

The Wiccan “Great Rite”—*Hieros Gamos* in the Modern West¹

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Abstract

This paper deals with the core of the Wiccan religion—the small group based practices which define Wicca as an initiatory Mystery religion practiced by clergy. At the centre of Wiccan ritual and theology is an ancient idea—the *hieros gamos*/sacred marriage. The *hieros gamos* ritual, called by Wiccans *The Great Rite*, is a ritual of sexual magic involving intercourse between the Goddess of fertility, embodied by Her Priestess, and Her Consort, present in the Priest. It is an egalitarian erotic mystical path open to both genders and all sexual interests, most often expressed as heterosexual, valuing sexuality and the female body and challenging the sexual power dynamics in Western culture.

The paper begins by outlining the theology and history of the Great Rite, Wiccan ritual in general and the Rite, then excerpts from primary documents of Priestesses and Priests reporting on their experiences of the Rite, before concluding. The sacred marriage in Wicca confirms and seals the highest level of religious initiation, third degree, and has the mystical meaning of a loving union with Godhead. Wiccan Initiates are taught the skills needed to enter into and leave mystical states of consciousness. The connection between the Wiccan religion, a feminist-influenced religion, and the practice of sexual ritual is not unexpected. What can *hieros gamos* be in the modern age? Why is it a central symbol and frequent practice in a modern religion? What does the practice bring to its participants?

[1] Wicca is a modern religion, based on occultist ideas, founded in the mid-1940s in the United Kingdom but now widespread in the English-speaking world. This paper deals principally with the core of the Wiccan religion—the small group based religion which defines Wicca as an initiatory mystery religion practiced by clergy—rather than the broader “Outer Court” neo-Pagan movement that has grown up around it, influenced by it but also somewhat independently of it. The origin myth of Wicca as being substantially a survival of pre-Christian ideas of the indigenous northern European or Celtic religions has been thoroughly discredited by modern historical scholarship, although a minority of fundamentalist Wiccans still hold to the myth instead of the history.²

[2] Although Wicca draws from older materials, most of these go back no further than the late Victorian United Kingdom and it has, particularly the “Outer Court,” since incorporated popular religious and New Age ideas like astrology, folk magic techniques, and a range of alternative healing arts as well as strong

influences from feminism and popular culture—in particular science fiction fandom and the Society for Creative Anachronism. The neo-Pagans emphasize individualism and nature-centredness even more strongly, often use the same symbols and celebrate on the same occasions, but there are some substantial differences—a greater influence from the New Age movement, for example, and a greater emphasis on beliefs over experiences.

[3] At the centre of Wicca, however, is a truly ancient idea—the *hieros gamos*/sacred marriage. The *hieros gamos* ritual, called by Wiccans *The Great Rite*, is a ritual of sexual magic involving intercourse between the Goddess of fertility, ruler or embodiment of the land, as embodied by Her Priestess, and Her Consort, represented in the king or Priest, said to have been practiced from ancient times into the classical Greek period.

[4] This paper will begin by outlining the theology and history of the Great Rite then outline Wiccan ritual forms and the specific ritual of the Rite and move on to excerpts from primary documents of Priestesses and Priests reporting on their experiences of the Rite, before concluding.

The Great Rite

[4] Through sexual intercourse with the Goddess, the king's right to rule is made legitimate in the classical Greek literature. In Homer's *The Iliad*, for example, the kidnap and marriage of Helen by Paris was not just an affront to Agamemnon as a husband, but undercut his legitimacy as a ruler. The attempts of Penelope's suitors in *The Odyssey* to woo her were also connected to Ulysses' rulership of Ithaca.³ According to Mircea Eliade's *Myth of the Eternal Return*, on the day-to-day level marriage rituals frequently still recapitulate hierogamy, especially the union of heaven and earth,⁴ and "the cosmic myth serves as the exemplary model not only in the case of marriage but also in the case of any other ceremony whose end is the restoration of integral wholeness ... the cosmogony first of all represents Creation."⁵

[5] The *hieros gamos* continues in the Jewish and Christian mystical traditions of the marriage to God, with the soul as the bride and God as the groom, although without physically being acted out. The route by which the *hieros gamos* came into the English occult milieu and ultimately into Wicca began with Sir William Hamilton and Richard Payne Knight's writing on phallus worship in the 1770s and Payne's research into the Orphic Mysteries which gave rise to a significant strain of esoteric phallicism.⁶ Another route was through the German Ordo Templi Orientis's (OTO) influence from Indian Tantra and from the American sex magician Paschal Beverly Randolph, which came to England through the prominent occultist Aleister Crowley with his 1912 Initiation into the OTO.⁷ The influence of the OTO into the foundation rituals of the Wiccan religion was profound.

[6] The sacred marriage affirms the right of the king to rule and in Wicca confirms and seals the highest level of religious initiation, third degree, and has the mystical meaning of a loving union with Godhead. Wiccan Initiates are taught the skills needed fruitfully to enter into and leave mystical states of consciousness. The revived interest in mystery traditions and Paganism in the late Victorian period fed directly into the milieu of the birth of Wicca. This movement had a more-or-less neo-Platonist belief in an occluded spiritual realm and a broad animism in which all is interrelated and part of a universal or cosmic soul. This, together with a "belief in the essential unity of matter and spirit and, similarly, a correspondence between things earthly and spiritual,"⁸ makes "the mystical" mean "occultism". So, reclaiming the mystical might properly be said to include reclaiming the occult.

[7] The mystical experience can be and is, interpreted in many contradictory ways—facets of the experience include both remaining separate but joined, dissolving, both ultimate powerlessness and connection to great power, and being awash in the experience. Some aspects are socially and personally positive and some are corrosive and antinomian. In the Great Rite, the antinomian challenge is to norms of heterosexual monogamy, in particular. The mystical experience dissolves away the boundaries of the

individual and permits them to honour themselves as a part of the All. The individual can become aware of themselves as a unique expression of the divine purpose or an integral portion of the universe. By dissolving the ego boundaries an intensity of feeling, a depth of connection, and a kind of meaning is derived. It is terrifying as it begins but it resolves into an immensely reassuring fact as the fear of death and the sense of loneliness dissolves. The existential fact of separateness is momentarily set aside in a fundamental joining.

[8] William James, in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, sets reasonable limits to the authority of the mystical state and provides a thorough discussion of the range of explanations applied post facto to the experience. He also differentiates the mystical experience from the psychotic break or fugue state, both of which it resembles highly, not by the details of the experience but by how the person is changed by it: “Religious mysticism is only one half of mysticism, the other half has no accumulated traditions except those which the textbooks on insanity supply.”⁹ The mystical initiatory experience opens one up in ways different than a mental break but must be tested by the same empirical methods that would be used to evaluate any other experience, and “non-mystics are under no obligation to acknowledge in mystical states a superior authority conferred on them by their intrinsic nature.”¹⁰

[9] There is, after all, no “pure” experience, only experiences in one context or another, interpreted by the person experiencing them in the light of previous experiences and the expectation of future ones. They are subject both to the past and future and act as inspiration and fuel to further experiment, analysis and creation. By embracing this intertextual quality of mystical experience, its shaping and reference (and self-reference) we can appreciate the mystical not as meaning itself but as provoking meaning-making activity, shaking up and reshaping the configurations of the psyche, although not in a predetermined direction. The mystical is greater than any of the explanations of it.

[10] Abraham Maslow provides a cross-cultural and materialist description of the typical features of the mystical state in *Religions, Values and Peak Experiences*.¹¹ He affirms the mystical experience as common and deeply meaningful, although inexplicable. He argues that “man has a higher and transcendent nature, and this is part of his essence, i.e. his biological nature as a member of a species which has evolved.”¹² The experience does not necessarily point toward a Goddess or God but may be purely biological.

[11] Another perspective on the mystical experience is Dipesh Chakrabarty, who, in *Provincializing Europe*, points out that “gods are as real as ideology is—that is to say, they are embedded in practices. More often than not, their presence is collectively invoked by rituals rather than by conscious belief.”¹³ Chakrabarty’s inclusion of religion and religious experience in history and his post-colonial challenge to enlightenment materialism is bracing. Catherine Bell provides a provocative discussion of a number of theories of ritual in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* in the process of developing her own theory of ritual as social production and practice, and Pierre Bourdieu, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* has a brilliant development of theories of cultural capital and practice (in the Marxist senses, particularly of the Marx of “Theses on Feuerbach”), which both Bell and Bradford Verter draw upon. These scholars are highly useful analytical starting places for this paper’s discussion.¹⁴

[12] All of these theoreticians emphasize practice, experience and the pragmatic consequentialist evaluation of experience over the theoretical and ideological. Beliefs are not primary to them because specific beliefs do not predict specific behaviours and vice versa. The fact of belief in general terms is important but practice leads to practical consequences which then spur on belief. This practice-based approach opens up the possibility for a rational exploration of the mystical, an approach to trance and to factors that lead toward the mystical experience and a rational and conscious shaping of the experience and its energy into making meaning useful to the mystic and her or his religious community.

