

Gender and Transgender in Modern Paganism

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First Edition, January 2012

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Contents

Preface		v
	<i>Gina Pond (Little Crow)</i>	
Chapter 1.	Gender and Transgender in the Pagan Community	1
	<i>Sarah Thompson</i>	
Chapter 2.	The Goddess and Transphobia	5
	<i>Amethyst Moonwater</i>	
Chapter 3.	Who is Lilith's Tribe?	11
	<i>Anya Kless</i>	
Chapter 4.	Response to the topic of Pantheacon, Gender and the Amazon Rite of Lilith	19
	<i>Come As You Are Coven</i>	
Chapter 5.	Witchcraft and Sexuality: The Last Taboos	25
	<i>Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone</i>	
Chapter 6.	Against Duality	29
	<i>Jacobo Polanshek</i>	
Chapter 7.	Polarity without Gender	35
	<i>Helix</i>	
Chapter 8.	Awakening The Transsexual Gods	41
	<i>Foxfetch</i>	
Chapter 9.	Gender Polarity in Ritual and Metaphysics	45
	<i>Kat Lunoe</i>	

Chapter 10. See Me Now?	57
<i>D. M. Atkins</i>	
Chapter 11. Boys Shorts: an experience of gender and modern paganism	59
<i>Lance Moore</i>	
Chapter 12. Walkers Between the Worlds	65
<i>Michael R. Gorman</i>	
Chapter 13. God as Multigender Deity	73
<i>Philip Tanner</i>	
Chapter 14. The Third Voice	75
<i>Raven Kaldera</i>	
Chapter 15. Twenty Years in the Dianic Traditions	87
<i>Ryiah Nevo</i>	
Chapter 16. Snapshots: Musings on Polarity and Flow	91
<i>T. Thorn Coyle</i>	
Chapter 17. Religious Freedom: A Dianic Perspective	93
<i>Ruth Barrett</i>	
Afterword	115
<i>Sarah Thompson</i>	
Glossary of Terms	117
Author Biographies	119
Creative Commons License	127
Bibliography	137

Preface

Gina Pond (Little Crow)

On sitting down to write this preface, I realized that the events that lead to the Circle of Cerridwen's actions at Pantheacon in February 2011 were both simple and complicated. Simple because there is a visible line of thought and action associated with what we accomplished, but complicated because of the emotions and the many years of quiet grumbling about gender issues in our community.

I could say that it all started in 2009 when I went to my first Pantheacon, but in reality, my thoughts about gender and transgender have been forming and re-forming in my head since I was in my first coven in New England. I realized, through several situations in that particular coven, that, while professing to be inclusive, there was both misandry and misogyny going on in the community. For example, my former coven leader had a particular penchant for drumming straight white cisgendered men from our coven on a regular basis. In the northeast, I observed that most of this went pretty much unchallenged and unacknowledged.

I moved to the west coast in 2005 and after a year or so started making tentative excursions into the local pagan community. In 2009, I decided to really start practicing and teaching what I know, after much time in thought and meditation and much encouragement from others. From my experiences, the west coast was much more open and inclusive than what I experienced on the east coast, but there was still an undercurrent that I saw that, to me, just seemed wrong. Again, it was something that was grumbled about, but no action followed.

But, but... You're a woman!

2009 was my first Pantheacon. I had decided to not stay at the con hotel, but drive down on the days I wanted to go. I arrived on Saturday morning full of excitement – I had heard about the con since I moved, but had never seemed to be able to attend. I

got to the hotel late, which meant I missed one of the workshops I wanted to go to, but that was ok, because there was another one I wanted to go to afterwards about male deities. I spent some time in the dealer's room and then made my way to the room where the workshop about the male deity was taking place.

I walked into the room. I was pretty excited about this workshop. As a woman with a male deity as one of her patron gods, I thought it would be interesting to talk to others who are also worshipping male deity. There was a man setting up for the ritual in the middle of the room, and several other men of varying shapes, sizes and apparent orientations sitting in the chairs on the edges of the room. I sat down and waited for the workshop to start.

Another woman, who was wearing more feminine looking clothes than I, came into the room and sat down. Shortly thereafter, the man in the middle of the room went over to her, said something, and she left.

At this point I started to wonder if the ritual was for men only. I'm a fairly butch looking woman, and I was wearing clothing at the time that made me look more masculine than feminine. Not wanting to intrude where I wasn't wanted, I decided to double-check with the man to see if it really was a men's only ritual. It hadn't been billed as such in the program. The conversation went something like this:

"So, um, is this a men's only ritual?"

"Yes," he replied, "there was a mistake in the program."

"Oh, well, that's a bummer. I was really looking forward to it."

I started to walk away.

"Well, you could always go to the Dianic ritual down the hall!"

I turned back to him and said, with a little heat, "My patron god is The Dagda!" and left the room. (The Dagda is, in short, the Celtic Father God, and decidedly masculine in my contacts with him)

I was pretty angry when I left. At lunch afterwards, I was talking to my (now) wife and another friend about the whole experience. I realized then that there were a couple of assumptions that the person at the men's-only ritual made that really run rampant in paganism, and particularly among the Wiccan-derived paths:

- (1) Women should worship a goddess and men should worship a god.
- (2) As a woman, I am expected to participate in women-only rituals, and it is assumed I automatically wish to do so.

By now, it is probably needless to say that I do not fit either of these assumptions. As stated previously, my patron god is The Dagda, who comes to me (and others) as very much a masculine

deity. He is a father figure and mentor in my practice, and the first god to really claim me as His own. In my dealings with Him, He's made it perfectly clear that my gender doesn't matter to Him, it's my actions for truth, justice, feeding those who come to me, and moving with the seasons that matter. I have other deities that I work with who come to me as female, but they, too, usually laugh when I ask them about gender, and then they mutter something about "silly humans."

I also do not typically work in women-only space. I have in the past, mostly because it was just who was available at the time. And while I can see the need for other women to have such space, it is not something I really have the real desire for in my life. It is also not a requirement for me to have this space in order to practice my own tradition.

But the assumption that because I was female that I needed to be in such a space and that I shouldn't be worshipping a male deity really stuck in my head. Initially I wanted to just hold a talk about women who practiced with male deity, but then it hit me: there was an often grumbled about, but never talked about issue of gender assumptions and gender discrimination.

Pantheacon 2010

Digging deeper over the last couple of years, it was apparent that it wasn't just gender discrimination in the general sense, but there were also other kinds of discrimination going on. There was a deep misunderstanding by several groups about transgendered persons. Who was and wasn't female or male? What if you didn't identify as male or female, but as other? Does not having a womb mean that you can't feel feminine energy? Does having a penis make you an oppressor? What about hetero-normative wording in rituals?

At Pantheacon 2010, Sarah and I went to the entire convention. We had just started working with people, doing rituals for full moons and holidays (the core of whom became some of the founding members of the Circle of Cerridwen). One of the first workshops I attended really demonstrated to me the problems inherent in our community. The workshop was for the high priestesses of covens to talk about issues that came up in their practice. Though the workshop as a whole did address these kinds of coven issues, I looked around the room at all of these women and thought to myself "I don't belong here."

I was a butch queer high priest that had a masculine deity as her patron God.

I didn't consider queer persons, transgender persons, couples, and cis-gendered men enemies of coven cohesion or of the Gods.

And here is where the seed of action took root.

Direct Action

In the spring of 2010, my wife and I, after much research, started the Open Source Alexandrian project and officially formed the Circle of Cerridwen. Initially we were kept busy with getting hand fasted and with establishing the coven. But the idea that something needed doing at Pantheon to address the issue of gender assumptions stuck in my brain. I also wanted to address transgendered issues, not only because Sarah is transgendered, but because there were some groups (not just certain groups of Dianics) that passively excluded transgendered people. Not necessarily through overt exclusion, but by the practical consequences of their default gender assumptions.

It was brought home to me one day when Sarah and I were talking about some of the women's rituals at Pantheon. She told me that she wouldn't go to women's rituals in general because she would feel unwelcome.

Just because she is transgendered and for no other reason.

I thought about my first Pantheon, and the assumptions I saw about who should worship what. I thought about how we made a conscious effort in our line to be multi- and non-gendered in our rituals. I thought about my own meditations on my own gender identity, and how some groups are outright hostile about what constitutes a "real" woman and a "real" man. I thought about all the stories I've read online about transgendered men and women and what is required for them to just be who they are.

And then I thought about the hypocrisy of it all.

We pagans, who call ourselves Earth-worshippers, who profess to be inclusive of all and empowering of all, were not.

It seemed to me that, though there was plenty of grumbling, no one was stepping up to address this issue.

It hit me then. If not me, then who? If not now, then when? The opportunity was there. All I had to do was take it.

So I started talking about writing an essay to distribute at Pantheon 2011, and while I started with good intentions, it never quite came together. In my frustration, and after several failed, very angry essays, I asked my coven to help me figure out where to go with this. Through magical workings and meditation, I realized that I needed to write a ritual. Not just any ritual, but a ritual of direct action to be performed at Pantheon. A ritual to directly challenge the assumptions people made about gender. A ritual to

put the call out for people to openly discuss this issue and that would force people to see what was going on in their own circles.

While I was writing my ritual, I still thought that we needed some sort of essay, and I knew that it couldn't come from me, because I was just too angry to write it. I knew it had to be written by Sarah – she is the only one who can tell her extremely powerful story. It was an extremely difficult decision for her to decide to tell her story, and I think it's one of the bravest things she's done. Sarah's essay ended up becoming the cornerstone of our actions, and her words (see Chapter 1) resonated throughout the entire convention. See also <http://cerridwen.st4r.org> for the complete story of our actions at Pantheacon.

Our actions that weekend caused a firestorm of comments and discussion, which was, for us, not only awe inspiring, but quite surprising. We found out later that we were the talk of the convention and that Sarah's essay sparked intense discussion in many groups. Our goal was accomplished: the discussion about gender and transgender moved from grumblings to wide open conversation. The magick we set in motion sent waves across the internet and through paganism as a whole. What started as a protest to get a group of people at a convention to think about their actions and rituals became a rallying cry for people of all gender identities to come to the table and say, "I exist!"

Continuing the Work

After the storm died down, we realized that there needed to be some way that the discussion we started at Pantheacon could continue. People needed to understand each other and we needed to make the discussion more wide-ranging. We needed something that people could use to make up their own minds about this issue, while making sure as many viewpoints as possible were represented. We felt that creating this anthology would be the best chance of achieving this, since people could tell their stories in their own voice, and hopefully create understanding as to how different traditions and individuals thought about gender and transgender issues.

This book is a result of wanting to make sure that these voices are heard. It is also the result of a promise to ourselves to continue the work we started. The voices you will read here are from both cisgendered and transgendered, male and female, queer and straight, old and young. Some are well known, some are not, but all have a story to share. We present these essays as they were sent to us, with no commentary. We give these words to the community as a way to build understanding and to give people the opportunity to decide for themselves how to act.

