Witchvox every week.

⁸⁴ For more on this, see Christopher Helland, "Surfing for Salvation", *Religion*. Vol. 32. (2002), 293-302.

Gardnerian Witchcraft are the following: a veneration of the Earth; a ritual calendar of Sabbats (Wiccan rituals) arranged around the solstices and the lunar cycles; an emphasis on the “religious” aspect of Witchcraft, designed to “put the individual and the group in harmony with the Divine and the creative principle of the Cosmos”; a use of operative magic, designed to “achieve practical ends by psychic means”,⁸⁵ and, most importantly, a veneration of both the feminine and masculine aspects of the Divine.

Witchcraft as Gardner relates it bears a striking resemblance to the tradition described in Murray’s book. The “Old Tradition” is said to have survived from ancient times and represents a “universal, organized Old Religion.”⁸⁶ The religion venerates a number of deities, the most important of whom is an androgynous male/female deity alternately called Janus or Diana. Murray claims that the indigenous matriarchal religion of Europe was superseded by the patriarchal religion of Christianity,⁸⁷ and Gardner’s revivalist Witchcraft tradition sought to reinstitute the divine feminine in its rituals.

Gender Roles

According to English Witchcraft, all group rituals must be performed with both men and women present. In English Witchcraft, fixed gender roles are very important because they are indicative of the androgynous nature of Janus. The Farrars, who joined the Alexandrian tradition in 1970, put it this way:

Wicca is matriarchal, and the High Priestess is the leader of the coven – with the High Priest as her partner. They are essential to each other, and ultimately equal (remembering that the immortal Individuality, the reincarnating monad, is hermaphroditic), but in the context of Wiccan working and of their present incarnation, he is rather like the Prince Consort of a reigning Queen. He is (or should be) a channel for the God aspect, and there is nothing inferior

⁸⁵ Janet and Stewart Farrar, *A Witches’ Bible*, (Custer, Washington: Phoenix Publishing, Inc. 1996), 12.

⁸⁶ Adler, 46.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 47

about that; but Wiccan working is primarily concerned with the “gift of the Goddess”, so the Priestess takes precedence; for woman is the gateway to witchcraft, and man is her “guardian and student”.⁸⁸

The rituals for each Sabbat found in *A Witches' Bible* all mandate that both a High Priest and a High Priestess be present. Their roles vary depending on the ritual being performed, but in all cases each is of equal importance.

In English Witchcraft, the theme of the Sky God/Earth Mother dichotomy runs throughout all of these rituals.⁸⁹ In Wiccan magic, the identification of women with the moon and the earth and of men with the sun and the sky is prominent. For example, every “call of the Goddess” or “call of the God” which I have encountered refers to the Goddess as the moon or Earth⁹⁰ and the God as the sun.⁹¹ While both the God and Goddess figures are considered equal counterparts, they both play specific roles in Wicca and are equally venerated in Wiccan rites.

An example of this can be found in a Yule⁹² ritual given in *A Witches' Bible*, where the following exchange takes place:

While the crowning is going on, the High Priest lays himself on the floor in the centre of the Circle, curled up in a foetal position. Everyone pretends not to see him doing this.

When the crowning is over, the Oak King says:

“My brother and I have been crowned and prepared for our rivalry. But where is our Lord the Sun?”

The Maiden replies:

“Our Lord the Sun is dead!”

If the High Priestess' tabard has a veil, she drapes it over her face.⁹³

⁸⁸ Farrar, 169.

⁸⁹ For more on this, read Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, (New York: Sheed and Ward. 1958), pp. 258-270.

⁹⁰ Eliade notes the way in which the moon is associated with the Earth due to the ancient belief that the moon was originally part of the Earth in his *Patterns in Comparative Religion*.

⁹¹ The “Song of the Goddess” and the “Call of the God” in Scott Cunningham's *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* contains a good example of the sorts of language these calls frequently employ, even though Cunningham's work was published in 1998 in America (St. Paul: Llewellyn Press. 111-115).

⁹² Yule is the Wiccan holiday which takes place on December 22nd.

⁹³ Farrar, 147, emphasis in original.

As we can see, the role of the Sun during this winter time ritual is performed by the High Priest, showing the masculine nature of the sun and the sky.

