

Book Reviews

Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 262 pp., \$69.50 (cloth), \$28.50 (paperback).

In anthropology's formative years, Edward Tylor proposed that indigenous people were mistaken for believing that 'spirits' enlivened inanimate objects, and he argued that this 'animism' marks the origin of religion. Such a view is itself mistaken: indigenous communities are not the key to the religions of the past, but are dynamic and creative agents of their own survival in the present. According to the 'new animism' currently theorized in religious studies and anthropology (e.g., Nurit Bird-David, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Signe Howell, Carlos Fausto), indigenous realities are far more sophisticated than Tylor allowed. Hallowell informs us that the Ojibwa's Algonquian language classifies persons and personal actions differently to objects and impersonal events, due to a grammatical 'animate' and 'inanimate' gender distinction. The Ojibwa's preferred self-definition, Anishinaabeg, identifies them as 'human persons', and they speak of a wide range of 'other-than-human persons', including tree persons, stone persons, fish persons and cat persons. Animism is a relational ontology according to which the world is filled with people, only some of whom are human. For human people there are other-than-human-people, and for tree people there are other-than-tree people.

On a daily basis, animists come into contact with a range of people who require respect and etiquette in order to maintain harmonious relations. All too often, human people offend other-than-humans, and these relationships must be repaired. It is usually the role of shamans to mediate between the worlds of humans and non-humans in order to negotiate better relations. They achieve this by entering the other-world(s) of other-than-human people – what Westerners might term altered states of consciousness, or, as Harvey puts it, 'altered styles of communication'. Some Inuit shamans undertake a hazardous journey to the otherworld where they meet the fearsome *Sedna* who must be placated in order to re-establish good relations with seal-people offended by a hunter who used an inappropriate tool/spear to hunt them. Shamanism is often a dark business. For some Amazonian communities, eating (other-than-human people) involves cannibalism, in that animals are actually human. It is only humans who see them in animal form. Shamans, with their altered modes of perception, can see animals in their real human forms and must broker situations where animals are willing to be killed and eaten. Animism and shamanism in the Amazon are predatory affairs.

These examples from Harvey's book offer a reminder of how different indigenous ontologies and epistemologies are from our own. We tend to position humans at the top of the evolutionary schema with nature exploited as a resource, but this schema is thwarted by an animist relational ontology. At the same time, this animist otherness

should not be seen as inaccessible or entirely alien. Harvey demonstrates what an animist worldview has to offer to a late modern world. He discusses green politics, road protesting and ecology as well as a variety of contemporary Paganisms. This is not to assume that animism is necessarily green, or that road protesting and Pagans are necessarily animistic, but to point to instances where respectful relations with non-humans are crucial.

Pagan studies has gained significant momentum over the last twenty years, and, as scholarly discourse, has contributed to the construction of Pagan identities. Animism is now making an impact among Pagan 'neo-tribes' (as Maffesoli would term them). The Pagan shaman Gordon 'the toad' MacLellan marks one such example. Gordon is an environmental educator using such activities as pond dipping, mask-making and sacred dance to encourage children and other humans to establish strong, sensitive, and respectful bonds with the natural world. Heathens engage with ancestors at such prehistoric sites as West Kennet long barrow in Avebury (Wiltshire), and communicate with 'wights' (spirits or other-than-human beings of various forms) in the living landscape of Britain. As contemporary Pagans are increasingly re-indigenizing themselves in the landscapes of Britain and expressing this identity at prehistoric sacred sites (www.sacredsites.org.uk), so new animism may inform a nuanced understanding of these engagements.

