

**A Religion without Dogma: Discursive Constructions of Sex and Gender in  
North American Neopagan Witchcraft and their Impact on Feminism and the  
LGBTQ+ Community**

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A graduating Essay Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements, in the  
Honours Programme  
For the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts  
In the  
Department  
Of  
History

The University of Victoria  
April 1, 2020

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## Introduction

Religions with indefensible histories and dogmas cling to them tenaciously. The Craft avoided this through the realization, often unconscious, that its real sources lie in the mind, in art, in creative work. Once people become comfortable with the Craft the old lies begin to dissolve.<sup>1</sup>

-Margot Adler

Neopaganism has been one of the fastest growing religious phenomena in North America in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>2</sup> This figure can perhaps be explained by the breadth of religious phenomena included under the moniker ‘neopagan’. In her germinal work on the subject, *Drawing Down the Moon*, Margot Adler characterises paganism in the United States as “the pre-Christian nature religions of the West and [their own] attempts to revive them or recreate them in new forms”.<sup>3</sup> This description is helpful as a catchall for neopagan practice, but is too broad to adequately explain the beliefs and practices of those whom it purports to describe. Many who, by this definition, qualify as ‘neopagans’ do not self-identify as such, but instead identify with the sub-group into which their beliefs fit.<sup>4</sup> Indeed the moniker itself is divisive because of the implications of the prefix ‘neo’ towards the antiquity of the practice. Many prefer the term ‘pagan’, because they believe ‘neo’ implies the existence of a previous pan-pagan identity.<sup>5</sup> For others, the use of ‘pagan’ on its own demonstrates continuity with the ancient religions they see themselves as the continuers of.<sup>6</sup> Recent scholarship has also received

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<sup>1</sup> Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979): 90.

<sup>2</sup> David Waldron, “Witchcraft for Sale!: Commodity vs. Community in the Neopagan Movement” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 9, no.1 (2005): 32.

<sup>3</sup> Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, V.

<sup>4</sup> Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004): 60. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/reader.action?docID=3441725>.

<sup>5</sup> Helen A. Berger, “Witchcraft and Neopaganism” in *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America* ed Helen A Berger (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2006): 30. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=3441467#>

<sup>6</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 60.

criticism for focusing too directly on Wicca, and applying the beliefs of this sub-group to the broader neopagan community.<sup>7</sup>

The focus of this paper is on a subset of the neopagan community whose beliefs most closely align with Wicca, or Modern Witchcraft. It will examine the belief systems presented by three key writers: Gerald Gardner, Z. Budapest, and Starhawk, all of whom self-identify in their works as Wiccan, and who have founded covens based on their beliefs. Taking into account the individualistic approach to religion embraced by neopagans, I will avoid the use of the moniker ‘Wiccan’ because the followers of these individuals may be members of more than one coven, and may not consider themselves ‘Wiccan’ as such.<sup>8</sup> Instead I will use the term ‘Neopagan Witchcraft’ or simply ‘the Craft’ to refer to the belief systems with which I am concerned. The practices created by these three figures share a foundation story that situates their origins in a pre-Christian matriarchy centred on devotion to nature and a feminine divine principle called ‘The Goddess’. The centrality of this narrative to modern Witchcraft varies in accordance with one’s stance on its historical accuracy, which has come under scrutiny.<sup>9</sup> Many witches<sup>10</sup> now conceptualise it as a myth, implying that though it may not be factually accurate neither is it false.<sup>11</sup> This paper will examine how this myth-history blended with social concerns prevalent at the time of Witchcraft’s emergence in North America to create a religious belief system that is anchored in ideas of gender essentialism and heteronormativity.

Early research into the neopagan movement, notably that by Ronald Hutton, conducted after its emergence in the 1950s, sought to determine the validity of this myth-history. However,

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<sup>7</sup> Christine Hoff Kraemer, “Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Paganism” *Religion Compass* 6 no.8 (2012): 390. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2012.00367.x>

<sup>8</sup> The term ‘Wiccan’ holds considerable baggage within the neopagan community. I will not go into detail on the intricacies of the debate here, but I consider the term divisive enough that I will avoid its use.

<sup>9</sup> Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 46.

<sup>10</sup> Followers of Witchcraft, regardless of gender often refer to themselves as ‘witches’.

<sup>11</sup> Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 45.

as Starhawk has pointed out, the historical narratives of traditional Western religions such as Judaism and Christianity are not subjected to this same scrutiny.<sup>12</sup> More importantly, she argues, regardless of the factual validity of the matriarchal narrative, it remains meaningful to the religion's adherents.<sup>13</sup> This paper will not pursue the historical accuracy of this narrative; it will instead focus on how one's stance in reference to its accuracy is relevant to the perceived authenticity of religious practice and to the ability of Witchcraft to adapt to changing feminist discourses.

Some scholarly attention still focuses on historical validity, but there is a more distinct trend towards understanding the motivations behind conversion to neopagan religions. This research is primarily ethnographical and is conducted in the field of anthropology. Some notable scholars include Sarah Pike, who has done significant work on the makeup of neopagan ritual and the importance of neopagan festivals to community building and knowledge-sharing. Additionally, scholars such as Helen Berger and Sabina Magliocco have contributed to the discussion of neopagan<sup>14</sup> worldviews and the function of magic in neopagan groups. With the advent of the internet, scholars such as Douglas E. Cowan, and James R. Lewis have focused on how knowledge of neopagan traditions is spreading across the web, and how the advent of virtual covens and magick schools is changing the structure of the tradition itself. There is room for significantly more research to be done on the influence of the internet and social media on the neopagan community, but it is beyond the scope of this paper. The internet will be assessed in relation to modern consumer culture, and how the commodification of neopagan symbols is

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<sup>12</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999): 4.

<sup>13</sup> Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 183. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 4. Urban, "Wicca and Neopaganism", 165.

<sup>14</sup> I am using the term 'neopagan' here because these scholars research looks at additional groups who have different belief systems which are not addressed in this paper.

contributing to the process of identity formation in Craft communities, with a focus on the research of David Waldron and Tanice G. Foltz.

The adoption of Witchcraft by the feminist and environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s remains one of the central aspects of research into the Craft.<sup>15</sup> Research in this area has focused on the imagery of the Goddess and her relationship to the God,<sup>16</sup> as well as the conditions which precipitated the adoption of a polytheistic religion in the modern West. Central to this research is the influence of Budapest and Starhawk, both of whom present religious traditions that view nature and feminism as intricately connected phenomena. For both women, Witchcraft, or more specifically Goddess spirituality, adds a necessary religious dimension to feminism.<sup>17</sup> They believe that by bringing the religion of the ancient matriarchy into the modern day they are providing a means for women to subvert the patriarchy.<sup>18</sup>

This paper will provide a brief overview of the narrative of prehistoric matriarchy as articulated in the writings of Gardner, Starhawk, and Budapest. This will be supplemented by an examination of religious origin stories, which are integral in the development of worldview. These three figures exemplify different approaches to Neopagan Witchcraft, and while their belief systems are similar, they differ in their approach to the factual validity of their histories and in their understandings of gender and sexuality. Gardner is credited with the founding of modern Wicca and as such his work is inseparable from modern Witchcraft practices.<sup>19</sup> Though there are feminist tones in Gardner's work, it is primarily Starhawk and Z. Budapest who were

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<sup>15</sup> Hugh B. Urban, "Wicca and Neopaganism" in *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements: Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 160. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/reader.action?docID=2025592&ppg=146>. Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 71.

<sup>16</sup> While the designation 'the' before God may seem superfluous it is common practice within neopagan groups.

<sup>17</sup> Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Holy Book, of Women's Mysteries: Feminist Witchcraft, Goddess Rituals, Spellcasting, and Other Womanly Arts* (Oakland: Wingbow Press, 1993): 2. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 2-3.