[13] Alex Owen, in *The Place of Enchantment*, demonstrates exactly this approach to rational mysticism in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an occultist group that was a direct ancestor to the Wiccan religion. She states that “individuals underwent training in the apprehension and negotiation of occult phenomena, and subjective claims were tested and measured against clearly established criteria.”¹⁵ These magicians sought a spirituality that was not revealed, but self-consciously created as a joint project through ritual and symbolism utilized as tools for inner exploration. Catherine Bell emphasizes, after Jonathan Z. Smith, that ritual is work, a kind of labour, a social product and a way of making, not something given from the Gods but created by human beings together.

[14] If mythology emerges to explain ritual and theology arises in order to explain mythology, then, where possible, a study of religion must go back to ritual.¹⁶ The intellect makes sense of an experience or work of art, but it does not make meaning. As religion is primarily in the business of making meaning, rather than making knowledge or sense, the structuring done on the level of ritual performance is the primary experience, and the codification of it is secondary. This is particularly true, as Bell claims, because “religious beliefs are relatively unstable and unsystematic for most people.”¹⁷ This points to a key difficulty in historical recovery of religious experience. There is a need to go beyond the texts to recover the experiences imbedded in practices, and in order to derive the likely beliefs of practitioners. Practices and rituals, particularly of popular religion, are less well documented than the elite theological exegeses. Therefore, the analysis in this paper will be strongly based on ritual scripts and, where possible, first-hand reports of the experience of ritual performance.

[15] The questions that legitimately can be asked of *hieros gamos* include: What can it be in the modern age? Why has it emerged as a central symbol and frequent real practice in a modern religion? What does it say about modernity, anti-modernity and what does the practice bring to its participants? What does it say about and how does it inform thinking about sexuality, revelation, the mind-body problem, the

sacred and mundane, and the psychology of ritual? How does it relate to conventional morality? What types of power relationships and resistances are expressed through it?

[16] Another question that needs to be asked of the *hieros gamos* in particular concerns the ambiguous relationship between its valuing of sexuality and the female body and the sexual power dynamics in western culture. A relationship seems to exist between the suppression of free sexuality and of women, and the suppression of *hieros gamos*, which occurred at roughly the same time in Europe as the patriarchal era began. The connection between the Wiccan religion, a feminist-influenced religion, and the practice of sexual ritual then is not unexpected. However, envisioning a free sexuality, and even more one that is connected to spirit rather than separate, requires more than simply ethical archaeology—the experience of sex has been so shaped by the inequalities between women and men, the anti-body attitudes from the Olympian Greeks onward in Western cultures, the Jewish and Christian dethroning of the Goddess,¹⁸ and institutional homophobia and compulsory monogamy that its reclamation is not simple.

[17] Wicca is a new religion, growing rapidly but not centred on a charismatic leader, so that its rituals and practices and its theology are evolving from a community of believers' experiences rather than a prophet's individual inspiration. Because Wicca emphasizes prophetic trance experiences, it could be said to be a religion of prophets rather than being inspired by only one. Its links to the feminist spirituality movement, its role as a critical voice in debates around sexuality and the equality of women and men, and its creative syntheses of traditions, all give it an importance greater than its current numbers. Whether Wicca will serve the same functions as Theosophy did in the 1890-1920 period, as a creative leavening of the spiritual landscape prior to collapse and decline, remains to be seen.

[18] The Great Rite, *hieros gamos*, is at the centre of Wiccan ritual and theology. It is an egalitarian erotic mystical path open to both genders and a variety of sexual interests, although most often expressed

as heterosexual. Unlike the patriarchal sacred marriage in which God is the bridegroom and the soul is the bride, the Great Rite has a meeting of equal powers through two equal bodies, with both parties possessed by the divine, and with a physical acting out rather than purely an internal or symbolic expression. Unlike those traditions in which the divine is seen as masculine only, so that the deepest erotic mystical joining is only possible for homosexual men and, in those traditions that allow women mystics, heterosexual women, Wicca worships a variety of deities with both sexes and all sexual preferences and genders.¹⁹

[18] The study of religion can centre on a view of religions as ordering systems of law and morality, as communities of worship, as central cultural and political forces legitimating the power of the king or the state, as artistic creations, or as many other things. There are legitimate reasons to argue against the dominance of a mystic focus in the study of religion and to question the motivation of the great emphasis on the mystical in recent history of religions.²⁰ The mystical paths are seen to be antinomian, attacking structures and laws, overturning morality, and as intensely personal and individualistic. These facets of the mystical experience are directly contrary to the experience of religion as community, even of minority religions as alternative systems of meaning and alternative communities of belief.

[19] However, this critical view of the mystical accepts the individualistic fallacy—if the individual is not created *ex nihilo* but emerges in a social context, individualistic experiences must always be interpreted through a social lens, both in support of and in harmony with the norms or in reaction against them. There is no pure experience, but always an experience which is being reflected upon as it occurs in an intertextual dance with not just other experiences but also other descriptions of them, no pure individual subject but always a social creature, and no experience free of power, resistance, creation and so on. The individual's mystical experience, therefore, embodies some social and spiritual capital,²¹ and it is an action in society, not just in the psyche of the person experiencing it, through their actions.

[20] In the case of Wicca, mystical actions are explicitly framed as social, and the consequences of them are seen as shaping the whole of the religion and its effects on its adherents and the larger world, even by those Wiccans who do not experience them or who are deemed unqualified to interpret them. The deep experience of the mystical shapes the habitus of the Wiccan practitioner, at least of the religious specialists, and the production of spiritual capital by all participants in Wicca reinforces the forms that are effective in its production.²²

[21] Although different forms of mysticism exist, the Romantic bent of the Western intellectual has led to the interpretation of the “real” mysticisms as those individualistic and antinomian aspects.²³ This is unconsciously culturally bound—in some other cultures there is group and community ecstatic and public mystical experience—in Voodoo and the other Afro-diasporic religions of South and Central America for important examples.²⁴ By looking at the specific form of mysticism expressed through the Great Rite, we can move away from this formulation and see how this ritual and its theology of sexuality can be a viable centre to a modern religion.

[22] First of all, it involves two equal participants, who are defined as Priestess and Priest of the religion. It has a particular form and the set and expectations are defined in the religion—the transubstantiation of the bodies of “proper persons, properly prepared”²⁵ into the bodies of the Goddess and Her Consort (in the most usual, heterosexual form, whose language this paper will adopt for simplicity’s sake—although same sex Great Rite can occur and one of the primary documents drawn upon here is from a lesbian Great Rite).

[23] The Priestess and Priest engage in the ritual not for the sake of their own pleasure or to achieve a purely personal enlightenment but to find and bring power and wisdom back into their community. They see the Great Rite as a source of fuel for all the work that they do as clergy, both personally affirming and grounding them and also providing the theological and symbolic foundation to other Wiccan rituals

and practices. The experience of the ritual is a powerful affirmation of the panentheism of the Craft and gives personal experience and conviction of the divine nature of each individual.

[24] The Great Rite is linked to other sexual ritual and other sexual activity in Wicca. The use of sexual energy to perform magic—to charge talismans, energize spells, and bless marriages—is common in Wicca. The ordinary associations of sex as a source of pleasure, expression of friendship and love and an essential component of relationships of romantic love, is kept in Wicca, although the range of acceptable sexual partners and acts is broadened substantially from that accepted in other religions. These learned associations of sex with love, with relationship, with pleasure, with play, and with shame, guilt and sin, will form a part of the context of the experience for the actors in the Great Rite, even if unstated or denied, although the purpose of the ritual is not directly related to these things.

[25] Wicca emerged as a pro-sex religion at the same time as the first woman-controlled generally available birth control method, the Pill, which was distributed by the National Health Plan in the United Kingdom at a nominal fee beginning in December 1961, just as the founder Gerald Gardner's books were being published (1954, 1959).²⁶ The separation of sex from reproduction has theological as well as practical real world implications that the mainstream religions still are unable to cope with. Family models need no longer be based on reproduction only, or on sex, and non-reproductive sex, such as gay and lesbian sexuality, can be seen as a basis for lasting families only when reproduction is by choice. It is also a basic fact of feminist theory that women cannot be free and equal until they can control their own reproduction, so the birth control pill was essential to the lasting second wave of feminism emerging in the 1960s. The strong linkage between Wicca and feminism will be demonstrated, and the centrality of the Great Rite and sexual ritual is an integral part of that connection.

[26] Looking at the religions which celebrated the *hieros gamos* in the past points to the ritual being linked to strong Goddesses such as Inanna in Sumer, Persephone and Demeter in Greece, and to the

power of women.²⁷ The suppression of the ritual coincided with the suppression of women's sexuality and the worsening of an unequal situation for women. The attack on sexual ritual by the patriarchs is replicated in the anti-pornography and anti-sexuality faction in the women's movement, which attacks heterosexuality as inherently oppressive to women, and which values enforced monogamy just as strongly as the patriarchs. The alliance between radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Katherine McKinnon and the religious Christian right against pornography was shocking only to those who do not know the moral purity origins of much feminism. Dworkin would have fit in well with the radical feminist moralizers of the late Victorian period, and their essentialism, which granted men sexual agency only to make them bestial and oppressive, and denied women any desire. However, history seems to not be treating the moralizers well.

