

THE SIGN OF THE WITCH

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THE SIGN OF THE WITCH

MODERNITY AND THE PAGAN REVIVAL

David Waldron

UNIVERSITY OF BALLARAT
AUSTRALIA

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For Jasmine, Talia and Rowan.

Witchcraft is a word that frightens many people and confuses many others. In the popular imagination, Witches are ugly, old hags riding broomsticks, or evil Satanists performing obscene rites. Modern Witches are thought to be members of a kooky cult, primarily concerned with cursing enemies by jabbing wax images with pins and lacking the depth, dignity and seriousness of a true religion.¹

1. Starhawk (Simos, Miriam). *The Spiral Dance: 10th Anniversary Edition*. San Francisco: Harper Press, 1989. p 16.

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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

IDEAS AND THEIR TRANSFORMATIVE PERMUTATIONS IN HISTORY

Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart

We are happy to include David Waldron's work, "The Sign of the Witch", in our Ritual Studies Monograph Series with Carolina Academic Press. Waldron's study is remarkable in that he traces a history of his topic that runs into the contemporary sphere, taking us from seventeenth century to twenty first century Europe, showing the twists and turns of ritual practices and reformative ideas that have given shape to the notion of witchcraft through these centuries. Contemporary ideas and actions attempt to reach back in time, beyond the religious and political conflicts of the seventeenth century, to the much contested realms of pre-Christian practices in the "folk" domain of Europe: practices that are linked to animism, nature worship, goddess figures, and the like, all of which spring into life in the imaginative worlds of the neo-pagan practitioners of Wicca. Carefully, and at times entertainingly, Dr. Waldron guides his readers along the historical pathways and into the labyrinthine worlds of the so-called "post-modern" times, with their emphasis on eclecticism and bricolage, including the eco-feminist strands of affiliation. We ourselves enthusiastically encouraged Dr. Waldron to revise his manuscript in relation to a number of topics as he prepared the work for inclusion in our Series with Carolina Academic Press.

In some ways these experimental activities represent both a response to contemporary forms of social alienation in people's lives, to which Charismatic and Pentecostalist forms of Christianity can also be seen as counteractive responses or types of therapeutic renewal. Jone Salomonsen has perceptively grouped together two studies she has made in the USA, one of the neo-pagan Reclaiming Witchcraft community in San Francisco, the other of the First Church of Christ in Connecticut. Unconnected to each other, and one defined as "pagan" while the other is "Christian", the two show similar el-

ements of attempts at creative renewal through initiation rites for young people. The Reclaiming movement, founded by Starhawk, centers such rituals on girls at the time of their first menstruation. The First Church rituals center on the entrance into sexuality by both boys and girls. Both lay some stress on the theme of “visions” to be attained by initiands. And both movements drew on anthropological writings stemming from the time of Arnold van Gennep in order to create their ritual forms. Gennep’s work, of course, in turn drew on the historical and cross-cultural records of his day. Streams of “tradition” and its reformulations thus feed into these practices (see Salomonsen 2003).

Returning to the seventeenth century and to the highly specific locality of Essex County in England, two further things are of note in Dr. Waldron’s treatment of the materials. Building on Alan Macfarlane’s pioneering work on the historical study of witchcraft in this area, Waldron also brings in a brief discussion of our own comparative work on the importance of rumor and gossip in the genesis of witchcraft accusations (Stewart and Strathern 2004)¹. The crucial concept here is the idea of social fluidity and uncertainty. Uncertainty breeds suspicions, and suspicions lead to accusations if they are mobilized to do so. Theological ideas and agents of government may become attached to such a populist trend if it reaches a certain crescendo and has to be dealt with. Local community life is always full of suspicions as well as solidarities (see Møhl 1997 on a village community of central France), and forms of talk, as Møhl stresses, are the media in which such conflicts are primarily expressed. An application of our theory of the role of gossip and rumor to the spread of witchcraft accusations generally is hinted at in Waldron’s presentation (see our own discussion in Stewart and Strathern 2004: 152–156).