It is our will to create change, but how that will happen will not be decided by a select few, but by our community as a whole. As paganism comes more and more into its own, we need to learn how to work and live together with understanding and respect. If we do not learn from the mistakes of other religions and put our own house in order, we will not survive.

CHAPTER 1

Gender and Transgender in the Pagan Community

An open letter to all pagans, and particularly the Pantheacon organizers

Sarah Thompson

To Whom It May Concern:

Paganism, as currently wonderfully practiced, is comprised of a multitude of living, breathing, evolving traditions that all empower their practitioners to enact their Will, bringing love and life and knowledge to all.

At least, that is what we'd like to think. The reality isn't quite so rosy.

In practice, we are all human, striving to do the best we can, though inevitably messing up here and there, learning from our mistakes, and doing it better next time. By this process, society evolves, typically in the direction of improved human rights and the enactment of mutually beneficial social change. Paganism does not stand separately from society – it is immanent, rather than transcendent. Consequentially, to stay relevant, paganism must also evolve, and it will do well to accommodate the best practices that social progress gives us. In recent years, increasing awareness of the effects of unrecognized personal privilege on less-privileged others has perhaps been more effective than anything else in catalyzing positive change.

I am a witch and a ceremonial magician. I co-lead a coven in the Alexandrian tradition, and am also an initiate of the Golden Dawn tradition, with a particular specialism in magickal toolmaking, theurgy and goety. I also happen to be a transsexual woman. It feels very strange to write that, because I happen to regard it as probably the least interesting thing that anyone might know about

me, because it simply doesn't concern anyone but myself and perhaps my partners. It's certainly not anyone else's business beyond that very small group.

It is my not so humble opinion that a lot of nonsense is talked about gender in magick. Some people say that women can (or should) only deal with female deity, and that men can only deal with male deity. Some, including many from other branches of my own tradition, say that only through the interplay of male and female energies can magick be enacted. Some claim that gay people can not perform magick. Some say that transsexual and transgendered people are similarly disconnected from the current. Personal experience, and that of many people I've worked with, illustrates that this simply isn't so. It's just so much superstitious nonsense.

Of course, gender or sexual energy absolutely can be used, and to great effect, in magick. But, magick is no respecter of people's petty bigotries. All prejudice can do is restrict your own magick – it has no effect whatsoever on that of me or mine.

Bigotry, as an act of Will, however, is an incredibly damaging curse. A killing curse. To be on the receiving end of such energies, consistently, throughout one's life, requires incredible strength of Will in order to survive. I am, as it turns out, the second transsexual woman in my family. My first cousin committed suicide about 20 years ago as a direct reaction to the negative responses of my own family to her coming out as transsexual. My family's response to her death was to remain absolutely silent – I didn't find out for many years what had really happened. Her death, and the guilt that it incubated in my family, meant that I had a slightly easier time – all they did was disown me.

Some people say that transsexual women possess male privilege, and that they seek to use that privilege, consciously or otherwise, to oppress other women or to gain access to women's space. Some say that transsexual women aren't women at all, twisting the argument into one over the mere definition of a word, rather than honestly owning up to their bigotry.

I can say, quite categorically, that transsexual women do not have privilege over other women. In practice, I have found that, when someone doesn't know that I'm transsexual, I'm discriminated against just like any other woman. When they know, or suspect, that I'm also transsexual, this typically causes further discrimination. I've been thrown off a D.Phil programme at Oxford University, survived a violent attempted murder that was ignored by the police, been fired from several jobs, denied many job interviews, been paid less than my male (and cis-female) counterparts,

all specifically because people knew I was transsexual. I'm lucky. I have a bitter privilege that was denied my cousin:

I'm alive.

I support the Will of all witches and magicians to choose with whom they practice their Art. I, however, charge anyone making such decisions to ask themselves why: are they exercising their right of choice, or are they excluding someone because of their prejudice, and to be honest, with themselves and others, about their reasons. If the reason is too embarrassing to talk about, *it's probably morally wrong*.

I charge the organizers of Pantheacon to enact a nondiscrimination policy from future events that will protect participants from the consequences of such bigotry, and that presenters planning future events should be prepared to leave such baggage behind.

Pantheacon should be a safe space for all of its participants.

By Hekate, by Geburah, by the Great President Buer and by all the power that is mine to command, I so charge you.

So mote it be.

CHAPTER 2

The Goddess and Transphobia

Amethyst Moonwater

When I first heard about the uproar at the 2011 *PantheaCon* Conference, involving an organization that was checking to make sure no one who wasn't born with female genital equipment at birth would enter their ritual, I was surprised. I was not shocked to learn of the identity of the offending coven; I have personal experience with their dehumanizing attitudes. The surprise occurred because they were open about their discrimination and I heard about the incident from mostly non-Transgender and gender variant people who were outraged. Several years ago, I presented a workshop entitled "Gender Identity and Pagan Communities: What wigs you out the most?" at *PantheaCon*; only a handful of people showed and I knew a couple of them. Our issues rarely raise popular appeal. If something happened that was offensive to Transgender and gender variant people, I would expect to hear about it from Transgender and gender variant people.

The truth to keep in mind is that this is not the first time Transgender and gender variant people have faced discrimination or harassment from pagan communities. We will call this discriminatory behavior *transphobia*. Most Trans people face it on a regular basis. It is one of those blessings bestowed on us by a whimsical and ironic Goddess. Sometimes this transphobia is overt but more and more, I am seeing transphobia that is covert. This behavior is communicated behind closed doors and kept confidential within the core group of the Circle(s). The group in question at *PantheaCon* fell in the covert category until *PantheaCon*. Then they were exposed and are now overt about their discriminatory beliefs and actions.

I want to explore in this chapter how transphobia is as deep a sickness as racism, sexism, or homophobia. I believe the Goddess is not pleased with transphobia. If some sector of society was going

to lead a revolution on gender identity, would it be people who adhere to gender polarity thinking, or transgender and gender variant people whose lives combat such polarity and who have struggled for freedom? I believe the Goddess made such souls in just this way so we could lead our communities to liberation.

Gender identity is how someone feels about gender; it is not always the same as their assigned biological sex. Transgender people often take active steps to align their bodies with the rest of their selves. Everyone has a gender identity, not just Trans people. There is a continuum on gender identity, similar to a continuum on sexual orientation. Some people may not question their gender identity. Others might question some information they received growing up in patriarchy, such as gender roles. There have always been people in history who have questioned their gender identity and expression.

I am a Transgender woman who also identifies as Bisexual. When I tell people I am also a Pagan Priestess, their eyes often look for the quickest exit. I knew I was Trans when I was 4 years old. I didn't have a word for it. The year was 1955 and the country was still struggling with McCarthyism, so it wasn't the most progressive period you might imagine. I was raised to be like John Wayne: it didn't quite work out that way. I would show how tough I was and keep pushing down the gender issues. In 1995, I couldn't push it down any longer. I started taking hormones. I came out to my family and friends in 1996, and to my workplace in 1997. I finally had enough money for gender confirmation surgery in 2007.

I have been an activist for my entire adult life, and for part of my adolescence. It was natural that I would continue to be an activist. I became the Speakers Network Coordinator for the Bay Area Bisexual Network. I joined a Transgender Advocacy Group. I began work with AIDS Project East Bay, the largest HIV and AIDS service agency in Alameda County. I was the first Transgender person elected to be the Community Co-Chair for the HIV Prevention Planning Council of Alameda County. I facilitated gender identity and expression non-discrimination protections for the City of Oakland and the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. I was the Executive Director at the Lighthouse LGBT Community Center in Hayward for two and a half years. I now work as the Executive Consultant for Oakland Pride.

Progressive thinking generally assumes in this time and space that human beings are composed of multiple ethnicities, sexual orientations, ages, and abilities. Yet, when thinking of gender, many still think it has to be this or that. We see the benefits of multiplicities in other areas, but are reduced to polarized thinking when the issue turns to gender. I remember when I transitioned to becoming

a Trans woman. My Mother was so concerned with my redneck, republican brother. "This is hard for him," she would say. I countered by agreeing it would be challenging for my brother, but added that it is just as challenging for me to deal with him.

I see myself as a warrior for the Transgender Community. A friend painted me as *Sekhmet*, the Egyptian Goddess of Strength. I have experienced a fair amount of transphobia in my life. It has intensified of late. I thought I would apprentice with a Circle in my community that I knew. This was the same coven that was busted at PCon. I did ritual theatre with a number of women in that circle. I heard excitement about me leading a Trans Circle. The tune changed when I also said I wanted to expand the gender identity consciousness of the entire Circle. I was denied acceptance into the fold. They never really gave me a specific reason but I believe it was because of transphobia. My suspicions were confirmed sometime later. I observed a thread on Facebook. A woman from the transphobic circle said that *men* (referring to me and other Trans women) don't know what it is like to bleed. I thought about this. I don't bleed like her perhaps but I bleed. I have been denied access to my daughter. My two brothers want nothing to do with me. I have suffered discrimination when looking for housing and employment. I do bleed. Yes, indeed!

Following *PantheaCon*, I spoke to a leader who organizes the conference. I asked what she thought about the incident in question. She thought it was a matter of truth in advertising. I thought about this statement for a while. Really! So it would be okay if someone acted in a transphobic way as long as they advertised it correctly. Would it be okay to approve segregation or sexual harassment if it was advertised correctly? Of course not and it is not okay to approve transphobia either.

I realized I could no longer participate in sacred circles with those who were associated with transphobic entities. I need these parties to educate themselves and take responsibility for their bigotry and ignorance. I was told by one leader of the ritual theatre group I was a part of that I was going mad and to not turn my back on my community. I informed him that transphobia is not a part of my community.

Then I heard the Pagan Festival that I was a part of for half a decade was going to celebrate a transphobic individual as their honored *Keeper of the Light*. Why would we honor such a person? We would honor her for discriminating against Transgender women? I was particularly alarmed because I had personally given gender identity and expression information to this group over the years. Then I tried to organize to stop the Festival. I contacted one group

that is known for their political activism to boycott the festival. They showed me empathy but still provided insurance and went on to do a table at the Festival. The organizers of the Festival assert that they will organize a conference on gender in the future. I am seeing this action as akin to a fox claiming to be a leader in chicken safety.

The first step in trying to address the harm committed against Trans people is to understand that harm is in fact happening. I think people at *PantheaCon* were beginning to see that Transphobia is a form of bigotry as harmful as racism, sexism, or homophobia. I believe if the transphobia in the cases described was instead racism, sexism, or homophobia, the reactions would have been much different. So once transphobia is understood, we must stop it and see it as as offensive as any other kind of bigotry. The true issue here is taking action. I believe that the parties I addressed have the awareness but they lack the courage to take action that is Goddess-affirming. One of my favorite sayings comes from Ambrose Redmoon, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the judgment that something else is more important than fear."