[27] The Great Rite and *hieros gamos* have been explicitly celebrated in Wicca since the foundation of the religion, and not simply in the most conservative sections of the movement. Deena Metzger's 1985 essay "Revamping the World: On the Return of the Holy Prostitute,"²⁸ for example, celebrates a rededication to "sexuality and erotic love as spiritual disciplines" and to "re-establish the consciousness of the Sacred Prostitute" as feminist and political activism.²⁹

[28] The standard form of Wiccan ritual began with the composition of the first rituals by Gerald Gardner and associates in 1948.³⁰ These rituals circulated in manuscript form and were modified by successive associates of Gardner, notably Doreen Valiente, prior to being described and published in part in Gardner's *Witchcraft Today* and *The Meaning of Witchcraft*. The history of the successive versions of these rituals has been established by Aidan Kelly in *Crafting the Art of Magic Book 1: A History of Modern Witchcraft, 1939-1964*. The streams of British occultist and counter-cultural thought that influenced Gardner and associates have been examined in detail by Ronald Hutton in *The Triumph of the*

*Moon: a History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft.*³¹ This study will rely substantially on the chronology established by these two scholars.

[29] However interesting Wicca as a new religion and its reclaiming of *hieros gamos* might be, new religions are founded every day. The Wiccan religion has been modestly successful in its growth, with Paganism growing in Canada from 2295 in 1981 to 5530 in 1991 to 21,085 in 2001.³² Wicca is the largest fraction of the Pagan religious movement in the United States and in Canada as well.³³ Virtually all of this growth has been due to conversion, demonstrated by the small number of immigrant adherents (8% of the total), in contrast to the other rapidly growing religions like Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism, religions of immigrants, and despite a strong bias against proselytizing. Wicca has also been highly influential in raising issues that went on to be addressed in other religious fora. Aside from the intrinsic interest of the new and creative religious expression, therefore, Wicca's growth and influence points to unresolved tensions in the areas which it is addressing and cultural capital which it is producing.

[30] Wicca is focused on ritual and experiences derived from it rather than theology and so attention must be paid to details of the content of the rituals and the religion. A brief outline of the original forms of their ritual will follow, and then an outline of the ritual of the Great Rite. Some of the changes to the ritual and Wiccan practices will be outlined as well—although the form and much of the wording of the foundation rituals remains, there have been changes in them since they were written in the 1940s.

[31] A Priestess, usually assisted by a Priest whom she chooses, leads the rituals. The Priestess, as the embodiment of the Goddess in ritual, is explicitly primary, although the male principle is normally included in ritual as well. Rituals are performed in the nude and include a small group of celebrants of both sexes, known as a coven. There are explicitly sexual aspects to the foundation rituals, and the Great Rite, which is not performed at each coven meeting, is a *hieros gamos*, sacred marriage rite. These

aspects are transgressive of gender norms today and were more so in the immediate post-World War Two period that the first authenticated Wiccan ritual manuscripts date from.³⁴

[32] A careful read through the earliest version of the Wiccan *Drawing Down The Moon* ritual from 1949³⁵, established by Aidan Kelly, reveals its textual influences and origins. It also establishes the ritual space as a heterotopia, conforming very well to Foucault's discussion of the term as a space set aside for the intensification of cultural differences, conflicts or social options. Heterotopian sanctuaries allow the focused development and working out of social facts and may or may not later be reintegrated into society as a whole as catalysts for social change.³⁶ Because heterotopias are set aside they do not necessarily affect the larger society. The Wiccan ritual has the heterotopian features of a formal opening and closing of the boundaries of the ritual space, which is typically only open to initiated members of a small worship group (in Wicca, a coven), the suspension of ordinary time and the aspect of critical reflection outside of time, space and culture. The transgressive element is marked first by the requirement for ritual nudity of all participants, save for jewellery and marks of rank in the religion.

[33] Numerous details of the ritual are Masonic or derive from classic works of the Western Ceremonial Magic traditions, although they are creatively adapted to suit the circumstances of the Wiccan religion. The set-up of the ritual circle is adapted slightly from the medieval grimoire *The Key of Solomon the King*³⁷, a popular text among occultists in England. A circle is marked out, nine feet (2.7 metres) in diameter with two outer circles around it separated from the first by six inches (15 cm) and one foot (30 cm). Names of deities are written in the two rings surrounding the inner circle. The perimeters of the circles are traced by the ritual leader with her *athame* (knife used in ritual). There is then a blessing of water and of salt, which are mixed together and with which the circle is asperged. The wording of the water and salt purifications used in Wiccan ritual is very similar to that found in *The Key*³⁸ although

asperging with salt water is also a Roman Catholic and Anglican tradition. Candles are lit at each of the cardinal directions with a blessing.

[34] The *Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram*, a ritual derived from the Order of the Golden Dawn, is then performed. The Priestess leading the ritual makes the gesture of the Cabbalistic Cross by touching, in turn, her forehead, chest, right shoulder and left shoulder and then clasping her hands in front of her while intoning “Ateh (thou art), Malkuth (the Kingdom), Ve-Geburah (and the power), ve-Gedulah (and the Glory), le-Olam (for ever), Amen.” She then turns to each of the cardinal directions in turn, beginning with the east and going clockwise, draws a pentagram (a five pointed star with one point upward) in the air with her athame and calls out the deity name associated with that direction: Yod He Vau He, Adonai, Eheieh, and Agla. Then, standing with arms outstretching in the form of a cross in the centre of the circle she says; “Before me Raphael, behind me Gabriel, at my right hand Michael, at my left hand Auriel. Before me flames the Pentagram, behind me shines the six-rayed star.” She again makes the Cabbalistic Cross as before.³⁹ This part of the ritual is explicitly Christian ceremonial magic, with Cabbalistic trappings—calling upon Christian names of God and angels, the ritual leader crossing herself, and the Cabbalistic translation of part of *The Lord’s Prayer*.⁴⁰

[35] Finally the ritual leader will walk three times around the circle clockwise, turn and address each direction in turn, and call for the spirits of those directions to come and participate in the ritual. This originally Christian Ceremonial Magical ritual has been simplified, and partly de-Christianized, in order for non-Christian folk magic to be worked. The substantial use of the Cabbala, derived originally from Jewish mysticism, has been a mark of the British occult community since its introduction in the 1740s, although the magical Cabbala is very different from the mystical one.⁴¹

[36] Following the casting of the ritual circle, *Drawing Down The Moon* follows. *Drawing Down The Moon* is a ritual of ecstatic possession trance. Its purpose is to assist the Priestess to embody the spirit of

the Goddess of the Wiccan religion, one of Whose most prominent symbols is the Moon. The symbol of the pentagram is drawn on her body by the Priest, through touching her with a phallic-headed wand while reciting an invocation. Although the specific points touched are not specified in the document, current practice is at neck, left hip, right breast, left breast, right hip and neck again.⁴² His invocation incorporates a quotation from Crowley's *Gnostic Mass*; "By seed and root and stem and bud and leaf and flower and fruit we do invoke Thee."⁴³ He then kisses her feet, knees, lower belly, breasts, and lips while reciting a blessing; "Blessed are your feet, which have brought you in these ways, ...your knees, that shall kneel at Her sacred altars, ... womb, without which we would not be, ... breasts, formed in beauty and in strength, ... lips, which shall speak the sacred Names."⁴⁴

[37] These invocatory gestures and statements explicitly establish the sacredness of the female body, and specifically the body of the individual Priestess receiving the blessings and being asked to embody the Goddess. The blessing of the genitals and breasts, the ritual nudity, as well as the use of the phallic wand in the blessing, emphasize the overt sexuality and carnality of this embodiment, as do the ritual kisses. The body is sacred here, *because* it is a body, not *despite* its carnality. The identification of the woman's body with nature does not involve the association of nature with lesser spirituality as conventionally assigned, but is an identification of the type of divine power being called—the immanent divinity of the forces of nature, the force of fertility, sexuality and the body.

[38] The Priestess, seen as embodying the Goddess, ordinarily now recites the *Charge of the Goddess*, a central theological statement of Wicca. It begins with a syncretic list of Goddesses from various times and places, all identified as aspects of the Great Mother: Artemis, Astarte, Aphrodite, Cerridwen, Bride, and others. Then she recites a lengthy section adapted from *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches* by Geoffrey Leland in which the Goddess asks Wiccans to assemble once a month, preferably on Full Moon⁴⁵, to "be free from slavery, and as a sign that ye be really free, ye shall be naked in your rites, both men and

women”⁴⁶, to dance, sing, feast, make music and love⁴⁷ in Her praise. Then follows a quotation from *Book of the Law* which includes the phrase “nor do I demand aught in sacrifice”⁴⁸ and other material adapted from *Magick in Theory and Practice* by Aleister Crowley, and particularly from the *Gnostic Mass* (Liber XV).⁴⁹ There is some original material in the Charge, including the theologically significant phrase “all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals”⁵⁰, but slightly more than half of it is reworked from Aleister Crowley.