<sup>19</sup> Berger, "Witchcraft", 31.

responsible for directing the movement towards serving their political goals.<sup>20</sup> Many neopagan practitioners participate in circles<sup>21</sup> that are either led by these figures or based on their teachings.<sup>22</sup> However, the individualistic nature of neopagan belief and worship means that many others, particularly solitary practitioners, have created their own practices based on a ‘pick and choose’ method where elements of these and other neopagan traditions are combined into a system best suited to its members.<sup>23</sup>

The neopagan movement prides itself on its inclusivity as well as its capacity for change.<sup>24</sup> With these features in mind, I will assess whether the worldview is indeed able to accommodate changing understandings of gender and sexuality while maintaining its desire to avoid hierarchy and the institutionalisation of belief. Adaptation to current feminist discourses is essential if Neopagan Witchcraft is to maintain its relevance as a feminist religiosity. My approach to questions of sexuality and gender will be from a non-essentialist perspective which holds gender to be a social construction not based in biological difference. Through an examination of the movement’s origin myths, I will illustrate how the gendered conception of the universe central to neopagan Witchcraft is discursively constructed in these key texts. This will be supplemented with a study of the narrative of matriarchal prehistory because I consider one’s stance in relation to this integral in the process of constructing the authenticity of one’s religious practice. If it is held to be true, then the authenticity of the religion is partially anchored in the

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<sup>20</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 344-5. <https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/2027/heh.30841>. Urban, “Wicca and Neopaganism”, 160.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Circle’ has a multitude of meanings within Witchcraft. It may refer to the physical space in which a ritual is conducted, the ritual itself, or be used as an alternative name for a coven. One may participate in a circle without necessarily belonging to the coven or tradition with which it is associated.

<sup>22</sup> Berger, “Witchcraft”, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Judy Harrow, “The Contemporary Neo-Pagan Revival” in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* ed James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996): 12.

<sup>24</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 6.

antiquity of its practice.<sup>25</sup> This makes fundamental change to core beliefs, which advocate gender essentialism and hetero-normativity, problematic, while potentially undermining Witchcraft's ability to modernize. If not true, the hetero- and cis-normativity of the narratives must still be assessed as potentially unwelcoming to LGBTQ+ community.

## Chapter 1: Worldview and Identity Construction

The Worldview of Witchcraft is above all one that values life. The cosmos is a polarized field of forces that are constantly in the process of swirling into form and dissolving back into pure energy. Polarity, which we call Goddess and God, creates the cycle that underlies the movement of the stars and the changing of the seasons, the harmony of the natural world and the evolution within our human lives.<sup>26</sup>

- Starhawk

The absence of a doctrinal basis for Witchcraft traditions makes it difficult to ascertain if there are any 'required' beliefs or practices for membership in the community. Thus while the three traditions examined here: Gardnerian Wicca, Starhawk's Reclaiming tradition, and Budapest's Susan B. Anthony Coven, all fall within the category of Witchcraft, members of these respective traditions differentiate themselves both from each other and from the rest of society based on the individual characteristics of their subgroup. Witches construct boundaries of difference partially to differentiate themselves from the rest of society, but also to create 'in' and 'out' groups within the different traditions.<sup>27</sup> Carol Barner-Barry defines this boundary construction in three parts: defining the self, defining the group, and defining the out-group.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 24.

<sup>26</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 58-9.

<sup>28</sup> Carol Barner-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in Majoritarian America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 49. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/978-1-4039-7338-2>.



Despite their differences, Sabina Magliocco identifies certain attitudes shared by the majority of American neopagans.<sup>29</sup> She identifies these as a reverential attitude towards nature, a belief in interconnectedness, the idea that there is a feminine component to divinity, and the moral precept along the lines of “do as you will, but harm none.”<sup>30</sup> This sole ethical principle, commonly called ‘The Wiccan Rede’, represents the only shared ‘doctrine’ within Witchcraft traditions.<sup>31</sup> My findings are consistent with Magliocco’s, but I would add a focus on experience as a central determinant of religious truth, and an emphasis on the importance of sexuality both in worship and in understandings of the universe.

Critical to the worldview espoused by these groups is the embrace of a philosophy of non-dualism. Magliocco locates the origin of this belief in the neoplatonic concept of ‘the one’.<sup>32</sup> This theory posits that there is one divine force throughout the universe which is fundamentally unknowable by humans. The embrace of this philosophy has allowed Witches to create a religion that is ‘polytheistic’ in that it accepts all deities as manifestations of ‘the one’, while in effect remaining monistic.<sup>33</sup> It also allows for increased tolerance towards other religions and worldviews, since their beliefs and practices are still held to be pathways to the one.<sup>34</sup> Religious tolerance has been a theme within Neopagan Witchcraft since Gardner’s publication of *Witchcraft Today*. Gardner devotes this work to tracing the history of witchcraft, and in so doing defines its relationship to other religions. In reference to Christianity, he states that one of the “most common charges against witches is that they denied or repudiated Christian religion... I and my friends have never seen or heard of such denial or repudiation.”<sup>35</sup> For Gardner, a Witch

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<sup>29</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 214.

<sup>32</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> Gerald B. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, (New York: Magickal Child, 1954): 43.

cannot refute another's religious belief without also refuting their own because all Gods and Goddesses represent different manifestations of the deities worshipped by witches.<sup>36</sup> Multiple scholars have pointed to this as being, from a social and political viewpoint, a distinct strength of this belief system. While Witchcraft does not equate to complete religious toleration, the belief that there are multiple manifestations of the divine, and that one can choose that best suited to them, allows for religious diversity.<sup>37</sup>

This concept of 'the one' is manifest in the origin myth Starhawk presents in her book *The Spiral Dance*, which will be related fully in the following chapter. In brief, the Goddess was the original force in the universe and all other beings were born from her as a result of her love for, and sexual relations with, herself.<sup>38</sup> Based on this myth, one can ascertain that the energy, 'the one', that makes up the universe is the Goddess, or more accurately, the Goddess's desire.<sup>39</sup> This fact is central to the belief, within Starhawk's Reclaiming tradition, that ecstasy is the essence of witchcraft and the method through which one communicates with the divine.<sup>40</sup> The myth presents the God as both the Goddess's son and consort, who personifies her polar opposite.<sup>41</sup> These two are visualised as magnets: they represent oppositional magnetic poles which are constantly drawn together by their innate polarity.<sup>42</sup>

Starhawk's creation myth is intrinsically linked to the myth of matriarchal prehistory. According to this myth, there was once a time when Goddess worship was the primary religious affiliation spread throughout Europe.<sup>43</sup> Goddess worship ensured that women held higher social

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<sup>36</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 43.

<sup>37</sup> Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> Berger, "Witchcraft", 32.

<sup>42</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 50.

<sup>43</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: a Western Religious History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2005): 278. <https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/2027/heb.33863>

status than at present, and society was structured along matriarchal lines. Patriarchy, and the female oppression that accompanied it, are said to be the result of the invasion of violent Indo-European nations.<sup>44</sup> In Greece, Starhawk sees the Goddess as being integrated into the male pantheon through marriage to other deities, while in Britain her worship was adopted by the Druids.<sup>45</sup> Her narrative depicts a slow erosion of Goddess spirituality, which was hastened by the coming of Christianity and the transfer of the Goddess's attributes to the Virgin Mary.<sup>46</sup> Z. Budapest's rhetoric is much stronger in its condemnation of patriarchal religion. She accepts that the Goddess was integrated into the Greek pantheon, but sees this as the result of "a full scale religious war" that subverted the Goddess's power by forcing her to share it with her accompanying male deities.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Budapest considers the "patriarchal hordes responsible for the invention of rape and subjugation of women."<sup>48</sup> Though she holds the ancient Greeks responsible for the initial destruction of Goddess worship, she holds the Christian faith responsible for the continuation of this in the West.<sup>49</sup> This belief is reflected in the anti-Christian rhetoric employed in her work, and demonstrates the fallibility of Witchcraft's supposed religious tolerance. The scholars who originally presented the theory of matriarchal prehistory, such as Margaret Murray, were not Witches.<sup>50</sup> However, it was adopted first by Gardner, and then by later neopagan writers to authenticate the religion by locating its origins in the antique past.<sup>51</sup> Both Adler and Starhawk have acknowledged that the factual validity of this narrative is

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<sup>44</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 28-9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>47</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 5-6.

<sup>48</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 3,7.

<sup>50</sup> Carol Cusack, "The Return of the Goddess: Mythology, Witchcraft and Feminist Spirituality", in *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism* ed. James R. Lewis and Murphy Pizza (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 344.

