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Book Reviews

Jacob Rabinowitz, *The Rotting Goddess: The Origin of the Witch in Classical Antiquity's Demonization of Fertility Religion* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1998), 153 pp., $14.00 (paper).

The dramatic title for this book refers to the fascinating and comparatively obscure Greek goddess Hekate. Essentially, Rabinowitz's thesis holds that this figure was originally a Neolithic agricultural deity from Anatolia (akin to the Sumerian Innana and the Canaanite Ashtoreth), who was imported by the Greeks into their pantheon prior to being adopted by the Romans, and that this lengthy, thousand-year journey across the ancient Mediterranean world saw her gradual degeneration from munificent fertility goddess to maleficent proto-witch figure. On the surface, this type of narrative is instantly recognisable to followers of modern nature religions; however, Rabinowitz's arguments are a lot more subtle (and plausible) than those which typically appear in such circles, describing as they do a convoluted rather than contiguous development, and backed up (mainly) by copious and detailed classical sources.

According to Rabinowitz, in addition to her role as matronly goddess of growing things, Hekate also functioned as a hypostasis or personification of the 'World Tree' (the 'Cosmic Axis' that features in many mythologies worldwide), having the ability — as was apparently common among fertility deities, such as her Sumerian counterpart — to traverse celestial, human and chthonic realms. But for the Greeks, Hekate's range was horizontal as well as vertical, since she also served as a goddess of the crossroads (an association the author attributes to her later mergence with Enodia, another fertility goddess). Interestingly, Rabinowitz runs with this fairly well-attested ascription by speculating that it may help account for another of Hekate's notable features, this being her 'triple goddess' aspect, an attribute clearly illustrated in a number of contemporary artefacts. He explains that the origins of this role are illustrated by early representations of the deity (*hekataion*), which consisted of 'a post or pole hung with wooden masks', and were situated 'at the place where three roads meet' as 'protection for travellers' (18-19).

As with some of Prudence Jones's recent arguments, this scheme might come as a relief to those Pagans who have found themselves bemused or upset by the thoroughgoing debunking the 'triple goddess' notion of Robert Graves has been subject to from certain scholars in recent years. However, Rabinowitz is also at pains to point out that, while she eventually accrued strong lunar associations, these were in fact a misleading Roman imposition prompted by superficial resemblances to the goddess Luna, whose influential cult had no equivalent among the more solar-oriented Greeks. Rather, he avers, this attribute can more readily be explained by referring to a triplicity of goddesses with whom she appears to have had a much greater affinity, these being Juno, Diana and Persephone, the 'archaic triple Juno' (50).

In Roman hands, the goddess's fortunes changed for the worse. Always a rather vaguely defined character, she became an even more nebulous figure, turning from 'an effector of change' to a representation of 'Change itself' (53). Moreover, and simultaneously, Hekate's chthonic, not to mention 'ecstatic' (64), associations were further highlighted and stigmatised, thus transforming her into a sinister and corrupting entity associated with death, decay and nightmares—'Hekate-Persephone who takes her dinner in the graveyard' (62), and whose dog-like 'howl shakes the universe' (65). However, Rabinowitz persuasively argues that as Hekate was fading into the realms of virtual abstraction, the thematic baton was passed, via other mythic *femmes fatales* such as Circe and Medea, to the characteristically Romanised witch figure—a 'monster of sexual appetite' (78), usually portrayed as a crone but also on occasion as a beautiful temptress. He supports his argument by referring to the way that Greek lore relating to the goddess re-emerged time and time again in later Latin writings on witchcraft. Most notably, such texts contain subverted allusions to Hekate in their depictions of witches as expert in the use of herbal charms, and as possessors of animal familiars (Hekate was often depicted with accompanying lions), frequenters of the type of geographical features associated with the goddess, these being 'hills and rivers and vegetation' (103) (although Roman accounts often portrayed them as city dwellers who were so compelled to perform their rites on 'rooftops' [99]), and holders of wild celebrations in parallel with actual seasonal festivals (in which respect Rabinowitz singles out the Roman 'New Year rites' as having most significance [106-107]).

However, lest any contemporary Pagans attempt to cite the author's arguments as evidence for certain latter-day theories that witches were 'real' characters who maintained the remnants of an ancient fertility religion tragically demonised by patriarchy and civilisation, two important points should be borne in mind. Firstly, any such resonances should be seen first and foremost as narrative products, rather than illustrations of actual religious continuity—that is, they describe a '*literary* not a ritual tradition' (116). There was, as the author points out, 'never an original basis in Hekate worship for witchcraft' (116); furthermore, Rabinowitz is adamant that the classical witch was a wholly fictional character—a '*mythological* figure' (115) who served, it seems (as so many mythic characters appear to do), to give dramatic flesh to humanity's perennial preoccupation with sex and death. Secondly, unlike many modern Pagans, the author is unconvinced by the appropriateness of feminist interpretations of such developments, arguing that they cannot explain the 'far from gynophobic character' of the authors responsible for a number of the Roman accounts, nor why their Hellenic forebears chose to portray their witches (such as Medea) in a comparatively positive light, despite that culture's far greater disposition toward 'misogynistic literature' (81). Later on, he suggests that the Roman witch figure may have acquired her unprecedentedly threatening aspect in late antiquity by virtue of the classical world's by then overbearingly jaded *Weltanschauung*, memorably describing her as 'one-woman Apocalypse' for a society 'sick with History' (107)

