

Hannah E. Johnston and Peg Aloï (eds), *The New Generation Witches: Teenage Witchcraft in Contemporary Culture*. Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007, pp. xv + 172, ISBN 978-0-7546-5784-2 (Hbk). Review doi: 10.1558/arsr.v24i1.99.

Questions regarding the interest of Western youth in religion and spirituality have been raised since the 1960s, when (despite the decline of institutional Christianity) non-Christian and new religions became popular among elements of the counterculture. Recently, factors such as the aging profile of the mainstream Christian churches and of Western society in general have added urgency to the investigation of what types of religion appeal to young people. This volume, in Ashgate's 'Controversial New Religions' series, is a serious and thought-provoking investigation of teenage witchcraft.

Modern pagan witchcraft's history can be traced to Gerald Gardner, the founder of Wicca, an initiatory movement in which magic and witchcraft can be pursued. Gardner's publications in the 1950s reached a broader audience and 'Wicca' became variegated, with initiatory lineages vying with acephalous movements, and self-initiation and solitary practice rivalling coven-based traditions. In the early twenty-first century the Internet has contributed greatly to the spread of information about alternative religions/spiritualities and 'religious conversion' may be the result of self-seeking and personal identity quests. Further, popular media such as television programmes ('Charmed', 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer', and 'Sabrina the Teenage Witch') and films ('The Craft') have positively coded witchcraft in young women's (particularly) identity formation and search for empowerment.

This volume employs a wide range of evidence and methodologies. In Part 1, James R. Lewis provides a useful comparative overview of census data from Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and New Zealand ('The Pagan Explosion'). Melissa Harrington's 'The Perennial Teen Witch' argues that the young have always been attracted to witchcraft and therefore contemporary teenage witchcraft is not simply the product of media and consumerism. The essays by Doug Ezzy and Helen Berger ('Becoming a Witch') and Julian Vayne ('The Discovery of Witchcraft') concentrate on arriving at witchcraft (as 'conversion' is a term generally rejected or avoided by witches) and also address the question of whether becoming a witch and practicing the Craft has to be 'religious'. These last two essays feature many primary source accounts, and Vayne's reflective comparison of his own experience as a 'teenage witch' in the early 1980s with those of Dawn in the early twenty-first century are particularly illuminating.

Part 2 of the book consists of two accounts from the field; shorter, less academic essays in which Heather Jenkins (United Kingdom) and Morboriel Parthenos (United States) share their different experiences of arriving at pagan practice. (Parthenos' reverence for the Greek gods despite her Caribbean ancestry is fascinating; the question of ethnic identification in witchcraft and paganism is otherwise absent from the book. Another dilemma, that of under-age seekers and adherents and the reactions that their parents might have, is more fully covered.)

Part 3 investigates the *mélange* of pop cultural texts that contemporary teenage witches can draw upon. The television series and films already mentioned are discussed, as are the books of popular pagan authors for teens like Silver RavenWolf (and mainstream authors such as J.K. Rowling, whose Harry Potter novels have stimulated interest in witchcraft for pre-teens and teens). Essays by Stephanie Martin, Denise Cush and others also highlight the vital importance of the Internet as a safe space for open discussion and

for ease of distribution of material about witchcraft, which in the past often required effort and special knowledge to acquire.

This volume is well-conceived and well-executed, possessing a coherence that many edited volumes seek but fail to achieve. The material contained within is fresh and relevant, the sense of 'teen witches' discussing their own experiences is a strength, and the authors' discussion of the relationship between teen witchcraft and popular cultural discourses is generally sophisticated. This book is recommended to all who are interested in contemporary witchcraft or aspects of youth religion in the West more generally.

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