Another work which we recommended to Dr. Waldron while he was preparing his manuscript in response to our overall comments is the book by Emma Wilby on “Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits” (Wilby 2005). Wilby’s study was notable not only for its detailed anatomy of folk and popular practices but also because it employed the term “shamanic” in relation to ritual practitioners of the seventeenth century and earlier. The use of the term may remind us of the element of “vision” entering into both neo-pagan and what we might call neo-Christian practices referred to above. Wilby has drawn attention to the fact that in an “enchanted world” these popular practitioners gave people the perceived opportunity to communicate with the “supernatural” world: the witches’ journey thus becomes comparable to the idea of the

1. For further reference to works by Strathern and Stewart, including works on witchcraft and sorcery see (www.pitt.edu/~strather).

shaman's journey that informs so much classic literature on that topic. (See also discussions in the *Journal of Ritual Studies* 16(2), 2002, on the topic of shamanism and its definitions, e.g. MacDonald 2002 a & b; also on neo-shamanism and performance Blain and Wallis in *Journal of Ritual Studies* 20(1), 2006. These references indicate that we have been taking a close interest in the topic in recent years. We are also engaged in working with colleagues at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica in Taipei, Taiwan, where we have been situated as Visiting Research Scholars for periods of time from 2002 to 2007, on the topic of Shamans and Ritual Performance.)

These two perspectives, the perspective of gossip and the perspective of shamanic practice, can both help to enrich the kinds of materials Dr. Waldron ably covers in his own analytical discussions.

The "sign of the witch" can thus be seen as like a multivocalic or polyvalent symbol that can take on various colors and contrasts and incorporate alternative analytical viewpoints over time. Dr. Waldron has made an ingenious and substantial contribution to this semantic and historical tapestry.

Cromie Burn Research Unit
October 8th, 2007

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Wilby, Emma 2005. *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic*. Brighton, UK: Sussex University Academic Press.

INTRODUCTION

When I first wrote the dissertation that was reconstructed as this book, the arena of Pagan Studies and Wicca, as one of a plethora of New Religious Movements emerging into the cultural mainstream during the 1980s, was still somewhat a fringe area of study. Indeed, neo-Pagan revivalist movements, of which Wicca is the most predominant, were still very much the target of vitriol and scare mongering particularly by religiously inspired political conservatives. Republican congressman in the United States for example, after discovering that many self-proclaimed Witches served in the U.S army at a military base in Fort Hood made the claim, “We believe they are Satanic and that they do not deserve to have any place in Fort Hood”. Republican politician Storm Thurmond asked in the senate “What’s next? Will armored divisions be forced to travel with sacrificial animals for satanic rituals?”¹

Since working on my dissertation however, the wide dissemination of ground breaking and original research by pioneering historians, such as the superb research by Professor Ronald Hutton of Bristol University in an extremely detailed local history approach to British Folklore and the history of Wicca, and that of the many social theory, cultural studies and feminist analysis of the Pagan revival have shifted the field into, if not the mainstream, then a least out of the fringe of respectable scholarship. Similarly, the numerous anthropological studies of pagan revivalist communities, festivals and ritual groups have shifted neo-Pagan studies to the forefront of much urban anthropological and women’s studies research. In terms of popular culture neo-Pagan and Wiccan inspired characters are now extraordinarily common in fantasy and science fiction stories. Pagan and Wiccan characters and scenarios are not uncommon in television and cinema and they are commonly represented in a positive manner. There are several television serials predominantly featuring neo-Pagan characters and witches in a positive light, *Charmed*, *Hex*

1. Gynne, S.C. “I Saluted a Witch: An Army base in Texas becomes the hotbed for earth goddess worshipers called Wiccans.” *Time Magazine*. Time Warner Publications. 5 July, 1999. p 41.

and Buffy the Vampire Slayer and its spin offs, are perhaps the most significant examples. So while some degree of antipathy and ridicule exists neo-Paganism in both scholarly and popular circles has now come in from the cold, as it were, and entered the forums of popular representation and academia with unprecedented respectability.

In any case, representations of Witchcraft are capable of stirring strong emotions and the image of the Witch has a uniquely resonant psycho-symbolic impact in Western culture. Most of us are aware of the image of Witchcraft illustrated by the image of the wrinkled, malevolent Old Crone as described by a wide array of fairy tales, literature and films such as Disney's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" or MGM's famed musical "The Wizard of Oz". Similarly, as illustrated above, most of us are aware of the representations of Witchcraft by many conservative Christian movements, such as New Christian Right in the United States, who construct their image of Witchcraft as a manifestation of Satanism or amoral Paganism. Representations of Witchcraft are often utilized by the mass media, keen to link images of Witchcraft with cults, mass murderers and anti-humanist behavior, as part of a moral panic linked to the contemporary mythology of Satanic Ritual Abuse. These images have a strong symbolic impact in Western culture and subsequently impact on popular representations of those who have constructed their identity as Witches or Pagans.