Rabinowitz concludes that Hekate's negative transformation from 'nymph-like generation spirit of Asia Minor' into 'Rotting Goddess of Rome' (122) can be understood as 'the predictable outcome of a particular type of culture clash' (120), as occurred when the societies of settled 'agricultural authochthones' were overwhelmed by wandering bands of warriors (119). Typically, this resulted in a sense of ambivalence on the part of the invading culture towards the indigenous and hitherto insuperable fertility goddesses, who, although reduced in stature, retained their chthonic strange-

ness, becoming at once sinister and beguiling (indeed, bewitching).

That said, as Rabinowitz himself admits, much of the evidence is circumstantial, and this has resulted in him backing up his concluding arguments with examples from Scandinavian and—even more curiously, perhaps—Native American myths. However, the parallels are striking (although possibly not as conclusive as the author would like them to be), and the author provides more back up from the Mediterranean world in the first appendix, where he persuasively argues for the relevance of the Hebraic tale of the Witch of Endor to his thesis.

Elsewhere, some of Rabinowitz's attempts to read 'between the lines' of his source materials are more contestable. Chiefly, this is the case where he proposes that 'we cannot help but suspect a certain continuity' with the type of 'Great Mother' figure found in the Anatolian ruin of Çatal Hüyük (17), his point presumably being that Hekate's roots might extend back to the matriarchal, Goddess-worshipping cultures that Marija Gimbutas proposed were amply evidenced by that site. Unfortunately, as Ronald Hutton has pointed out on a number of occasions, such arguments have never really held much water in academic terms, which strongly suggests that to make too much of this type of speculation might not be the best course of action in a scholarly work. Happily, however, Rabinowitz leaves it at that, and whatever one's personal feelings on the matter, it has to be said that the point is hardly central to his overall thesis.

Also potentially troublesome—although undeniably fascinating—are the (perhaps too tempting) shamanic parallels Rabinowitz draws, which some might think serve to push the comparative analysis envelope a tad too far. (For example, it is difficult to see how a phenomenon that perhaps the foremost academic authority on the subject, Piers Vitebsky, describes as being primarily a 'hunter's religion' can be so readily squared with Rabinowitz's portrayal of Hekate as the defining goddess of an early agricultural society.) Rabinowitz justifies this course by comparing classical sources denoting witch practices with what appear to be congruous examples mainly drawn from Eliade's seminal but by no means uncontested study, although in his defence he clearly states that any such resemblances were most likely the product of latter-day thematic borrowings rather than direct transmission, and—perhaps wisely—has saved such considerations for the appendices.

Overall, though, the book is rather convincing, not to mention lucid and scrupulously annotated (although let down somewhat by its lack of index). Furthermore, what could have been a stodgy or dry exegesis (always a peril when dealing with classical texts) has been rendered an accessible—and at times, heady—read by the author's prose-style, which is poetic and witty in turn. Thus, for example, Rabinowitz writes that such was the magical potency attributed by the Roman world to the goddess's mythic followers, 'the witches' powers (began) to extend, like Hekate's, over all three worlds, flickering the stars, bursting open the earth, reversing the rivers and tempesting the sea', although doubtless not everyone will appreciate his description of the 'drawing down the moon' rite on the same page as 'the spiritual equivalent of rolling the tanks into Prague'(102).

The author's enthusiasm for his goddess is evident from the beginning, in the form of a poetic dedication to her, which is so effusive as to suggest that somewhere along the line Rabinowitz has developed an affinity with Hekate that reaches well beyond conventional scholarly limits. Whether this connection served as the original inspiration for his endeavour or grew as a consequence of his immersion in the subject

is difficult to say. But when all is said, it is ultimately irrelevant to one's enjoyment of what has clearly been a labour of love, in honour of a figure arguably worthy of such attention.

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Ronald Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003), xviii + 320 pp., £19.95 (cloth).

At the conclusion of John Ford's classic Western movie *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), the newspaper reporter tells the senator (Jimmy Stewart), "When the legend becomes the fact, print the legend." That yet another King Arthur movie is playing in theaters this year proves that his mythic impact is still strong—and guarantees that historians like Professor Hutton will continue to be able to examine the complex interplay of myth and history and mythic history.