While men embody “masculine” aspects of the androgynous divinity such as the sun and the sky, women are identified with the role of the earth in Wiccan rituals. During the spring, “woman identified herself with the Goddess, and man sank himself into the Goddess through her, giving of his masculinity but not destroying it, and emerging from the experience spiritually revitalized.”⁹⁴ This erotic symbolism has obvious agricultural connotations, and may be easily linked to the earth/sky relationship described in Frazer’s and Eliade’s theories of early fertility rites. During the spring ritual related in the Farrars’ *Bible*, the woman is even further identified with the earth:

After the Great Rite, the High Priest names a woman witch as the Spring Queen and stands her in front of the altar. He crowns her with the chaplet of flowers and gives her the Fivefold Kiss.

The High Priest then calls forward each man in turn to give the Spring Queen the Fivefold Kiss. When the last man has done so, the High Priest presents the Spring queen with her bouquet.⁹⁵

As we can see, the identification of the woman with the earth and the man as the sky manifests itself in Wiccan religious rituals. While the genders are considered to be equal, they both have specific roles and are expected to fulfill those roles with no variation.

In operative magic, however, women generally take a more prominent role. Although operative rituals require the presence of both male and female witches, more often than not the Goddess is called upon to carry out the desires of the supplicant. In *A Witches’ Bible*, the Goddess is referred to as “*the first of the Old Ones. [She has] seen the dawn of time, from the suns beyond our earth. Men call [her] the Stone goddess, old, steadfast, wise,*”⁹⁶ while the God

⁹⁴ Ibid, 74.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁶ Ibid., emphasis in original.

is referred to as "*The second of the Old Ones...Men call [him] the Father of Chaos.*"⁹⁷ Not only is the Goddess older, she is called upon more often in order to work magic for practical purposes. As the Farrars have stated, "Wicca is matriarchal."⁹⁸

While operative magic may call on the Goddess more often because she is older than the God and more powerful, it can also be interpreted as a further manifestation of the Sky God/Earth Goddess relationship. The Goddess' concern for mundane matters may come about as a result of the idea that women are more identified with the earth, whereas a male sky god would be too far removed from such matters. However it may be, this focus on the female divinity as the catalyst for operative magic represents the English Witchcraft focus on specific gender roles.

Homosexuality

The gender roles in English Witchcraft are straightforward and traditionally heterosexual. Women represent the Goddess in rituals, and men represent the God. There is no room for sexual ambiguity in Gardnerian Witchcraft. As the Farrars say, "We deliberately refrain from commenting on 'gay covens' ([a] particularly American phenomenon) because we feel that we are not equipped to do so, and because anything we could say might be interpreted as anti-homosexual prejudice."⁹⁹ They go on to explain:

We have even had one or two homosexual members during our coven's history, when they have been prepared and able to assume the role of their actual gender while in a Wiccan context...But we are utterly heterosexual ourselves, and our own concept of Wicca is built around natural maleness and femaleness of mind, body, and spirit.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid., emphasis in original.

⁹⁸ Cf., footnote 22

⁹⁹ Farrar, 169-170.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 170.

In English Witchcraft, the biological sex of the participant is much more important to the ritual than the gender with which they most identify. English Witchcraft takes a conservative view of gender in this regard and is uncomfortable with the idea of alternative gender roles.

More convincing than this are Gardner's personal feelings and teaching regarding homosexuality. Kelly says that "Gerald Gardner was as homophobic as many Englishmen of his generation, and revealed that homophobia in some of his writings."¹⁰¹ Doreen Valiente, who was initiated and trained by Gardner, says that "Homosexuality, we were told, was abhorrent to the Goddess, and Her curse would fall upon people of the same sex who tried to work together."¹⁰² Gardner's religion emphasized an egalitarian treatment of male and female aspects of divinity, and he claimed that the religion could not function unless the "polarity" was maintained by having both men and women present.¹⁰³ This raises some interesting questions regarding the treatment of women in Gardnerian Witchcraft.

One hypothesis suggests that the Goddess was promoted by men in England in order to satisfy their own sexual desires. Linda Jencson calls this treatment of the divine feminine "the Goddess of the misogynists."¹⁰⁴ According to Jencson, Aleister "The Beast" Crowley began promoting the Goddess tradition in the early 1900s in order to "breed human children with unprecedented magical abilities...through sadomasochistic ritual sex", and that his "holy woman is to be a nonsentient, unfeeling object of male lust, no longer capable of love or compassion."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Kelly, 149.