Reacting to overt transphobia presents a clear alternative. You are either offended by the transphobia or not. You have a clear choice. Support liberation or support oppression. The first book I read on Paganism as a younger Witch was *The Spiral Dance*. In it, Starhawk says, "Witchcraft strongly imbues the view that all things are interdependent and interrelated and therefore mutually responsible. An act that harms anyone harms us all."

It is more complicated to decipher the truth when dealing with covert transphobia. For those of us who are old enough to remember, Daniel Ellsberg released *The Pentagon Papers* during the Vietnam Era and revealed the true actions of the war effort. This book affirmed much of what the Anti-War Movement was saying. It is difficult when things are hidden. What is needed is allies. When Circles or Organizations are being transphobic or potentially harming other segments of community, the offending organizations will not reveal their motives or actions to the subjects of their discrimination. Daniel Ellsberg was an ally in the Vietnam Anti-War Movement. We need people in transphobic organizations to be allies and live their values, and oppose the transphobia in their circles.

There are things a Circle or organization can do to make their groups open and welcoming to Transgender people. State in your advertising that you are welcoming to Transgender women or men, or other gender variant people. Seek out Transgender people and invite them to your Circle. Invite Transgender and Gender Variant people to talk to your Circle about gender identity and expand

your consciousness. There is no diversity without inclusion. It takes raising our awareness and taking actions that demonstrate a change in consciousness.

There is the matter of how we deal with issues of justice as human beings. There is also the question of how we engage in these struggles as Pagans. As a Wiccan, I try the best I can to follow the Wiccan Rede. In “The Wicca Handbook”, Eileen Holland notes:

“All of Wicca’s ethics and its moral code
can be summed in eight words.
This is the Wiccan rede,
The law that we choose to live by:
And it harm none, do what you will”

These words are pretty clear, no? I see nothing in these words that says it is okay to be covertly transphobic. I believe supporting a status quo that is oppressive is doing harm. The inability to express resistance to bigotry is doing harm, even though such inactivity might be traditional. In the specific instances previously stated, I think supporting a metaphysical store that is linked with a transphobic coven is doing harm. I think supporting a pagan festival that is honoring a transphobic person as their spiritual leader of the year is doing harm. I think that when perhaps the largest pagan organization in the Bay Area, known for *The Spiral Dance*, continues to support the pagan festival that is honoring a transphobic person, it is doing harm.

So why are pagans transphobic? Sometimes, it is due to a lack of awareness. Sometimes, it causes people discomfort to acknowledge that their awareness and actions are harmful to some people around them. Sometimes, it is a numbers game: there may be more transphobic people that are more visible than Trans or gender variant people. Since Trans or gender variant people are still regularly harassed and beaten, many will not surface if the environment is not deemed safe. If you wondered, I will show up and so will the Goddess. Let us remember that the international commemoration of the *Transgender Day of Remembrance* in November recognizes the number of Transgender people who have been murdered. Sometimes, people who are Transphobic are not courageous enough to do the humane thing.

The resolution of this dilemma is simple enough. There needs to be increased awareness of Trans and gender variant issues. Someone needs to take responsibility. If individuals, covens, or organizations have been transphobic, then someone needs to take responsibility. Forgiveness happens sometime after responsibility has been taken. This is a principle of the universe.

There is a saving grace amidst the chaos. Those who have been directly impacted by oppression lead liberation movements. Look to Transgender and gender variant people in your midst to help you address your situation. This is a gift. Access the situation and be grateful that there are solutions to bring us closer to the blessings of the Goddess.

Blessed Be!

CHAPTER 3

Who is Lilith's Tribe?

Anya Kless

I believe that gods choose people and communities. For Lilith, those considered to be outcasts hold a special place in her heart, particularly if that outsider status comes from transgressing rigid categories of gender and sexuality. Thus, I strongly believe that those within Dianic traditions and transgender pagans are beloved of Lilith. They embody so many of her values: fearlessness, authenticity, and righteous rebellion. With the rise of Goddess Spirituality, Lilith became an emblem of the sacred feminine and the magic of women's bodies. She found Her way onto the roster of "dark" goddesses alongside figures like Hecate, Kali, Ereshkigal, the Morrigan, and Sekhmet. She became a role model of a freedom that will not compromise, of choosing exile over submission. More recently, Lilith has been taken up as a transgender icon, even if the qualities that make Her a candidate for this role can be found in much older stories and writings. Raven Kaldera's Hermaphrodeities and essays by transgender devotees in my own devotional, *Lilith: Queen of the Desert*, testify to her kinship with this growing subset of neopagans. Through their experiences with Her, a different image of Lilith has come to the forefront—a hairy, androgynous shapeshifter who disrupts female cycles (both menstruation and childbirth) and bestows the "gift" of barrenness. From this perspective "She" may not even be the correct pronoun to describe this strange figure. And yet this too is Lilith.

It's impossible to talk about Lilith and not talk about gender – it's in every one of Her stories, no matter the culture or the source. And yet, Lilith's gender identity is not fixed. While in some She appears as a sleek, sexy femme fatale, in others she emerges out of the shadows as a hairy, indeterminate thing. She has been held up as The First Woman, yet many of Her origin stories reveal hermaphroditic or androgynous roots. Rather than seeing these complications as a problem, to me they explain why has Lilith has

endured so long, how She has so successfully trespassed narrative upon narrative. She survives because she has come to represent each culture's greatest fears about gender and sexuality. And for those outside of the norm, she becomes a banner, an icon, a Mother.

Because I recognize both of these faces of Lilith (and many more), the incidents surrounding the Lilith Rite at PantheaCon 2011 hit me hard. Whether it stemmed from a simple misunderstanding or not, the turning away of transgender participants by a Dianic group carried a symbolic weight. It demonstrated that two populations with some of the strongest ties to Lilith could not share ritual space in Her name. To be sure, these groups certainly have their own goals and needs, but the fact that a certain attendance had been assumed at a Lilith Rite was telling. It suggested an inability to hold a wider vision of Lilith Herself and of the rightful members of Her ever-growing tribe.

As a priestess of Lilith, researcher of Her lore, and editor of a devotional anthology to Her, I felt it necessary to weigh in on the situation (for the record, She didn't really give me a choice). On my blog, *The Fruit of Pain*, I posted an essay on Lilith's history of gender transgression, what I had seen of Her burgeoning relationship with pagans in the transgender community, and the sad irony of the entire situation. The comments section of that post soon became a public battleground, and as the debate drew on, I watched people from both sides attack each other. Fear and anger bubbled to the surface. Even so, I suspected that this was exactly what Lilith wanted. A long overdue dialogue about gender and transgender issues had finally burst onto center stage. Multiple traditions and generations within that sprawling thing called neo-paganism were directly engaging each other, publicly airing their fears and their scars. In Her eyes, Her Lilith Rite had been a smashing success because, as Lilith knows, sometimes old forms need to be smashed.

As befitting Lilith, I want to use this essay to look back and look forward. I will briefly examine how past communities have viewed Lilith not only in terms of gender but the places where gender binaries break down and become blurred. Next, I will explore what lessons Lilith can impart to the contemporary neo-pagan community as it goes forward, particularly in managing the diversity of its goals, identities, and peoples. To invoke one of Her most powerful symbols, Lilith has been and continues to be a mirror to societies and selves. And yet, She is not merely a passive receptacle for whatever we may project onto Her. In each age, Her beloved peoples act as mirrors themselves, reflecting back to the larger community its hang-ups, its cracks, and its fears. Through these children, She brings hard lessons and truths about who we are

and what we might become as neo-pagans. They are at the edge of transformation, the place where our collective skin is shed first and with the most obvious struggle.

Originating in the cultural narratives of the Fertile Crescent, Lilith's roots sink down into the birth of civilization (perhaps even before this), and she has cameos in some of its most famous origins stories (the Garden of Eden, the Epic of Gilgamesh). And yet, she is constantly being expelled from these cultures because of the threat she poses to the established order. Lilith tends to break rules, encourage chaos, and lead people into the dark places within themselves. She is unsafe, undomesticated. One only need examine the list of crimes laid at Her feet to understand this. Through her couplings with desert demons (or, in some stories with Adam), Lilith gave birth to a legion of demonic children, populating the world with evil. All incidents of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) were seen as the work of Her hand, and Hebrew children laughing to themselves were tapped on the nose to keep Lilith away. She and her female offspring, the *lilim* (or *lilin*), became the culprits behind men's nocturnal emissions or "wet dreams," forcibly copulating with them their sleep. Thus, in the first century C.E., Rabbi Hanina warns: "it is forbidden for a man to sleep alone in a house, lest Lilith get hold of him" (Patai 224). And yet, for every incantation written to cast her out, there was another to call her near. Medieval Rabbis turned to her to learn black magic, taking Her as a teacher and lover. Victorian artists like Dante Gabriel Rossetti made Her their dark muse, exploring the shadow side of their own psychology.

For anyone with a working knowledge of Lilith, this is old news. She is the original "bad girl" who refused to lie beneath Adam in the Alphabet of Ben Sira, the powerful seductress who lured men into Inanna's temple in Sumerian tales. She has become a symbol of resistance to patriarchal authority, female independence, and freedom from male oppression at any cost. In feminism's reading of such encounters, Lilith's "bad reputation" stems from Her threat to male authority – the traditional writers of history. Images of Her as a demon or dangerous force are chalked up to scare tactics designed to keep women in place. She personifies the full range of female sexuality and its potential power. This dominant reading of Lilith has clear value, as generations of women have taken inspiration from it.

One aspect of this retelling, however, troubles me. A succinct explanation of that trouble can be seen in a small blurb from *Idols of Perversity* (1986), a fascinating study of feminine evil in late Victorian culture by art historian Bram Dijkstra. In a statement echoed

by many modern accounts of Lilith, Dijkstra notes, *“the search for woman as the lily, the paragon of virtue [has] carried within itself the discovery of Lilith, of woman as snake, the inevitable dualistic opposite of the image of virginal purity”* (216). In my mind, the primary danger of honoring Lilith is falling into a dualistic mindset, one that relies on a tired list of binaries: virgin/whore, good/evil, man/woman, real/fake, villain/victim. Rather than dismantling rigid categories, this model simply embraces those previously vilified. Truth becomes simplistic rather than nuanced. Individuals are slotted into easily defined identities that can be instantly and visually confirmed. What do we lose when we rely on this mode of reading? And is this really an accurate interpretation of Lilith Herself?

There are plenty of little stories tucked away in Lilith's narratives that suggest otherwise. In this tale from the Talmud, Adam and Eve try to atone for their disobedience in the Garden by abstaining from sexual activity with each other, in an attempt to purify themselves. This plan fails, as Adam could not control his nocturnal emissions. With his spilled seed, he impregnates the daughters of Lilith, who give birth to demons, spirits, and even more lilim. At the same time, male spirits visit and impregnate Eve, making her the mother of demon children (Patai 224). Rather than merely the victims of outside forces, humanity is complicit in the creation of the plagues of mankind. “Good” and “evil,” humans and demons mingle bloodlines and sexual fluids.