Witches, Druids and King Arthur follows Hutton's magisterial *The Triumph of the Moon*, his history of contemporary British Paganism. Unlike that book, with its single theme, this is a collection of spin-offs, echoes, and further thoughts expressed in essay form. One of them, "A Modest Look at Ritual Nudity," appeared in *The Pomegranate* in 2001. Others deal with the tension between mythos and academic history as applied to Arthur, the town and shrines of Glastonbury, and ancient and contemporary Druidry. Yet other essays discuss the Neo-Platonic roots of contemporary Paganism in general, the "Inklings" (J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, in particular), and the relationship between historian as participant-observer and his community of study, in this case contemporary British Pagans.

The public, he writes, whether as readers or in the audience of a lecturer, can appreciate "the spectacle of myth-busting" as much as the original myth itself. They can enjoy both "positive" histories (in American terms, for instance, the "winning of the West" mythos that underlies John Ford's movies) and they can also appreciate revisionism; either way, the historian's performance is a "bardic art." "[The public] still wants from historians above all what it has always wanted since the first bard tuned an instrument to sing of days of old: to be edified and to be entertained, and of the two the latter is the more important." While the historian must work with integrity, rigorous methodology, and logic, in the end, the final product must have the "carrying power of myth" (37).

Thus, Hutton laments the tendency of some of his colleagues to write off Arthur altogether, given that the reliable evidence for his actual existence is slim indeed, whether as king or as *dux bellorum*, leader of a Romano-Celtic war band. His essay "Arthur and the Academics" traces the ups and downs of Arthur's historicity through generations of historians. The revisionists, he notes, currently hold the upper hand but cannot answer the question of how "a character who may never have existed came, within three hundred years of his presumed lifetime, to be the greatest hero of his people" (58).

The cherished mythos of contemporary Paganism is that it represents a continuation of the common people's religion, nowhere more strikingly expressed than in the last twenty years' worth of Pagan song, such works as "Burning Times" or "We Won't Wait Any Longer," which, in the face of historical evidence, maintain the story of the "nine

million [Pagan] witches killed" and of an underground religious attitude, if not an underground religion, held in defiance of official Christianity. The reality, Hutton argues, is more likely that the continuity is the transmission of written texts between generations of intellectual occultists and small-p pagan literati.

He traces the linkage in "The New Old Paganism," an attempt to link the intellectual world of late Classical Paganism—at that time forced to justify itself in the face of Christian attack—with the contemporary Pagan revival. He argues for a "Pagan survival," but one that is academic rather than folkloric. In other words, scholars and practitioners both are wrong to look for survivals in country custom, folk songs, the recipes of flying ointments, local legends, and seeming pre-Christian practices. The real survival, Hutton says, lies in the refined religious ideas of the Neo-Platonists, such as Porphyry (late third century CE), known also for his attacks on what he saw as the false and philosophically inconsistent monotheism of the Christians. In this era, Hekate, for example, was elevated to a savior deity, while Nature (sometimes equated with Zeus's wife, Rhea) could be seen by both Platonist Pagans and Platonizing Christians as carrying forth the will of the supreme Godhead.

A second characteristic of the time was the rise in theurgy, which collapsed the traditional (and pre-Christian) distinction between public, cultic religion and private magic. This rise seems to have been centered in the eastern Mediterranean provinces, particularly Egypt, and it is exemplified by the so-called Chaldean Oracles and the writing of the late Neo-Platonist Iamblichus, who, while treated poorly by many later commentators, was important to the twentieth-century magical group centered on Dion Fortune and Charles Seymour. The actions of the theurgists (a tiny minority of their time, it must be remembered) included the creation of small mystery cults, the veneration of natural forces, and the belief that, through magic, divine energy can be drawn into the phenomenal world—all very much parallel to Wicca,

First modern ceremonial magicians—those of the Golden Dawn and its offshoots—and then Wiccans adopted something of the Neo-Platonic cosmos: "When Doreen Valiente wrote its most famous representation of female divinity, the Charge of the Goddess, in the 1950s, she made this deity one from whom 'all things proceed,' and to whom 'all things must return'. This is a Neoplatonic deity, and also a Hermetic one, clearly recognisable from a range of late classical texts" (132). Yet Hutton also recognizes, skidding into a conclusion, that Wicca inverts much of the practice of ancient theurgists: today's Wiccans are generally not ascetic in their personal lives and do not seek to transcend the phenomenal world and unite with the One. Rather, contemporary Pagans tend to view the universe as benevolent and seek to drawn down divine power in order to enrich earthly life.

Here, beyond examining the Neo-Platonic, Stoic, or Hermetic roots of contemporary Paganism—and such roots exist although they are not often so named—we would have to leave the Mediterranean world of antiquity to find the root for this paradisiacal outlook. I would suggest that it lies in a remark tossed out by J. Gordon Melton, scholar of new religious movements, when he said that the first holy books of the Neopagans were anthropology texts. A great deal of contemporary Paganism is based, at least emotionally, on thoughts of a golden past populated by nobler peoples, whether that past is mediated by writers of fiction or by maverick anthropologists. (Let us not forget that Gerald Gardner too could describe himself as an anthropologist when writing *Witchcraft Today*.)