¹⁰² Doreen Valiente *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, quoted in Farrar and Bone, *The Pagan Path*, (Custer, Washington: Phoenix Publishing. 1995), 126.

¹⁰³ In all fairness to Gardner's followers, they have changed their views over time. Whereas the Farrars initially lambasted the practice of homosexuality (cf., footnotes 36 and 37), they now openly accept and even applaud the efforts of gay covens (Farrar and Bone, *Pagan Path*, pages 125-126). Valiente has also changed her views, and there is evidence that Alex Sanders, the founder of the Alexandrian tradition, may have been bisexual.

¹⁰⁴ Linda Jencson, "In Whose Image? Misogynist Trends in the Construction of Goddess and Woman," *Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America*, Elizabeth Reis, ed. (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc. 1998), 247 - 267. 248.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

Since Crowley influenced, whether directly or indirectly, English Witchcraft, he affected the Gardnerian tradition in the following ways:

Gardner's cosmology and liturgy [have] a number of Crowleylike aspects: Rituals were to be done in the nude; sexual arousal was a source of magical power; the High Priestess was to perform ritual sex acts with the High Priest (if not the whole of the male congregation); flogging and brandishment of knives went hand in hand with a mythology of ritual incest (mother/son) and human sacrifice. There is evidence that rape was (and may still be) viewed as a legitimate exercise of power by High Priests seeking to discipline female coveners in some Gardnerian covens.¹⁰⁶

While Jencson's claims are rather vitriolic, the fact that Crowley was involved with the formation of the Gardnerian Craft makes it easier for one to believe that this is how Gardner interpreted sexual freedom: dominance of men over women without the constraints of socially recognized relationships.

The Goddess tradition in England has played out in a rather confusing way. The idea that the divine feminine is equal, if not superior to, the divine masculine has resulted in a number of interpretations. While a religion which believes in an androgynous divinity might promote such practices as homosexuality, the Gardnerian tradition describes homosexuality as "abhorrent to the Goddess". And while the belief in a natural polarity between the sexes might lead men to become more feminine, the Gardnerian tradition seems to have preferred that women become more sexually aggressive in their rites, taking on multiple sexual partners and submitting themselves to ritual scourgings while in the nude.¹⁰⁷ Why is this?

It is my belief that the tradition of English Witchcraft developed the way it did because English Witchcraft came about in a specific social setting. As I mentioned before, the claim to an "ancient, pristine" truth lent credence to Gardner's writings, and the support he received from the scholarship of Margaret Murray only enhanced the spurious veracity of his religion. With its

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 256.

claims to authenticity having been established, Gardner and his co-founders were able to develop their tradition in whatever way they saw fit. Since Gardner and Crowley both were homophobic English men, they naturally treated homosexuality as an aberration from the spiritual norm. They focused on the magical power of sex. That is, the magical power of *heterosexual* sex. Because the tradition was founded by straight white men, the emphasis on the “polarity of the genders” became very important. Not only was sexuality pleasurable, it was now religious and the importance of “gender polarity” meant that only men and women could practice sex magic. If one did not agree with the practice of having sex for religious purposes, then one obviously did not understand the ancient knowledge that Gardner possessed.

While it may be unfair to say that the gender roles in Wicca were developed with the sinister intent of lulling women into a false sense of empowerment in order to exploit them, the salacious personal lives of its founders do not make it easy to believe that there was no ulterior motive in forming a tradition which mandated nudity, ritual scourgings, a “Great Rite” in which sex magic is practiced, and ritual rape as a form of punishment. However, from this rather sordid background, the idea of the divine feminine was gleaned and appropriated by the American Witches. If there is any direct link between American and English Witchcraft, then it is this idea. While the idea of the sexually empowered woman may have been a ruse created by Gardner in order to form a tradition to meet his needs, the divinely empowered female was taken seriously in America and played a major role in the formation of American Witchcraft.

American Wiccan Theology and Practices

Although both groups worshipped the divine feminine, the differences between American Witchcraft and English Witchcraft had become so great by the late 1970s that they began to have

very little in common. Feminist spirituality groups, in particular, avoided the formalized English Wicca for two reasons: they did it as a form of protest against a largely patriarchal mindset in which everything is done the same way every time, and they did it because the Gardnerian tradition of Wicca is notably difficult to follow.