Lilith's stories also tend to blur clear dividing lines between male and female. From earliest written records, Her relationship to the idea of womanhood and women as a group has always been murky. For the Sumerians, Lilith's epithet was “the beautiful maiden,” yet, as Raphael Patai notes in his excellent study *The Hebrew Goddess*, She was also “unable to bear children and had no milk in her breasts” (222). The Aramaic incantation texts dated to 600 C.E. Babylonia reveal that Lilith caused barrenness, miscarriage, and complications in labor. She disrupted menstrual cycles and caused the death of virgins. This side of Lilith tends to be ignored in modern times, as evidenced by the existence of *Lilith*, a magazine for progressive Jewish women – whose ancestors would have seen Lilith as a killer of their infants.

Some of Her most fascinating source material questions whether Lilith can be considered strictly female at all. In a Babylonian image believed to be of Lilith, She holds a combined ring and rod in Her hands, suggesting hermaphroditic genitalia. The Zohar, the foundational text of Kabbalah, describes the hermaphroditic birth of Lilith and her partner/brother Samael:

... out of the dregs of wine, there emerged an intertwined shoot which comprises both male and female. They are red like the rose, and they spread out into several sides and paths. The male is called Samael, and his female [Lilith] is always contained in him. (Patai 230-1)

As Lilith's partner, Samael is far less popular, perhaps due to the overlapping of His own stories with that figure pagans take great pains to avoid: the Judeo-Christian Satan. However, to honor one is to honor the other. I can say from personal experience that my Lilith altar felt more complete with His statue added to it (a modified Saint Raphael with broken wings). Their origin story teaches us that male and female are always contained in each other—and cannot be separated. Their entwined bodies pose a challenge to any Lilith Rite limited to “female-born women” that must be at least taken up and considered. Overall, we as a community need to grow more aware of the complexities of our own gods, their multiple incarnations in the past and present, and the places where their own gender is not singular. We need to resist the urge to put a velvet rope around the face we choose to honor, as well as the urge to become that deity's bouncer or political advisor. We need to acknowledge the legitimacy of other faces of our deities, even if those faces are not turned toward us.

So what can Lilith and Her tribe bring to neo-paganism? As Her devotees know well, Lilith can be a powerful teacher—wise, patient, and generous with Her attention. In *Lilith: Queen of the Desert*, I outlined some of the major lessons Lilith tends to bring to the individuals She touches. Below I've adapted some of these to neo-paganism as a community. These should be taken as food for thought—the jumping-off point for further conversation and development.

Self-Knowledge

Neo-paganism is a huge and sprawling entity, and it would be an impossible task to educate oneself on every aspect or new development. However, each of us can make an effort to know our own neck of the woods. What Which other neo-pagan groups honor my gods? How do other traditions view them? What are the other faces of my god, even if those faces don't speak to me? Do I have a balanced knowledge of my god's lore and evolving, modern practice? Can dialogue between groups or individuals who honor the same gods be done in a fruitful manner, i.e. respectful yet open to difference and debate?

Authenticity

In any quest for self-knowledge, we will inevitably come across some parts of ourselves we deem too ugly to ever see the light of day. Lilith can help us through these moments of turning over a rock and seeing insects swarm up from underneath. Do I closet parts of myself when I interact with my spiritual community? Do neo-pagan groups and events exist where I feel that I can be my authentic self? Should the goal of a circle be the comfort of a certain set of participants, even if that means excluding others who might also find the space valuable? Am I honest about what makes me uncomfortable and why? Is my group aware of its own limits and rules, as well as the rationale behind those rules? Are these rules revisited and tested over time? Can we acknowledge those moments when our community fails? Can we devise solutions?

Transformation

Letting go of the familiar, even if it is currently making us miserable, can be exceptionally difficult and painful. It is not surprising that Lilith often appears when we stand on the cusp of transformation. For most, we need Lilith's destructive hand to topple some of our towers for us—or at least to remind us, "If you don't, I will." What Which changes do I fear? What am I afraid to lose? What does my fear prevent me from gaining? Are my fears excuses for avoiding change? Has my practice evolved and changed with my own growth or the growth of my group? Can I see the value in doing something new? Do I visit other groups to learn from their practices and models? When I see a problem, do I brainstorm and share ideas to make things better?

Anger

Anger can be one of the most difficult emotions to process in a healthy manner. It is all too easy to either let it explode or to swallow it, letting it control us in either mode. As a deity associated with righteous anger, Lilith can be an excellent teacher in this realm. How do we as neo-pagans handle conflict? Is there currently a place in our communities, large and small, for productive anger? What other emotions—such as hurt or fear—lie at the base of conflicts over gendered space? Can I acknowledge the anger of my opponent without dismissing it or being victimized by it? Can I translate anger into thoughtful and well-reasoned language? Can I step away from a conflict when my anger overpowers me and prevents me from making a fruitful contribution? Is it more important for me to be right than to find a solution?

Power

Like anger, power can be a dirty word. Because of the way it has traditionally been used and abused, it may be hard to conceptualize power without envisioning power over someone else. Consider how effectively the neo-pagan community uses the power it has. How well do we wield it? What do we do with it? Do groups within our community take responsibility for their actions? Do groups try to put velvet ropes around gods or acts as their sole domain? Do they use their power to attack other groups with whom they disagree? Do we as neo-pagans use our power to present ourselves as a model of goodwill and right action in the modern world?

Despite Her centuries-long vilification, Lilith has never abandoned the society of humans. Whether we view Her as a demon, deity, or ancestor, She remains keenly interested and even invested in us. Perhaps it's because in every age, there are those who need Her, honor Her, and love Her. In any case, She stands at the outskirts of society, gathering outsiders to Herself. She whispers secret knowledge into their ears before pushing them back toward the lights of civilization—a civilization that would prefer they'd behave or cease to exist.

Lilith is both ancient and always ahead of Her time. Walkers of many paths have identified Her as one of the spirits of our age, and yet She's been this many times before. From ancient Mesopotamia to medieval Jewish mysticism to Victorian England, to dare to say Her name meant tapping into a potent vein of the forbidden. It's a remarkable range, and I struggle to think of another deity that has remained so persistently prominent in our psychological and spiritual landscape. Theistic Satanist Geifodd ap Pwyll has this to say about Lilith in the modern age: *"Perhaps Lilith the demoness became Lilith the goddess in today's world because today's world is more agreeable with Her nature than the ancient one was."* (Pwyll, "There's Something About Lilith"). It may be impossible to gauge how Lilith feels about modernity. But after years of studying Her, both in text and in standing before Her covered in wine and sweat, I know Her to be just as vibrant and alive today as ever.

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CHAPTER 4

Response to the topic of Pantheacon, Gender and the Amazon Rite of Lilith

Come As You Are Coven

The Clergy of Come As You Are Coven wish to address the recent events and conversations regarding gender discrimination and the Amazon Priestess Tribe's Rite of Lilith at PantheaCon 2011. It is our intention that this statement will a) open an inclusive, compassionate and respectful dialogue, b) shed light on some points that require clarity due to miscommunication, lack of communication, and misinterpretation, and c) help heal any deliberate or inadvertent pain caused by anyone along the spectrum of this emotionally-charged matter. Please accept the following offerings as an invitation to share in conversation as well as mutual understanding with us.

First, from the Lady Yeshe Rabbit, HPS of CAYA:

"I extend my heartfelt apologies to anyone who was confused, dismayed, hurt, angered, or disappointed due to my personal failure to clearly communicate in the program the intended audience of the Lilith ritual offered by the Amazon Priestess Tribe at PantheaCon 2011. When I wrote the description for the program, it was not my intention to leave out important information, and any confusion was a direct result of my mistake. This responsibility is mine alone, and I do not wish for anyone in CAYA to be blamed for my error in representing the intentions of the ritual clearly.

The issue of female-born versus transgendered-inclusive spaces for worship is a longstanding one that did not begin with this ritual and will not end with this ritual. It is an issue loaded with questions, theories, competing realities, and personal trial all around. Although I do not propose to know of a single, perfect solution to meet all needs, I am confident that I am not alone in wanting to work with other smart, committed, caring community leaders toward effective and acceptable solutions that begin to build trust and

healing for all parties. I am grateful that this situation has opened a healthy conversation toward greater understanding within the pagan community. Issues like this one, left unexplored and festering, might undermine our kinship as pagan family. I believe that, above all, we need to stand together in order to defend our right to freedom of religion. I want to publicly state that my first priority as a High Priestess and witch is to stand with all of my pagan sisters and brothers of all backgrounds in the utmost loyalty to our shared goal of honoring the Divine as we each see fit for our own highest personal and collective good.”

Second, from the Clergy of Come As You Are Coven:

CAYA Coven is an organization, not a Tradition. We define the organization of CAYA Coven as a loosely-held container for a wide variety of spiritual beliefs and practices. Some of our members and Clergy follow established Traditions, and some do not. We define Traditions as lineage-based “families” that share common affinity and purpose. There are many Traditions that are represented in CAYA, and they do not all share the same philosophies, stances, practices, or beliefs. We allow space for there to be harmonious disagreement between individuals and Traditions within CAYA for the sake of highest possible growth. CAYA’s largest Tradition, and our only Tradition open by application, is the Wildflower Tradition.

The Wildflower Tradition is a public-service lineage which is open by application to anyone who successfully completes our year-long Dedicant Program. All applicants are expected to self-identify their genders, and may expect to be assigned to circle duties accordingly. All other Traditions represented in CAYA are, as is customary among many Traditions of witchcraft, open by personal invitation only. These invitation-only Traditions include the Amazon Priestess Tribe, the Green Men, the Evensong Tradition of Wicca, and the FOI lineage of the Iseum of Black Isis.

CAYA has never rejected a Clergy applicant for training based upon sex, gender, prior or current spiritual/religious practice, race, class, age, or ability. However, we have rejected and will continue to reject Clergy applicants based upon too-brief duration of membership, weakness of application, inability to demonstrate commitment to task at the appropriate level, or lack of personal preparedness for the challenges of public service. We maintain high standards of service, ethical behavior, personal responsibility, and commitment to eclecticism from our Clergy. We welcome those from all backgrounds who are dedicated to excellence to pursue the road of training with us if they feel inspired by our community practices, wish to learn our methods and seek to extend greater public service.

CAYA Coven seeks to provide space for everyone to have a safe, reverent experience of the ineffable Divine. All are welcome as members in CAYA Coven who approach appropriately, respectfully, with an open mind, willing to participate and share thoughts/feedback constructively. Each of us is individually self-determined and autonomous, and all are attempting to work collaboratively toward the greater strength of the many-faceted pagan community. We feel that coexisting and lovingly collaborating despite differing opinions challenges us all to grow, stretch, and ultimately yield higher selves than if we stagnated unchallenged in complete agreement.

Please note that the conversations about gender now happening around and about our organization have already been happening within the organization for several years. They will continue to happen and we will continue to evolve with our community's needs. We are collectively committed to finding ways to create broad-based community that feels authentic and sustainable to us, without asking anyone to sacrifice personal beliefs.