Witches, Druids and King Arthur is held together by its author's enthusiasm for

testing cherished myths, looking for historical connections, and tying up some loose ends from his earlier work, most notably *Triumph of the Moon*. As such it will present a challenge to library catalogers, but, as bardic art, a pleasure to his readers.

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James L. Pearson, *Shamanism and the Ancient Mind: A Cognitive Approach to Archaeology* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2002), ix + 198 pp., $72 (cloth), $27.95 (paper)

In Americanist archaeology there is an "in" joke among excavators that whenever someone finds some object or cultural feature that cannot be immediately explained in functional terms, the object or feature is identified as "religious" and thus outside the realm of acceptable interpretation. Recently the archaeology of religion and the effect of religion and belief on material culture has become a popular research in archaeology: this is the second volume in AltaMira's Archaeology of Religion series. *Shamanism and the Ancient Mind* presents as its central thesis that ancient paintings and carvings on stone were created by shamans, often under the effects of hallucinogenic substances.

Pearson begins the volume by providing a history of archaeological explanation in the United States from the early twentieth century to the present (Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and the beginning of Chapter 4). Regardless, of Pearson's point, the historic treatment of archaeological interpretation seemed overlong and repetitive. The goal of the presentation of such an extensive history of American archaeology is to provide a historic contrast with what Pearson terms as the cognitive approach to archaeological explanation. Within the cognitive model human artifacts are created, used and changed by individuals as they live their lives in social space. Cognitive researchers seek to recover values, beliefs within given societies as expressed in their material remains. One area of research amenable to cognitive archaeological interpretation is rock art, since the images of rock art represent the product of the mind.

Pearson next presents a review of archaeological history of the interpretation of rock art. Previously rock art has been viewed as evidence for totemism, evidence for hunting magic, and more recently, as portraying myths or symbols. Based on previously published work with the Kalahari San, Pearson views rock art as representing the products of shamans. Drawing on a generic ethnographic model of shamanism, Pearson interprets rock art images in terms of the results of various types of shamanic experiences including the hallucinations induced through trance or the use of psychoactive plants. Such images include the emergence or entry of figures into cracks in the rock, suggestive of entrance into the underworld, transformation of parts of the human body, or the transformation of humans into animals. The appearance of grid-like or spiral images in rock art represent the entopic images derived from the use of hallucinogens by shamans. It is these entopic images that are important for cognitive archaeological studies in that current research in neuropsychology suggests that humans experience hallucinogens in the same way and share cross-culturally the same types of images.

Pearson tends to gloss over or avoid published research that would seem to serve as precursors to his work. The most glaring omissions include the association of the elaborate polychrome rock art from the lower Rio Grande Valley of southwest Texas,

where archaeologists since the 1940s have seen association between the humanoid figures, referred to as shamans, and their possible use of the hallucinogenic red berries from the Texas Mountain Laurel. Recent excavations have recovered Mountain Laurel berries and fragments of the peyote cactus in rock shelters that also contained elaborate prehistoric rock paintings. Another example for the early association of hallucinogens and indigenous religious practice is in the public art of the Maya. Mushrooms and frogs, the latter are the source of the hallucinogenic bufotenin, are widely figured in public art throughout the Maya area.

Much of Pearson's insight into the appearance of rock art is based on his extensive descriptions of rock art recorded in the Coso Range located in south-central California and from elsewhere in the American southwest. Based on multiple methods, the rock art at Coso Range has been directly dated as having been produced sporadically between 10,000 until about 300 years ago. The striking images of Coso Range rock art provide persuasive evidence of their serving as containers for meaning. There is no ethnographic evidence for the production of rock art having been produced by the indigenous Numic-speaking peoples of the western Great Basin. Rock art is described by Numa speakers as the creation of supernatural beings. In one case small human footprints were described as evidence that some of the rock art was made by supernatural "water babies," beings that are part of Numic mythology present in the Coso Range. These seemingly interpretable images were produced by local Numic shamans.

In the final chapter Pearson expands on the concept of a "shamanic hypothesis" to explore several major research areas in archaeology including: trade, the origins of agriculture, the development of religious and political hierarchies and the peopling of the western hemisphere. For Pearson, social evolution is based on the production and exchange of psychoactive substances and the aggrandizement of social power by shamans. Outside of the Mediterranean world, religion and religious practice have remained an underdeveloped area of inquiry, especially by archaeologists working with hunting and gathering cultures. However, offering shamanism as a totalizing explanation for such a wide range of social phenomena, such as the origin of social complexity, agriculture, and peopling the western hemisphere, seems a bit ambitious.