Feminist spirituality groups differ greatly from Gardnerian Wicca because the religion that Gardner described would be pragmatically difficult for feminists operating in 1970s America to follow. Most of the members of Gardner's covens were older, retired upper-class people who had time to attend weekly meetings and to perform rituals. For women in the 1970s who were trying to break away from patriarchal norms, the time and energy commitment was a bit much. Eller notes that feminist spirituality groups "often had little patience for the measured pageantry and role-playing that characterized some neopagan rituals or for the encyclopedic lists of greater and lesser divinities and spirits."¹⁰⁸ Women who were active in Wicca were also active in the feminist movement and were career women. This left little time for a demanding religion. Because Gardnerian Wicca is difficult to follow, the feminist spirituality movement changed it to fit their needs. As a result, it became more flexible and focused on spontaneity.

Both the influence of the feminist spirituality movement and the influence of the New Age movement transformed American Witchcraft into an eclectic, spontaneous religion. Starhawk writes that "Witchcraft has always been a religion of poetry, not theology."¹⁰⁹ She supports her claim by citing Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father*, saying that "a male God...serves to legitimize male control of social institutions,"¹¹⁰ and says that by embracing the

¹⁰⁸ Eller, "Roots", 37-38.

¹⁰⁹ Starhawk, "Witchcraft as Goddess Religion," *Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America*, Elizabeth Reis, ed. (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc. 1998), 201-220. 210.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

Goddess, “we can move beyond narrow, constricting roles and become whole.”¹¹¹ She sums up the theology of American Witchcraft when she says that “each of us is potentially capable of writing our own liturgy,”¹¹² and that “covens are autonomous, free to use whatever rituals chants and invocations they prefer. There is no set prayer book or liturgy.”¹¹³ Due to the influence of a strong feminist theory which saw any sort of structure or hierarchy as “patriarchal”, American Witchcraft has a strong aversion to formalizing any of its institutions.¹¹⁴ In American Witchcraft, spontaneity and eclecticism are highly emphasized.

This is also seen in the types of rituals that American Witchcraft employs. Instead of following a set of inflexible rules, these religions have embraced spontaneity and creative thinking. Wiccan rituals in the feminist spirituality movement are more relaxing than Gardnerian rules; the feminist rituals usually include some form of meditation or yoga and are more of a way for women to take a break and to regroup their thoughts than the rituals that Gardner described.

As a result of this, feminist spirituality began to become more eclectic. They tend to worship deities from different cultures and traditions; for example, the coven that Phyllis Curott writes about in her *Book of Shadows* invokes four goddesses from four different cultures whenever they start their rituals. They worship Nike (a Greek goddess), Yemanja (a Yoruban goddess), Brigantia (a Celtic goddess), and Amaterasu (a Sumerian goddess).¹¹⁵ This is different from English Witchcraft, where all of the deities invoked are of Celtic origin. Eclecticism such as this happens for a number of reasons: America’s “melting pot” culture and lack of culturally indigenous gods force American neopagans to look elsewhere for deities, Eller’s idea that

¹¹¹ Ibid., 212.

¹¹² Ibid., 214.

¹¹³ Ibid., 217.

¹¹⁴ However, some aspects of American Witchcraft are being inevitably formalized. See Helen Berger, “The Routinization of Spontaneity,” *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 56, Issue 1. 49-61. In it, she discusses the way practical, administrative aspects of running a religion have started to demand that certain aspects of Witchcraft be defined.

¹¹⁵ Curott, 112-114.

feminists had little patience for the “encyclopedic lists” of Gardnerian deities explains how it would be easier to focus on popular gods of many different cultures rather than focusing upon the minutiae of one culture, and the feminist idea of bucking tradition shows how eclecticism would appeal to feminist spirituality.

American Witchcraft differs greatly from the Gardnerian tradition in their treatment of the creative process. Whereas Gardner and Crowley were interested in re-creating an ancient religion, American Witches create their own religion on a day-to-day basis. While Gardner emphasized the importance of tradition Witches use whatever they find inspiring in their rituals. Because of this change in emphasis, the gender roles are quite different in American and English Witchcraft.