[39] If the ritual of Great Rite is now to be performed the Priestess, embodying the Goddess, will call for the Horned God of the Animals and the Great Hunt, Her Consort, to come into the body of her Priest. Kelly found no version of *Drawing Down the Sun/Horned God* in the original Gardnerian rituals. It remains less common than *Drawing Down The Moon*, because of the Goddess-primary focus of Wicca. There is a version in Janet and Stewart Farrar’s *The Witches’ Way* (1984).⁵¹

[40] In it, the Priestess, prior to reciting the Charge of the Goddess, makes the gesture of the Invoking Pentagram of Earth (beginning at top, down to her left, thence up to right, across, down to right, and returning to top)⁵² toward the Priest and recites:

Of the Mother darksome and divine/Mine the scourge, and mine the kiss;/The five-point star of love and bliss—/ Here I charge you, in this sign.⁵³

She then blesses him with the Five-fold Kiss, steps back a pace and recites the invocation:

Deep calls on height, the Goddess on the God/On him who is the flame that quickens her;/That he and she may seize the silver reins/And ride as one the twin-horsed chariot./ Let the hammer strike the anvil,/Let the lightning touch the earth,/ Let the Lance ensoul the Grail,/ Let the magic come to birth.⁵⁴

[41] She then touches with her right forefinger at his throat, left hip, right breast, left breast, right hip, and throat, the Invoking Pentagram of Fire. She spreads her hands, palms forward and continues:

In Her name do I invoke thee/Mighty Father of us all—/ Lugh, Pan, Balin, Herne, Cernunnos -/Come in answer to my call!/Descend, I pray thee, in thy servant and priest.⁵⁵

She steps backward and the Priest makes the Invoking Pentagram of Fire toward her while saying “Let there be Light!”⁵⁶

[42] The Great Rite is now most often performed as part of the Third Degree Initiation ritual (the highest grade in the Wiccan initiatory system). Gardner's script as established by Kelly begins with the Priestess binding and then scourging the Priest with three, seven, nine, and twenty-one strokes separated by short intervals.⁵⁷ The Priest is untied, binds the Priestess at the altar and then circumambulates the Circle, proclaiming to the four quarters that the Priestess is prepared and will "proceed to erect the Sacred Altar."⁵⁸ He then proceeds to scourge her with three, seven, nine and twenty-one strokes.

[43] The Priestess now is untied and lays down on the altar or floor so that her vagina is at the approximate centre of the circle. The Priest recites an invocation proclaiming that the great altar of the ancients was woman, and that the most sacred point was the centre of the circle, the point of origin which all should adore. He kisses the Priestess' genitals. He invokes "the power of the lifted lance" and touches his genitals.⁵⁹

[44] He recites an invocation, largely taken from the *Gnostic Mass* by Aleister Crowley and at each point marked by a star (*) below, kisses the Priestess' genitals:

Oh circle of stars (*), whereof our Father is but the younger brother (*). Marvel beyond imagination, soul of infinite space, before whom time is ashamed, the mind bewildered and understanding dark, not unto thee may we attain unless thine image be of love (*). Therefore, by seed and root, and stem and bud and leaf and flower and fruit do we invoke thee, O, Queen of space, O dew of light, O continuous one of the Heavens (*). Let it be ever thus, that men speak not of Thee as one, but as none, and let them not speak of thee at all, since thou art continuous, for thou art the point within the circle (*), which we adore (*), the fount of life without which we would not be (*).⁶⁰

He then announces that "in this way truly are erected the Holy Twin Pillars Boaz and Jachin" and kisses the breasts of the Priestess.⁶¹ This identifies the body of the Priestess with the Masonic Temple and her breasts with the two symbolic pillars of Mercy and Severity. This particular identification is multi-layered because the traditional assignment of the Tree of Life in Ceremonial Magical Kabala is also evoked thereby and mapped onto the woman's body.

[45] A series of kisses on various parts of her body are followed by a recitation, again substantially adapted from the *Gnostic Mass*, but calling upon the God:

secret of secrets that art hidden in the being of all lives. Not thee do we adore, for that which adorest is also thou. Thou art that and That am I (*). I am the flame that burns in every man and in the core of every star (*). I am Life and the giver of Life, and therefore is the knowledge of me, the Knowledge of Death (*). I am alone, the Lord within ourselves whose name is Mystery of Mysteries (*).⁶²

The above invocation formed the foundation to the Drawing Down the Sun invocations in Janet and Stewart Farrar, cited above.

[46] At this point the Priestess and Priest couple, as the embodiment of the Gods. Both recite together:

Encourage our hearts; Let thy Light crystallize itself in our blood, fulfilling us of resurrection. For there is no part of us that is not of the Gods.⁶³

Substantial rewriting of this ritual has occurred in most Wiccan groups that use the Great Rite in Actual, although the pattern established remains constant.

[47] We may briefly contrast the sentiments in this central theological statement of Wicca with those expressed in Christian tradition. This is particularly telling when we consider that the period immediately after the Second World War, the period of the birth of Wicca, saw a dramatic revitalization of British Christianity, of domestic ideology and the rebirth of the “Angel in the House.”⁶⁴ The Wiccan “acts of love and pleasure” sharply contrasted with the ideal of the sexually unassertive woman whose “desire shall be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”⁶⁵ Wiccan ritual nudity may be contrasted with the general Christian attitude, but echoes the theme of Genesis 3, that unashamed nudity symbolized innocence. The leadership by women in Wicca contrasted with the Christian norm, after the deuterio-Pauline epistles, that “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.”⁶⁶

[48] This sacralization of sexuality and of sexual intercourse is highly transgressive in the context of late 1940s England, and only somewhat less so at present. However, there was a sex-positive counter-current

in western culture at that time, exemplified by the publication of Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948 and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953, and the publication of *Playboy* magazine, beginning in 1953. Although there is a great deal of variation among modern Wiccans, the basic form of ritual established in 1949 continues.

[49] The use of the scourge and of *hieros gamos* has been greatly reduced, with the majority of Wiccans accepting these things as legitimate aspects of Wiccan practice but not personally engaging in them. The Great Rite *in Token*, which was included in the first Book of Shadows in 1949,⁶⁷ is very commonly used in public and semi-public rituals, which have become frequent occasions for worship. The Great Rite *in Actual* is reserved for coven workings, and most usually only for Third Degree Initiations and marriages. As the Wiccan community has grown very rapidly but the number of covens has not grown to keep up with it, the emergence of a group of Outer Court rituals that are based on the Initiatory Mysteries but veil them in symbolism opaque to the non-Initiated has been a pronounced feature of the religion. This process began as early as Chicago's Pagan Way, which was an Outer Court of some Wiccan covens in that city in the early 1970s. The publication of Pagan Way's *A Book of Pagan Rituals* in two volumes in 1974 and 1975 provided a Wicca-based set of simple rituals for non-Initiates.⁶⁸

[50] In the original Great Rite *in Token*, the Priest fills the chalice full of wine and kneels and holds the chalice at about waist level of the Priestess. She holds her athame between her palms, point downward, and inserts the point into the wine, then withdraws it. The Priest recites: "As the Athame is the Male, so the Cup is the female: so, cojoined, they bring blessedness." The Priestess puts her athame aside, drinks and gives the Priest the cup. The Priest then holds up the platen with food on it, Priestess blesses with her athame, then eats and gives food.⁶⁹ This is now the most common form of the Great Rite.

[51] However, ritual nudity, the use of kisses on the body during *Drawing Down*, the ritual of *Drawing Down the Moon*, the general form of the Initiation rituals and many other ritual ideas from Gardner's

first covens remain prominent features in contemporary coven practices, de-emphasized or absent in public rituals. The Wiccan religion has changed from a religion of small groups, all of whom were Initiated Priesthood, to a variety of private and public traditions all drawing elements from the same roots but not practicing in the same way. This polyvocality was established as a norm by Gardner with his “insist[ence] that all Wiccan Initiates should not merely copy the existing rituals and statements of belief but alter and add to them according to their own tastes and abilities,”⁷⁰ and continues as a prominent feature of Wicca.

[52] The discursive construction of femininity in the immediate post-war period with its return to domesticity, the “traditional values of family, home and piety”⁷¹ and the revitalisation of the evangelical Christian discourse runs directly counter to the Wiccan religion in these key aspects. However, it would not be correct to see Wicca as an overtly bohemian or counter cultural reaction like the Beats of the 1950s. The adherents of the first covens were conventional and conservative people in many regards, although there are transgressive and challenging ideas in these first rituals.⁷² The one area where the first Wiccans challenged the norms most strongly was in sexual morality, embracing couples living together without marriage, and open relationships with sexual intimacy “regarded as appropriate not only in expressing the mutual love of a committed couple but also close friendships.”⁷³ The stream of occultism from which Wicca emerged was the solidly middle class Golden Dawn, Theosophical movement and Ordo Templi Orientis, not the anarchic or Satanic rebellion of more obscure groups.