As previously discussed, there have been a variety of new forms of Witchcraft representation coming to prominence in Western popular culture. Many feminist and eco-feminist scholars, such as Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin, Robin Morgan and Miriam Simos (Starhawk), have utilized the image of the Witch as a powerful symbol to metaphorically represent the oppression of women in contemporary post-enlightenment patriarchal and technocratic society. Many of these writers also argue that Witchcraft, construed as a matrifocal belief system rooted in connection with the natural world and feminine identity, offers a new and unique capacity for women to find their own spiritual identity and source of spiritual experience beyond the limitations of patriarchal religion.² As one coordinator of the feminist organization "Women's Spirit" writes,

Feminism tells us to trust ourselves. So feminists began experiencing something. We began to believe that, yes indeed, we *were* discrimi-

2. Brooke, Elizabeth. *A Woman's Book of Shadows: Witchcraft: A Celebration*. London: Women's Press, 1993; Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology*. London: Women's Press, 1979; Dworkin, Andrea. *Women Hating*. New York: Dutton, 1974; Starhawk (Simos, Miriam). *Dreaming the Dark*. Chicago: Llewellyn Publishers, 1986.

nated against on the job; we began to see that motherhood was not all it was advertised to be. We began to trust our own feelings; we began to believe in our own orgasms ... Now we are beginning to have spiritual experiences and for the first time in thousands of years, we trust it. We say, "Oh, this is an experience of mine, and feminism tells me there must be something to this, because it's all right to trust myself." So women began to trust what they were experiencing. For example, a woman has a dream about stones and she goes to the library to see what there is about stones. Then she finds Stonehenge. Then she gets interested in the Druids and discovers that people do ceremonies and that is often called Witchcraft. Then this woman becomes interested in Witches and goes to them to find out what has been going on."³

Another form of Witchcraft representation is that of Witchcraft being a more authentic and natural form of religion located in an idealized pre-industrial past. This particular perspective is well illustrated by prominent neo-Pagan and feminist author Miriam Simos (Starhawk),

But Witchcraft is a religion, perhaps the oldest religion extant in the west. Its origins go back before Christianity, Judaism, Islam—before Buddhism and Hinduism as well, and it is very different from all the so-called great religions. The Old religion, as we call it, is closer in spirit to Native American traditions or to the Shamanism of the Arctic. It is not based on Dogma or a set of beliefs, nor on Scriptures or a sacred book revealed by a great man. Witchcraft takes its teachings from nature, and reads inspiration in the movements of the sun, moon and stars, the flight of birds, the slow growth of trees and the cycle of the seasons.⁴

In contrast, historians, writing in the context of nineteenth century Enlightenment narratives of teleological progress, have tended to define the Witch trials of the Early Modern period as a conflict between the terror and barbarity of ignorance and superstition, and the civilizing power of an Enlightenment crusade against irrationality. Some prominent examples of this encapsulation of Witchcraft and the Early Modern Witch trials are Arthur Miller's

3. Adler, Margot. *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess worshipers and other Pagans in America Today*. 2nd Edition. New York: Penguin Group Publishing. 1986. p 183.

4. Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance*. p 16.

play “The Crucible” and historian Norman Cohn’s attempt use of Witchcraft persecutions as a model to explain Europe’s long history of persecuting minority groups which, he argues, culminated in the Nazi persecution of Jews and Gypsies, amongst others, the during Second World War.⁵ Enlightenment historians utilized Witchcraft representations as a means of illustrating the dangers of religion, superstition and irrationality in contrast to the humanist ideals of logic, science and reason. An example of this is André and Lynette Singer’s comment that,

Although we find it hard to accept that a rational person accepts these events, rationality hardly came into it. Witchcraft was a belief—and the role of the Devil was declared by the Church. Not to believe it was heresy. If the belief was accepted there was nothing unusual about the trials themselves. For people who believed in covens, Devils and flying Witches the trials brought few inconsistencies. As the belief waned, it became acceptable to condemn the trials and even to ridicule the belief itself.⁶