Gender Roles

In American Witchcraft, the term “gender roles” has little to no bearing whatsoever. Whereas the Gardnerian tradition maintains that women and men must perform roles according to their gender in order to venerate the androgynous nature of their deity, American Witches do not have any such stipulations. In a footnote to her famous book, *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk states that “When I originally wrote *The Spiral Dance*, my covens always invoked both the Goddess and the God. In the intervening decade [between the first and second editions of the book], the covens I work with have become more fluid in our interpretation of our relationship to images of divinity.”¹¹⁶ American Witchcraft has developed in such a way that the God is not always invoked or mentioned during rituals. Why is this?

The disavowal of the masculine divinity in American Witchcraft comes about for two reasons: the influence of feminism and the influence of Gardner’s original Sky God/Earth

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 203

Goddess dichotomy. As I mentioned earlier, the emphasis on the feminine divine was a response to the largely patriarchal mainstream American religions.¹¹⁷ By emphasizing the Goddess, American Witches were able to rectify the perceived injustice done to women in religion by excluding the God from their ceremonies. In America, one only has to walk to the nearest church or synagogue to worship a male god. By worshipping the Goddess almost exclusively, American Witches were creating a space for women separate from the influence of patriarchy.

Gardner's initial theological dichotomy also influenced the way American Witches worship. His idea of the Sky God bears a striking similarity to the Judeo-Christian God. To women seeking to escape these patriarchal religions, the exclusion of such a god is a natural step. As Starhawk says, "the model of the universe in which a male God rules the cosmos from outside serves to legitimize male control of social institutions."¹¹⁸ Because the God of Wiccan cosmology is less powerful than the Earth and not as connected with it, most American Witches choose to emphasize, if not exclusively promote, worship of a Goddess who is more concerned with mundane matters.

Homosexuality

In American Witchcraft, homosexuality is not only accepted, but it is treated as superior to heterosexuality. Z Budapest writes the following in *Grandmother Moon*:

One of nature's most pleasant ways of coping with overpopulation is to increase the number of homosexuals in the community. Rather than producing children, gays provide support for those in the community who do have children. The gay uncles and aunts are the legendary fun relatives we remember as adults. Their productivity is directed into other areas. They have enriched our culture with outstanding works in the arts – theater, dance, music, and so on. They are the emotional and cultural caretakers of the population.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ See footnote 38.

¹¹⁸ Starhawk, 211.

¹¹⁹ Zsuzsanna Budapest, *Grandmother Moon*, (San Francisco: Harper Publishing, 1991), 13.

In American Witchcraft, homosexuality is viewed as a divine gift, one which controls the overpopulation of the Earth and allows for the cultural development of humankind.

Budapest's theology has an obvious ulterior motive. She originally was part of the lesbian separatist movement after leaving her husband in Chicago. This influence can be clearly seen in her writings, and the positive response she has received from her readers and followers is testimony to the influence of the lesbian separatist movement on Witchcraft's formation.

No matter where it has come from, homosexuality and the theology of American Witchcraft have complemented each other ever since the formation of the religion. Sarah Pike writes the following in her book about American Pagan festivals:

Participants feel that they can be their "real selves" in the festival families they have chosen. They can dress as they please, worship foreign goddesses and gods, explore their sexuality, and express their sexual orientation as they are unable to do in their given families...At festivals I witnessed gay as well as straight handfastings, and a handfasting between two men and a woman. In the festival setting, invented families are a haven from the struggles of daily life, and they call into question accepted norms such as heterosexuality and monogamy.¹²⁰

Although Pike's book focuses specifically on the way pagan festivals are treated as liminal stages, she also brings up an important point as to how American religions foment alternative sexualities. Because religions like American Witchcraft are themselves rebelling against established norms, they ally themselves very well with those whose sexual orientations are not socially accepted.

The tenets of American Witchcraft, which I mentioned earlier, promote sexual freedom, eclecticism and spontaneity. While social circumstances may have influenced the inchoate American Witchcraft, the basic ideals of the religion may have also influenced the way in which American Witchcraft views homosexuality. Does the social setting of American Witchcraft cause

¹²⁰ Sarah Pike, *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2001), 32-33.

it to promote the religious idea of homosexuality, or does the nature of the religion cause it to alter its social views in such a way that would accept homosexuality?