Harvey's theorizing of new animism has significant implications across a range of disciplines. According to the archaeologist Colin Renfrew, "'I create therefore I am" [is] the basic statement of the artist through the ages'. This claim reifies the eighteenth-century definition of art as *original* (situated in a capitalist dealer-critic system) and the artist as inspired (Kantian) *genius* – a metanarrative that archaeologists of art and art historians are seeking to revise. If rock art can be termed *art*, then it is clearly an entirely different order of visual culture than canonical art history allows. While the shamanistic approach to rock art has had its problems, it has been re-invigorated by Thomas Dowson, who situates Bushman (San) rock art within an animist worldview, with shamans as agents and rock art as a resource in negotiating human–non-human relations within the context of sex, gender, and hunting and gathering. My own research posits that rock-art researchers consistently interpret landscapes as natural palimpsests inscribed with (human cultural) meaning, such as rock art. With an animistic approach, this dualistic, essentially Cartesian, and solipsistic approach is disrupted and neatly sidestepped. Of course rock art imagery is engraved and painted onto rock surfaces, but from the artists' point of view, this engagement with the rock (rock-people?) and the wider landscape filled with other-than-human-people may have more to do with other-than-human people engaging with humans, than a straightforward (one-way) cultural marker or inscription of human meaning. A more indigenous understanding is gained, perhaps more in line with the rock-art producers and consumers themselves. Harvey's new animism thus facilitates a more sensitive and nuanced approach to indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, and, in the context of other art and artists, might assist in refining and advancing Alfred Gell's theory of art and agency. I anticipate that *Animism: Respecting the Living World* will quickly become a classic.

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Nikki Bado-Fralick, *Coming to the Edge of the Circle: A Wiccan Initiation Ritual* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), xii + 181 pp. \$35.00 (cloth).

For the vast majority of people in North America, I suspect, the Wiccan rituals of dedication and initiation remain shrouded in an uncomfortable sense of mystery. This is not because Wiccans and Witches are necessarily uncomfortable or mysterious in and of themselves, but because popular perceptions of these ritual processes are both tainted by centuries of deeply embedded cultural fears and trivialized by much of what passes for “witchcraft” or “wicca” in late modern popular culture. In *Coming to the Edge of the Circle*, however, Nikki Bado-Fralick, who is both a religious studies scholar and a long-standing Wiccan priestess, has given us a wonderful addition to the academic material aimed at overcoming the prejudice inherent in both taint and trivia. Written in a lively, accessible style, her detailed descriptions of the various stages in the Wiccan initiation process – including the formal rites of dedication and initiation – offer an engaging exploration of modern Pagan belief and practice. More than that, though, she presents both a sophisticated analysis of these rituals and a welcome discussion on the often contentious dynamics of reflexivity, self-research, and auto-ethnography.

Bado-Fralick sets out her primary task clearly. Referring to well-known paradigms established by scholars such as Van Gennep, Turner, and Lincoln, she seeks “to challenge notions of initiation as a tripartite process with sharply defined movements of separation, liminality, and reincorporation” (p. vii). More particularly, she writes, “I want to see to what extent the scholarship on ritual initiation fits my own experience as someone who has been initiated and who has initiated others” (p. 63). Since in some academic circles these paradigms have come to have something akin to the force of an ideology, any attempt to test them against the lived practice and experience of religious believers is worthwhile. While some might contend that an attempt to test these paradigms against one’s own lived experience is ill-advised, I believe that Bado-Fralick has succeeded at least in part because she is unwilling to sacrifice either her integrity as a religious practitioner or her standards as a researcher-scholar.

The author approaches her subject through detailed discussions of her own coven’s rituals of dedication and initiation, which are covered in the book’s three middle chapters and which form, as it were, its auto-ethnographic heart. Intertwined with this, she includes well-crafted introductions to the history of Wicca and Witchcraft in general, to the basic principles, beliefs, and rituals tools of Wicca, and to the process by which one chooses (or finds) the Wiccan path. Building on Kasulis’s theoretical principle that “there is no such thing as religion, only religious people” (p. 41), each of the central chapters considers its topic both from the perspective of the person involved (the dedicant or initiate) and from that of the community with which he or she is involved. The processes of seekership, dedication, and initiation, then, are seen as interactive, interdependent, and mutually interwoven. No one is left unaffected. To these descriptions she adds her analysis of the structural and theological elements of the process.