Another example of this approach is historian Trevor-Roper’s commentary on the reasons for the decline of Witchcraft trials and the concomitant belief in diabolism and sorcery in 17th century Europe,

What ultimately destroyed the Witch-craze on an intellectual level was not the argument of the skeptics but the new philosophy, a philosophical revolution which changed the whole concept of nature and its operations. It was the Enlightenment in which the duel in nature between a Hebrew God and a medieval Devil was replaced by the benevolent despotism of a modern scientific deity.⁷

What these representations illustrate is that the Witch is a powerful and culturally significant symbol in contemporary Western culture. Furthermore, the means by which images of Witchcraft and Witches are represented in contemporary Western culture, are indicative of a wide range of social and cultural structures representative of differing sectors of Western society and models of cultural identity. Similarly, the divergent manner in which different sectors within the Western culture appropriate a particular historical con-

5. Cohn, Norman. *Europe’s Inner Demons*. London: Sussex University Press, 1975.

6. Singer, Andre & Lynette. *Divine Magic: The World of the Supernatural*. London: Box-tree Publishing, 1995. p 110.

7. Trevor-Roper, Hugh. “Witches and Witchcraft: a Historical Essay.” *Encounter*, Vol 28. No 6. 1967. pp 29–30.

struction and its related cultural symbols, gives insight into the relationship between historicity and cultural identity in contemporary society. These points of divergence and symbolic representation are exacerbated by the strong emotive impact of Witchcraft symbols in Western culture, and the fact that these representations of Witchcraft are generally aligned with the socio-political agendas of particular sub-cultures and their corresponding socio-economic circumstance and ideologies.

With regards to the terminology used to describe the various Pagan and Witchcraft revivalist movements, I have decided to use the term neo-Pagan over other possibilities for several reasons. The commonly used term Wicca or Wiccan originated with the strand of neo-Paganism linked to a representation of witchcraft as a pagan survival as initially propagated by Gerald Gardner and other progenitors of the 1950's Pagan revival and is thus only used by certain sectors of the neo-Pagan movement. As such it tends to exclude many antiquarian neo-Pagans, ritual magicians and members of the Goddess spirituality movement who may use a wide array of alternative titles to describe their construction of Pagan identity. Similarly, I have declined to use the term Witch to describe neo-Pagans as it refers to an incredibly wide variety of historical and cultural phenomenon that are labeled under the one term (Witch), originating in medieval England yet used to describe a plethora of social forms. Similarly, its etymological heritage is extremely complex and made problematic through its indiscriminate and intensely politicized usage across cultures, civilizations and history.⁸ This problem is exacerbated by the fact that there is little evidence directly linking today's neo-Pagan movement with those individuals tried for Witchcraft in the Witch crazes of the Early Modern period. In this light, I have come to feel that the very diversity of the word "Witch", as applied in Western culture, is so broad and fragmented as to divest the term of useful descriptive meaning in categorizing the neo-Pagan movement.

The term neo-Pagan appeared in the late nineteenth century and was used to refer to Romantic discourses that supported the ideal of a Pagan revival as an antidote to the ills of industrialization and the perceived restrictive nature of conservative Christian morality.⁹ It has been criticized within the contemporary neo-Pagan movement as singling out its discontinuity with the past and its lack of homogenous rituals, symbols and practices as a means of dele-

8. Clifton, Chas. *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America*. Alta Mira Press: New York, 2006. pp 79–83.

9. Hutton, Ronald. *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. p 28.

gitimating neo-Pagan beliefs in comparison to mainstream religions such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It was argued that since Christianity has also gone through substantive revision and contains many breaks and discontinuities, the singling out of Paganism as a discontinuous, constructed and revivalist movement was unfair. This perspective is illustrated by the comment “This ‘neo’ label keeps popping up. Graham Harvey was just saying how he does not like it on the grounds that we have had many varieties of Christianity, for instance, but we don’t call the ones today ‘neo-Christians’”.¹⁰ However, whilst sympathetic to this perspective I am inclined to agree with the response posed by Michael Strmiska of the History and Comparative Religion Department of Miyazaki International College in Japan when he states that,