While the idea that American Witches changed their viewpoints on social issues because of their religion is certainly enticing, the idea that the social settings in which American Witchcraft was founded influenced the formation of the religion is more compelling. As we have seen, Gardner, who was operating in a different time and location, was thoroughly against homosexuality. His version of Witchcraft contains strict gender roles which do not allow practicing homosexuals the opportunity to worship in a way in which they would feel comfortable. While the Farrars and later European Witches have begun to allow homosexuals into their covens, the idea of an all-woman or gay coven is a "particularly American phenomenon."¹²¹ The social influences of 1970s America versus the social influences of 1900s England can be clearly seen in the way these two traditions treat gender roles and homosexuality. Thus, the views on gender roles are a product of social settings and not of religious ideals.

III. CLOSING COMMENTS

In studying the way society and religion affect the manner in which people act, it seems that the differing gender roles of English and American Witchcraft are a concrete example of the way social settings affect the formation and practices of a religion. English Witchcraft, which was formed during a very modern period of social thought and whose founders were children of the English colonial generation, has taken on an institutional role. Its rituals are formalized, it sees itself as the continuation of an old tradition, and it has very strict rules regarding gender roles and leadership. American Witchcraft, having its formative stages set during a time of social rebellion and with its founders having a strong interest in the American counterculture, has taken

¹²¹ Farrars, *Witches' Bible*. 169.

on the role of a charismatic religion. Its rituals are spontaneous, it has no centralized leadership, its gender roles are not regulated in any way, and it perceives itself as a recreation of an ancient past, not the continuation of it. The differences of these two religions have come about as a result of their social settings.

Even though both religions acknowledge and worship an androgynous deity, they do not practice in similar ways. While English Witchcraft emphasizes gender roles and relegates them in a specific manner, American Witchcraft does not. The “balance” that is discussed in English Witchcraft is not emphasized in American Witchcraft; if anything, American Witchcraft sees itself as a counterstrike to the established patriarchy. Again, this is a result of social setting; although the theology of both religions was initially the same, their evolution has taken them in drastically different directions.

Call for more research

Before any definitive statements can be made about these two traditions, there is more work which must be done. The English tradition is not static; it has changed considerably since its creation. When the Alexandrian tradition split off from the Gardnerian tradition, there is evidence that Alex Sanders may have done so because of his own bisexuality. Sanders was known to consort with both male and female followers, and although the tradition largely remains identical to Gardner’s, this aspect of their differences has not largely been explored.

Likewise, Janet and Stewart Farrar, followers of the Alexandrian tradition, entered into a “polyfidelitous relationship” with Gavin Bone in 1993. It is unclear to what extent Stewart’s sexual orientation influenced this relationship. While it may simply be a case of two men marrying one woman, the idea that Stewart may have had bisexual tendencies is certainly a

possible explanation. More research should be done on this aspect of English Witchcraft in order to describe how this religion may have changed. There is certainly a change between the earlier works of the Farrars (ca. 1960), in which homosexuality is denounced and almost vilified, and the later works (ca. 1975 and after) in which homosexuality is tolerated. More research must be done in this area in order to fully explain the effect of social circumstance and the role of its founders' personal biographies on the development of a religion.

By and large, more research must be done on the English tradition after the 1960s. While it is easier to describe how the English tradition affected the American tradition, since the English tradition is older, I feel that it is also probable that the American changes made to Wicca may have transferred back to England and influenced their theodicy. More work must be done in this area in order to fully examine the influence of social setting on these two traditions.

Not only must more research be done on the evolution of Wicca after its move to the U.S., but more work must be done regarding the influence of Gardner's travels in India. The Hindu tradition and the transplantation of mystical ideas have affected a large part of both English and American societies in the early twentieth century. The Hindu religion has also been adopted by the American counterculture, and many aspects of it can be found in New Age movements. Also, the influence of the British occupation of India on Hinduism should also be compared to the changes made during the American appropriation of Witchcraft in order to fully explain the effect of social settings on religious doctrine. As of now, the only biographical work on Gardner's life remains *Gerald Gardner: Witch*, which was published in 1960 by Jack Bracelin; an intellectual biography detailing Gardner's work as a civil servant and the influences his life had on his theology would be a tremendous addition to the study of English Wicca. More

research needs to be done which will explore both the pre- and post-Gardner influences of Witchcraft; a sort of “prequel” and “sequel”, if you will.

For now, examining the beginning stages of these two religions is as good of a place as any to start. While there is much to be read regarding the later stages of American Witchcraft and the effect of the Internet on new religious movements, what is written on the later stages of English Witchcraft largely remains in its primary stages. However, the beginning stages of both of these traditions have been well-documented, and are an excellent place to begin examining the influence of social setting on the formation of Witchcraft, both American and English.