[53] An examination of how the religion was first practiced poses several questions and offers intertextuality for the religion that has evolved; what did Wiccan rituals tell the participants about themselves and their religion, what do they bring to them, and how did their interaction with the material reshape the ritual?

[54] The Goddess is called first in *Drawing Down The Moon*, reflecting the primacy of the Goddess and the Shakti-like view of the Goddess as the energizing, active, creative principle in the Inner Planes, the attractive and evoking principle. Then the Goddess calls in the God through *Drawing Down the Sun*, reflecting the God as Father Earth, material reality to be moulded by the active feminine force. This relationship is also reflected in the Great Rite *in Token* used in the consecration of the wine in ritual, as presented by Janet and Stewart Farrar, in which the phallic, active, athame is wielded by the Priestess.⁷⁴ In the Farrars' Symbolic Great Rite, however, the athame is wielded by the Priest.⁷⁵

[55] Ritual nudity told Wiccans that they are bodies. The erotic is made clearly a sacred force through many details of the ritual. *Drawing Down* is explicitly about immanence and trance and the possibility of prophecy. Bringing to the ritual the assumptions about the body and sexuality from the broader society led to a challenging and redefinition of those things. The awkwardness of the initial involvement with this ritual style, the discomfort with nudity, the weak and ineffective experience of trance the first few times it is practiced, gave way through habituation and the construction of a stronger and more defined magical personality⁷⁶ to a more effective and graceful performance. The small group norm makes this learning less difficult because of immediate feedback and lesser performance anxiety.

[56] As Tanya Luhrmann points out in her *Persuasions of the Witches Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, "people often argue for a belief as a means to legitimize, and even to understand ... the practice in which they have become involved."⁷⁷ The practice of the ritual produced resultant experiences that were then made sense of and made into beliefs. Bell argues that a key function of ritual is the production of ritual actors, "persons who have an instinctive knowledge of these schemes embedded in their bodies, in their sense of reality, and in their understanding of how to act in ways that both maintain and qualify the complex microrelations of power,"⁷⁸ since ritual is another venue for social practice, not a separate reality (although it is situated by the actors in ritual as such). Through the

body, its postures and the physical habits and gestures that form the ritual, the patterning happens below the level of ideas or theology.⁷⁹

[57] Some provocative research undertaken in Canada by Shelley Rabinovitch in the late 1980s found that a large proportion of the active participants in the Wiccan religion had been emotionally, physically, or sexually abused as children or adults, in most cases in more than one way.⁸⁰ Her study indicates that the transgressive aspects of Wiccan practice acted as means to bring forward the feelings of participants in a psychodrama and heal them from their abuse. It is possible that these data can be projected backward, carefully, to the origins of Wicca as well. The high rates of abusive families hidden behind the ideological façade of perfect domesticity have only recently been brought forward. The patriarchal monotheisms have been inadequate in religiously dealing with or even in acknowledging the extent of familial dysfunctionality. In the discursive climate of the origin of Wicca in the late 1940s and early 1950s, with the reified family and Freud both influential, this factor may well have been important.

[58] The experience of sacred sex, and other ritual as well, the ecstatic possibility of reclaiming the body and its pleasures from what has hurt, gives Wiccan ritual a therapeutic tone as well as a religious one. This turn toward therapy is particularly pronounced in that feminist wing of Wicca centred on the work of Starhawk and the Reclaiming Tradition of Wicca, a Tradition which draws less directly from Gardner's original rituals than most others.⁸¹ Reclaiming descends from Appalachian folk magic, together with influences from Voodoo and the Hawaiian Huna tradition, although it has been absorbing many Wiccan and New Age ideas as well.⁸² Sex magic ritual practiced by Ceremonial Magicians and Reclaiming Witches, among others, is not the Great Rite because it does not necessarily include the aspect of possession trance, an essential component of Great Rite. In the same vein, other sexual magic does not aim to the same ends as Great Rite. It can be performed by Wiccans or others simply as an effective way to raise a great deal of energy to be devoted to healing, job seeking, blessing, or some

other magical purposes. There is a minority of Wiccans, now, typically in the British Traditional wing, practicing Great Rite. What is their experience of it?

[59] It is an experience of transubstantiation. The bodies of the Priestess and Priest become the bodies of the Goddess and Her Consort without, however, ceasing to be those of the human servants of the Gods. It is this intermingling of the carnal and the divine, the physical and the metaphysical, that is the key to the emotional and spiritual power of the rite. The sexual act as performed in the *hieros gamos* makes the act sacred, in exactly the same way as the Roman Catholic will see the breaking of bread and drinking of wine as sacred acts during Mass but not at other times. The difference is that the bread and wine are not conscious beings that can experience the transformation and be moved to live their lives differently as a consequence of the transformative mystery. This is why it is typically only Third Degrees that undertake Great Rite, as they are expected to be spiritually mature enough to benefit, and to embody the Gods without fear or expectations.

[60] This rite is symbolic, of course, as are all rituals, which is to say that it is not about the actions which make it up, or at least not only about those things, referring to a more fundamental reality underlying appearances. It is symbolic in this case of the embodiment of the divine, the panentheism central to Wiccan theology, the sacred and holy nature of the body, the sacredness of pleasure and its value as a route to the direct experience of the divine, the idea that the Gods enjoy our bodies as we do, and pleasure as prayer, not as snare. The “Great Rite in Token” is thus a symbol of a symbol, removed even further from the thing itself.

[61] The Great Rite challenges on a deep level many of the norms of our society, around pleasure, the nature of the divine, the nature of the body. It directly challenges monogamy, sexual taboos, and body taboos. It is a magickal act and it springs from the power of the Will to desire and to transcend ordinary limits of thought and of action. The universe is malleable, and the Gods can come and play. This is a

profound spiritual experience mediated through the most carnal of means, a transubstantiation through an antinomian reclaiming of sex and the body and a rejection of the conventional limits of spirituality.

[62] Although both partners start the ritual in a state of light trance the trance must be intensified throughout until it is Goddess and God, not Priestess and Priest, performing the ritual (PS and P present only enough to be aware, to absorb the energy back into themselves, to be affected by it). There is an energetic feedback in the ritual as experienced—the Goddess yearning for the God and calling Him forth in response to Her desire, the God responding with passion and directness which pulls out a deeper level of desire and so forth. It is the aim of this ritual to attain a transcendent experience beyond the polarity of genders and to give birth within oneself to a mental or spiritual androgyne.⁸³ The goal is a merger at the point of orgasm which transcends division and which, in an ecstatic feedback, returns and reinforces then dissolves the essence of both sexes. The structure of a regular ritual is used, although the two celebrants are alone for the Great Rite portion.

[63] Roberto Calosso's discussion of hierogamy and sacrifice in *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* may provide insight into a continuing thread of experience from the Greek model to Wiccan practice: "The appearance of the world came about with the copulation of a god with that which was not god, with the laceration and dispersal of a god's body."⁸⁴ Through sex, life, and in life, necessity, the necessity to kill and eat and to experience loss and pain—life constantly is guilty of causing death, a guilt that must be expiated. Hierogamy is akin to sacrifice—offering up, although temporarily, one's body and spirit as a gift to the Gods for their use. The parallels between blood and sexual fluids, the equation and connection of life and death, sex and death, eating and sex, all layer underneath the experience of hierogamy.

[64] The fact that humans and gods copulated at the beginning of everything creates a connection between humanity and the divine, a kinship. We share lust, sexual passion, and we can remind ourselves

of our fundamental relationship in each sexual act—with orgasm we can project our consciousness back to the primal moment of creation. But this journey back to the beginning is dangerous, and threatens to erase the boundaries between human and divine permanently, to collapse the universe back into primal disorder. So we sacrifice, which reminds both parties of the absolute distinctions of life and death between gods and humans. Sacrifice, however, seen as an aspect of sex, tying life and death together (much as the great story of the maiden Goddess of spring, Persephone, and her *hieros gamos* with the God of death and the underworld, Pluton/Hades, brings sex and death together⁸⁵). Sexual fluids like amrita⁸⁶ and semen, being produced and sacrificed from the body, and like blood being tied to life itself, are perfect for this purpose.