For most religions, Oldness is important. The Old Ways were and hence are Good Ways; that feeling or experience is part of what makes religion powerful and appealing. The nice part about being “neo” is that you are not limited by the weight of past tradition, but are more free to explore and invent. There are pluses and minuses both ways, but one of the tests for neo-Paganism, as I see it, will be whether neo-Pagans will ever be able to agree on enough to allow common, definable ground which can unite people across geography and time, or whether neo-Paganism will remain an experimental, experiential grab-bag blissfully free of authority-structures and fixed dogma. For myself, I will reserve the word Pagan for past (or present) traditions that can claim an unbroken line of transmission, like Hinduism and Shinto or religions of First-world people that have survived the persecutions and oppressions concomitant with Christianisation, and use neo-Pagan for modernday movements like Asatru and Wicca.¹¹

In initiating a study of Witchcraft representations and historiography in the neo-Pagan movement, I have divided up the myriad of different forms of neo-Paganism into four general areas which I believe are indicative of the main approaches to cultural and ideological construction within the neo-Pagan movement. In a movement as diverse and fragmented as neo-Paganism there is, by necessity, a certain degree of overlap, however, they are not meant to be used in an exclusivist way. In this sense, they are not meant to be categories of neo-Pagan practitioners but are instead patterns of approaching belief, identity and

10. Personal communication Fritz Muntean. Editor of the *Pomegranate Journal of Pagan Studies*. “Natrel-L” newsgroup. 29-11-2000.

11. Personal communication Michael Strmiska. Lecturer in History and Comparative Religion, Miyazaki International College. “Natrel-L newsgroup”. 29-11-2000.

historico-cultural identity that are indicative of general trends within the contemporary manifestation of the neo-Pagan revival.

Antiquarian or Reconstructionist: Antiquarian or reconstructionist approaches to neo-Pagan identity tend to rely on empirical approaches to historical identity and the legitimacy of ritual and symbolic expression in creating a contemporary neo-Pagan identity. Antiquarian or reconstructionist oriented neo-Pagans tend to follow an indexical relationship to the past by orienting rituals, symbols and cultural representations according to historical findings on the Paganism of antiquity and medieval Witchcraft.

Traditionalist: The groups derived from the ritual magic intensive Witchcraft such as Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca. This approach evolved out of the ritual magic, spiritualist and theosophical movements of nineteenth century Europe. Integrated with this spiritualist and theosophical basis of religious practice were the romanticist histories and comparative anthropological analysis of the Folklore Society via historians and folklorists such as Margaret Murray and Sir James Frazer which worked to create a specific cultural identity based in the notion of authentic pagan revivals buried in folklore, spiritualism and ritual magic. The term “Traditionalist” is occasionally used to describe those neo-Pagans claiming to have a hereditary background to their Witchcraft or magical beliefs, however, here the term is used to refer to those groups originating in the spiritualist and theosophical movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries as linked to the notion of an authentic religious practice rooted in folklore and esoteric magical practice.

New Age/Eclectic: New Age/Eclectic neo-Pagans are particularly concerned with the psychological impact and universality of symbols. They posit the psychic truth of symbolic representations manifested in history and other cultures as the ultimate source of authenticity in ritual, as opposed to the empirical veracity of truth claims. The development of New Age eclecticism amongst neo-Pagans, particularly in the US, is intrinsically linked with the development of the sixties counter culture and is typically heavily indebted to the work of Carl Jung in interpreting and constructing neo-Pagan symbols, mythology and ritual.

Eco-feminist: I have used this term to represent groups that are particularly concerned with the plight of women and utilize the symbol of the Witch as an ultimate expression of the persecution of women within patriarchal culture and society. The fundamental historical concern of the eco-feminist branches of the neo-Pagan movement is the ability of historical representations to empower women, irrespective of empirical arguments regarding the historical validity of their truth claims. Of particular significance within the eco-feminist variants of neo-Paganism are the attempt to utilize the Witch trials of

1480–1680 and the persecution of Pagans by Christians as a model for the contemporary persecution of women. This model, heavily influenced by the Romantic episteme in Western culture, tends to perceive femininity as integrally linked with nature and thus perceive a natural conjunction between deep ecology and radical feminism.