<sup>51</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 24.

highly disputable. However, they continue to support the narrative because they believe it still has value as feminist concept.<sup>52</sup>

For Budapest, embracing Goddess religion is explicitly connected to politics, because one's beliefs and worldview directly influence their actions.<sup>53</sup> She considers mythology to be the basis upon which the ruling powers build their desired society.<sup>54</sup> The goddess-worshipping matriarchy of whom she considers herself the continuation thus creates an opportunity for women to build a society based upon a mythology which benefits them. It is interesting here that she considers the matriarchy to be a 'mythology', as this implies uncertainty as to its historical accuracy, something which she otherwise does not address. Budapest's *Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* provides the most in-depth description of the practices characterizing this matriarchy provided by any of these individuals. She details practices which ensured the separation of women from men, and fertility traditions that ensured the biological father of children was uncertain and thus unimportant.<sup>55</sup>

Starhawk's tradition is the most outspokenly political, and her embrace of neopagan religiosity displays her need to find a religious tradition that supported her political goals. Environmental advocacy, feminism, and the liberation of oppressed peoples are central to Reclaiming.<sup>56</sup> Indeed Reclaiming initiates are required to take vows which ensure their future political action.<sup>57</sup> The principle of interconnectedness inherent in the Witches' worldview is highly conducive to environmental advocacy.<sup>58</sup> For example, the Goddess exists in all things, all

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<sup>52</sup> Harrow, *The Neopagan Revival*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>56</sup> Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, 350.

<sup>57</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 81.

<sup>58</sup> Morning Glory and G'zell, "Who on Earth is the Goddess?" in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996): 29.

things are believed to hold an innate life force, and all things are connected. Harm inflicted on one feature of the natural world is thus harm inflicted on the whole.<sup>59</sup> For Starhawk, this makes witchcraft a belief system uniquely suited to contemporary issues as it advocates environmental preservation and respect for all beings.<sup>60</sup> Belief in reincarnation is also widespread within the neopagan community.<sup>61</sup> Many may not believe in direct reincarnation, but the understanding of energy as an omnipresent facet of the universe implies that the ‘energy’ composing each being will continue indefinitely in some form. This adds an element of self-preservation to political and environmental concerns, as it is advantageous to resist actions may be detrimental to one’s future incarnations.

Equally central to neopagan Witchcraft, and central to the difficulties in categorizing it, is its embrace of individualism. Witchcraft is not dogmatic: there is no leader, no doctrine, and - besides the Wiccan Rede- no rules.<sup>62</sup> One may be involved in multiple traditions at a time, or may be simultaneously Jewish or Christian.<sup>63</sup> Both Adler and Starhawk consider the lack of a doctrinal element to be a distinct strength of the movement as it differentiates it from more ‘traditional’ institutionalised religions.<sup>64</sup> Gardner’s, originally British, tradition does not advocate individualism, but is instead characterised by an elaborate hierarchical system with different religious practices only being revealed as one ascends through the initiatory system.<sup>65</sup> The addition of a doctrine of individualism to Witchcraft, appears to reflect the broader shifts towards inclusivity that characterised the counter-cultural movement in North American society

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<sup>59</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 159.

<sup>60</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 36.

<sup>61</sup> Berger, “Witchcraft”, 33.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

<sup>64</sup> Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 34. Berger, *Witchcraft and Magic*, 41.

<sup>65</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 70.

at the time of Witchcraft's introduction.<sup>66</sup> This is furthered by North America's status as a settler and immigrant society, which has provided it with a wealth of ethnicities whose beliefs have been incorporated into neopaganism.<sup>67</sup> The Craft thus varies regionally, both across America and Canada, following the ethnic makeup of the region.<sup>68</sup> This diversity, and the individualism that accompanies it, is a source of pride for many Witches.<sup>69</sup> By encouraging diversity, Witches stimulate innovation and creativity, qualities which can play a crucial role in creating meaningful ritual experience.<sup>70</sup> The ethnic makeup of North America is thus conducive to the transformation of neopagan practice.<sup>71</sup>

In Magliocco's study of neopagan identity, she focuses on its performative nature, pointing to how it changes depending on the context the individual is in. While in a festival context, Witches may wear ritual robes or symbols such as the ankh or pentacle. In everyday life they are more likely to select symbols identifiable by other 'group' members, but not by outsiders.<sup>72</sup> In capitalist society, this performative aspect of identity is embodied through consumption.<sup>73</sup> This aspect of Witchcraft is of recent origin, for as Gardner stated in 1954, "there are no witch's supply stores" and "the average witch does not have a full battery of tools."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Cusack, "The Return", 346.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>68</sup> Berger, "Witchcraft", 28. Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 76.

<sup>69</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 60.

<sup>70</sup> Berger, "Witchcraft", 39.

<sup>71</sup> Though I consider cultural appropriation too nuanced an issue to be adequately addressed in this paper I feel it is necessary to acknowledge that it is a problem within neopagan groups and belief systems. What I consider to be the core issue leading to cultural appropriation in these traditions is the embrace of a Darwinian approach to religion which assumes that religions 'evolve' along similar lines. As such, the prehistoric religions of Europe can be assumed to resemble other 'pagan' or Indigenous spiritualities still in practice today. This, when accompanied with the supposed historical basis of these traditions, has caused some to engage in cultural appropriation to supplement or embellish insufficient historical knowledge. I noticed this within the works of Adler, Starhawk, and Gardner, all of whom draw parallels between neopagan practice and those of various 'indigenous' groups. There is room for significantly more research to be done on the subject. However, it is important to note that there is also a growing awareness towards cultural appropriation within neopagan groups and many endeavour to avoid it.

<sup>72</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 62.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>74</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 150.

While many covens may share ritual tools, the advent of magazines, websites, and stores selling ritual tools certainly increases their availability for the solitary witch.<sup>75</sup> Ritual objects are commodified, and may be decorated with neopagan symbols even when this is not necessary for ritual purposes.<sup>76</sup> From Gardner's perspective, these tools are undesirable because they lack the power built up in old tools, reducing their efficacy in magical workings.<sup>77</sup> Display of these objects either on one's person or in their home allows Witches to actualize their identity, confirming their adherence to what for most is a new belief system.<sup>78</sup>

## Chapter 2: 'Feminism' and the Patriarchy in Gardnerian Witchcraft

From its initial appearance with Gerald Gardner, Witchcraft was seen as a religion particularly welcoming to women because of its conception of the divine feminine.<sup>79</sup> Gardner claimed to have been initiated into a secret Wiccan coven by a Witch he referred to as 'Old Dorothy'.<sup>80</sup> In these early years, the mere existence of a Goddess, who held a position equal to or greater than that of her male consort, seemed feminist in comparison to the patriarchal structures of most Western religions.<sup>81</sup> Despite the pre-eminence of the Goddess within Gardnerian Wicca, it has received criticism for patriarchal norms inherent in its practices.<sup>82</sup> There are several contradictions present in Gardner's theology which make it, despite its supposed reverence for

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<sup>75</sup>Tanice G. Foltz, "The Commodification of Witchcraft" in *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America* ed Helen A Berger (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2006): 155. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=3441467#>

<sup>76</sup> Foltz, "The Commodification of Witchcraft", 137-8.

<sup>77</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 150.

<sup>78</sup> Foltz, "The Commodification of Witchcraft", 156. Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 63.

<sup>79</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 62.

<sup>80</sup> Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 61.

<sup>81</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 62.

<sup>82</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 277.

women, distinctly oppressive. Particularly problematic is Gardner's emphasis on female beauty, which he considers an integral precursor to women holding power in Gardnerian covens.<sup>83</sup> The story he provides in both *Witchcraft Today* and *The Gardnerian Book of Shadows*, concerning the source of the Goddess's power is contradictory in its positioning of the Goddess as the most important deity for Witches while simultaneously asserting the source of her power is the God.<sup>84</sup>

Gardner's theology held that the world was composed of masculine and feminine energies.<sup>85</sup> These energies were represented by the Goddess and God and embodied in the physical world by men and women. At the most basic level, this was displayed in Gardner's assertion that a circle must be composed of six hetero-sexual couples: six men, six women, and a High Priestess as leader.<sup>86</sup> To the Witches who taught Gardner, this number was apparently tradition, and was convenient because more people would both make the ritual too long and difficult to fit within a nine foot circle.<sup>87</sup> Gardner himself asserts that thirteen was likely chosen because "it is a lucky number and there are thirteen moons in a year".<sup>88</sup> Berger argues that the number was meant to ensure the balance of masculine and feminine energies.<sup>89</sup> This reasoning is never explicitly stated in *Witchcraft Today*, but is supported by Gardner's assertion that to perform magic "male and female intelligences are necessary in couples".<sup>90</sup>

Regardless of its origin, this number became the standard for Gardnerian covens. Gardner did acknowledge that the desired ratio of couples was not always achievable and in such cases individuals who failed to meet the standards could be supplemented to reach thirteen.<sup>91</sup> If we

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<sup>83</sup> Gerald Gardner, *The Gardnerian Book of Shadows* (USA: Andesite Press, 2015): 79-80.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>85</sup> Kraemer, "Gender and Sexuality", 391.

<sup>86</sup> Berger, "Witchcraft", 31.