In the interest of growth, education, and diversity, we welcome questions and suggestions from all who attend our rituals and participate in our community. We seek constructive input from parties who are informed and invested in CAYA's well-being. If you were not in attendance at the Rite of Lilith, have not spoken with us nor asked us questions about our community, policies or intentions, it would be helpful for you to approach us directly before forming or publishing firm opinions or positions about us. We are prepared to engage in compassionate conversation with all who are seeking to create productive dialogue peacefully, respectfully, and kindly for the mutual highest possible outcome.

To create utter clarity around CAYA's policies on gender, public ritual, and the Amazons, please note the following:

- (1) Since CAYA first opened to the public 5 years ago, our Sabbats for All in the East Bay and South Bay have always been open to everyone from every possible background, and these rituals have always been mindfully balanced to include gender-diverse deities and energies, among other considerations we maintain regarding diversity. This was our commitment from the beginning of our Coven, and it remains our commitment.
- (2) CAYA's Grove of Artemis and Brotherhood of the Moon circles are open to anyone who self-identifies as woman or man, respectively. We have welcomed transgendered persons in both of these circles and will continue to do so. The newly-formed Grove of Hekate in the South Bay is

- also open to anyone who self-identifies as a woman, though no transgendered women have yet chosen to attend.
- (3) CAYA's Sprouts circle for children welcomes all self-identified families to participate.
 - (4) Under the umbrella of CAYA, the Amazon Priestess Tribe is a private Tradition that offers public and private rituals and ceremonies based on the menstrual lifecycle of female-born-women in order to meet that particular need in our community. Not all women of CAYA participate in the Amazon Priestess Tribe, which formed as a result of a shared affinity between several female-born-women with the goal of creating healing and personal empowerment through the lens of the menstrual lifecycle. Those who founded the Tribe and participate in it have grown significantly, personally and collectively, from working together in safe space around acceptance of the female-born body and its meaning in our society. Safe space for this kind of work has long been withheld from female-born-women as a taboo and continues to be ridiculed, attacked and minimized by society at large. Therefore, it is crucial that this safe space be maintained for those who require/desire it. However, the Amazon Priestess Tribe recognizes that safe space for the exploration of womanhood has similarly been withheld from Trans sisters, and that at a public venue such as PantheaCon all possible needs must be taken into consideration for the highest good. Several members of the Amazon Priestess Tribe are currently in a discernment process about creating public ritual proposals (for events such as PantheaCon) that will serve the healing and empowerment of all self-identified women.
 - (5) CAYA is open to collaborations and proposals of local circles that might meet a wider range of needs, but our Clergy also ask for patience. We prefer to take our time in mindfully developing all new offerings and making certain that they meet our high standards of preparation and sustainability.

If you would like to discuss your questions or anything related to this topic with a member of CAYA's High Council, please send an e-mail with your name and telephone number to cayacoven@gmail.com and a Council member will call you to discuss your questions or comments in a respectful, conversational manner.

Thank you for taking the time to read these statements. It is our sincere desire that this challenge of growth ultimately inspires

greater harmony, balance, joy, collaboration, and shared commitment to defend diversity and freedom of religion for all within our CAYA community and the pagan community at large.

CHAPTER 5

Witchcraft and Sexuality: The Last Taboos

Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone

*‘Let my worship be within the heart that rejoiceth; for behold,
all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals’*
Charge of the Goddess, Doreen Valiente

1. So why are there still hang ups on Sexuality within Paganism?

While in London in December of 2002, we heard a very odd rumour. This was that we were extremely against homosexuals being in the Craft. Why was this odd? Well, over the years we have initiated many gay men, and women for that matter, into Wicca. At one point, in the early 1980’s, Janet and Stewart even lost a coven because they ‘dared’ to initiate to gay men. We had heard a stranger rumour a month earlier that we liked to ‘swing’ with our initiates; we are in fact, in a very stable monogamous relationship and we don’t feel the need to go outside of that relationship. We are not sure how this one started; our only conclusion can be that it was linked with our membership of the US Church of All Worlds, which has always openly had polyamorous members, which we will talk about later. Initially our motivation for this article was to clear up these rumours and bring the truth out, but it began to develop into an important question as to why such rumours exist in a religious practise supposedly at home with all kinds of sexuality. The fact that such rumours continue to spread, either to counter those of a prejudiced nature, or to smear someone’s sexual immorality, indicates that there are those who still hold on to Judeo-Christian attitudes regarding sexuality within Paganism and Witchcraft.

It is important to look at the origins of Wicca to understand why it initially had an anti-gay stance. First of all, Homosexuality was illegal when Gardner, Doreen Valiente, and many others

first explored, or came into, Witchcraft. To be anti-homosexual was the norm, unless of course you were in the theatre, so it is not surprising that Patricia Crowther never had this prejudice. It was a different culture than what we have today; when men were men, and women were silent! The subject of homosexuality wasn't even discussed; one period film comes to mind, *Spartacus*, where Sir Laurence Olivier's character discusses with Tony Curtis's character whether he has a preference for 'snails or muscles', a veiled reference to anatomy if every there was one! There is in fact an important truth within this film for all those who have a problem with homosexuality in paganism, and that is that it was considered so normal in ancient cultures there wasn't even a name for it.

In ancient Greek, Roman, and certainly Celtic cultures, there are references to homosexual practises – the Greeks even had their 'regiment of lovers', a unit of soldiers that all were in homosexual relationships with one another which bonded them. The Celts of southern Gaul were known to house all their young unmarried men together in the same long houses and there are references to this in several Roman works of that period, where it is mentioned that homoerotic practises among the young men were common, and in some cases encouraged. Of course Gardner ignored such references and the like as being 'distasteful' ignoring the fact that anti-homosexuality was in fact monotheistic and patriarchal in origin. In Christianity this prejudice is based on the notion that sex is only for procreation and therefore any sexual practises which are for enjoyment, are therefore 'sinful', which means not just homosexuality. This is important to note as it also refers to other forms of sexual practises, which we will refer to later. In ancient forms of shamanism homosexuality was commonplace, and in some cultures this went as far as gay members of their community being considered 'sacred' and 'magical'.

Of course Gardner and the older generations prejudices should be understood, although not necessarily condoned. This is what they were brought up to believe, that such acts were 'dirty' and 'shameful', but many have realised this to be untrue. Doreen Valiente, at the Pagan Federation Conference in Croydon in 1999, stated very clearly that homosexuals should not be excluded from Witchcraft. When we (Janet and Stewart) published *The Witches Way* in 1984 we clearly stated that we had initiated gay coven members, although at this stage we still felt that it was necessary for them to polarise; Stewart also pointed out that he had prejudices, but he recognised these for what they were – the social norms and values he was brought up with. Our view today is quite different regarding polarity, as we shall explain later but even back then we

(Janet and Stewart) were still some of the first who had no problem with gay couples in a coven setting. We were also unfortunate enough to lose a coven for initiating two gay members. Some coven members felt that gay members simply couldn't work polarity as required in Wicca. We stood our ground and lost our coven. We should point out that the individuals concerned worked through their prejudices and now have gay, lesbian, and bisexual members in their own covens.

The subject of polarity has always been the stick with which to beat gay members of covens. Our experiences have taught us some interesting things, the first being that homosexuals tend to have dealt with the polarity issues even before they've joined a coven, coming to terms with their own anima/animus complex and even facing their own shadows and stripping away the norms that Judeo-Christian society has placed on them. Some of the best Priests and Priestesses we have initiated have been gay for this reason. These are things which both connect with shamanistic practises, and after all isn't Witchcraft just the reconstructed remnants of Western European Shamanism? For us, the need for an individual to work both polarities as a Priest or Priestess is essential in the working of magic. This is not to say in a sexual way, but most certainly in a magical.

It is with the Jungian shadow that some of the problems still lie within the Pagan community amongst those who are anti-gay in the craft, and those who spread sexual rumours. What it comes down to is individuals who have not faced their shadows, and therefore their own repressed sexual natures. They still hold on to the Judeo-Christian values they were brought up with. This is strange when you think about it, as this is the path of the second degree within Wicca, so any HP or HPS who has this problem with sexuality has never been through that mystery and faced their own true nature. We are pleased to say that such covens or community leaders are few nowadays, and the gay pagan community has every right to 'out' those who are prejudiced, but they should also recognise that it is harder for an older generation to change what has been ingrained in the culture for so long. Homophobia is an anachronism that has had its day within Witchcraft and paganism in general. So was Homosexuality the last taboo? No it wasn't. The last taboos are still there, although their origins are close and interconnected with the homosexual issue, and related directly to those who hold on to montheistic attitudes of sex.

If we talk about 'Goddess', 'Scourging', 'bound with rope naked', what does this envision for you, Gardnerian or Alexandrian Wicca? Or the BDSM/Fetish scene, because you would find these terms

used in both scenes. Most people's first reaction is that the two are not connected. Some years ago we decided to start researching a book on paganism and sexuality. What we found was quite interesting. In the United States we met several pagans who were involved in this scene; we even accompanied them to fetish clubs out of curiosity more than anything. It was not what we expected! What we saw were people at play, in many cases in a childlike way. Letting go of their inhibitions in a responsible controlled way. 'Playing' by the way, is a term regularly used in that scene. Most of the people we met were well-balanced individuals who were acting out shadow issues in a constructive rather than destructive way. The first thing we were told was an interesting statement which had a ring of familiarity: 'safe', 'sane,' and 'consenting.' Does this sound familiar? It should, as philosophically it's no different from the Wiccan Rede: 'an it harm none, do what thou wilt'.

The other thing that we noticed also had similarities to Wicca: women were most definitely in charge regardless of whether they were submissive ('bottom') or dominant ('top'). It was noticeable that women were treated in these clubs with utmost respect. The terms 'Goddess' and even 'Priestess' were sometimes even used in reverence of them. It is therefore not surprising that crossovers have occurred between the two communities, as what we saw in fetish 'play' was very ritualistic and had much in common with the rituals associated with initiation. Many of the people we have talked to describe spiritual or psychic experiences during such play. This included trances, which is described as 'sub space' by some. It should be remembered that binding an initiate and scourging within Wicca was once not symbolic, but an actual magical act which caused endorphins to flow in the recipient allowing them to enter into an altered state. These practises have been emasculated within Wicca over the years due to the hangups of some HP's and HPS's. Interestingly, while this has happened in Wicca, the fetish scene has been getting into Magic due to the experiences of its players. This is something many in the Wiccan community are going to have to deal with, but first they going to have to deal with their own Judeo-Christian views of sex.

CHAPTER 6

Against Duality

Jacobo Polanshek

To deal with Paganism’s issues surrounding gender, we are going to need to erase from our metaphoric vocabularies anything to do with the number two. And while we’re at it, I think we should take a long hard look at the number three.

The problem, as I see it, is that we — within Paganism, the Western Mysteries, mystical and magical traditions of most kinds — rely too heavily on the idea of biological procreation as the metaphor for creation. Worse, we mostly don’t realize when we’re doing it.