Whilst these four areas of Witchcraft history have different structures of legitimating historical interpretation and ideological/cultural perspectives, there are several elements that link them together. The first is a belief that the advent of the Enlightenment and industrialization represent a distancing of humanity from its more authentic and natural existence uncorrupted by the influence of Western civilization. Secondly, the neo-Pagan movement is generally unanimous in the belief that Western Christianity is guilty of suppressing much of what is free, creative and autonomous in human nature in favor of static, oppressive and patriarchal systems of morality and social control. Thirdly, the Witch crazes of the early modern period are taken as representative of a conscious attempt to oppress and destroy the vestiges of pre-Christian nature religions. Finally, the reclaiming and recreating of the pre-Christian agrarian past is perceived as the most authentic and successful path to transcend the ills perceived to be caused by the oppressive aspects of Christianity, the Enlightenment and Western modernity.

The purpose of this book is to examine the construction of Witchcraft images, histories and identities within the neo-Pagan movement. Of particular significance is the relationship between the various approaches to historiography and the means by which these historical constructions are utilized in the creation of a contemporary neo-Pagan identity. Underlying this analysis is an examination of the interaction of Enlightenment and Romantic epistemes within Western modernity in relation to the construction of Witchcraft symbolism and cultural representations within the neo-Pagan movement. A central focus of this study is the shift from modernist to post-modernist forms of historical legitimation and symbolic appropriation in the post-sixties era. Critical to this analysis is the extent to which the intense commercialization of Witchcraft by the New Age industry and mass media during the 1990s has impacted on the social and cultural structure of the neo-Pagan movement and the corresponding constructions of Witch and Pagan identity.

In this context I have analyzed a broad range of materials in order to bring into focus the historical antecedents and socio-historical context of the many symbolic constructions of “Witches”, “Witchcraft” and Paganism. At base, it is these symbolic constructions that form both the cultural and socio-political basis of the Pagan revival and inform the public representations of these New Religious Movements. In this light, I begin with a discussion of the con-

text and end of the witchcrazes in Early Modern England and discuss their legacy and cultural, social and political import in the rise of the English Enlightenment. I move on through the Romantic inspired Pagan revivalist movements of the 19th Century and the influence of the closely linked Rosicrucian and Occult revivals of the same period. I move on to a discussion of the rise of Wicca and concomitant movements in the early 1950s and parallel movements in the United States. This leads to a discussion of the impact of the 60s and 70s feminist movements and the appropriation of the witch as the quintessential symbol of women's historical oppression by Patriarchy. In this context I also review the influence of the New Age based New Religious Movements of the 60s and 70s and the rise of American neo-Pagan movements. I finish with an examination of the impact of popularization and commodification of Witchcraft and Paganism and the issues facing the Pagan revivalist movements today. Through this process I closely link the neo-Pagan revival to developments in philosophical and ideological structures in academia and the broader social context such as the influence of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Feminism, Post-Modernism and particularly influential scholars such as Carl Jung, Margaret Murray, Robin Morgan, James Frazer and Friedrich Schlegel amongst others.

Chiefly I have aimed this book at the student who desires an overarching perspective on the social, cultural, political and philosophical context of Pagan revivals and its broader influence on society and culture. I also hope this book will serve as an easily readable excursion into the field of Pagan studies for the general public and neo-Pagans themselves so that they may better situate the revivalist movements historically, culturally and ideologically within the broader spectrum of Western society and culture.

Ultimately, the primary focus of this book is to trace the historical and cultural patterns by which representations of Witchcraft and Paganism have been formed since the end of the witch trials of the early modern period. The primary ideological correlation between contemporary neo-Paganism and romanticism, is the belief that it is necessary to gaze inwards and to appropriate images from the past to find forms of identity and symbols of meaning perceived as natural, culturally authentic and in opposition to the forces of the Enlightenment and industrialism. Conversely, this also involves a belief in the veracity of symbols, images and feelings over empirical experience and logic. In this sense, neo-Paganism is fundamentally dominated by a reification of beliefs and images. Symbolically antiquarian but historically contemporaneous ideological and symbolic socio-cultural formations are reinforced by interpretations of a past that are perceived to give a sense of authenticity and a sense of place. Thus the Witch serves as a symbolic focal point of many

of the issues facing modern society and our ambivalent and multifaceted interaction with the impact and legacy of the enlightenment and modernity.