<sup>87</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 115.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

<sup>89</sup> Berger, "Witchcraft", 31.

<sup>90</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 29.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 115.



accept the argument that this number was meant to balance male and female energies, we are still left with the discrepancy of the high priestess. The priestess is meant to embody the Goddess during ritual work, her presence thus making the quantity of female energies greater than that of the male.<sup>92</sup> There are several ways to interpret this discrepancy: the simplest would be to state that the High Priestess was hierarchically above the rest of the circle and her energies were thus not counted. Another would be to state that male energies are more powerful than female, and thus though there are fewer male members, the energy provided remained equivalent. A third would be that while male energies are required to balance the female, since they are ranked lower it is not necessary to have an equal amount. None of these interpretations represents ‘equality’, and Gardner’s explanation for the numerical makeup fails to address these faults.

It is of equal import that while Gardner held that the circle must be led by a woman, he also required that she be young and beautiful, so as best to represent the Goddess.<sup>93</sup> When she grew older, and her beauty began to fade, she was expected to step down as “the greatest virtue of a High Priestess is that she recognizes that youth is necessary to the representative of the Goddess...she will return to pride of place in another life, with greater power and beauty”.<sup>94</sup> There were no regulations on attractiveness for the other members of the circle, whether male or female. This regulation explicitly connects a woman’s capacity to lead to her attractiveness and desirability. It further suggests that a woman’s closeness to the Goddess, and thus her innate divinity and ability to work magic is determined by her perceived attractiveness. This issue has been recognized as a problematic element of Gardner’s belief system since its origin. Doreen

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<sup>92</sup> Gardner, *The Gardnerian Book of Shadows*, 11.

<sup>93</sup> Berger, “Witchcraft”, 32.

<sup>94</sup> Gardner, *The Gardnerian Book of Shadows*, 79-80. Berger, “Witchcraft”, 31.

Valiente, one of Gardner's earliest supporters and a high priestess of his coven, considered it so critical that she broke with him over it.<sup>95</sup>

An aspect that seems often neglected in scholarly discourse on Gardner's feminism is the Goddess origin story he provides. This myth supports the conception that the God is responsible for death and rebirth, and indeed even supports Gardner's insistence that High Priestesses be beautiful so as to best represent the Goddess.<sup>96</sup> In this myth, the Goddess, who is an incredibly beautiful woman, journeys to the underworld, where she meets Death. Death is transfixed by her beauty and asks her to remain with him in his realm, which she refuses to do because she does not love him and blames him for causing all the things she loves to die. Death explains that "Age causes all things to wither; but when men die at the end of time I give them rest and peace and strength so that they may return".<sup>97</sup> Following this explanation are several key events which play a central role in Gardnerian ritual practice: scourging, magic, and mysteries. Gardner relates these as follows:

Death scourged her and she cried "I know the pangs of love." And Death said: "Blessed be," and gave her the fivefold kiss, saying: "Thus only may you attain to joy and knowledge". And he taught her all the mysteries, and they loved and were one; and he taught her all the magics. For there are three great events in the life of man - love, death, and resurrection in the new body- and magic controls them all.<sup>98</sup>

Gardner claims that this myth was related to him and suggests that it may have been created to provide an explanation for existing rituals and practice. Regardless of its

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<sup>95</sup> Berger, "Witchcraft", 32.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 41.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

origins, he states that it is the myth upon which Witches base their actions and beliefs.<sup>99</sup> What is interesting about this myth is that it does not place the Goddess as the most powerful or even the original divine force in the universe. Instead, “the Priestess should ever mind that all power comes from him. It is only lent.”<sup>100</sup> This statement has received shockingly little attention despite being a direct inversion of the power relations which seem to at first dominate Witchcraft. Gardner is stating here that while Witches worship the Goddess, she is effectively a representative of the God and not a powerful deity in her own right. Her power is a gift, and as such can be taken away if her actions are not desirable to the male authority from which they arise.<sup>101</sup>

This myth “explain(s) why the wiser, older and more powerful god should give his power over magic to the goddess”. If this is to be taken as an explanation, one can ascertain that Gardner considers a woman’s attractiveness and submission to male authority to be the actions necessary for her to gain power in her own right.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, Gardner seems to find Witches focus on the Goddess and the fact that “they have forgotten practically all about their god” problematic.<sup>103</sup> Considered in the context of gendered power balance within a circle, this also creates a new interpretation for the unequal power balance in Gardnerian covens. In my previous discussion of this I illustrated how a circle of thirteen weighted energies in favour of the female.<sup>104</sup> However, if the High Priestesses is the embodiment of the Goddess, and the Goddesses power

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Gardner, *The Gardnerian Book of Shadows*, 79.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>102</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 41.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>104</sup> Gardner, *The Gardnerian Book of Shadows*, 11.

comes from the God, the Priestesses power is masculine and as such Gardnerian circles are weighted in favour of the male.

### **Chapter 3: The Feminist Turn**

Were we not better off as a species practicing the life-affirming religion, acting out life-oriented rituals, regarding each of us as children of the Goddess? Enfolded in a celestial motherlove, would we not spin healthier dreams, societies, relationships, lives? Is the male principle of the universe not death without the tempering inclusive force of the Goddess?<sup>105</sup>

- Z. Budapest

The success of the neopagan movement can in part be credited to its adoption by some adherents of the women's movement in the 1960s.<sup>106</sup> The emergence of Z. Budapest's Susan B. Anthony feminist-separatist coven cemented the association between Witchcraft and feminism begun by Gardner's conception of the divine feminine.<sup>107</sup> Like Gardner, Budapest claimed to belong to a Witchcraft tradition that had been practiced in secret since pre-Christian times.<sup>108</sup> Budapest claimed to be born into this tradition, however, making her a hereditary Witch.<sup>109</sup> Budapest's coven was explicitly designed to add a spiritual element to the feminist movement.<sup>110</sup> Only women could be initiated, and the Goddess was worshipped at the expense of the God.<sup>111</sup> Starhawk was a mediating force in this process. While she embraced feminism, she believed that in the long term a female only religion could be as oppressive as one dominated by men.<sup>112</sup>

Much of the apparent feminist potential of Witchcraft is created by the images it provides of powerful female figures and ritual practices which can be used to ameliorate oppression. The

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<sup>105</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, xxiv.

<sup>106</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 71.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>109</sup> Barner-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism*, 45. Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 277.

<sup>110</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 7.

<sup>111</sup> Berger, "Witchcraft", 38.

<sup>112</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 50.

use of a myth-history which situates the beginning of Witchcraft in a period of female supremacy, regardless of its factual validity, is presented as a valuable tool in allowing women to envision themselves in a society where they do not suffer from gender oppression.<sup>113</sup> Starhawk, Budapest, and scholars such as Ronald Hutton and Margot Adler have asserted the importance of ‘witch’ as an image. As Hutton sees it, witches are the only example of powerful women existing in European historical consciousness.<sup>114</sup> For Adler, witches are proud and independent and exist outside the realm of traditionally acceptable female behaviour.<sup>115</sup> While Budapest acknowledges that Christian and pop-culture conceptions of witches have given them negative connotations, she sees the rehabilitation of the term as way for women to reclaim their power and dignity.<sup>116</sup>

Budapest’s first Susan B. Anthony coven was founded in 1971 in an effort to add a religious dimension to the feminist movement in the United States.<sup>117</sup> While her theology holds many similarities to Gardner’s in ritual structure, she worships only the Goddess, and membership in Dianic<sup>118</sup> covens is only open to women.<sup>119</sup> While Budapest has admitted that there may one day be room for men within Goddess spirituality, she believes that in order for women to unlearn and overcome ingrained patriarchy, they must first be able to live and worship in a female-only space.<sup>120</sup> Budapest asserts that she is a hereditary witch from a Hungarian tradition whose family has been practicing for eight hundred years.<sup>121</sup> This effectively removes Gardner as the founder of modern Witchcraft, severing the link between her practice and that of

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<sup>113</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, xi. Urban, “Wicca and Neopaganism”, 173.

<sup>114</sup> Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, 341.

<sup>115</sup> Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 178.

<sup>116</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, xvii.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, xii.

<sup>118</sup> A term for feminist witchcraft focused on Goddess worship. Budapest’s teachings are important within this tradition but there are Dianic covens who do not equate themselves with her specific brand of feminism.

<sup>119</sup> Berger, “Witchcraft”, 38.

<sup>120</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 3. Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 279.