The *reason* this is a problem is that it harms very many people. In particular, it hurts people who are not cisgendered, people who are not heterosexual, people who are not monogamous, people who do not procreate: in short, people who are marginalized for reasons of sex, gender, and relationship. If you are, or love, or care about any such person, I believe that you should be worried about our creation metaphors.

The solution, or a solution, is to change our metaphors. We’re magic users. We can do that sort of thing.

(At the outset, I wish to acknowledge that many readers may find this essay to be deeply beside the point. My approach relies on an equivocation, though many would say “confusion”, between philosophy, metaphors, and the language we use. Indeed, I think each of these is a manifestation of the others. This project is basically Wittgensteinian, for which I make no apologies.)

The Problem of Two and Three

The idea that the supreme power of magic, indeed of existence, consists in love — particularly erotic love — is an old one in the Western esoteric traditions. It was echoed famously by Ficino in his commentary on the Symposium; it underlies the theurgy of the divine Iamblichus and the cosmology of the Chaldean Oracles; it was

developed in great and obscure detail by Giordano Bruno. “This is the creation of the world,” says Nuit, “that the pain of division is as nothing, and the joy of dissolution all.” I claim that wholeheartedly embracing this insight must involve rejecting bisexual procreation as the paradigmatic form of existence-from-love.

I have previously expressed this opinion in conversation with friends. The typical response is a kind of baffled, “Yes, we *could* use different metaphors, but biological procreation *really is* the fundamental experience of creation.” But among other living species, we have asexual reproduction, parthenogenesis, and (recently discovered among clams [9]) androgenesis, in addition to copious quantities of hermaphroditism.

Among humans, binary gender is an artifact of the desire for easy categorization, and violations of the schema appear at every and all levels at which gender is typically thought to be determined. XXX, XXY, and XYY genotypes each have an incidence of between 1 in 2000 and 1 in 1000 individuals.¹ Some developmentally-based intersex conditions are even more common, with up to 1 in 100 people showing some form of intersex [7]. Even the more conservative estimate, of 1–2 births per 1000 receiving additional medical scrutiny or surgery for ambiguous genitalia [10], translates to a vast but invisible group of people. Cognitive and social manifestations of gender are hugely diverse, both between cultures and between individuals within any given culture. The variability between individuals in our own cultures encompasses not only “usual” transgender and transsexual individuals, but all manner of genderqueer, agendered, omnigendered, and similarly complicated persons.

By treating human reproduction as the necessary metaphor for creation, this diversity of gender manifestation and expression is *necessarily* reduced to two, or at best three (male, female, and “other”), categories.

The apparent inevitability of the procreative metaphor is, I think, simply a case of our blindness to how our own metaphors shape the way we see the world. Metaphorical and analogical reasoning are critical tools in allowing us to explore and understand the world, since they allow us to use insights gained in one domain to help us think about something entirely different [8]. These vary across cultures [3, 4] across individuals within a culture, and across situations for a single individual [2]. Nevertheless, the metaphors active at any particular moment tend to be invisible to us; indeed, we often fail to recognize that we are using metaphors at all. We fall into such a habit of both *talking* and *thinking* about the world

¹See, for example [11, 13, 12]

using one particular set of tools, that we forget that the tools are not inherent in the world. Such is the case here.

Again, this metaphor-blindness leads the procreative metaphor to appear to be the only way of thinking about how things come into existence through love. This metaphor creeps in even when it is not explicitly invoked; consider the Pillar of Mercy and the Pillar of Severity in the Tree of Life, or the Yin and the Yang of the Tao, or the actives and passives of the natural magicians, or the Form and Matter of the Hellenistic traditions, or the Goddess and God of modern duotheistic Paganisms. Whenever we think about these dualities, we are implicitly thinking about reified Male and Female urgenders, whether or not we so label them in the moment.

Indeed, the link between active-passive and masculine-feminine dualities has metastasized so thoroughly, and so malignantly, into so many parts of our metaphorical vocabulary, that I am convinced that the only solution is to stop talking about actives and passives at all.

“But wait,” you may cry, “the Tree of Life has also the Pillar of Balance! The Tao is beyond both Yin and Yang, and the interplay of Form and Matter gives rise to something that shares in both. We don’t have pairs, we have triples! Male, Female, and Other!”

Please stop now. Reset your brain. Really look at those words. Man. Woman. Other.

Other.

This idea is attractive, that there is a neuter, genderless, or omnigendered One, from which the Male and Female principles emerge, or which participates equally in both. It seems nicely egalitarian, even feminist, when compared to traditions which talk about the supreme being as purely male. I believe that this seeming egalitarianism disguises a damaging metaphorical framework. The framework is simply and exactly that which qualifies everything between, beyond, above, below, and just plain orthogonal to “Male” and “Female” as Other. This is why I think the problem is not just with Two, but also with Three.

(Relatedly, I see many people trying to be genderqueer allies by arguing for a continuum between male and female. But this model is deeply misguided, mostly because it is just another manifestation of the “man, woman, other” trinity. Please don’t do this. Gender can vary along I-don’t-even-know-how-many dimensions; it couldn’t possibly fit on anything as narrow as a line.)

Eros as Solution

I previously pointed to a move, common within esoteric traditions, of emphasizing the role of erotic love in the creation of all

things. In practice, the procreative metaphors subsume, or overwhelm, the purely erotic. But this is not necessary. My experience of Eros is certainly not procreative; I have had romantic and sexual relationships and encounters with people of different genders and with multiple people at a time. I therefore propose, as a replacement for procreation, the *erotic love-bond itself*.

The metaphor goes like this. All things that exist, exist because there was some bond of consanguinity between themselves and the form of their manifestation. This is just the theory of sunthemata, or marks, which is so critical in the Neoplatonic framework. When something new is brought into existence — an idea, a poem, an artistic work, a work of craft, a living entity — it is drawn through the subtler to the grosser planes, again by virtue of some bond of similarity, creating a yearning on the part of the New for its own coming-into-being. That which exists, is *seduced* into existence.

Just so, all that exists seduces itself into continued existence; this is the continual self-becoming described by Whitehead and other philosophers of Process. Just so, we manifest beings are ultimately seduced back into the Void and Formless Ground of Being. “This is the creation of the world.” Eros is therefore the *solution*, and also the *coagulation*; it is Eros that brings us into being, and Eros that brings us back out again.

There is fertile ground here for reshaping ritual, for exploration in meditation, for feeling the erotic bonds between ourselves and our surroundings and our lovers and our All.

I would also suggest another move, explicitly regarding our ideas around gender. It is not that we eliminate gender, or even culturally-typical binary gender, from all our myths and rituals and speech. It is rather that we open our myths and rituals and speech to Gender, as broadly as we can manage. Humans manage already to cover an astonishing breadth of types of gender. How much more, then, spirits, or Gods? This naturally results in embracing all alternative sexualities, of course; sex is ubiquitous in myths, and if we are playing with gender, we will inevitably play as well with sexualities. Even the most traditionally gendered Goddess-births-God-fights-God-loves-Goddess myth cycle can be genderqueer, if we consciously, deliberately, and lovingly (lustfully?) embrace the true diversity of Gender.

Do I believe that we can completely eradicate all our binary-opposite metaphors from our magical and religious traditions? Of course not. But I do believe that we can deliberately, effortfully *choose* our metaphor-tools for knowing the world. It’s not instantaneous; just declaring that we’ve switched metaphors won’t do the job. But we have many other tools for accomplishing the work:

meditation to reveal the structure of our minds, contemplation to unearth entrenched conceptions, ritual to transform them. And, of course, we can always always always ask for help from all the Deities Spirits Buddhas and Ancestors who have promised to aid us. And, perhaps, we can achieve moments in which the procreative metaphor is not so inevitable after all, and we can let our genders explode into the many-dimensional space of possibilities as we seduce ourselves into creation.

CHAPTER 7

Polarity without Gender

Helix

Gender polarity has acquired a bad reputation in some Pagan and magickal circles. In the Craft ritual of the Great Rite, a blade is gently inserted into a full cup with words such as, “As the athame is to the male, so the cup is to the female” – or, if the rite is not being performed “in token,” the priestess and priest may engage in an act of heterosexual intercourse. The ritual recalls and participates in the universe’s moment of creation, where (in kabbalistic terms) amorphous life Force plunges into the vessel of material Form and triggers the birth of Being itself. Primal Force is identified with the athame and the phallus, while the cup and womb represent primal Form; the universe bursts forth from their erotic union. It’s beautiful imagery, and a beautiful ritual – unless, of course, heterosexual intercourse is your number one turn-off.

I’m overgeneralizing here – there are gay, lesbian, and transgender Pagans practicing traditional Craft or ceremonial magick, and for some, this imagery works well. Usually, GLBT practitioners of these traditions understand the universal Feminine and universal Masculine as psychological aspects of every human being, regardless of their sexual orientation, biological makeup, or gender identity. But for some practitioners, gender polarity in ritual excludes and marginalizes those for whom male-female pairings are unappealing. Even those who consider heterosexual intercourse to be one acceptable dish amongst a smorgasbord of sexual choices may not want it as the centerpiece of their spiritual practice. Those who champion gender-polarized magickal systems may correctly point out that (some recent miracles of modern medicine aside) we are all the result of acts of heterosexual sex. But for me, this overlooks the queer diversity of Mama Nature, who for millions of years has been content to let at least some of her organisms reproduce by asexual methods. (Parthenogenesis, anyone?)

In my mind, to fixedly equate the penis with universal Force and the vagina with universal Form is a case of mistaking the map for the territory (or, as I'll suggest later, *a* map). As many recent gender studies theorists have pointed out, the active, aggressive, solar, intellectual "phallus" that we associate with so many troublesome and oppressive social constructs in Western culture is not actually the same as the rather delicate, fleshy instrument that hangs between men's legs. Indeed, the amount of pressure placed upon the penis by this cultural construct is nigh overwhelming. Unlike in popular representations of the gods Priapus and Pan, a real penis is not continuously hard, infinitely fertile, and constantly exuding virility and dominance. Individual men are not stereotypes: they are not all tirelessly assertive, inherently rational providers and protectors, nor are they all blindly power-hungry rapists. The positive and negative psychological qualities we associate with the phallus occur in both genetic men and genetic women. While it may be true that statistically, traditionally "masculine" qualities occur slightly more often in men, there is always greater variation between individual men and women than there is between men and women as groups. To take a simple example, men are taller than women, on average; but don't we all know some very short men and some very tall women, and many men and women who are the same height? When we associate the symbolic phallus too rigidly with the penis, and by extension with men, we stereotype men and lock them into constrictive gender roles that do not necessarily benefit them or their communities.

