

Tyr: Myth-Culture-Tradition, Volumes 1 (2002), 2 (2003-04), and 3 (2007-08), ULTRA Publishing, Atlanta, Ga., 530 pp. (Vol. 3), \$25 (paperback).

Tyr is a unique, largely but not exclusively Pagan-oriented publication that is in fact rather difficult to categorize. It has much to recommend it, from scholarly articles on ancient European Pagan religion and mythology, thoughtful reflections on Ásatrú and other Pagan revival movements of the last several decades and their roots in earlier cultural movements such as Romanticism, interviews with leading figures in contemporary Paganism, philosophers and musicians, and music and book reviews. It also has certain more controversial political aspects, which will be taken up below. The problem remains of how exactly to define *Tyr*.

Is *Tyr* an academic journal? It has been professionally published in three attractive and quite hefty book-like volumes since 2002, and while *Tyr* does include a number of excellent articles by credentialed academics, many of *Tyr's* contributors are not professional academics, but freelance writers, private scholars, translators and journalists. *Tyr* lacks affiliation with any academic institution or academic publishing house, and neither of its editors, Michael Moynihan and Joshua Buckley, hold a terminal degree nor an official position in any academic institution. Both have a long and varied record of activity in underground music and publishing, which includes a joint stint as editors of the Ásatrú Alliance publication *Vór Trú* and Moynihan's co-authorship with Didrik Sonderlind of *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (1998; revised edition, 2003), a well-regarded, book-length study of the violent Norwegian metal music scene of the early 1990s. Ultra, the company that issues *Tyr*, began as a record company run by Buckley that later shifted to publishing, which speaks to the multiple endeavors of the prime movers behind this journal. *Tyr* cannot therefore be characterized as an *academic* journal, strictly speaking, but it does contain much content of academic quality and interest. *Tyr* might therefore be best defined as a quasi-academic, intellectually serious journal of high quality, with much of interest to offer the Pagan audience and scholars involved in Pagan studies.

Is *Tyr* primarily a Pagan journal? The answer would have to be both Yes and No. A good many of the articles do concern Norse-Germanic-Scandinavian Paganism, and the name of the publication comes from the ancient Germanic sky god who, according to Norse myth, volunteered to have his hand bitten off by the monstrous wolf-being Fenrir, as part of a scheme concocted by the gods to restrain the ferocious beast. However, other contents push in other directions, and the editors are

quite emphatic that the journal is dedicated not to Paganism, *per se*, but to a philosophical viewpoint they refer to as “radical traditionalism.” This is where *Tyr* becomes something more and other than a straightforward journal of Norse Paganism, and engages with topics and views that are more controversial and potentially disturbing.

Radical Traditionalism is defined by the editors in a concise formulation printed as a kind of manifesto on the back cover of each volume as “reject[ing] the modern, materialist reign of ‘quantity over quality,’ the absence of any meaningful spiritual values, the mechanization and overspecialization of urban life; and the imperialism of modern corporate monoculture, with its vulgar ‘values’ of progress and efficiency...” and “yearn[ing] for the small, homogeneous societies that flourished before Christianity – societies in which every aspect of life was integrated into a holistic system.” Instead, radical traditionalism embraces “resacralization of the world versus materialism; folk/traditional culture versus mass culture; natural social order versus an artificial hierarchy based on wealth; the tribal community versus the nation-state; stewardship of the earth versus ‘maximization of resources’; a harmonious relationship between men and women versus ‘the war between the sexes’; handcrafts and artisanship versus industrial mass production.”

As the reviewer is a scholar of contemporary Paganism who has himself struggled with the internal contradictions involved in seeking to revive and reconstruct past traditions in order to make use of them in the entirely different social and cultural context of the modern world, he notes with interest a possible internal contradiction of the *Tyr* editors’ Radical Traditionalism. In calling not only for a revival of pre-Christian religious traditions but a return to a pre-modern way of life and an ethnically homogeneous, tribal society, the Radical Traditionalist viewpoint would seem to risk rejecting the very diversity of modern – or post-modern – society which made the resurgence of Paganism possible in the first place. Moynihan and Buckley are, however, conscious of this issue and its ironies, noting in the editorial preface of Volume One, “one of the advantages of living in the modern period is the tremendous number of options available to us should we choose to follow an anti-modern ‘script’ within our own lives” (9). This paradoxical, symbiotic relationship between the post-modern and the pre-modern is something which all modern Paganism has to grapple with, and one of the most interesting aspects of reading *Tyr* is reflecting on the different ways in which the fundamental “forward to the past” / “back to the future” dilemma of modern Paganism is addressed.