Although, at the beginning of her discussion of the insider-outsider problem (chapter 1), Bado-Fralick suggests that those who are less interested in this theoretical material can skip ahead to join her “on the journey to the Circle’s edge” (p. 4), I would suggest that readers not do so. Instead, I would encourage them to pause and reflect on her careful, nuanced approach to the issue. One of the problems that has arisen in a

number of modern Pagan auto-ethnographies is that, in the rush to overcome cultural (and academic) stigma about their subject, authors have too easily slipped into religious apologetic, something which has unfortunately occluded the scholarly analysis the authors intended to present. *Coming to the Edge of the Circle*, on the other hand, is a delight to read precisely because it does not do this. Rather, Bado-Fralick's approach can serve as a model for other scholar-practitioners who seek to pursue similar work. Wondering in the conclusion, for example, what is lost in the process of reflexivity (or what I have called here "auto-ethnography"), she answers, "the purity of objectivity," though she recognizes that "while purity is an admirable goal, it is not...a realistic one" (p. 141). Problematic though it may be, the language of "objectivity" still creeps into debates about the insider-outsider problem, and is likely to do so for the foreseeable future. Although she does not say this explicitly, Bado-Fralick offers another, more useful way of framing the discussion. We will never be able to achieve "the purity of objectivity," but we can do our scholarly work within the framework of fairness—both to our research subjects, and to our scholarly disciplines. This is a book to which all scholars of modern Paganism should pay attention, and, more than that, scholars of new religious movements and ritual practice more generally.

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Michael F. Strmiska, ed. *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 382 pp., \$85.00 (cloth) \$105 (ebook).

With *Modern Paganism in World Cultures*, editor Michael Strmiska offers readers an engaging and insightful look into several under-reported forms of European and North American Contemporary Paganism. The collection is extremely well written, accessible, and organized in such a way that professors of religious studies will immediately see its application for their courses on comparative Pagan religions. Each chapter is fully and extensively referenced, including both online and traditional print resources, ideal for students and scholars who wish to pursue additional information about the Pagan traditions covered. *Modern Paganism* is sure to make a delightful addition to the growing body of first-rate scholarship on Contemporary Paganism.

While not dealing with Paganism in a fully global sense, the book's focus on traditions centered around a European-North American axis nevertheless provides a much-needed complement to works that deal exclusively with British or American Wicca. *Modern Paganism* includes chapters on Italian American Stregheria, Druidry in Contemporary Ireland, Asatru in Iceland and America, British Heathenry, Ukrainian Native Faith, and Lithuanian Paganism. It also includes a chapter on Paganism in the US military, which at first seems an eccentric choice, but makes perfect sense within the context of the book's overall design.

In chapter 1 Strmiska introduces the reader to several important and often inter-related overarching themes that repeat throughout the book: the roles of both ethnicity and race in the construction of Pagan identity, the nature and place of tradition in Pagan practice, and the relationship between Paganism and Christianity. For example, Strmiska notes a critical difference on the subject of identity between Europeans and North Americans: Europeans tend to place a greater emphasis on ethnicity, while North

Americans downplay or dismiss it as irrelevant. Since ethnic culture and identity remain important organizing principles of social life, Europeans also have a tendency to understand religion as received tradition and are likely to perceive Paganism as reconstructed rather than invented – in contrast to their more eclectic North American cousins, for whom race and ethnicity are often far from straightforward affairs.

Subsequent chapters on particular cultural traditions of Paganism explore the nuances between these multiple sets of tensions – ethnic vs. universal, reconstruction vs. reinvention, ancient vs. modern, and the often problematic relationship of Paganism and Christianity – within particular cultural traditions and demonstrate how these tensions propel a dynamic, constantly evolving sense of Pagan religious self-understanding. Some, but not all, of the chapters' authors include explicit statements about their own identities as scholars/practitioners and their use of a reflexive research methodology, or what is sometimes termed "auto-ethnography," as part of their analysis of the tradition. (One of the best examples is the chapter by Jenny Blain on Heathenry.) Scholars like myself who wish to problematize the all-too-easy distinction between "insider" and "outsider" will find these chapters particularly useful demonstrations to students of the process of locating one's position within this additional tension that runs through the field of religious ethnography.

Each chapter of *Modern Paganism* also typically includes maps of the geographical area(s) discussed, interviews with selected practitioners of the traditions, photographs of practitioners and/or aspects of material culture, and some reflection on the future of Pagan religions within that region or ethnic group. The maps are a good idea, especially for students whose grasp of geography is a bit vague, but I found myself wishing for more detailed maps when authors referred to groups from specific counties or regional areas. Taken together, the chapters provide an accessible and coherent framework within which to begin a comparative study of the similarities and contrasts between different forms of Contemporary Paganism. A handsome and well-made volume, *Modern Paganism in World Cultures* is securely placed to become a mainstay of the Pagan scholar's bookshelf.