The identification of women with their wombs and with child-bearing has a similarly mixed history. In the past, women's nurturing was associated with passivity and weakness and used as a justification to deprive women of political and economic power. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, women embraced traditionally feminine qualities as a source of strength. Particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, many women found inspiration and empowerment through identifying their bodies – and specifically, their menstrual cycles – with the body and creative power of the Goddess. Today, women who have been taught that sex is sinful and menstruation is dirty often still find this approach to women's mysteries to be freeing and affirming. Similarly, girls who are approaching puberty or women who are in the process of having children may find a deep connection in identifying their uteruses with the universal womb of the Goddess. This imagery, however, does not speak to all women at all times. Women who are unable to have children or who do not wish to have children may find it alienating to work in religious groups that strongly associate the divine with female

reproduction. Nor does every woman resonate with the nurturing, receptive, lunar, and emotional qualities that are traditionally associated with the divine feminine and the womb.

The strong association between anatomy and particular psychological characteristics is called “gender essentialism,” and it is a stance that easily leads to marginalizing or persecuting those who do not fit the ideal of what a “woman” or “man” should be. A woman need not be nurturing and emotional to be a “real woman.” Women should be able to work in analytical jobs, join the army, hold positions of leadership, enjoy taking a dominant role in sex, or remain happily childless without having their womanhood questioned. Men, similarly, should be able to be stay-at-home parents, cry at sad movies, or enjoy receiving penetrative sex without being labeled as “sissies.” Nor should participating in pan-Pagan community require an individual of any gender to take on a rigidly gendered role. I myself am often more comfortable with active roles in ritual than I am with receptive ones, and I would have difficulty functioning in a tradition that insisted that I always serve in the role of a nurturing Moon Goddess. When it comes to my sacred anatomy, at this point in my life, I see menstruation as no more or less sacred than digestion – and indeed, digestion is the holy process by which my body transmutes matter into spirit every day. But to celebrate digestion in every ritual I perform strikes me as likely to lead to an unhealthy food fixation. Although coming to understand every part of the body as sacred can be incredibly healing, to identify the genitals – or the stomach! – too tightly with enormous theological concepts is not necessarily a liberating practice.

Because of the strength of the symbols of phallus and womb in contemporary Paganism, polarity-based magick has been accused of being gender essentialist. Polarity-based magickal systems often have rigid ideas about what masculinity and femininity are, and they sometimes put pressure on practitioners to live up to those ideals (in ritual, if not always in everyday life). In the process, practitioners’ poor, unassuming genitalia acquire an enormous amount of symbolic weight. Understandably, those who prefer to use their genitals in a culturally non-mainstream fashion object to the idea that they cannot celebrate creation as well as their heterosexual counterparts. If a Great Rite or other central ritual requires a penis and a uterus, rather than simply an active partner and a receptive partner, GLBT practitioners are effectively excluded from full status in their traditions. And so, gender-polarized magick has acquired a reputation for homophobia, as well as for a bit of stodginess and bad taste.

Some years ago, I left a British Traditional Wiccan coven that was attempting to become more “traditional” through, among other things, putting greater emphasis on the nature of members’ plumbing. Transfolk were welcome only as long as they had had surgery to make their bodies match their chosen gender, and initiates were prohibited from drawing down deities of the opposite sex until they had attained the second degree (apparently differently-gendered energy was thought to be “confusing”). At the time, I was entirely skeptical of the notion of polarity, preferring Starhawk’s idea (as she articulates it in the second and third editions of *The Spiral Dance*) that the energy of the universe does not move fundamentally between any two poles, but instead is a complex dance among many beings and forces. Reflecting on her evolving understanding of the myth of the Star Goddess as told by Feri (or Faery) tradition founder Victor Anderson, she writes:

[W]hat we call “female” and “male” are sort of arbitrary designations of points along a continuum, stations on a wheel. Polarity, desire, attraction might arise between and among any combination of them. Polarity is not merely a straight line between two poles; it is a net of forces between a multiplicity of nodes in a sphere, each of which contains its own opposite. [...]

Polarity certainly exists in nature at the atomic level, in the dance of attraction between protons and electrons – however, trying to identify one or the other as “female” or “male” seems purely silly. And that dance takes place, we now know, in a complex do-si-do with other forces: the strong force, the weak force, gravity, and undoubtedly others we don’t even know of yet. Rather than a simple, bipolar universe, we might do better to conceive of a web of forces and energies holding the universe in dynamic tension. (p. 234, 267, 20th ann. ed.)

Starhawk speaks of this connective web of life force as *the erotic*. In doing so, she draws on a theological tradition that defines the erotic as something deeper and also broader than sexuality. Early in the twentieth century, influential psychologist C.G. Jung defined eros as a relational principle, “the great binder and loosener” within the psyche, between people, and between the individual and the world. In the 1970s, black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde described the erotic as the impulse to flourish, a desire for pleasure that drives one to resist oppression and strive toward a joyful, satisfying, and meaningful life. For Lorde, the erotic can be expressed sexually in the bedroom, but it is also present in every moment of intense engagement with the world, particularly moments that are celebratory or creative. Today, progressive Christian and post-Christian theologians are busy constructing what they call a “theology of eros.” An

erotic theology is one that emphasizes physical pleasure, embodiment, desire, and relationship – but without the necessity of male-female polarity, or even a more metaphorical masculine-feminine polarity.

Victor Anderson told his students, “Perceive first, then believe.” My experiences with energy exchange and magick fit Starhawk’s web of forces better than they do a bipolar universe. As a practitioner of the Anderson Faery tradition, my religion is founded on the experience that Being is fundamentally queer, wildly diverse, and unbound by rigid erotic orientations. Erotic desire can arise between any two or more Beings, or even within a single Being; in our tradition, creation occurs when the Star Goddess (who is clitorophallic, containing all possible genders) makes love to Himself. At the same time, however, I do not find the notion of polarity useless. Whenever we focus our attention on another, whether that Other is a person, a flower, or even a part of our own selves, a temporary state of polarity comes into being: Self and Other, I and Thou. It’s been my experience that the pull of life force, of attraction (not always sexual), and of connection and desire is stronger with some pairings than others. It’s also true that erotic connections can be cultivated. As part of my spiritual practice, I have done so with other people, with the land and spirits where I live, and with parts of myself that I struggle to love. *Many* kinds of polarity are possible, and male-female is only one – one that is not naturally a strong force for every Pagan practitioner.

I think there is a truth in the early Wiccan notion of male-female polarity: because of the way people in the West are socialized, there is often limited emotional compatibility between straight men and straight men, or between straight women and straight women – and this, I suspect, was even more true in the 1950s, when Wicca first became public. Our culture does not provide strong social structures for creating bonds of intimate friendship. Instead, it worships heterosexual romance through sentimental films and histrionic love songs. Sexual attraction between straight women and straight men is both culturally encouraged and (for many people) biologically hardwired. As result, it is a strong force that can be easily used to drive magickal workings. But other forms of sexual attraction can also be utilized, as well as initially weaker forces such as emotional and intellectual compatibility or non-sexual forms of erotic connection.

In my work as a massage therapist, I sometimes meet clients with whom I feel an instant connection; before they even get on the massage table I know that when we’re finished, they’ll be glowingly transformed. Much as I hate to admit it, these reactions are not

due to some amazing therapeutic talent of mine but rather to a natural energetic sympathy that, as a trained witch, I am able to sense. Because of that complementarity – arising from any number of factors of which I am not consciously aware – my ability to mediate energy and help such clients facilitate their healing is greatly increased. Since most of my clients are women, it is clear that the energetic polarity has little or nothing to do with gender (although it may have much to do with my ability to project and theirs to receive).

If the Pagan community were to embrace a concept of polarity decoupled from gender, a whole new model of how to do effective magick might arise, based on identifying and then using strong complementarities between individuals, between groups, or between groups and their environments. I do not think that Paganism needs to completely throw out the use of heterosexual intercourse as a symbol for the union of divine erotic forces. Rather, heterosexual sex can remain *one* image among many for primal creativity, without being privileged over every other meaningful and erotic ritual act. Some Pagan traditions already encourage practitioners to draw down deities of a gender other than their own and to practice manifesting energies that are distinctly different from their everyday personalities. By cultivating such magickal flexibility, groups can hone the ability to generate a variety of kinds of strong connections. What, for example, is the relationship between fire and water, and what happens when they come together in steam? What pulls earth and air to become a dust storm? These elemental examples are basic, but they suggest the kinds of magickal thinking that a notion of polarity decoupled from gender might bring to Pagan theology and practice. In the future, perhaps Pagans will be able to more easily speak of a polarity that can include the spark of connection between any two people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity – erotic connections that are not necessarily sexual, but are based on intimacy, sympathy, and trust.

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CHAPTER 8

Awakening The Transsexual Gods

Foxfetch

Even before the PantheaCon conflict blew up, I was an Angry Transsexual Witch. When the conflict that's been rumbling for years finally erupted this year, after sixteen years in my religion I reached a turning point. We need to rebuild our Craft. This has been brewing in me for a long time, and now I pour it out for you.

I've had enough. Things need to change.

As a transsexual man, especially one currently unable to access lower surgery, I was already exhausted and frustrated by the ongoing refusal of my religion to move beyond an inaccurate, cissexist model of human sex¹. The Goddess is always a cissexual woman; the God is always a cissexual man. How are we trans witches to feel wholly content with these milky-breasted Goddesses, pregnant bellies round with unborn children, with Gods forever spilling life-giving seed?

Sometimes a bone is thrown to trans pagans by presenting us with "third gender" deities. Identify with those, we are told. You are mysterious, powerful androgynes, walking between worlds! Go over there with your "transgender gods," and stay away from us! But how is a binary transsexual man, a binary transsexual woman, to see themselves reflected in such gods? We are not "third gender" - we are men and women².

For those of us who have binary identities paired with bodies that don't match up entirely to the standards of our society, our faith and practice can be a long and painful struggle.

¹I want to be clear, yet again: **I am not talking about third gender or non-binary deities** in this call to arms. I'm talking about gods and goddesses who happen to be trans. About The God, and The Goddess, revealing themselves in transsexual forms. We need third gender, multi-gender, beyond-gender deities, yes, but that is not the focus of my personal work. Non-binary people are already doing that work, and have their stories and visions to share. I hope that you will seek them out.

²See, for example, Anne Fausto-Sterling's "Sexing The Body" for a breakdown of such models and their scientific inaccuracy.

And I'm done with it.

I demand transcentric imagery, gods and goddesses with the wide variety of trans bodies, trans genitals, trans selves. I demand a Horned God with hairy breasts and the new Year sleeping in his swelling womb. I demand Artemis, wild and free, with a penis. And some pagans think that's blasphemy.

To use a colloquialism: *fuck that noise*.

Our bodies are sacred too. We, too, are God, are Goddess. I want a god who sings of his crescent-shaped Barge of Heaven, a Goddess at whose mighty rising the desert fills with green, like a pleasant garden. I want metaoidioplasic gods, and gods with soft, divided, fat-filled scrota, the shaft of whose penis is split into crescents like moons or bows³. I want images of a goddess with her testicles pressed gently inside her body and radiant female power spilling from her dual cunts⁴; of a goddess with a long soft dangling clitoris, with fused labia gently cradling her ovaries outside her body.