Conclusion

In both of these traditions, when one applies the sociological theories of scholars such as Weber and examines the social backgrounds of their individual geneses, it is easy to see how social influence has dominated the way in which the theology was developed. The gender roles in English and American Witchcraft are an example of how social thought affects the development of theology and not the other way around. If these two traditions had developed in the same way despite their different backgrounds, the case could be made supporting the hegemony of religious thought. However, this is not the case. Although both traditions contain the same fundamental ideals, they developed in very different ways.

While it is possible to view religious thought as immutable and any differences between these two traditions as superficial conglomerations added during theology’s journey through various times and locations, this is not the case. Rather, we should view these two traditions as fundamentally different with their strongest similarity being the treatment of the divine feminine.

In America, the worship of the divine feminine is a phenomenon completely self-contained outside the world of Witchcraft. Traditions such as Christianity and Judaism had also begun to include aspects of the divine feminine at the same time as Witchcraft's formation in response to the feminist movement's call for equal treatment in religion. The worship of the Goddess is not a religious notion; rather, it is a social one. The empowerment of women, although emphasized in these two traditions for different reasons, is a product of social thought and does not fall wholly into the realm of religious development.

In these two cases, one can see how the social setting of a religion affects its development during its transition from a charismatic religion to a formalized institution. In England, the transition was made rather quickly due to the splintering of the Witchcraft tradition and its development during a time which encouraged quick formalizations of religion. In America, the transition to formalization has been prolonged due to social influences which discouraged formal bureaucracy, such as feminism and the New Age movement. The gender roles in each of these traditions reflect their social settings; while English Witchcraft promotes a strict, conservative interpretation of gender, American Witchcraft does quite the opposite. The cause of this lies in the differing social environment. Although their theologies regarding the androgynous deity are largely the same, the way in which these traditions treat gender are very different.

In conclusion, when we examine two religious traditions whose theologies closely resemble each other and whose practices and pragmatic beliefs differ from each other, we can assume that the difference is caused by a change in social setting. Weber's sociological theories help us describe American Witchcraft as a charismatic movement and English Witchcraft as a formalized institution. When one examines the social surroundings of the American tradition and notices that certain influences, such as the American religious process and the feminist

movement, were present during its formation and absent during the formation of English Witchcraft, one can easily see how these two traditions, both of which are named “Witchcraft” and both of which have similar theologies, have come to differ so greatly in the area of gender roles.

Appendix A: European Wiccan Writings

The Wiccan Rede¹²²

"An (if) it harm none, do as ye Will"

The Wiccan Charge¹²³

Whenever ye have need of anything once in the month and better it be when the Moon is Full, then shall ye assemble in some secret place and adore the Spirit of Me, who am Queen of all the Witcheries. There shall ye assemble, who are feign to learn all sorceries who have not as yet won my deepest secrets. To these will I teach that which is as yet unknown. And ye shall be free from all slavery and as a sign that ye be really free, ye shall be naked in your rites ad ye shall sing, feast, make music and love, all in my presence. For mine is the ecstasy of the Spirit and mine is also joy on earth. For my Law is love unto all beings.

¹²² <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bos/bos055.htm>

¹²³ Jessie Wicker Bell, *The Grimoire of Lady Sheba*, (St. Paul: Llewellyn. 1972), 145., although it is also said that this Charge originally appeared in Valiente's *Book of Shadows*.

Appendix B: American Wiccan Writings

The Principles of Witchcraft

as adopted by the Council of American Witches, April, 1974

The Council of American Witches finds it necessary to define modern Witchcraft in terms of the American experience and needs.

We are not bound by traditions from other times and other cultures, and owe no allegiance to any person or power greater than the Divinity manifest through our own being.

As American Witches, we welcome and respect all life-affirming teachings and traditions, and seek to learn from all and to share our learning within our Council.

It is in this spirit of welcome and cooperation that we adopt these few principles of Wiccan belief. In seeking to be inclusive, we do not wish to open ourselves to the destruction of our group by those on self-serving power trips, or philosophies and practices contradictory to these principles. In seeking to exclude those whose ways are contradictory to ours, we do not want to deny participation with us to any who are sincerely interested in our knowledge and beliefs, regardless of race, color, sex, age, national or cultural origins, or sexual preference.