<sup>121</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 270.

the patriarchal Gardnerian craft.<sup>122</sup> Budapest claims to have been taught witchcraft by her mother, Masika, whose birth was the result of immaculate conception.<sup>123</sup> While Budapest does not assert that she herself is the result of an immaculate conception, the positioning of her mother as being conceived, and raised, without the taint of a male influence decreases the presence of male authority figures within her hereditary tradition and provides a messianic influence to her teachings.

The Goddess takes on a more central role in Budapest's teachings than in Gardner's, as does the role of matriarchal prehistory. Gardner stated that he considered Witchcraft to be the remains of a Stone Age matriarchal religion.<sup>124</sup> This belief was elaborated on by both Budapest and Starhawk, despite the lack of definitive evidence to support the claim. For Budapest, this matriarchy represented a 'golden age', when Goddess worship was a world religion.<sup>125</sup> The matriarchy was characterized by infrastructure designed to support physical health and beauty: namely, refined bathing and sewage systems.<sup>126</sup> Artistic practices such as painting and jewelry making were common, and sexual pleasure was celebrated.<sup>127</sup> Men were present in this society but were not permitted to dominate, and were identified in relation to their mothers and lovers: those who resisted this were exiled.<sup>128</sup> Budapest describes how patriarchal domination of families was prevented by women engaging in mating rituals which made it "impossible, not to mention irrelevant, to pair off children with biological fathers."<sup>129</sup> Motherhood in this period was

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<sup>122</sup>Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 277.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 43.

<sup>125</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 54. Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 278.

<sup>126</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 294.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 278.

<sup>129</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 55.

celebrated because of the difficulties women faced in carrying a child to term and was thus a “warrior’s job”.<sup>130</sup>

Budapest’s narrative is valuable in that it celebrates traditionally feminine traits and practices, the worth of which is often minimized in patriarchal societies. Proving the importance of ‘feminine’ qualities was crucial to the early women’s movement and remains valuable to feminism today. However, this rhetoric maintains a binary wherein these feminine practices are associated with those who are biologically female, implying that they are qualities which women ‘naturally’ possess or that are inherent in female biology. Indeed, it encourages conformity to these gender norms, for both men and women. Budapest directly associates women with superior magical skills because she associates traditionally ‘feminine’ traits with spellcasting.<sup>131</sup> While placing women in a position in a power, Budapest's tradition thus also encourages them to “be intuitive, sensitive, nurturing, and inventive”, traits which she states they have already been urged to embody all their lives.<sup>132</sup> While these are not negative traits, their traditionally feminine connotations support claims that they are biologically innate to females. Additionally, supporting the practice of exile for men who fail to conform to female supremacy does not represent equality of the sexes but rather a matriarchal oppression.<sup>133</sup>

However, there are instances in Budapest's writings where she seems to suggest that a rehabilitation of the male image and of our social constructions of masculinity is possible.<sup>134</sup> What is central is the need to first rehabilitate women and provide a space in which their power and sexuality can be celebrated.<sup>135</sup> She believes this requires a space free from male influence

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 17

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ruether, *Goddess and the Divine Feminine*, 278. Berger, *Witchcraft and Magic*, 28.

<sup>134</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 164.

but acknowledges that there is a role for men to play in pursuing feminist goals.<sup>136</sup> Budapest's writings place males in a position where they are dependent on females, because it is only females who possess the capacity to give birth, as "there are only two types of people in the world: mothers and their children".<sup>137</sup> This is exemplified in her origin story where the God, who she refers to as Pan, is the Goddess's son.<sup>138</sup> Pan is an example of Budapest's quest for what masculinity could be "without violence or competition".<sup>139</sup> He is the personification of all male energies in the universe, and interestingly, is believed to exist within both men and women.<sup>140</sup> While Budapest notes that he is not without faults, particularly when his energies are overemphasized, she also describes him as a feminist who did not "seek to control women's sexuality".<sup>141</sup> Pan thus exemplifies what we might today refer to as 'non-toxic' masculinity.

Feminism and the myth of matriarchal prehistory play an equally important role in Reclaiming. Starhawk presents a compromise between the radical feminism of Budapest by allowing men to be included in Goddess worship and acknowledging that men as well as women suffer under the patriarchy.<sup>142</sup> Budapest's teachings were part of Starhawk's initial exposure to Witchcraft, but rather than joining one of her covens Starhawk was initiated into the faery tradition.<sup>143</sup> She is critical of feminist rhetoric which she sees as potentially creating a matriarchy which could become as oppressive as the patriarchy.<sup>144</sup> This opinion may have been influenced by the criticisms directed at Budapest's teachings. The mixture of teachings Starhawk was exposed to, combined with her own beliefs in the centrality of politics to religious beliefs,

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<sup>136</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 279.

<sup>137</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 163.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 166.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 161-2.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

<sup>142</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 34.

<sup>143</sup> Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 280. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, 345.

<sup>144</sup> Berger, "Witchcraft", 38. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 50.



influenced her creation of a tradition that focuses on combatting both social inequalities and environmental destruction.<sup>145</sup>

Starhawk began by teaching Witchcraft classes in San Francisco, where she lived.<sup>146</sup> Originally these classes were open only to women, but that stipulation did not last.<sup>147</sup> An understanding of Starhawk's beliefs and teachings is of critical importance to understanding feminist Witchcraft because of the incredible popularity of her work *The Spiral Dance*.<sup>148</sup> This book replaced Gardner's works as the germinal source for those new to Witchcraft: regardless of whether Witches ascribe to the Reclaiming tradition most have internalized her teachings.<sup>149</sup> After its initial publication in 1979, *The Spiral Dance* has been re-released in tenth and twentieth anniversary additions that include commentaries on the text reflective of Starhawk's changing views. Many of these are reflections on her own feminist rhetoric and in the discursive methods she utilized in presenting her teachings.<sup>150</sup>

*The Spiral Dance* contains an alternate narrative of the Goddess myth that demonstrates a distinctly different attitude towards the Goddess than Gardner's. Indeed, the two myths bear remarkably few similarities. Like Gardner, Starhawk is careful to note that this narrative is a myth and should not be taken literally.<sup>151</sup> Unlike Gardner, Starhawk's narrative situates the Goddess as the original force in the universe, possessed of her powers before the existence of other beings. Starhawk's narrative presents the Goddess as initially alone in the universe, but states that she then:

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<sup>145</sup> Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, 340, 350.

<sup>146</sup> Berger, "Witchcraft", 48.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, 345.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> This is particularly notable in the appendix to the Twentieth anniversary addition, where she is critical of the female-male binary as presented in her rituals and on the absence of rituals including and in support of men.

<sup>151</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 46.

saw by her own light her radiant reflection and fell in love with it. She drew it forth by the power that was in Her and made love to Herself... Their ecstasy burst forth in the single song of all that is, was, or ever shall be... The Goddess became filled with love, swollen with love, and she gave birth to a rain of bright spirits that filled the worlds and became all beings.<sup>152</sup>

This narrative ensures the Goddess is female by asserting that she gave birth to the universe and its inhabitants.<sup>153</sup> It thus provided women with a reason to celebrate themselves as unique and meaningful in their ability to give birth, to create life just as the Goddess did. The assertion that it was the Goddess menstrual blood that rained down and brought life at the time of creation, further allowed females to celebrate an aspect of their biology that many religions and cultures considered ‘dirty’.<sup>154</sup> However, this narrative has received criticism for these same qualities which some see as promoting traditional maternal qualities as natural and universal.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, this narrative links a woman’s importance to her childbearing capacity, potentially reinforcing binary constructions of gender.

#### **Chapter 4: Fertility and Gender Essentialism**

The Sabbats are the eight points at which we connect the inner and the outer cycles: the interstices where the seasonal, the celestial, the communal, the creative, and the personal all meet. As we enact each drama in its time, we transform ourselves. We are renewed; we are reborn even as we decay and die.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 50. Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism: The Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* 1<sup>st</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 2002): 227. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.4324/9780203160282>.

<sup>155</sup> Kathryn Rountree, “The Politics of the Goddess: Feminist Spirituality and the Essentialism Debate” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (July 1999): 138. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23166525>.

