

Marisol Charbonneau, *Quebec's Distinct Paganism* (Montreal: Arcana Elements, 2017), 274 pp., \$24 (paper)

Quebec's Distinct Paganism by Marisol Charbonneau is one of a growing genre of books and articles that explore the particularities of contemporary Paganism in a specific geographical place. Composed of two distinct linguistic communities, Quebec offers what sociologists call a natural experiment: two different groups in the same place that have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This existent distinction between groups permits Charbonneau to explore the question of how much language and cultural differences influence the practice of those who become contemporary Pagans.

The book is based on ethnographic work by the author in the summer of 2007 and a survey in both English and French of Anglo and Francophone Pagans at around the same time as her fieldwork. Both her qualitative and quantitative research were conducted in Montreal and served as the basis of her master's thesis, which has in turn become this volume. Her discussion of the larger Province is based on her own experience living as a Francophone Pagan in Quebec, both in and outside Montreal, and on the work of other scholars who have done research in the region whose work is primarily in French. The book more accurately should be entitled *Montreal's Distinct Paganism*, but that is a minor quibble.

Among her major findings was that Francophone Pagans were stymied by the fact that most writings by and for Pagans are in English. Practitioners who were bilingual or had enough English to get by used English as their liturgical language. This she believes explains why there are fewer Francophone than Anglophone Pagans in Quebec. Although she describes many similarities between French and English speaking Pagans in Montreal – such as their sense of “coming home” to Paganism, the emphasis on nature as a central element of their spirituality and the celebration of the female divine – Charbonneau's emphasis was on the differences between these groups, which she attributed to cultural and historic factors, the most important of which was the Quiet Revolution, which occurred in Quebec in the 1960s. The Quiet Revolution was a response to the corruption discovered in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in

Quebec. This resulted in what Charbonneau describes as a very fast process of secularization and the decrease of the church's power within the political landscape of the province. She believes it is this cultural and political background that has resulted in Francophone Pagans, unlike Anglophone Pagans, viewing their practice as a lifestyle instead of a religion.

Charbonneau observes that there are fewer public Goddess Spirituality groups and feminist Witches in Montreal than in other places in Canada or the United States, which she attributes to a different trajectory of feminism in the province. This too she views as a result of the secularization of the Quiet Revolution, as Francophone feminism is more secular than its Anglophone counterpart. She further notes that Francophone Pagans are more likely to practice shamanism than Anglophone Pagans. Although both English and French-language Pagans look to ancient cultures for inspiration for their spiritual practice, she found that French-speaking Pagans were less tied to exploring their own ancient culture and were more likely to incorporate the practices of others. This again she connects to the disillusion with the Catholic Church, which until the Quiet Revolution had been part of the French-speaking Québécois' identity. Being a Pagan provides them a new identity, which is separate from their own ancestral roots. Charbonneau believes that this attitude of Francophone Pagans makes it easier to incorporate shamanism into their current practice even though it may not have been part of French pre-Christian religion.

This book provides an initial examination of the distinction between the Pagan practices in two cultural groups that live in the same geographic area. Charbonneau's discussion of the Quiet Revolution as backdrop to the development of Francophone Paganism is insightful. More, however, is needed to fully explore these two forms of Paganism. In total, she surveyed thirty-five Montreal Pagans, which is too small a sample to extrapolate from. The sample size was further diminished by having included some respondents who did not fit neatly into the two categories of Francophone or Anglophone practitioners – some were foreign-born with a third language as their primary language, others were bilingual and bi-cultural, among other distinctions. This mix provided a more complicated image of the Montreal Pagan world, which was interesting in and of itself. However, it resulted in each category of analysis including too few respondents to be reliable.

Her analysis is supplemented by her own experience as a Francophone Pagan, her personal interactions with others, as well as her brief fieldwork, and the work of other scholars on Francophone Pagans. As much of this literature was written in French, her translation of some of it, and reference to others of it, makes a valuable contribution to those who read English but not French. Oddly, however, although this book is written in English, Charbonneau doesn't provide translations for the quotes she provides from her field work and written responses in her survey with French-speaking Pagans. This could easily have been put in the footnotes so that she could retain the original language for the bilingual reader. As it is, it makes the book neither fully available to English nor to French-speaking readers.

Even with these gaps the book will be of interest to scholars of Paganism, particularly those interested in how geography and culture help to transform the practice of the religion. Charbonneau helpfully includes her survey questions in both French and English in the appendix for use by future scholars. The author has raised important questions about how cultural heritage affects spiritual practice. Hopefully Charbonneau as well as others will be stimulated by this book to pursue these questions further.

Helen A. Berger
Brandeis University