Tyr accordingly explores European Pagan religion, and the possibilities of its modern revival and revision within the context of a substan-

tive anti-modern, pro-traditionalist, neo-tribalist perspective that seeks to not only revive the spiritual traditions of ancient Norse-Germanic *religion* for the modern age, but also many aspects of Norse-Germanic *society* and *culture*. The editorial intertwining of notions of ethnic homogeneity and socio-cultural atavism may raise a red flag of warning to anyone who fears modern Norse-Germanic Paganism being overtaken by or associated with right-wing nationalism, as happened during the Third Reich, but *Tyr* is by no means a neo-Nazi or pro-Fascist publication. In their introduction to Volume Two, editors Moynihan and Buckley voice their unequivocal rejection of Nazism and neo-Nazism, explicitly rejecting the brutal Nazi program of racial eugenics as an example of the very kind of destructive modernity that Radical Traditionalists deplore, finding more in common with the German *völkisch* cultural movement that preceded and was simultaneously incorporated into and co-opted by Nazism. The rich and varied contents of the journal are a still more convincing demonstration that *Tyr* is not a bullhorn for a right-wing, ethno-nationalist agenda, let alone a Nazi call to arms, but an investigation of Pagan European, primarily Norse-Germanic spiritual and cultural traditions, and the possibilities for the renewal and adaptation of such traditions in the current day.

In email discussions with the reviewer and elsewhere, Moynihan has defined his own politics as neither of the left nor of the right but essentially libertarian. This is a perspective shared by many American Ásatrúar, though it should be noted that in the contemporary American context, libertarianism tends to be associated with the conservative-to-right-wing end of the political spectrum, as the current Tea Party movement illustrates. My impression is that Moynihan's views might be better characterized as more anti-modern and anarchist than anything else, hoping to cut away structures of modern life seen as oppressive and obstructive and thereby clear the way for the revival of what are considered older and better ways of thinking and being.

Tyr's contents are not limited to discussing Norse-Germanic myth, tradition and culture, though that is the predominant subject matter. Non-Germanic-oriented contributions include a number of fine articles on Celtic Pagan literature and lore, which are found across all three volumes, an excellent, comprehensive account of the Baltic Pagan Romuva movement by Vilius Rudra Dundzila, interviews and reviews dealing with various Pagan musicians, a number of articles on arts and crafts, including a fine exploration of pre-modern European herbal traditions by Christian Rättsch, and several essays by the prolific Pagan scholar Nigel Pennick. The first volume contains a translation of a 1978 interview with the French Indo-Europeanist Georges Dumézil con-

ducted by the pro-Pagan, anti-modernist French philosopher Alain de Benoist, who is himself interviewed in the second volume and represented by an article of his own in the third volume. Benoist is generally perceived as a right-wing intellectual in the French academic community, and his strong representation in *Tyr* illustrates the possibilities of overlap between certain right-wing viewpoints and the anti-modern Radical Traditionalism espoused by the editors. This is also demonstrated by Joscelyn Godwin's sympathetic treatment of the anti-modernist, esoteric philosopher Julius Evola, a past supporter of both the Fascist and Nazi movements.

Some of the more prominent Germanic-oriented contents include ruminations on the philosophy of culture by Stephen Flowers in the first volume, another Flowers essay in the second volume on the Northern Renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a precursor of the Norse-Germanic Pagan revival movement, and

American Ásatrú founding figure Steven McNallen's reflections on the development of the movement over the last four decades in the third volume, which also features Jónína Berg's touching reminiscences of the Icelandic Ásatrú leader Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson.

Tyr is certainly one of the more thoughtful and scholarly, if not fully "academic," Pagan publications available, and is recommended both for the quality of many of its articles on various Pagan and Pagan-related issues, and for its more controversial political aspects, which are a dimension of the modern Pagan revival in need of more sustained exposition, debate and analysis.

Michael Strmiska
State University of New York –
Orange County Community College