We are not separate from each other, from the broader world around us; we are one with the Goddess, with the God.<sup>156</sup>

- Starhawk

The Witchcraft traditions presented by Gardner, Starhawk, and Budapest all share a belief that there is a correlation between human fertility and agricultural fertility. This belief has been present since the publication of *Witchcraft Today* but has been most fully capitalised on and embellished by feminist Witchcraft. Gardner's text both asserts that Witches had the capacity to influence agricultural fertility through ritual, and that the Gods gain some of their power through human intervention.<sup>157</sup> Adding to this is the centrality of birth, development, death, and regeneration to the Craft's belief system.<sup>158</sup> This process is ritualized through the succession of yearly sabbats and esbats which form the basis of Witchcraft's ritual year.<sup>159</sup> It is further embodied by the Goddess' and God's respective traits. The Goddess brings life, and in her manifestation as the 'Triple Goddess' embodies the fertility cycle. The God is responsible for death and decay.<sup>160</sup> Starhawk is careful to note that within her ideology, death and decay are not negative but are simply a necessary process in the cycle of life and rebirth.<sup>161</sup> The centrality of sexuality and fertility as embodied in the cycle of the seasons and relationship between the God and Goddess lends itself to a hetero- and cis-normative viewpoint that supports an essentialised view of gender. The dichotomy of masculine-feminine polarity is acted out in ritual as sexed and gendered objects are manipulated by those of the corresponding sex.<sup>162</sup> The previous chapter

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<sup>156</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 197.

<sup>157</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 123.

<sup>158</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 106.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 130-34.

<sup>160</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 51. Glory and G'zell, "Who on Earth is the Goddess?", 32.

<sup>161</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 51.

<sup>162</sup> William Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism: Religions of the Earth from Druids and Witches to Heathens and Ecofeminists* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2011): 41.

began the discussion of how the process of gendering in Witchcraft has received criticism for its binary understandings and lack of intersectionality. Here, this discussion will be furthered through an examination of how the gendered and sexed language utilised in origin stories and the matriarchal myth-history is actualized through ritual.

An often-cited example of the role sexed objects play in ritual is Gardner's Cakes and Wine ceremony, also known as the Great Rite. For Gardner this ritual is ideally performed by a married heterosexual couple.<sup>163</sup> These two individuals embody the Goddess and God, and engage in a symbolic, and sometimes literal, sexual union of the male and female divine principles.<sup>164</sup> The rite, which is a critical step in initiation into the third and final level of Gardner's religious hierarchy, consists of the Priest lowering an athame<sup>165</sup> into a chalice full of wine held by the High Priestess.<sup>166</sup> While performing this action, the Priest recites the words "as the Athame is the male, so the Cup is the female; so, conjoined, they bring blessedness", the two then share the wine and eat cakes.<sup>167</sup> This ritual embodiment of male-female sexual union exemplifies the centrality of sexual polarity and heterosexuality to Gardnerian Witchcraft.<sup>168</sup> It is also illustrative of the equation between sex and gender in this tradition and the importance of one's biological sex to their position within the religious hierarchy. The ritual serves to reify the

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<sup>163</sup> Hugh Urban, "The Goddess and the Great Rite: Hindu Tantra and the Complex Origins of Modern Wicca", in *Magic and Witchery in the Modern West: Celebrating the Twentieth Anniversary of 'The Triumph of the Moon'* ed. Shai Ferraro and Ethan Doyle White (United States: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019): 34.

<https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/978-3-030-15549-0>

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> A short, ritual knife, usually magnetized and black handled.

<sup>166</sup> Urban, "The Goddess", 31.

<sup>167</sup> Gardner, *The Gardnerian Book of Shadows*, 23. Gardner does not explain the significance of the cakes, but it is likely they are meant to signify the 'abundance' the ritual is purported to provide.

<sup>168</sup> Martin Lepage, "Queerness and Transgender Identity: Negotiations in the Pagan Community of Montreal", *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 46, no.4 (2017): 604. DOI: 10.1177/0008429817710971.

divine hierarchy and allows the participants to celebrate themselves as the physical manifestations of this gendered divine order.<sup>169</sup>

Budapest discusses the Great Rite in the context of feminist witchcraft, while acknowledging that it receives less attention than in other traditions.<sup>170</sup> According to the history she provides, the Rite once took place in all cultures and was a method for achieving social cohesion and stability.<sup>171</sup> As performed at this time, the Rite consisted of witches engaging in sex acts with multiple men and women and in so doing bringing themselves closer to oneness with nature and the Goddess.<sup>172</sup> In her modern tradition, it is of course practised only by women, since men are not permitted to participate in ritual.<sup>173</sup> She considers it important because “the Goddess is intimately connected with religious sexual practices”.<sup>174</sup> Women’s sexuality is thus both a celebration of the Goddess and a method of combatting patriarchal mores. If the Great Rite were practiced as it had been in matriarchal times, Budapest believes it could play an integral role in the dissolution of the patriarchy. She points out that if women were regularly engaging in sexual relationships with more than one man, this would once again make paternity impossible to determine.<sup>175</sup> Budapest’s discussion does not focus on male participation in these rituals, and does not state whether male sexuality has the same divine characteristics as female. However, the association between female sexuality and childbearing capacity suggests that men do not gain the same benefits as women from participation in the Great Rite.

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<sup>169</sup> Lepage, “Queerness”, 613. Léon A van Gulik, “The Blind Moondial Makers: Creativity and Renewal in Wicca”, in *Magic and Witchery in the Modern West: Celebrating the Twentieth Anniversary of ‘The Triumph of the Moon’* ed. Shai Ferraro and Ethan Doyle White (United States: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019): 34. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/978-3-030-15549-0>

159.

<sup>170</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 98.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid 98-9.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 99-100.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 100.

Female fertility is intricately woven into Witchcraft's conceptualisation of the divine. Critical to this is the association between the Goddess and the earth, and the Goddess and women. By making the Goddess manifest in nature, and linking women's fertility to agricultural fertility, Witchcraft effectively defines women as sacred because they are inherently closer to nature than men.<sup>176</sup> Budapest's rhetoric directly equates the Goddess with nature, and asserts that human sexual relations have the capacity to stimulate the growth of crops.<sup>177</sup> In their focus on the practices of the ancient matriarchy, all three traditions discuss how rituals would have been performed in this time focusing on their connection to high agricultural yields.<sup>178</sup> This is reflective of a broader assumption that pre-Christian religions were primarily fertility cults dedicated to ensuring good harvests and healthy populations.

The concept of nature and what is 'natural' is problematic because 'nature' is a cultural construct reflecting societal understandings of inherent traits: the implication is that what is 'naturally' female or male is that which would continue to exist were the individual to be unaffected by processes of socialisation. Basing one's worldview on these cultural constructions becomes problematic because they are not static. The 'natural' basis for 'woman' as it is discursively constructed in the respective writings of these traditions is 'one who can have children'. Although Budapest acknowledges that not all women choose to have children, she does not account for trans- or cis-women who cannot bear children.<sup>179</sup> Budapest holds women's childbearing capacity to be what connects them to the feminine divine principle, making "the biological destiny of women, which has been used against us, [is] actually the basis of our

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<sup>176</sup> Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism*, 216. Urban, "The Goddess", 160. Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 2,5.

<sup>177</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 3, 158.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 75. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 123. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 197.

<sup>179</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 110.

Divine.”<sup>180</sup> This belief is shared by many Witches, particularly those devoted to a feminist Craft.<sup>181</sup> Discourses on trans and cis- identities were not prominent when Budapest was writing in the 1970s; however, the failure to treat these criticisms presents a weakness as these issues come to the fore of feminist discourses.<sup>182</sup>

The continuous referral throughout Budapest and Starhawk’s works to the Goddess as ‘Mother Earth’, ‘Mother Nature’ or the ‘Great Mother’ discursively affixes her status to the earth, making her both ‘motherhood’ and ‘nature’ embodied. Starhawk’s depiction of the Goddess ‘giving birth’ to the universe furthers this by making the Goddess ‘mother’ of the universe.<sup>183</sup> This narrative not only situates the Goddess as the original force in the universe, but makes the male force a derivative of her, as “Miria was swept away and as She moved away from the Goddess She became more masculine... She became the... God”.<sup>184</sup> This description hierarchically positions the feminine principle above the masculine, while also illustrating how masculinity and femininity are constructed in opposition to each other. Masculinity is achieved by distancing oneself from a feminizing influence. This hierarchical ranking of gender: women over men, has been identified by several scholars and members of the Witchcraft community as a problematic aspect of the Craft.<sup>185</sup>

Many of the rituals provided by Budapest are designed to celebrate aspects in a woman’s life connected to her fertility. She includes rituals to aid in conception and to celebrate the start and cessation of menstruation, which correlate with a woman’s position within the ‘maiden,

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism*, 227.

<sup>182</sup> Michelle Mueller, “The Chalice and the Rainbow: Conflict’s Between Women’s Spirituality and Transgender Rights in US Wicca in the 2010’s” in *Female Leaders in New Religious Movements* ed. Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen and Christian Giudice (Norway: University of Tromsø, 2017): 250. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/978-3-319-61527-1>.