The major contribution of this volume is that it brings together in a single volume the work done by UCLA archaeologists using a cognitive paradigm for the interpretation of rock art in the western Great Basin and its production by shamans. I would have liked to have seen more comparative material from ethnographic contexts of drawings made after ingesting various hallucinogens. Michael Taussig's work in southern Columbia with ayahuasca or Johannes Wilbert's illustrations made by tobacco shamans in Venezuela are two references that come immediately to mind. I would also have liked to have seen more discussion of neuroanatomy and the effects of different psychoactive substances on the human brain.

Regardless of the book's shortcomings, this study of shamanism in the material world opens up a world of interpretive possibilities in the world of prehistoric and indigenous art. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in archaeology, rock art, shamanism, or cognitive theory.

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Carol P. Christ, *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 277 pp., $24.95 (cloth) $18.95 (paper).

In *She Who Changes*, Carol Christ offers readers what is arguably one of her best books to date, reaching across the all-too-often contentious boundaries of religious difference to establish a renewed dialogue in the feminist study of religions. Although not written from the standpoint of contemporary Paganism as such, this fascinating contribution to philosophy of religion has much to offer Pagan scholars who are interested in theology, embodiment, feminism, and process thought.

While it may not be as extensively taught in the West as it deserves, process philosophy is not exactly new. Scholars who are familiar with Eastern philosophy and religion will readily find examples of process thought in Buddhism, including the works of Nagarjuna (c. 150-250 CE), who established the Madhyamika school of Buddhism, and the seventh-century Japanese philosopher Kukai, who founded Shingon Buddhism.

In the West, philosopher Alfred North Whitehead springs to mind as the leading proponent of process thought. However, Christ draws on the work of a somewhat lesser known American philosopher, Charles Hartshorne, in whom she finds several advantages: Hartshorne's work is more accessible to the general reader, more clearly and immediately concerned with ethics, more overtly feminist, and not addressed to a specifically Christian audience (16-17). Hartshorne directly critiqued the hierarchical and patriarchal images of God found within traditional theism and "understood the appropriateness of female imagery for divine power" (16).

Process philosophy and feminist theology share several important things in common, including placing an importance on the body and embodiment, and the idea that all life—including the divine—is engaged in a process of constant change. As in Buddhist philosophical thought, the emphasis in process philosophy shifts from noun to verb: the human self is not a static thing, but a dynamic process that is "relational, social, embodied, and embedded in the world" (3). The divine is not purely metaphysical or transcendent, but also immanent and embodied in the changing and interconnected world.

When Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow first assembled their highly regarded anthologies on women and religion—*Womanspirit Rising* in 1979 and *Weaving the Visions* in 1989—they were struck by the ways in which feminists cooperated across religious boundaries in challenging traditional images of God as male, disembodied, and separated from the changing world. Since then, religious differences among feminists have become more pronounced, leading to a loss of common purpose and even at times a lack of constructive dialogue.

Christ believes that Hartshorne's process philosophy offers a way to bridge these religious divides by providing a "radically different way of conceptualizing divine power and its relation to the world that can illuminate feminist concerns and help us to express them more clearly" (4). She fondly describes Hartshorne, who died in 2003 at the age of 103, as a "…small man with a heart large enough to imagine freedom, love, creativity, and beauty as the guiding principles of all life in the universe, bold enough to argue that these principles apply to other animals and, in some respect, even to the cells and atoms that make up our bodies and the world body" (x).

Surprised to find herself waxing eloquent over a dead, white, male philosopher old enough to have been her grandfather, Christ nevertheless finds Hartshorne's process

view consistent with her own feminism. "If a feminist philosopher is one who assumes that women are (fully equal) human beings and who takes embodiment, relationality, and embeddedness in nature for granted, then Hartshorne is a feminist philosopher" (x). In *She Who Changes* Christ uses Hartshorne to establish a feminist process paradigm that restores both body and world to the divine and raises challenging questions about the nature of divine power and its relation to the world.

The book's first chapter, entitled "Problems with God," begins with a traditional image of God that may be all too commonly found in Western cultures:

> He is an old white man with a long white beard…sitting on a golden throne in heaven, surrounded by clouds. He created the world out of nothing. He rules it with His laws and could wipe it out at a moment's notice, if He chose… When we die we will go to heaven—if we are good—to live for all eternity with God. But He sometimes gets angry and unleashes His wrath on the sinners…[who] will be punished by being sent to hell to be burned in eternal flames… (25).

According to Christ, such familiar images of "The Old White Man" as Lord, King, Absolute Ruler, and Father are masculine and hierarchical depictions of divine power based in "ancient and feudal notions of kingship." They are also images that are patriarchal, racist, dualistic, and judgmental (26-27).

