

Douglas Ezzy, *Sex, Death and Witchcraft: A Contemporary Pagan Festival* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 204 pp., \$112 (hardback).

In his newest book, Douglas Ezzy presents an analysis of a small Pagan festival in Australia; he dances a fine line between sensationalizing this small festival (*viz.*, the title of the book), and providing a richly theoretical examination that challenges popular *and* academic assumptions about Paganism. He emphasizes that the pseudonymic Faunalia is transgressive, even amongst Pagans, many of whom consider its “widdershins” circle-casting and centrality of the controversial figure Baphomet troubling at best, and potentially evil at worst. Fortunately, he ends on the side of scholarship, and on the whole, this book provides a great model for bringing Pagan studies into the broader conversation by incorporating familiar theories and new data.

Borrowing from a variety of existing theoretical models, including especially Turner’s liminal/liminoid, as well as sociological and psychoanalytic ideas about the soul, and various models on relational etiquette, Ezzy provides a dense examination of this small, but not insignificant festival. At first glance, the theoretical apparatus that he constructs appears rather heavy and oddly jointed, but Ezzy weaves enough ethnographic data throughout to make a compelling case for this structure. He includes brief descriptive vignettes and photos between chapters, providing a compelling portrayal of this event.

Ezzy’s scholarship is most convincing in his discussion of the ethics of ritual, arguing that “[rituals] create commitments to particular ethical practices and etiquettes of relating” (29). Ezzy addresses the value of religious alterity head-on, and points out the ways in which ritualized difference facilitates the creation and maintenance of a shared ethics. For “when poetry, myth and ritual are valued as ends in themselves, they mediate moral relationships through the symbolic representation of shared moral orientations to ‘the other’... they allow participants to discover ethical strategies for living with this difference” (34). The central and most controversial event at Faunalia, the Baphomet ritual, is simultaneously a re-imagining of that most lingering vestige of Christianity – the devil – and a re-working of ethics that incorporates and celebrates the shadow.

The Baphomet ritual's blatant celebration of "other" encourages attendees to reconsider social and ethical norms, and provides a meaningful ritual structure in which to explore the central theme of alterity. The rite stresses the tension that is so apparent in contemporary Paganism: how does the communality maintain distinctiveness, while gaining, if not acceptance, at least understanding from the outside world? In this way, Baphomet may be read as a symbol of the Pagan community as a whole – Baphomet as a figure, who encourages a dialogical etiquette of both/and, rather than either/or. He/she is both male and female, both frightening and arousing, both adversary and friend. This complex ritual, and its associated relational ethics, are at the heart of Ezzy's study.

Ezzy's book should appeal to scholars of contemporary Paganism, but may not have immediate appeal beyond this somewhat narrow audience. However, if other scholars follow his worthy example of bringing scholarship on Paganism into theoretically driven conversation with broader fields, then Ezzy's work will have valuable impact.

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