<sup>183</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 41.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism*, 215. Harrow, “The Contemporary”, 17.

mother, crone' triad.<sup>186</sup> This triad separates women's lives into stages based upon their fertility: one is a maiden when they begin to menstruate, they become a mother after childbirth, and a crone post-menopause.<sup>187</sup> In addition to these, Budapest adds rituals created for events which may occur in women's lives but are not guaranteed. These typically equate with events which are either traumatic or meaningful and affect a woman's physical body; such as the birth of a child or the removal of a reproductive organ post-illness.<sup>188</sup> The choice of rituals included in *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* illustrates what Budapest considered to be the core issues facing women at the time of its writing and what practices she considered valuable in overcoming these barriers. Budapest explicitly states that the most important duty of feminist witchcraft is to aid women in overcoming internalised aspects of the patriarchy.<sup>189</sup>

Though there are significantly fewer rituals for men in Budapest's tradition, their position within the religious and gender hierarchy is explicitly associated to their perceived embodiment of masculine traits and their relationship to women. Though they don't feature in her covens, Budapest believes men can play a valuable role in protecting women, thus providing the safe space necessary for them to overcome the patriarchy.<sup>190</sup> However, to avoid excess, masculine energy must play a secondary role to the female which contains it.<sup>191</sup> In Budapest's ritual for 'Acceptance of Manhood' the men are to enter the ritual circle dressed in armour.<sup>192</sup> They then participate in a ritual which has the initiates enact a scene wherein they protect a baby from older men who are attempting to steal it from its mother and eat it.<sup>193</sup> This ritual exemplifies men's

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<sup>186</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 75-8.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. Urban, "Wicca and Neopaganism", 166. Budapest actually begins the 'crone' age at exactly age 56, when saturn has returned to the woman's natal point twice.

<sup>188</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 72, 82-3.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>190</sup> Barner-Barry, "The Emerging Pagan", 38. Budapest, *The Holy Book*, xiii, 178.

<sup>191</sup> Barner-Barry, "The Emerging Pagan", 38. Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 164.

<sup>192</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 173.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 173-5.



position as protectors in Budapest's tradition: they must act to protect women and children from older men who exemplify patriarchal manhood and wish to inflict harm on the mother's child.<sup>194</sup>

The emphasis on women as mothers is less overt in Starhawk's theology, but she still places importance on women's fertility cycles. While part of a Reclaiming coven in San Francisco, Jone Salomonsen participated in one such ritual which celebrated the 'first blood' of a coven member's daughter.<sup>195</sup> The purpose behind this ritual was to help remove some of the negative connotations given to menstruation in Western societies.<sup>196</sup> This process is part of the removal of the oppressive idea that female bodies are in some way 'unclean'.<sup>197</sup> Salomonsen argues that in Western cultures today menstruation is not so much associated with uncleanness, but is considered a physical handicap which females but not males must endure.<sup>198</sup> This idea of 'female suffering' is influenced by Judeo-Christian notions of menstruation as a punishment inflicted upon women.<sup>199</sup> While explicit adherence to Judeo-Christian religiosity is declining in North America, its historical presence within Western society has led to an unconscious permeation of its beliefs within our collective psyche. First blood rituals, in encouraging discussion of menstruation and deeming it something to be celebrated, are intended to subvert this focus on suffering and normalize the experience of menstrual cycles.<sup>200</sup>

The focus on fertility in these traditions reinforces notions of sexual polarity. Budapest's tradition directly associates men and women with traditional gender roles. Despite her intentions to overcome the patriarchy, what these teachings effectively do is apply a positive spin to

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>195</sup> Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism*, 232.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 233

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

traditional gender norms.<sup>201</sup> The rituals base women's value in their capacity as child-bearers, while limiting men to a role as protector of mother's and their children. The overt sexuality of the Great Rite, in its Gardnerian and Dianic interpretations, focuses intensely on sexual relations between men and women.<sup>202</sup> In Gardnerian Witchcraft, this creates a hetero- and cis-normative ritual which serves to reify the equation between one's sex and gender that is in turn reflective of their position within the divine hierarchy.<sup>203</sup> These same tendencies are present in Budapest's presentation of the Rite, though she removes the centrality of heterosexuality. Instead, for her, the Great Rite becomes a method through which women may gain power in society by removing men's association with and connection to their children.

## **Chapter 5: Sexuality and LGBTQ+ Community**

In a world in which power and status are awarded according to gender, we necessarily identify with our gender in a primary way. In a world in which sexual preference is a grounds for either privilege or oppression, we necessarily identify with our sexual orientation. But to take one form of sexual union as the model for the whole is to limit ourselves unfairly.<sup>204</sup>

- Starhawk

The presence of gender essentialism within these three Craft traditions presents an enigma for LGBTQ+ folks wishing to be part of the community. On the one hand, Witchcraft, and particularly feminist Witchcraft, claims to be inclusive of alternative sexualities. Witchcraft is seen as a religious space where people can explore non-heterosexual identities.<sup>205</sup> However, the emphasis on heterosexuality and the importance of female fertility and childbirth to belief systems prevents Witchcraft from being open to those whose sexualities are neither cis- nor

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<sup>201</sup> Urban, "Wicca and Neopaganism", 174.

<sup>202</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 176.

<sup>203</sup> Lepage, "Queerness", 615. Urban, "The Goddess", 31.

<sup>204</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 20.

<sup>205</sup> Sarah M. Pike, "Forging Magical Selves" in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996): 122.

heteronormative. While gender essentialism is alienating to the transgender community, the centrality of sex to ritual practice also excludes asexual individuals. The most explicitly heteronormative ideology is that presented by Gerald Gardner. It was also the first of these traditions to be actively espoused in America. Considering the progress made in normalizing discussion of the LGBTQ+ community in the decades since his tradition was founded, this is unsurprising. Budapest's tradition is actively supportive of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. However, the rhetoric of her tradition is still heavily focused on fertility and on the pre-eminence of women.<sup>206</sup> The writings presented in *The Spiral Dance* fall victim to heteronormativity, but in her later comments on the text Starhawk acknowledges that in response to criticisms she has received from the LGBTQ+ community she would present her ideology differently were she to write the book today.<sup>207</sup> However, she is not willing to remove the centrality of sexual polarization to her worldview, which in its focus on oppositional forces implies heterosexuality.

Since Witchcraft does not require membership in only one tradition but instead encourages the adoption of those practices that are best suited to the individual, one does not need to accept any of these traditions in its entirety.<sup>208</sup> Instead, as is becoming increasingly common, Witches may be drawn to solitary paths that allow them to tailor their practice to their reality.<sup>209</sup> Involvement in the more institutionalized forms of Witchcraft, such as Gardnerian, is rare within the queer community.<sup>210</sup> Instead, queer Witches have created their own traditions, or tailored elements of others to their needs.<sup>211</sup> The increasing quantity of commodified images of

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<sup>206</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 3.

<sup>207</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*,

<sup>208</sup> Harrow, "The Contemporary", 12.

<sup>209</sup> Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism*, 35

<sup>210</sup> Lepage, "Queerness", 611.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, 603.

‘witches’ and witchy paraphernalia is utilised by queer individuals to aid in their acceptance and display of their gender and sexual identity.<sup>212</sup>

Of the traditions discussed in this paper, Reclaiming is the most willing to adapt to accommodate changing understandings of gender and sexuality. Starhawk acknowledges that since writing *The Spiral Dance* her understandings of feminism and of the LGBTQ+ community have changed.<sup>213</sup> She addresses her changing attitudes to her writings in the introductions to the tenth and twentieth anniversary editions and in the appendixes affixed to each. The changes in her ideology in relation to queer folks come directly from criticisms she received from the queer community in San Francisco.<sup>214</sup> In an attempt to remove the dichotomy of sexual polarity from her traditions, Starhawk states that she no longer uses “the terms *female energy* and *male energy*” because though the imagery of the Goddess has been helpful for her, she now sees using the God or Goddess as an idealized representative of what men and women should be problematic.<sup>215</sup> As she points out, attempting to affix gendered qualities to people of the corresponding sex is impossible, as there are always exceptions.<sup>216</sup> This is illustrative of a switch towards a more nuanced understanding of gender that recognizes its status as a non-static cultural construct. While Starhawk maintains that erotic energy is the essential force which makes up the universe, she disagrees with her former assertion that this energy is based in a male-female polarity.<sup>217</sup>

Inclusivity has been central to the Reclaiming tradition since its origins, and Starhawk’s willingness to adapt her tradition when issues of essentialism were brought forward illustrates her commitment to inclusivity. However, despite her willingness to re-evaluate the constructions

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<sup>212</sup> Van Gulik, “The Blind”, 160. Foltz, “The Commodification”, 157. Waldron, “Witchcraft for Sale!”, 35.