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Christopher McIntosh, *Gardens of the Gods: Myth, Magic, and Meaning* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2005), 203 pp., \$22.95 (paper).

It seems natural that people should imagine paradise as a garden. For most of us, wilderness is too stark, too threatening to be entirely welcoming, while the purely human landscape of the city often seems lifeless. The garden, on the other hand, strikes a perfect balance between nature and nurture, between the wild and the tame. It is not surprising, then, that the very word *paradise* is originally derived from the Old Persian *pairidaeza*, which means "garden."

In this engaging work, Christopher McIntosh, one of the most erudite writers on esotericism today, investigates the many dimensions the garden has taken on in the human imagination. To many creators of this most exquisite form of agriculture, McIntosh reminds us, "gardens were – or are – not merely places of beauty but places of meaning." As he goes on to show, many cultures regard gardens as means of com-

munication much like sacred buildings, and possessing their own language of correspondences. Indeed, McIntosh's appendix on the symbolism inherent in plants (yew and cypress symbolize death; the fig, sexuality) is one of the most valuable parts of this book.

As *Gardens of the Gods* explains, the primordial garden was a microcosm of the world. The Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, dating from the third millennium BCE, describes paradise as composed of four rivers radiating out in the four directions from a sacred center. This is much like the account of Eden in Genesis (and may well be the source of it). Not coincidentally, it resembles a mandala, and this pattern went on to become a standard plan for Islamic gardens.

Gardens of the Gods is perhaps at its most informative in its discussion of the Renaissance garden. While there was some interest in the subject in the Middle Ages (a German monk named Walafrid Strabo wrote a treatise on it in the ninth century), it was only with the rebirth of the Greco-Roman sensibility in the fifteenth century that the garden came into its own as an art form in the West. McIntosh argues, quite plausibly, that Pagan images appear so abundantly in gardens of that period and later because "the deities of the ancient world were, to some extent, personifications of natural forces and therefore at home in a natural environment."

One of the most fascinating sections of *Gardens of the Gods* explores the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, "Poliphilo's War of Sleep and Love," an enigmatic romance written by Francisco Colonna and published in 1499. The *Hypnerotomachia*, whose meaning has never been entirely deciphered, contains a long allegory of Poliphilo's search for his beloved Polia in a rich and bizarre symbolic landscape. McIntosh quotes the Italo-Romanian Princess Emanuela Krezulesco-Quaranta, who argues in her book *Les jardins du songe* ("Gardens of the Dream," a work that has never been published in English, though it has attracted a cult following in certain esoteric circles) that the *Hypnerotomachia* is an allegory of an initiatic journey.

Whether or not that is so, the *Hypnerotomachia* influenced a number of classic Renaissance gardens in Italy, and also possibly the one at Versailles. As McIntosh goes on to say, Versailles (which "smacks of *folie de grandeur*, and yet in its own way... is magnificent") is itself a grandiose allegory of the *splendor solis*, the splendor of the sun — appropriately for a creation of Louis XIV, the Sun King (Louis himself composed a brief guide to the gardens at Versailles).

McIntosh takes in a wide swath of the world in his survey, from Persia, China, and Japan to eccentric modern-day creations such as Ian Hamilton Finlay's Little Sparta in the Lanarkshire hills of Scotland, which is punctuated by little scraps of haiku-like poetry ("One orange arm of the world's oldest windmill") and which serves as a tool in its creator's self-proclaimed war against the "secular terror." There is also Niki de Saint Phalle's Tarot Garden in Tuscany, a six-acre marvel displaying figures corresponding to the Tarot's Major Arcana, including "the Hermit, an austere form in mirror glass with the head of a space alien," and "the Devil, a sinister, bat-winged apparition with a phallus shaped like a gold claw."

As fascinating as all this is, it would be somewhat academic if McIntosh had not concluded his book with chapters suggesting how to go about designing one's own garden of meaning. His advice is both sensible and down-to-earth, and his examples do not require the grandiose budgets of the *nouveaux riches* but are simple specimens such as one might create behind an ordinary English house.