[65] Although the Charge of the Goddess says “nor do I demand sacrifice, for behold, I am the Mother of all living and my love is poured out upon the earth,”⁸⁷ Wiccans bless food and drink and voluntarily sacrifice a portion as elements in a conversation that they are having with the Gods, an exchange with them that reflects a mutual interest in one another and mutual desire of each other. Humans are related to the Gods, although we are constrained by necessity and time as they are not. The occasions when they come to be in time are significant—copulation, bearing our children, eating, pouring libation in imitation of humans as they struggle to understand time and necessity. With libation we say “whatever we do we are this liquid poured away.”⁸⁸

[66] In the Mystery, for the Great Rite is a Mystery ritual, the Gods are brought into the flesh, into the flesh that decays and dies: “For the initiates, the mysteries are a moment when the gods become tangled with death.”⁸⁹ Sex is the essential life-giving act, and as the Wiccan Horned God says “I am Life and the giver of Life, and therefore is the knowledge of me, the Knowledge of Death,”⁹⁰ because sex opens the gate to death through life.

[67] Although the Great Rite can occur spontaneously, it is expected that at least one party is a “proper person properly prepared” and typically both parties are and they are planning to do the work. In general, the couple must be comfortable with each other and they must be open to the option of sexual ritual (and often they have done sexual ritual together in the past). The Gods must lust after them—they must have a relationship of sexual attraction with at least one deity. In Wicca it is expected that close and personal relationships will emerge between Matron and Patron deities and Their Priestesses and Priests, not always but quite frequently including a quality of sexual attraction. It is also expected that sexual attraction, whether or not it is ever acted upon, will be a part of the energy that works between working partnerships of Priestesses and Priests, and to a lesser but real extent among the members of a coven.

[68] The sexual mysticism of the Great Rite takes on a group and social quality under these circumstances, as discussed above. So, although a specific instance of possession trance and ritual sex does not follow the exact ritual form of the Great Rite and may be unexpected it will not come as a complete surprise and will be identified as Great Rite if it fulfils the general expectations for the ritual. The Great Rite is, in other words, not only a specific ritual, but a fundamental mode of engagement with the sacred and sexual that is opened up by the panentheistic idea and the possibility of transubstantiation of the living bodies and spirits of two ritual actors.

Primary Reports of Priests and Priestesses

[69] The normal form of the Great Rite ritual begins after the usual opening business of a Wiccan ritual—the cleansing, setting aside and consecration of the ritual space, the calling of the directions and the elements, and the welcome of the participants in the ritual. Now, the Goddess is usually Drawn into the Priestess first. She will be in an altered state of consciousness when she draws the God into the Priest. It is usually said that the Priest draws into the Priestess and then the Goddess, acting through the

Priestess, calls Her Consort into the Priest. There are occasions where the Priest will have the God drawn into him, first, as in Third Degree Initiation of a Priestess. The experience of the God becoming present in the Priest, as experienced from the Priestess:

The first time I felt the searing breath of Dionysus on my face, I was arrogant enough to call the God that cannot be commanded into one of our circles... I called Dionysus to thank him for His encouragement and His inspiration... He appeared in my Priest, phallus erect; lips parted and stepped into me. He took my face in his hands, pressed his Bordeaux flavoured mouth to mine and whispered, breath hot and gasping, into my ear: "I am the one who cannot be commanded. I come unbidden. Because you have called me I will tell you that I love you and desire you. I will ride you, like a horse, to waves of ecstasy you have never known..."⁹¹

[70] The Priestess will have the Goddess drawn into her. The Priest will experience some change in the Priestess as he performs the ritual, unless he is deeply in trance himself at this point. The type of stimulation and the details of the wording of the invocation will change for the Great Rite from the typical coven meeting. The Priestess' typical experience of possession, without the intention of doing Great Rite is:

I felt Her presence as soon as the Invocation began. She was already present by the time he finished the Five-Fold Kiss. When he began the Invocation, I felt Her take me pretty powerfully. I was aware that I was rocking back on my heels and could barely maintain the concentration to stand. I don't recall a lot of it (sign of a good possession). I lost myself in it. She left almost immediately after She spoke the message.⁹²

I have dripped with the glamour of Aphrodite and felt the amazed and awe-filled heat of the stares placed on me by strangers as I passed them in a grocery store the morning after experiencing Her in a Friday night circle.⁹³

[In the Great Rite, both Priestess and Priest are possessed by the Goddess and Her Consort. They are in trance and in a ritual space where the usual moral and ethical codes are said to not apply, "a space that is not a space, a time that is not a time"⁹⁴. In this transgressive heterotopia, sex is experienced as a divine force, not merely human, expressed through but not wholly of the body.

[71] There is a feedback loop of sexual stimulation that is needed to raise the bodies to their highest capacity. The repeated invocation and kissing of the Priestess' genitals, type and form of invocations and specific gestures and the details of coupling are not important. What matters is that at the point of sexual intercourse the Gods are experienced as present and acting through the bodies of the Priestess and Priest, who have stepped aside from their bodies and given them up in ecstasy:

Herne took over and entered her ... I felt the horns on my head ... I was in the pose of Mithras sacrificing the bull, my back arched, mouth open, moaning.⁹⁵

I felt the presence of both Aphrodite and Morrighan within, each perfectly present, both calling to the God. They called Him and He obeyed.... I knew the presence of the feral Lord. ... the Horns were huge and [the Priest] was no longer there.⁹⁶

I was aware the whole time of being both myself and Aphrodite as I was aware that [she] was both herself and Ares simultaneously. ... A mad passionate dance of powerful equals. I wanted to also supplicate to him to bring out his strong protectiveness and strength.⁹⁷

The sacrificed God, the God who dies that we may eat, the God who reduces flesh to soil... Dionysus had come to me... to initiate me to my third degree. He had come to ride me through the waves of ecstasy. He had come to teach me how to walk the path through ecstasy—not ecstasy of the flesh, but ecstasy of the spirit.⁹⁸

[72] The after effects of the Great Rite can vary depending on the needs that the person performing it went into it with. It has a powerful and transforming effect, because of its transgressive qualities, the amount of trust and the energy released through letting down one's guard, and the power of directed orgasm. For the Wiccan ritual participants the intention of the Gods in the work, as equal or even dominant actors, which may not be in complete agreement with the intentions of the Priestess or Priest, must be included in the analysis:

We were both a little dazed and needed some time to digest the power of our experience... I have been unabashedly sexual and flirtatious with everyone... AND absolutely fearless of anything. SHE is still with me more than a little. I think they have changed me a bit. I don't think I will ever lose either of these new traits. (Observation a couple of months

later—the flirtation has died down but not the sexual confidence or comfort. The fearlessness is not diminished in the least).⁹⁹

I have danced again with Dionysus ... and I have learned that He is what He is. When He wants what He wants He will come and take it—even if to the receiver of his affections, it feels more like rape than seduction. He is amoral—the most amoral of them all. ... as the teacher of boundaries, some boundaries are permeable and some are iron clad. How you feel about what He does is IRRELEVANT.¹⁰⁰

The man will be what the woman brings out in him and it is her choice what to do, when to do it, how it will be done etc. He is there to provide the energy. She is there to create with it. I learned that the Gods are grateful for our participation... what I felt was his [Ares'] love for my willingness to be the embodiment of the Goddess and that in me she could play with him.¹⁰¹

[73] Drawing Down the Moon or the Great Rite are both typically followed by a period of formal or informal debriefing, after the Priestess and Priest have recovered from the state of trance and returned to consensus reality. This typically takes a few minutes, if possession was strong, and often includes consuming some food and drink. Through the debriefing the ritual participants shape the experience consciously, asking each other for descriptive details of the Gods that possessed their bodies, asking for elaboration on any messages that may have been delivered, and in other ways incorporating the experience into their lives. There is also the strong expectation that every Witch will keep a Book of Shadows, a ritual and magical diary, and will record the details of significant rituals as soon as possible after their performance for future reference, and as a source for intertextual interpretation of future rituals. Although this is a heterotopian time set aside, Wiccan practice takes the insights and energy of the ritual and quickly brings them into the religious life and personal life of participants.

The Future of the Great Rite

[74] The Great Rite provides a model for ideal sexuality in Wicca—sex that is spiritually informed, ecstatic and deeply connective. It is, however, not a model that is necessarily monogamous, heterosexual, or controlled. It is power, but power that transforms on the shared Wills of both Gods and humans.

[75] Wicca is not centred on the limitation and control of ecstasy, particularly sexual ecstasy, but on trained and wilful expression of it. The rational exploration of magickal subjectivity, a project inherited by Wicca from the Order of the Golden Dawn occultists, as discussed above,¹⁰² continues in an open-ended development here, with libratory prospects and an implicit re-vamping of all of life in mind for both genders. Like all religion, however, it is guided by the spirit, the spirit in the body.

[76] The Great Rite is a central expression of Wiccan spirituality. As Wicca is becoming more mainstream and less occultist, and as the pressure of a great number of new converts has overwhelmed many teachers, the actual practice has substantially lessened in frequency. Working toward this high degree of trust and release has always taken time and application, and the number of people that have undertaken Great Rite was always small, but the rapid growth and the increasing number of people who come into the religion not proper people, properly prepared, or even near it, has decreased this proportion considerably more.