<sup>213</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 19-20.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>215</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 20.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

of gender in her teachings, Starhawk has maintained an emphasis on binary sexual difference.<sup>218</sup> This fails to account for developing understandings of biological sex as a spectrum rather than a binary. As she sees it, binary sexual difference is a certainty because it is what ensures reproduction.<sup>219</sup> In effect, what Starhawk has done is move the binary from gender to sex.<sup>220</sup> I have not found significant criticism of this process from either the neopagan or scholarly communities. However, as understandings of sexual difference and intersex people grows it may become a source of dispute.

Unlike Starhawk, Budapest has not adjusted her teachings to be more inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community. She is accepting of lesbian, gay, and bisexualities, but excludes trans and asexual individuals. Her tradition is dedicated to those who are biologically female, and the discursive reinforcement of traditional gender norms in her rituals and religious narratives creates an equation between biological sex and gender. Though Budapest's tradition represents a minority within the broader Craft community, it is a subset that is explicitly trans-exclusionary. For many in this tradition, the attempted participation of transwomen in their rituals is an example of men attempting to use their male privilege to invade women's spaces.<sup>221</sup> Despite this, in her discussion of the matriarchal age, Budapest suggests the men in this culture participated in displays of femininity, such as wearing jewelry and women's clothing, and that this was disturbing to the patriarchal hordes who would ultimately suppress this practice.<sup>222</sup>

Despite the prevalence of cis- and hetero-normative ideology within Witchcraft traditions, many queer people have seen it as a religion which allows for body-positivity and

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<sup>218</sup> Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism*, 215.

<sup>219</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 20.

<sup>220</sup> Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism*, 216.

<sup>221</sup> Kraemer, "Gender and Sexuality", 396.

<sup>222</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 5.

lessens heteronormativity.<sup>223</sup> Much of the rhetoric used in these traditions, if taken selectively, can serve to validate queer sexualities. Indeed, much of Budapest's rhetoric is directed towards achieving sexual liberation, since "the Goddess is intimately connected with religious sexual practices; when mating and pleasuring are observed in Her honor alone, the sexual inhibitions of any era are defeated".<sup>224</sup> By suggesting that women participating in the Great Rite should engage in sexual activity with both men and women, and that Pan is bisexual, Budapest seems to suggest that bisexuality is the ideal sexual orientation for witches.<sup>225</sup> This phenomenon has also been noted at Pagan festivals and gatherings.<sup>226</sup>

An additional factor allowing for queer people's membership in the Witchcraft community is the idea that, while there is only one divine force in the universe, it manifests in the form of multiple deities.<sup>227</sup> Following this principle, members of the queer community have endeavored to rediscover queer and transgendered deities from various ancient pantheons.<sup>228</sup> Much as the myth of matriarchal pre-history provides authenticity to Witchcraft practices, the rediscovery of queer deities serves to authenticate present transgendered and queer experience by providing historical precedent. This process of bringing real or imagined elements of history forward into ritual practice is a key element in developing neopagan religiosity.<sup>229</sup>

Queer identities are reified in displays of non-conformity to cis-gender and heterosexual norms in pagan spaces. This is exemplified in the prevalence of cross dressing at neopagan

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<sup>223</sup> Kraemer, "Gender and Sexuality", 392.

<sup>224</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 98.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 162, 98.

<sup>226</sup> Susan Harper, "'All Cool Women Should be Bisexual': Female Bisexual Identity in an American NeoPagan Community" *Journal of Bisexuality* 10, no.79 (2010): 81. DOI: 10.1080/15199711003609724.

<sup>227</sup> Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 27.

<sup>228</sup> Kraemer, "Gender and Sexuality", 396.

<sup>229</sup> Sarah M. Pike, *Earthly Bodies Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community* 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 171. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=223931>.

events.<sup>230</sup> These are considered safe spaces, separated from their normal lives, where people may experiment with their sexual and gender identities.<sup>231</sup> The individuals engaging in these practices are not necessarily queer or transgender, but in the liminal space created at neopagan festivals are still free to experiment with their sexuality and gender expression.<sup>232</sup> In normalizing this practice it becomes safe for individuals who do identify as transgender or queer to experiment with and construct their identity. As these identities are developed, the increase in neopagan paraphernalia which can be bought either at festivals or at neopagan stores allows for queer people to actualise their identity: both as queer and as a member of the Witchcraft community.<sup>233</sup> Just as another Witch may purchase items which correlate with their preferred embodiment of the Goddess, a queer person may purchase items to represent the queer deities they identify with.<sup>234</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This essay began with a quote by Margot Adler where she discusses the flexibility of belief created by Witchcraft's emphasis on experience over dogma.<sup>235</sup> Through a historical examination of the Craft, as exemplified in the writings of three prominent figures, this essay has endeavoured to expose the weaknesses of this argument. Witchcraft as presented by Gerald Gardner was not flexible; but was based on a strict hierarchy that ranked people in relation to other coven members, other genders, and the divine.<sup>236</sup> In an endeavour to direct Witchcraft towards women's empowerment, some members of the North American feminist movement

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<sup>230</sup> Pike, "Forging Magical Selves", 131.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 124, 127.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 124-5.

<sup>233</sup> Foltz, "The Commodification of Witchcraft", 137.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>235</sup> Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 90.

<sup>236</sup> Lepage, "Queerness", 613. Urban, "The Goddess", 31.

altered this hierarchy. By anchoring female worth in their child-bearing capacity, making them, as ‘life-givers’, closer to the Goddess and therefore more important than their male counterparts.<sup>237</sup> Combined with the equation between gender and sex, this resulted in an inverted gender hierarchy that ranked women over men. In the 1970’s, when Starhawk and Z. Budapest were creating their feminist traditions, binary notions of gender and sexuality were not yet being questioned.<sup>238</sup> Starhawk and Budapest thus did not address these concepts in their writings and in consequence, discursively constructed hetero- and cis-normative practices which exclude trans and asexual people. The narrative of matriarchal pre-history and the Goddess origin stories these traditions espouse function dogmatically. In their equation between female life-giving capacity and nurturance they create an essentialist rendering of gender in which women are innately superior to men. In this formulation, men are lesser than women because they lack the inherent qualities women possess and are thus limited to a role as ‘protector’ of the female.<sup>239</sup> This is problematic both in its oppression of masculinity and its enforcement of binary gender conceptions that fail to acknowledge sexual and gender diversity. Counteracting this dogmatic element is the individualistic nature of the Craft. By allowing people to choose those practices that reflect the needs and wants of the individual, it allows for the creation of new traditions. In so doing, traditional aspects of Witchcraft practices are maintained, while new elements reflective of contemporary experience are added.

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<sup>237</sup> Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism*, 216.

<sup>238</sup> Mueller, “The Chalice”, 250.

<sup>239</sup> Budapest, *The Holy Book*, 273-8.



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**Appendix:**

**Athame:** a short black-handled, often magnetized, knife used in ritual.

**Chalice:** a wine glass or cup used in ritual.

**Circle:** an alternative name for a coven. Also the name for ritual space.

**Coven:** a ritual group, usually composed of thirteen members who share a common belief system.

**Dianic Witchcraft:** a feminist tradition focused on worship of the Goddess. Zsuzsanna Budapest is a key figure in this tradition.

**Esbat:** a monthly full moon ritual.

**Gardnerian Witchcraft:** a secret and hierarchical Witchcraft tradition founded by Gerald Gardner in the 1950's.

**Gerald Gardner:** credited with the foundation of modern Wicca, founder of Gardnerian Wicca.

**The Great Rite:** a ritual shared by multiple Witchcraft traditions in which male and female sexual union is exemplified in ritual.

**Reclaiming:** a Witchcraft tradition based in San Francisco, founded by Starhawk in 1979.

**Sabbat:** a holiday marking seasonal or celestial changes, of which there are eight. Includes: the autumnal and vernal equinoxes, winter and summer solstice, Imbolc/Brigid's Day, and Beltane/May Day.

**Starhawk:** aka. Miriam Simos. Founder of the Reclaiming tradition of Witchcraft.

**Susan B. Anthony Coven #1:** the initial coven founded by Z. Budapest in 1971.

**Zsuzsanna (Z.) Budapest:** A Dianic Witch and founder of the Susan B. Anthony Coven.