We therefore ask only that those who seek to identify with us accept these few basic principles:

I. We practice rites to attune ourselves with the natural rhythm of life forces marked by the phases of the Moon and the seasonal quarters and cross-quarters.

II. We recognize that our intelligence gives us a unique responsibility towards our environment. We seek to live in harmony with nature, in ecological balance offering fulfillment to life and consciousness within an evolutionary concept.

III. We acknowledge a depth of power far greater than that apparent to the average person. Because it is far greater than ordinary it is sometimes called "supernatural", but we see it as lying within that which is naturally potential to all.

IV. We conceive of the Creative Power in the universe as manifest through polarity--as masculine and feminine—and that this same Creative power lies in all people, and functions through the interaction of masculine and feminine. We value neither above the other, knowing each to be supportive to the other. We value sexuality as pleasure, as the symbol and embodiment of life, and as one of the sources of energies used in magical practice and religious worship.

V. We recognize both outer worlds and inner, or psychological, worlds known sometimes as the Spiritual World, the Collective Unconscious, Inner Planes, etc.--and we see in the interaction of these two dimensions the basis for paranormal phenomena and magickal exercises. We neglect neither dimension for the other, seeing both as necessary for our fulfillment.

VI. We do not recognize any authoritarian hierarchy, but do honor those who teach, respect those who share their greater knowledge and wisdom, and acknowledge those who courageously give of themselves in leadership.

VII. We see religion, magic, and wisdom in living as being united in the way one views the world and live within it—a world view and philosophy of life which we identify as Witchcraft or the Wiccan Way.

VIII. Calling oneself "witch" does not make one a Witch—but neither does heredity itself, nor the collecting of titles, degrees and initiations. A Witch seeks to control the forces within themselves that make life possible in order to live wisely and well without harm to others and in harmony with Nature.

IX. We acknowledge that it is the affirmation and fulfillment of life, in a continuation of evolution and development of consciousness, that gives meaning to the Universe we know, and to our personal role within it.

X. Our only animosity toward Christianity, or towards any other religion or philosophy of life, is to the extent that its institutions have claimed to be "the only way" and have sought to deny freedom to others and to suppress other ways of religious practice and belief.

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

XII. We do not accept the concept of "absolute evil," nor do we worship any entity known as "Satan" or "The Devil" as defined by the Christian tradition. We do not seek power through the suffering of others, nor do we accept the concept that personal benefit can only be derived by denial to another.

XIII. We acknowledge that we seek within Nature for that which is contributory to our health and well-being.

The Wiccan Way¹²⁴

by Lady Beckett of Circle Atheneum in San Diego, CA in 1988.

Recognizing that there is more than one path to spiritual enlightenment and that Wicca is but one of many, and that Wicca holds within itself the belief that there is more than one type of step set to the spiral dance, find here listed common denominators of the Craft.

That there is above all the Goddess in her three-fold aspect and many are her names. With all her names we call her Maiden, Mother and Crone.

¹²⁴ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bos/bos057.htm>

That there is the God, consort and son, giver of strength and most willing of sacrifice.

That and it harm none, do what ye will shall be the law.

That each of her children are bound by the three-fold law and that whatever we create, be it joy or sorrow, laughter or pain, is brought back to us three-fold.

That as she is the mother of all living things and we are all her children, we seek to live in harmony not only with each other, but with the planet earth that is our womb and home.

That life upon the earth is not a burden to be born, but a joy to be learned and shared with others.

That death is not an ending of existence, but a step in the on-going process of life.

That there is no sacrifice of blood, for She is the mother of all living things, and from her all things proceed and unto her all things must return.

That each and everyone of the children who follow this path has no need of another between themselves and the Goddess, but may find Her within themselves.

That there shall not by intent be a desecration of another's symbols of beliefs, for we are all seeking harmony within the One.

That each person's faith is private unto themselves and that another's belief is not to be set out and made public.

That the Wiccan way is not to seek converts, but that the way be made open to those who for reasons of their own seek and find the Craft.

And as it is willed, so mote it be.

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- <http://www.cog.org> – Covenant of the Goddess homepage.
- <http://www.whywiccanssuck.com> – A polemic against the lax attitude many American Wiccans take toward their religion. Includes useful information about Gardnerian requirements.