An objection might be quickly raised that the majority of contemporary theologians surely do not hold these images as literally true depictions of divinity. Neither, probably, do many members of the three Abrahamic traditions. But while "educated people" might not think of God in such literal and simplistic terms, Christ points out that this familiar image of God nevertheless rests on and is reinforced by several interrelated theological and philosophical assumptions, identified by Hartshorne as the "six mistakes" of classical Western theology: God as absolutely perfect and therefore unchangeable; God as unsympathetically good; God as omnipotent; God as omniscient; immortality; and revelation as infallible (34-44). These ideas are deeply embedded in our culture, combining with "traditional language and imagery to create the patriarchal God criticized and rejected by feminists" (44).

Christ finds Hartshorne's classification particularly useful for identifying the inherently anti-female bias of a philosophy that is ultimately rooted in the rejection of the body—particularly the female body—and the natural world. She tackles each of these mistakes in separate chapters, carefully reasoning them to their ultimate source: a rejection of embodied and changing life rooted in the devaluation and rejection of the female body and nature. In so doing, she lays bare the dualistic and hierarchical thinking that identifies man with the unchanging immortal and rational soul and woman with the changing body, nature, and death.

In the portion of the book contemporary Pagans may find most useful, Christ provides the reader with careful analysis of the source of these notions of classical theology and exposes some of their internal connections, contradictions, and paradoxes. These six mistakes lie at the foundation of some of classical theology's most vexing problems.

As an example of their internal connections, consider the first two: God as absolutely perfect and unchangeable and God as unsympathetically good. The first notion is historically rooted in Plato's ideal of the Good as unchanging: "whatever is perfect, especially God, cannot change." Change is what separates our (imperfect) world from

the (perfect) eternal, which must exist alone with itself, because relationships inevitably involve change and dependence (34-35).

The question then arises, "How can God be absolutely perfect, eternal, and unchanging and still love and care about the world?" "What does it mean to say that God is love?" (35). This leads to the second mistake: God's unsympathetic goodness. God is good, but he cannot accurately be said to care for or about his creation, for if he did, he would be affected by the joys and sorrows of the creatures. And if affected, then changed, and if changed, then not perfect. Theologians called this the doctrine of God's aseity or impassibility (35).

Christ points out that this is the mentality that produces ascetic movements and other doctrines within world religions that celebrate celibacy, monasticism, and freedom from intimate human relationships in order to be closer to God.

The third mistake—God as omnipotent—leads to two particularly troublesome problems in classical Western theology: the problem of free will and the problem of evil. If God is all powerful and determines everything according to his will, in what sense are humans free? And if God is all good, how can there be evil? Here Christ suggests feminist process theology can offer us "ways of conceiving a just and loving God other than the model of omnipotence" and "ways of imagining divine power that do not make a mockery of human freedom" (39).

In contrast to the six classical mistakes of Western theism, Christ's vision of feminist process philosophy offers alternative ways of thinking about the divine that "affirm change and embodiment, touch and relationship, power with, not power over, the world as co-created, this life rather than hope for another, and the fragmentariness of all knowledge" (44).

Contemporary Pagans, particularly those who are committed to a somewhat more polytheistic worldview, may find Christ's particular alternative formulations of the divine somewhat less appealing than her identification of the problems of classical theism. Most of the time she refers to the divine as "Goddess/God," a combination that will likely satisfy neither monotheists nor polytheists, and one redolent of those curious amalgams designed to be slightly suggestive but not directly challenging to male monotheisms: God/dess, God-She, God Mother/Father, or Godde.

Some readers may also take exception to her understanding of reincarnation and find inconsistent the suggestion that death somehow "stops the process." Her reasoning here is designed to relinquish the idea of immortality, which is one of the six mistakes, but perhaps there are other ways to conceive of the process of death and rebirth.

Those who are interested in navigating the rocky shores of dualistic theism, monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, mystic pantheism, panentheism, and so forth (have I left any out?) may enjoy her defense of feminist process panentheism in Chapter 8, including the following summary of the major differences between the approaches:

> Theism is associated with dualism, radical separation, and power over. Monotheism carries the baggage of religious intolerance. Pantheism has difficulty asserting that individuals other than Goddess/God really exist. Polytheism denies that there is a unity underlying multiplicity. Panentheism affirms divine presence in a co-created world. (209)

There is much to like about this book, and a good deal of it is extremely valuable to those of us who try to explain to our students why certain propositions are "mistakes"

in reasoning that lead us into philosophical corners and unsolvable problems. But there is also much work that needs to be done.

Keeping in the spirit of on-going process, Christ reminds us that, although our ideas and symbols are not ends in themselves, they are extremely important.

> When they work, religious symbols express our understanding of the meaning of life, open our hearts to wonder, and kindle our passion to co-create a world in which joy abounds for ourselves, for Goddess/God, and for all individuals in the world. (244)

This thought-provoking work is thoroughly engaging, eminently readable, and impeccably reasoned with the characteristic blend of personal and scholarly voice that is Carol Christ's trademark.