[77] To what extent can the Great Rite remain a lived reality for practitioners of Wicca and a central symbol, in some form, as the practice becomes increasingly rare? Will the recuperative impulse as expressed in one prominent couple's requirement that participants in the Great Rite "only be a man and a woman between who intercourse is already a normal and loving part of their relationship: in other words, husband and wife or established lovers"¹⁰³ result in the ordinary associations of sex substituting for the esoteric meanings and the loss of intertextual reading against the grain?

[78] Elevating heterosexuality and monogamy to theological absolutes is contrary to the strong norm of free sexual choice in Wicca. It also contradicts the practice of the Gods, generally anything but monogamous and not always heterosexual either, but Wiccans view humans as ethically autonomous, with the Gods as only occasional role models. The critical edge of Wicca on gender and sexuality, and its potential as a spiritual sexually liberating force is in danger of being blunted.

[79] Compulsory monogamy is such a deeply entrenched social norm that many sincere Wiccan practitioners must compromise their spiritual impulses in order to preserve their relationships. If the circumstances of someone's life, individual psychology or relationships do not permit a completely pragmatic approach to Great Rite, the norm need not be elevated into a religious principle in contradiction to Wicca's foundation principles. Acknowledging the central importance of the Great Rite does not make its performance obligatory. A Priestess or Priest who practiced Great Rite indiscriminately would be going counter to the spirit of it. The power of a conscious choice of what a Priest/ess will do ritually is as significant in this regard as in any other.

[80] Once experienced the Great Rite provides the bedrock of certainty that informs the rest of life. But as a Mystery, it must be experienced, not just described, before some of the energy and insights can continue to act in other ritual and non-ritual contexts. One can recall the experience and work with the energy through masturbation or while doing the Great Rite in Token in coven or other ritual.

[81] The amount of preparatory work required and the elitism in the requirements for sexual, emotional and spiritual maturity, prior to that, given the populism in modern Wicca, has led to many undervaluing or disregarding the actual Great Rite. Symbolic or solo sex magick or Great Rite in Token is not enough alone although sex magic is mostly practiced solo. As Frater U.D. puts it: "Sex-magical partner workings are not quite the exception, but autoerotic practices are certainly the rule."¹⁰⁴ By many would-be Priest/esses denying the centrality of the Rite, because they have not done it, and are unprepared to attempt it, or are afraid to challenge social norms in order to attempt it, the religion is weakened.

[82] Wiccans are acting "as if" they believe, to see what the results are, in search of experiences which are valuable to them, rather than in search of confirmation to absolute belief statements. They are not performing an intellectual dodge to make their religion non-falsifiable, but understanding the playful possibility of ritual and magical exploration and the positive results in aesthetic and psychological

happiness that result from a rational subjectivity in the exploration of the spiritual. By developing on the bases of the original practices of the religion, Wicca's challenge to the hegemony of Christian values has continued. The new aspects of its religious discourse about sexuality, which the gay and lesbian, polyamorous and "lifestyle" community members now involved have added indicates that it continues as a heterotopia, and continues to generate new religious compensators and spiritual capital for its members.

[83] To continue to accumulate cultural capital for its members and to be effective in the world in building toward social transformation in tune with its values, the Wiccan religion must continue to resist the normalizing impulse and to shape its development on the basis of these values. As the next generation grows up in the religion, they will shape it, increasingly (although a majority of Wiccans will continue to be converts).

[84] Part of the challenge facing Wicca is how to reawaken the critique of patriarchal sexual limits, in a situation where the religion is growing rapidly and is, particularly, adding young families and children. What alternatives can Wicca develop? The structural adjustment in some communities of an Inner Court for clergy and Initiates, Outer Court for the regular congregants, and the broader Sabbat congregation for the laity may be one useful option. What viable alternatives exist to the nuclear family? How can Wiccans avoid setting up a counter-morality that limits people's choices just as badly as compulsory heteromonogamy does? The argument has been made, among others by Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, that sectarian movements necessarily move toward the mean and normalize their practices.

[85] It is not the choice of monogamy that threatens the Great Rite, because it can be, and often is in some form, a practice of committed Wiccan couples, but the lack of understanding of its central importance to the religion as a whole. The inadequate critique of the Patriarchal sexual limits which leads those Wiccan traditions that embrace the use of the ritual to often endorse compulsory

heterosexuality and only monogamy in its performance weakens the Craft. Those sexual minorities that are growing in the religion feel disenfranchised by this.

[86] The development of Wicca points to the possibility of a religious embrace of sexuality and of sexual variety in a way that does not simply *tolerate* sexual variety (thus implicitly privileging one expression above the others) but which builds a workable theology around the differences and common thread in ecstasy. It also demonstrates that sexual ecstasy and religious ecstasy can be mutually reinforcing, and that a pro-sex feminist-informed spirituality is workable. Although the long-term viability of the Wiccan sexual spirituality is an open question the success thus far in building a religion embracing sexual variety and free expression poses a substantial challenge to the less sex-positive theologies of other religions, and the separation of the (sexual) body and spirit, central to the secular outlook as well as mainstream (Christian) religion.

Notes

¹ Sections of this article were adapted from Samuel Wagar, "An Explanation and Understanding of Wiccan Ritual: Approaching a Deviant Religious Discourse in the Modern West," *Illuminé* 4 (2005).

² Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: a History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Hutton is the best single history of the cultural developments in the United Kingdom over the past couple of centuries leading into the founding of the Wiccan religion.

³ A worthy recent treatment using this interpretation is Margaret Atwood *The Penelopiad* (Toronto: Alfred Knopf Canada, 2005).

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1954; revised edition Princeton: Princeton University Press 1971), 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶ Joscelyn Godwin *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), chapter one, 1-25 deals with theories of phallus worship.

⁷ Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 217. John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

⁸ The term "the mystical" will be used in this paper as Alex Owen used it in reference to the "range of spiritual alternatives to religious orthodoxy a distinctively 'esoteric' turn" that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s. Owen, *Place*, 21.

⁹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902, republished New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004), 368. His full discussion of mysticism is Lectures XVI and XVII, pages 328-371,

and he provides valuable points to illuminate the Great Rite in his Lecture XIX, 395-417, and the Conclusions, 418-450.

¹⁰ Ibid, 369.

¹¹ Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (1964; revised edition New York: Viking Press, 1970).

¹² Ibid, xvi.

¹³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 78.

¹⁴ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (1974; trans. and repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Bradford Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu," *Sociological Theory* 21,2 (June 2003): 150-174.

¹⁵ Owen, *Place*, 148

¹⁶ This formulation is developed from Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites First Series: The Fundamental Institutions*. Burnett Lectures. 1889, 1894; 2nd Edition London, p. 19 as cited in Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*, trans. Barbara Harshaw (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 75: "So far as myths consist of explanations of ritual their value is altogether secondary, and it may be affirmed with confidence that in almost every case the myth was derived from the ritual, and not the ritual from the myth; for the ritual was fixed and the myth was variable, the ritual was obligatory and faith in the myth was at the discretion of the worshipper." This is consistent with Tanya Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witches Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), chapter 22, 324-336, in particular.

¹⁷ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 184-5.

¹⁸ Susan Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Niditch documents the archaeology demonstrating the existence of the Asherah-Yahweh pairing in ancient Israel.

¹⁹ Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Kripal brilliantly discusses erotic mysticism and the homoerotic quality as well as the patriarchal limits placed upon it in the major religious traditions.

²⁰ As for example in Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Wasserstrom deals magnificently with the complex political and occultist factors informing the work of three great names in the history of religions, in particular pointing to occultist and fascist leanings and connections among them and reflected in their work's emphases.

²¹ Verter, "Spiritual Capital," 150-74.

²² "Habitus" is defined by Bourdieu as "a lasting, generalized and transposable disposition to act in conformity with a (quasi-) systematic view of the world and human existence." Pierre Bourdieu, "Legitimation and Structured Interests in Weber's Sociology of Religion," trans. Chris Turner, in *Max Weber: Rationality and Modernity*, ed. Sam Whimster and Scott Lash (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 126. Cited by Verter, "Spiritual Capital," 154.

²³ Wasserstrom's discussion of Scholem, Eliade and Corbin places a large amount of the blame for this turn at their illustrious feet, but the tendency was well-developed before the rise of the discipline of the History of Religions after the Second World War.

²⁴ Significant works which discuss these religions are: Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953; repr. Kingston, NY: MacPherson and Company, 1988), Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1983), and Seth and Ruth Leacock, *Spirits of the Deep: A Study of an Afro-Brazilian Cult* (1972; repr. New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1975).

²⁵ Wiccan phrase meaning a person of the appropriate rank and level of experience and training.

²⁶ Bernard Asbell, *The Pill: A Biography of the Drug that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 1995), 177.