Gardens of the Gods is, in short, a learned and exquisite guide to a subject that is too

often treated only in the most humdrum way. Reflecting on the book, I find myself wondering what McIntosh would have to say about other configurations of sacred space—Damanhur, for example, the weird underground “Temple of Mankind” built in secrecy underground in the Italian Alps. Perhaps in future works he will take his sharp but affectionate eye on other forms by which humans make the material an image of the immaterial.

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Linda C. Hults, *The Witch as Muse: Art, Gender, and Power in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 352 pp., \$49.95 (cloth).

The Web page for “Flying ointments” at About.com’s Pagan/Wiccan section is decorated with Hans Baldung Grien’s 1510 woodcut *Witches Preparing for the Sabbath Flight*. Frequently reproduced in works on the witch-trial period, the piece shows “a catalog of *maleficia*”: an urn labeled with a “magical” alphabet, oven forks for flying upon, a brush for applying “flying ointment,” animal and human bones, steam, dead and withered trees, and of course naked women of different ages. In such works, this and other early modern art is used to illustrate the reality of popular conceptions of witchcraft, the actual preparation of flying ointments, or more skeptically, the suggestion that drawing and painting “witches” merely gave male artists a legitimate and financially rewarding excuse to depict the female form.

Not so, says Linda Hults, an art historian at the College of Wooster, Ohio. Her feminist, somewhat psychoanalytic reading of the work of Baldung and other artists, ranging from the early sixteenth century through the eighteenth (Francisco Goya) indeed explores “gendered creativity.” But she sees these artists as seeking to display the grotesque and frightening female body and its “transgressive sexuality” in order to demonstrate their control over the forces of evil and disorder. (Hults is perhaps over-fond of the adjective “transgressive.”) Her review of witch-trial literature moves from Jules Michelet to Margaret Murray to Lyndal Roper’s *Oedipus and the Devil* with its thesis that early modern European women responded to the harsh realities of their lives by spinning fantasies of sabbats and witchcraft, for she wishes to stay closest to the misogynist theory of witch-hunting, rather than viewing it as theological crisis (Walter Stevens) or a crisis of state-building (Christina Lerner, Robert Muchembled). Ideologically if not methodologically she is closest to the views of Anne Llewellyn Barstow: the witch-trial period paralleled violence against women today. Male artists gained prestige through showing off their own creativity and simultaneously denigrating women.

The version of witchcraft depicted by Albrecht Dürer, his student Hans Baldung, and other artists such as Frans Francken is not to be taken as literal descriptions of a witch-cult but as titillating, “edgy” works produced for educated male art consumers, Hults argues. While aware that Francken’s (for example) work also speaks to Catholic responses to heresy, Hults is ultimately concerned with the issue of control, particularly the control by upper- or middle-class men of their wives and daughters. Are they pious and anxious about “the threatening growth of secular knowledge”? Then they must control their wives’ and daughters’ intellectual curiosity, not to mention their erotic curiosity. (The *Mallus Maleficarum*, with its linking of lust and femininity, was

increasingly reprinted in the late sixteenth century.) “Thus, elite male viewers of Francken’s paintings of witches could see their own thirst for knowledge and fascination with the exotic against the foil of the misguided curiosity of women... Francken deflected potential criticism of these curious pictures by gendering curiosity itself and placing it at the root of women’s involvement in witchcraft.”

Ways of understanding the witch-trial era have focused on an alleged moral defect in Christianity, an alleged surviving Paganism or shamanic cult, struggles between church and state, city and countryside, the pursuit of actual or imagined heretics, and, since Michelet and Matilda Gage (1826–1898), the subjugation of women. For those who wish to give greatest weight to the latter, Hults’s close analysis of these artworks demonstrates the role of artists in creating an image of the female witch as “the vehicle of disorder and disruption” and a threat to patriarchal family, church, and state. The artists’ own thoughts about the reality of witchcraft are irrelevant; more important is how the pictures shaped the discourse: “The paraphernalia surrounding [depicted] witches may sometimes inform us about actual magical practices at the folk level, but the primary insight we gain from the images is a greater understanding of the discursive pressures that shaped the consciousness, experience, and actions of early modern people.”

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