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Ann Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate: An Archaeology of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 328 pp., $65 (cloth).

The first contemporary Pagan festival that I attended in the early 1990s featured a ritual enactment of Persephone's descent into and emergence from the Underworld. The goal of the ritual was to reflect on one's own transformative and initiatory experience through Persephone's initiation. But if classicist Ann Suter's revisionist study of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* is correct, although the ritual I witnessed surely had symbolic meaning and personal value for participants, they got it wrong. According to Suter, the *Hymn*'s version of Persephone's story is not primarily an account of a young woman's initiation, but rather of a *hieros gamos*, translated to mean "sacred marriage" or, as Suter prefers, "holy union."

The story of Demeter and Persephone encapsulated in the *Hymn* has been widely interpreted by archaeologists, historians of religion (especially Mircea Eliade), linguists, literary critics, feminists and contemporary Pagans. Drawing on recent archaeological findings and anthropological theories about classical antiquity, Suter argues that the poet of the *Hymn* offered his audience a new version of earlier stories that demonstrates new relations between the deities. Although the *Hymn* became the canonical version of the myth, there were other, competing stories about Demeter and Persephone circulating before the *Hymn* was composed around 600 BCE. Some of Suter's arguments are technical, but the book's narrative will successfully engage general readers as well as classicists through the momentum of its central mystery: what is the older original story behind the "Olympian frame" imposed on it? In the process of following the book's arguments, readers will become thoroughly acquainted with the latest scholarship on these goddesses and the social and historical contexts in which their stories developed.

Suter finds the *Hymn* important for a number of reasons—particularly for what it reveals about the imposition of the Olympian frame on older materials. This is most significantly demonstrated by the fact that, in earlier versions of the myth, Persephone is portrayed as a free agent in a *hieros gamo*s. In the *Hymn*, however, she is first a captive of Hades and later an obedient daughter sent by her father Zeus as an

arrangement with his brother—a gift cementing the relationship between powerful male gods who in previous versions had far less power and importance. For this and other reasons, Suter concludes that the *Hymn* reveals the process of an older myth being made over to fit new theological concepts, "elaborating, confirming, and publicizing the new relationships among Demeter, Persephone, Hades, and Zeus first outlined in Hesiod" (20). The version of the myth through which so many of us first encounter Demeter, Persephone and Hades is only one of many versions of the myth and represents, like the other Homeric hymns, the organization of divinities under the panhellenic and patriarchal rule of Zeus on Olympos.

How do we know this? The very complexities of the *Hymn* seem to indicate that the poet was working with different, sometimes competing, versions that reflect different theological arrangements. First of all, says Suter, mothers and daughters are central to this story, while fathers and husbands are peripheral. According to linguistic evidence, Zeus, for instance, has no "authoritative speech" in the *Hymn* that would demonstrate he is already the powerful patriarch the poet wanted to construct for his audience. Suter repeatedly reminds her readers that the relationship between texts and society is far from simple. Understandings of deities are shaped by, but do not necessarily represent, the needs of their cultures. For instance, during the twelfth to eighteenth centuries BCE a grain goddess began to take priority over a fertility goddess, though both of them came and went with seasonal cycles, symbolizing both human and natural fertility. Even though patterns varied from place to place, by the eighth century male gods had increased in importance, perhaps because men were taking a larger role in planting and harvest. According to Suter, what has happened by the time of the *Hymn* is that "the control of the fertility of the earth has been transferred to a higher level of administrative level of divinity" (145).

If the *Hymn*'s Persephone is in fact derived from an ancient fertility goddess, then Suter's argument that the story is one of *hiero gamos* makes sense. Beneath the Olympian frame, Suter argues, and she marshals plenty of evidence for this from archaeological finds, is the story of the "holy coupling" between a fertility goddess and her consort. In one of the most interesting chapters of the book she sets out to prove that the union between Persephone and Hades is in fact *not* entirely one of a daughter given by her father to another man. The Olympian overlay would have us believe that Persephone conforms to the image of the young woman "given to a male by her father's choice to be a wife in patriarchal marriage" (100). Suter counters with evidence for Persephone's autonomy, a vestige of her role as a once powerful fertility goddess.

Suter's interpretation has Persephone go to Hades by choice because earlier versions of the myth did *not* include rape or abduction. Suter demonstrates that even in the *Hymn* their union retains some of its older meaning as a fertility rite. For example, she points to evidence that suggests they were not actually married; instead, their union was purely sexual, in fact "the sexual union of Persephone and Hades in the Underworld is an archetypal act of fertility magic" (98). Hades secretly feeds Persephone a pomegranate seed to signify sexual union rather than having a public feast to celebrate their marriage—another piece of evidence that this was no ordinary marriage. The pomegranate seed is the "*Hymn's* link between vegetal and human fertility. It is a symbol of sex and fertility as well as the narrative agent that causes Persephone's coming and going, parallel to that of the earth's vegetation" (99). Persephone, then, does not follow the accepted social pattern of moving from adolescence into marriage.