²⁷ *Hieros gamos* for Inanna is discussed in Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1983), and for Persephone and Demeter in Ann Suter *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate: An Archaeology of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

²⁸ Deena Metzger, "Re-Vamping the World: On the Return of the Holy Prostitute," *Heretic's Journal* (Seattle) (Fall 1985), repr. in *Pagans for Peace* 57 (1992): 6-9.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

³⁰ Date established by Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: a History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 228. Gardner was not the only OTO member to be envisioning a revival of Witchcraft— in California the head of the OTO lodge, John Whiteside Parsons, composed his essay "Manifesto of the Witchcraft" in June 1950. Parsons' accidental death in 1952 prevented his experiment from proceeding. "Manifesto of the Witchcraft" and "The Witchcraft" were published in John Whiteside Parsons, *Freedom is a Two-Edged Sword and Other Essays* (Las Vegas: Falcon Press, 1989), 69-73.

³¹ Aidan Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic Book 1: A History of Modern Witchcraft, 1939-1964* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1991).

³² Census Canada *Religions in Canada* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1983, 1993, 2003).

³³ Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina, 2003), 90-91. The Pagan Census found that 300 people chose both Wicca and Pagan as their religious path of 2089 completed surveys. Wiccans comprised 54.7% of their sample, Pagans 53.6%. Significantly, 50.9% of their survey were solitary practitioners (12).

³⁴ Hutton, *Triumph*, 238.

³⁵ *Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical* manuscript in Wiccan Church of Canada collection, Toronto. Kelly (*Crafting*) gives a detailed breakdown and analysis of this material from pp. 47-75.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16,1 (Spring 1986): 22-27.

³⁷ *The Key of Solomon the King*, S. Liddell MacGregor Mathers, trans. and ed. (London: George Redway, 1888; repr. New York: Samuel Weiser, 1974), 17-8.

³⁸ *ibid* 90-91.

³⁹ Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn* (1941; repr. 6th edition St. Paul MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1989), 53.

⁴⁰ Matthew 6:13 (KJV).

⁴¹ Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*. Godwin's excellent history of the Anglo-American occult traces the development of Christian occult Cabbalism in far more detail than possible here, beginning on p. 94.

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- ⁴² Janet Farrar and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft* (London: Robert Hale, 1984), 69.
- ⁴³ Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (London, 1929; repr. New York: Dover Publishing, 1976), 350.
- ⁴⁴ Kelly, *Crafting*, 52.
- ⁴⁵ Charles G. Leland, *Aradia or The Gospel of the Witches* (1890; repr. Custer WA: Phoenix Books, 1990), 6 cited in Kelly, *Crafting*, 53.
- ⁴⁶ Leland, *Aradia*, 6-7, cited in Kelly, *Crafting*, 53.
- ⁴⁷ Leland, *Aradia*, 14, cited in Kelly, *Crafting*, 53.
- ⁴⁸ Aleister Crowley, *The Book of the Law* (London: BCM Ankh, 1904, repr. York Beach ME: Samuel Weiser, 1976), 26 cited in Kelly, 53.
- ⁴⁹ Crowley *Magick*, 345-61.
- ⁵⁰ Kelly, *Crafting*, 53.
- ⁵¹ Janet and Stewart Farrar *The Witches' Way* (London: Robert Hale, 1984), chapter VI, 67-70.
- ⁵² Regardie, *Ceremonial Magic*, 124.
- ⁵³ Farrar and Farrar, *Witches' Way*, 297.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 69.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 69.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 70.
- ⁵⁷ The scourge is a symbolic cat-of-nine tails whip, typically made with woven cord of embroidery thread. The point of scourging is not to cause pain but to, through rhythmic stimulation, induce a trance state.
- ⁵⁸ Kelly, *Crafting* 60.
- ⁵⁹ This detail comes from Farrar and Farrar, *Witches' Way*, 37 although the wording is in Kelly, *Crafting*, 60.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 60-61. This section is adapted slightly from Crowley, *Magick*, 350.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*, 61.
- ⁶² *Ibid*, 61. This section is adapted slightly from Crowley, *Magick*, 351.
- ⁶³ *Ibid*, 61. This section is adapted slightly from Crowley, *Magick*, 352.
- ⁶⁴ A popular Victorian trope drawn from Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name celebrating love and marriage, 1854-6. An excellent gender religious history of Britain from 1800-2000, which inspired this analysis, is Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001). Brown deals with the return to piety from 1945-1958 in chapter eight, pp. 170-92.
- ⁶⁵ Genesis 3.16 (NASV).
- ⁶⁶ 1 Timothy 2.12 (NASV).
- ⁶⁷ Kelly, *Crafting*, 67.
- ⁶⁸ Norman Slater ed., *A Book of Pagan Rituals* (1974, 1975; republished York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser Incorporated, 1978).
- ⁶⁹ Kelly, *Crafting*, 67. A more elaborate version of the blessing wording is frequently used, typically "As the chalice is to the female/So the athame is to the male/and cojoined they are one in truth/one without the other is incomplete/for there is no power in all of the world/greater than the power of man and woman/ joined in the bonds of love" (the wording used by the Wiccan Church of Canada, similar to wording found in Farrar and Farrar, *Eight Sabbats*, 46. The Farrars also give a more elaborate Symbolic Great Rite for Sabbats, 51-53.

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- ⁷⁰ Hutton, *Triumph*, 248.
- ⁷¹ Brown, *Death*, 172.
- ⁷² Philip Heselton, *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival* (Chielveley, UK: Capall Bann Publishing, 2000), gives a detailed portrait of many of Gardner's early associates including Dorothy Clutterbuck, a member of the local gentry, Edith Woodford-Grimes, an English teacher, both of whom were alleged to have served as his mentors and Initiators. Information on other of the early Wiccans can be found in Hutton and Kelly.
- ⁷³ Frederic Lamond, *Fifty Years of Wicca* (Sutton Mallet, UK: Green Magic, 2004), 86. When Wicca consisted of one coven, in February 1957, Lamond was Initiated into the religion.
- ⁷⁴ Janet and Stewart Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches* (London: Robert Hale, 1981), 46
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 53.
- ⁷⁶ Luhrmann *Persuasions*. Her chapter 21 on "Interpretive Drift" 307-323 is an excellent description of the process of application of magical ideas which leads to a comfort with them, an ease in the use of the symbolism and ideas of the Wiccan and magical worldview.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 310.
- ⁷⁸ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 221.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 100.
- ⁸⁰ Shelley Tsivia Rabinovitch, "An Ye Harm None, Do What Ye Will: Neo-Pagans and Witches in Canada," unpublished MA Thesis, Department of Religion, Carleton University, Ottawa 1992. Rabinovitch found that 39 of the 40 women and 20 of the 27 men whom she interviewed in taped interviews reported experiences of abuse (98-114).
- ⁸¹ As see, for example Starhawk, *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority, and Mystery* (San Francisco: Harper and Rowe, 1987), which mixes substantial doses of therapy, radical politics and religion all together.
- ⁸² Kelly, *Crafting*, 21-22. Kelly here gives a brief sketch of the history of Fairy Tradition, from which Reclaiming Tradition derived.
- ⁸³ U.D. Frater, *Secrets of Western Sex Magic: Magical Energy and Gnostic Trance* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2001), 215.
- ⁸⁴ Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, trans. Tim Parks (New York: Knopf, 1993), 293.
- ⁸⁵ Ann Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate: an Archaeology of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002). Suter's chapter 5, pages 101-117, deals with *hieros gamos* in the stories of Demeter and Persephone.
- ⁸⁶ Literally meaning "the drink which conveys immortality," a term for the female ejaculate.
- ⁸⁷ Farrar and Farrar, *The Witches' Way*, 298.
- ⁸⁸ Calasso, *Marriage*, 293.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 315-6.
- ⁹⁰ Kelly, *Crafting*, 61.
- ⁹¹ Lady L 3rd, *Dancing with Dionysus* (unpublished mss. British Columbia, 1997), 1. Those providing first-hand accounts of possession trance and Great Rite will be identified by gender, a letter, their level of Initiation and their general location only. The texts provided are in the possession of the author.
- ⁹² Lady S 3rd, *June 25/05* (unpublished mss. British Columbia, 2005), 1. An excerpt from her magickal diary.
- ⁹³ Lady L 3rd, *op. cit.*, 1.

⁹⁴ A typical phrase used in the circle casting, to establish the ritual space as a place set aside from ordinary reality.

⁹⁵ Lord M 3rd, *27th of June 2005* (unpublished mss. British Columbia, 2005)

⁹⁶ Lady S 3rd, op. cit., 2.

⁹⁷ Lady Sy 3rd, *September 21 2006* (unpublished mss. British Columbia, 2006), 4-6. Lady Sy's Initiation by Great Rite was lesbian, although her Initiator Drew Down the Sun, and the Rite conformed to the typical Great Rite.

⁹⁸ Lady L 3rd, op. cit., 4.

⁹⁹ Lady S 3rd, op. cit., 3.

¹⁰⁰ Lady L 3rd, op. cit., 4.

¹⁰¹ Lady Sy, op. cit., 9-10.

¹⁰² As see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁰³ Janet Farrar and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches' Way*, 32.

¹⁰⁴ Frater, *Secrets*, 142