

David Waldron, *The Sign of the Witch: Modernity and the Pagan Revival*. (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2008), 288 pp., \$30 (paper).

Over the last two decades, a growing number of academic researchers have begun the work of uncovering the roots of the contemporary Pagan revival. For the most part, they have found that some of its most recognizable manifestations, such as the popularization of Gerald Gardner's brand of Witchcraft in the middle of the twentieth century, sprang from a fertile ground rife with historical, artistic, and philosophical antecedents in Western European and North American cultures. In *The Sign of the Witch*, David Waldron explores the socio-historical conditions from which the contemporary Anglophone Pagan movement emerged, by examining its relationship with major intellectual and cultural currents. In particular, Waldron understands these currents to be concomitant with the rise of modernity in the Western world, most notably a dialectical interplay of the Enlightenment ethos of rationality, secularism and materialism, with a rival perspective of Romanticism, an aesthetic and philosophical movement which seeks authenticity in the natural world and the non-rational human imagination.

Fully admitting the Anglocentric focus of his work, Waldron begins by discussing the Reformation's impact, as well as succeeding historical events (such as the English Civil war and Restoration) on the evolution of Witchcraft beliefs in English culture and society. With the loss of power and influence of the Catholic Church and the rise of the scientific worldview among the English intellectual elite, supernaturalist notions of diabolical witchcraft became increasingly associated with Catholic superstition. On the other hand, secularism and science became portents of rationality and good government from the eighteenth century onward. Near the end of the eighteenth century, however, belief in the unfettered potential of science and rationality was seriously challenged with the rise of Romanticism. The Romantics accused Enlightenment philosophers of excessively desacralizing and disenchanting the world through imaging a "clockwork" universe ruled by physical laws not subject to the whim of supernatural entities. Though Enlightenment and Romanticism at first appear to be near polar opposites, Waldron explains that the interplay between Enlightenment rationality and Romanticism allows for different degrees of synthesis between both perspectives. This in turn can be found in much of modern thought, and made manifest in the innumerable and highly idiosyncratic traditions included under the aegis of contemporary Paganism and Witchcraft.

Waldron follows this philosophical discussion by tracing the evolu-

tion of the contemporary Witchcraft revival in mid-twentieth century England. He does this by weaving together the historical importance of the occult milieu in England since the late nineteenth century with the crucial role played by Romantically inspired researchers such as Jules Michelet, Sir James Frazer, Margaret Murray, and subsequently other prominent members of the Folklore Society in developing authentic cultural identity. Waldron then shifts his focus by elaborating the impact of North American religious and philosophical currents (such as nineteenth-century Spiritualism, Transcendentalism, Theosophy and Hellenic Pagan reconstructionism) on the emergence of the New Age/hippie movement in 1960s American culture. Echoing Ronald Hutton and Margot Adler, Waldron discusses how the social and cultural conditions fostered by the 1960s counter-culture and the rise of Second Wave feminism in the 1970s allowed for the contemporary Pagan revival to find a home in North America by transforming away from its original conservative and English nationalist character.

North American brands of Paganism and Witchcraft were born from hybridizing folklore with left-leaning philosophical and political stances. The resultant eco-feminisms and other traditions created the perfect conditions for popular growth in eclectic approaches to Pagan spirituality. Waldron presents this development as a consequence of the widespread adoption of post-modern approaches to spirituality, itself a result of two impulses. One is the rejection of Jungian approaches to religion and the other is a skepticism regarding empirical historical claims to legitimacy that could be found within many lineage-based Witchcraft traditions until the late twentieth century. For Waldron, this phenomenon has created an environment where Paganism and its manifestations become subject to the whim of popular cultural representations and market forces, which may or may not jeopardize the future of contemporary Paganism as a religious movement in late capitalism.

The Sign of the Witch is a fascinating read; it provides a philosophical and historical discourse on the interplay of cultural forces shaping modernity and, consequently, the revival of Paganism as a product of late modernity. Such an in-depth discussion on the history of ideas is often absent from most historical and anthropological monographs on contemporary Paganism. Waldron's work presents a unique and highly relevant area of inquiry with regards to cultural currents and how they shape contemporary social and religious movements. Only a few aspects of this otherwise first-rate book require criticism. First, while other authors have addressed Pagans appropriating non-Western cultural motifs with regards to post-colonialism power relations, this is noticeably absent from Waldron's discussion on Pagan synthesis of modernity

and Romanticism in the construction of religious and spiritual world-views. Second, readers may find themselves distracted by the great number of typos, instances of inconsistent spelling, and generally poor editing done on this book. Subsequent editions should present standardized spelling of often-used terms (such as neo-Paganism, Romanticism, etc.), as well as consistent document formatting and page layout. Still, this book is a valuable contribution to the philosophical and cultural history of contemporary Anglophone Paganism in the diaspora of late capitalist modernity. It is also a very enjoyable and enriching read for any scholar of religion, anthropology, history, and/or philosophy.

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