In this regard she is a "misfit" or from a different perspective, an independent agent.

Why has Suter's fresh interpretation of the *Hymn*'s core story as one of the sacred marriage between a fertility goddess and her consort been overlooked by centuries of scholarship on this text? She admits that her study of the *Hymn* benefits from changes in knowledge and technology and, I would suggest, a more cautious and self-reflexive approach to the impact of culturally based assumptions on what we study. She thinks that the fundamental problem with other interpretations of this text has been "retrojection"—reading later practices back into earlier times, that is, assuming that the later canonical version of the myth was in place much earlier. From Suter's vantage point this is wrong, as is the assumption among scholars that the *Hymn* introduced the worship of both these goddesses. Instead, she argues that it introduced the worship of them as a pair, which did not occur in earlier times for which there is evidence of separate myths and cults for each goddess.

The *Hymn* can be seen, then, as part of a public relations campaign promoting these theological shifts. An important aspect of the *Hymn*'s version is a rivalry between Demeter and Persephone, evidence of Demeter usurping the power of an earlier fertility goddess. One characteristic of the Olympian frame is the growing importance at Eleusis (site of the Mysteries modeled on the myth) of Demeter over an older goddess, Persephone—also called Kore or Thea. Persephone was once the primary goddess at Eleusis, but in the *Hymn* Demeter takes on Persephone's powers and Persephone becomes subordinate to her. Although they typically are seen as a mother/daughter pair, Suter shows that the *Hymn* demonstrates that they were not always so.

Suter turns to the ritual practices of the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Thesmophoria for further evidence of Persephone as an older goddess whose power is being usurped by Demeter in the *Hymn*. According to Suter, the *Hymn* served as etiology for two important cults at Eleusis: the Thesmophoria (a fertility festival for women and the earth) and the Mysteries (female coming-of-age rites). The Thesmophoria developed out of the section in the *Hymn* that tells of Demeter traveling to Eleusis in disguise and attempting to make Demophoon (a human baby whose mother hired Demeter as a nurse) immortal, and is totally unrelated to the Persephone story. It was a festival restricted to females and involved both women's and the earth's fertility as well as the transition of adolescents into their role as mothers. Other scholars have argued that the Thesmophoria reflects the Demeter/Persephone story because it included eating pomegranate seeds, but Suter thinks not.

The Mysteries, also unrelated to Persephone, were derived from the end of the *Hymn* when Demeter brought back the earth's fertility and went to Eleusis to show the Eleusinians how to practice rites "that would make blessed those who saw them, while those who did not would waste away in the Underworld" (4). Both sets of rites were derived from peripheral stories in the *Hymn*, rather than modeled after the central story of the *hiero gamos*.

These rites are probably derived from the earliest cult practices in Greece that feature Demeter or Persephone (often as Kore) as important vegetation deities with a less significant male figure—called by a variety of names—in the background. Evidence from myth and archaeology for the origins of these goddesses suggests that the identities of Demeter and Persephone varied across time and place. Persephone seems to have been first a goddess of fertility and only second a deity of the underworld. Even there she was not a goddess of death per se but a protectress of dead souls. Although the *Hymn* carries these hints of Persephone as a powerful and independent

goddess, nevertheless it is a *Hymn* dedicated to Demeter and shows Demeter—not both goddesses—being worshipped. Thus the psychological tension between mother and daughter is reflected in the historical replacing of the older goddess; the poet asserted Demeter's power at a time when it had not in fact been fully established. Drawing on evidence from object relations theory, archaeology, anthropology and linguistics, Suter further concludes that their competition can be read on many different levels, including the story of daughter separating from her mother and a mother's mid-life crisis. She concludes that there are political reasons why both fertility goddesses survive in the *Hymn*, especially the co-optation of older local worship by the Olympian hierarchy. While not completely excluding the older practices, the *Hymn* simply emphasized the one goddess Demeter as the main goddess at Eleusis, over the older fertility goddess, perhaps Persephone.

Although Suter argues that Persephone's union with Hades did not follow any anthropologically recognized human marriage rites in classical Greece, why should it? While it makes sense that the gods would model some forms of behavior for humans to follow, clearly they do not always do so—why should this prove her case? Some of Suter's arguments are confusing and contradictory: the *Hymn* is foremost a mother/daughter story and yet its core ritual is the *hieros gamos*: are they of equal importance? On the whole, Suter's book is compelling and of interest to those of us outside as well as within the field of classical studies. She explores the ways in which shifting gender roles and social changes are reflected in myth and ritual and she enriches our knowledge about these two important goddesses and the rites that honored them.

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