I want us to **take our gods back**.

Gods with crescent-scarred chests, flat-breasted goddesses.

I want us to **take our gods back**.

I want white-haired winter gods whose vagina is the gate to the underworld. I want earth goddesses whose erection is the rising of the spring. Crones with shrivelled balls, fertility gods with juicy cunts. I want gods whose fierce bright male power is spilling milk, whose solar blaze is a bleeding hole between his legs.

Is this too much for you? We. Don't. *Care*. Our power is ancient, and it will not be denied.

I am tired of having to look for myself in your symbols. You throw me scraps that reflect little of my self: bearded goddesses, castrated gods. "Transgender deities," neither male nor female, unwanted by you or used to teach yourself such helpful, informative lessons about *yourselves*.

The Earth Goddess lies stretched beneath the summer sun, drifting pollen Her shining semen. The Earth God opens like the rose, phallic vines and labial petals. (He takes it up the arse as well, from a solar god with a cock of burning gold, forged in the heart of stars.)

I want a goddess who inseminates, a god who conceives; I want a god whose hard and swollen cock, leaking precome, is *nothing to do*

³The labia majora and the scrotum are the same tissue. Likewise, the clitoral crura and penile shafts are the same tissue. Cissexist models of anatomy demand that we use the term associated with the sex we were assigned at birth.

⁴Muffing – the sexual act of penetrating one or both of the inguinal canals – is described by Miranda Bellweather in the magazine *Fucking Trans Women* (No. 0) as a sex act enjoyed by some trans women.

with procreation but only with ecstasy, penetrable, half within and half without, giving and receiving the fierce bliss that transforms. A vaginoplastic goddess whose clit burns like a white diamond, pure sexual light. I want the god with the rams-head in his belly, curling-horned uterus that spills fierce masculine power: horned within and without⁵.

We have mysteries *you have not dreamed of*. And we are **taking our magic back**. We are finding gods in our own image, building our own Craft. You can run scared or you can join us, but we are *not going away*.

⁵Do I want also the goddess who grieves because she cannot conceive, the god whose phallus is hidden, who mourns his body's lack of fertile seed? I don't know. Our griefs may also be sacred, but claiming them is hard, and hard to speak to as someone who has never desired to reproduce.

CHAPTER 9

Gender Polarity in Ritual and Metaphysics

Kat Lunoe

This essay intends to describe my current impression of gender as it relates to magick and spirituality, arising from a background of Thelema, Hermetic Qabalah, and Vajrayana Buddhism. The initial event which led to my subsequent contemplation of this topic was a lively discussion of the Thelemic Star Ruby ritual. I will not go into the details of this ritual here as they are published and readily available, but suffice it to say that in general it is considered to be quite “Solar-Phallic” to the extent that it is sometimes jokingly referred to as a “penis-waving” ritual. Over the years, suggestions have been made by some to alter certain wording in the ritual to produce a “female” variant (such as changing ‘O Phalle’ to ‘O Kteis’), but my impression is that this impetus stems from a superficial consideration of gender in the context of the Star Ruby specifically, and Thelema in general. What follows is just one attempt to arrive at a more complex and multi-layered understanding of gender and gender polarity in the context of magick.

To begin with, within the paradigm in which I work, magick does not happen only in Malkuth in Assiah. It happens across all planes of existence. However, the “physical parts” with which we are currently endowed are characteristics that manifest specifically in Malkuth in Assiah. In other words, we are whole – we have “all the parts” of both genders – we just happen to be manifesting the physical representations of one or the other at any given moment. So, by my reckoning, “O Phalle” refers to the “phallus” that we do indeed have in every other plane of existence that’s not Malkuth in Assiah in this time and space.

These male and female “parts” – of which we usually (but not always) manifest one at a time – can be said to have their spiritual roots in the most abstract expression of duality. Some description of duality is common across many spiritual systems: the Taoist Yin/Yang being the most recognizable; Chokmah/Binah being one

way to parse it Qabalistically (or just Chokmah, as a representation of the vesica piscis); Hadit/Nuit and Therion/Babalon being Thelemic representations of the dual; and Emptiness/Bliss being one such descriptor in the Vajrayana tradition. A more secular descriptor that I find satisfying is Force/Form, and for some purposes, Active/Passive is also useful. For the sake of simplicity, I'll mostly refer to Hadit/Nuit as my example duality, but I think a similar case can be made for any pairing. Hadit, fundamentally, is what is manifest; therefore, it is activity, it is motion, it *does*. It *acts*. It is drive. It is motivation. Pan is one manifestation of this. Male physical sexuality is but one facet. Nuit is void, or potential; female physical sexuality is only one facet of this. Nuit materializes Hadit into existence from that which is potential. Without Nuit, Hadit fizzles out instantly; perhaps not unlike an unstable particle. Without Hadit, Nuit has no motivation to materialize anything; potential is all that exists. As such, they work in concert.

Ultimately, this duality is illusory, since one half of this dyad cannot exist without the other. Countless Buddhist texts offer fascinating explanations of the nature of this illusion and our experience of it; meditation offers this understanding experientially. What I can suggest for now in brief is my impression of Bliss as pure boundless beingness, and Emptiness as the realization that nothing exists independently, and everything arises only in relation to everything else. Thus the illusory halves of this dyad begin to appear interlinked; the separation of Emptiness and Bliss is seen as an illusion, and the union of Emptiness and Bliss becomes the transcendent goal of Vajrayana practice.

That being said, as long as we are manifest here on the plane of the relative and not the absolute, duality remains a persistent illusion. For the Thelemite, it can be a very enjoyable illusion with much potential for bliss, as we are “divided for love’s sake, for the chance of union” (Liber AL I:29). In other words, it can be said that duality exists so that the One can have an Other to play with. In its basest and most simplistic terms, this duality can be expressed as the male and female principles translated into the male and female sexes, interacting via heterosexual means. By “basest,” in this context, I am referring to the lowest or “most physically manifest” part of the Tree of Life, Malkuth in Assiah. The problem, however, comes in when interpretation of that duality stops there. Unfortunately, for many people the interpretation never evolves past that level, and thus we are burdened with a limited, simplistic view of gender duality that give rise to all sorts of ills from enforced gender roles and stereotypes to homophobia.

A frequent reaction to this problem apparently is to reject the concept of gender polarity altogether – whether it be in society, relationships, or ritual. I am inclined to argue that this is an over-reaction, and that to dump this concept altogether is to dump a very rich and rewarding (and perhaps even metaphysically ingrained) form of duality play that can look and feel very different when analyzed and experienced in more expansive ways. Qabalistically speaking, the key to this is to remember that each being is a microcosm of the entire Tree, not one side or the other. When one contemplates the Self as a microcosm of the entire Tree, then conceiving of any one being as solely female or solely male becomes ludicrous. That being said, emphasizing each possible manifestation of both polarities equally at all times makes the Tree static and uninteresting. However, when a being with temporary, transitory imbalances (of gender polarities or any other kind of “illusory division”) interacts with another being possessing a different but complimentary set of transitory imbalances, that is when manifest existence becomes an interesting game indeed. Note that in this context, “temporary” can mean spanning the entire course of a lifetime. Under this paradigm, a biologically male person may be considered as a being who is temporarily imbalanced towards the “male” polarity for the course of this lifetime, but a lifetime seems a mere blink of an eye when contemplating infinity. To summarize these concepts, one can simply say that because both principles of duality exist in every person, the same sort of dynamic can work for any pairing, and as discussed shortly, this dynamic also functions purely within oneself.

Taking this analysis a step further, one might consider that each half of the duality can be further halved. Going back to the Star Ruby, let’s note its invocation of Pan, and look to the paean in Liber XV for a feeling of Pan’s nature:

IO PAN, IO PAN PAN
 IO ISXURON, IO ATHANATON IO ABROTON
 IO IAO.
 XAIRE PHALLE KAIRE PANPHAGE KAIRE PAN-
 GENETOR.

The last line translates as “Hail Phallus Hail All-Devourer Hail All-Begetter.” Considering Pan’s myth and personality, he corresponds well with the concept of the “male principle” of the dual. And, if he is both All-Devourer and All-Begetter, then he encompasses the Beginning and End of all things, and only that which is Manifest can have a Beginning and an End. Therefore, he also corresponds well with “All that is Manifest.” In a very loose analogy (perhaps sloppy due to my limited knowledge of Hindu cosmology,

but useful nevertheless), he may correspond well with both Shiva and Brahma, whereas Nuit would correspond with Vishnu, serving a double role as maintaining that which is manifest, and that which is un-manifest.

In other words, the cycle of existence (from the macrocosmic down to every microcosmic moment) can be described and personified thus: Hadit wants to manifest, to start, and thus exhibits force (in other words, the Will of a point to extend into a line; Kether to Chokmah). Nuit nurtures him into existence, and maintains that form (Binah, Saturn). Now Hadit exhibits force again; this time the impulse to stop, to cease. It's an active cessation, rather than a failure of will or motivation; otherwise, a given form would stay a certain way in perpetuity, and one moment would never give way to the next. Nuit welcomes Hadit back into the void, ready for round two.

One might illustrate this by making a circuit of it on the upper half of the Tree –

Hadit starts: Kether → Chokmah → Binah
 (out of the Ains)
 Nuit continues: Binah → Daath → Chesed → Geburah
 Hadit stops: Geburah → back up to Binah
 Nuit continues: Binah → back to Kether
 (and back into the Ains)

– where Binah first acts as a womb for the manifesting form or Thing to exist, Chesed then acts as a continuing expansion of the form initiated by Binah, and Geburah represents the impulse to destroy that form which prevents perpetual expansion and brings the impulse back up to Binah, where Binah now acts as a container of No-Thing until the impulse again reaches Kether to re-start the cycle anew. Thus Nuit contains within herself both the elements of the fully-manifest and the non-manifest, as expressed in Liber AL I:28 and I:29 – “None, breathed the light, faint & faery, of the stars, and two. For I am divided for love's sake, for the chance of union.” It is equally well symbolized by the Thelemic formula $0=2$, wherein the “0” of No-Thing and the “2” of the “1” fully manifest as duality is demonstrated to be the same thing. Vajrayana seems to agree with this, in the context of the union of Emptiness and Bliss.

Contemplating this four-fold cycle, one can apply it to any aspect of existence. In its most abstract sense, gender play represents the ongoing flux of this cycle. This includes the play of gender internally, within one's own awareness of self-existence. Just as the Self contains both halves of the duality, by extension it contains all parts of the cycle of manifestation that is derived from it. However, manifesting this cycle in equal parts (and thus repeating it identically with every pass) would imply some kind of stasis. Therefore,

it is helpful to consider that at any given moment, the Self is somehow exhibiting more of one portion of the cycle than another, thus keeping this perpetual dualistic play of motion in constant flux. These cycles apply to every time scale. A momentary example may be represented by the arising and cessation of a single thought, whereas a lengthier example may be represented by a process initiated by some moment of forceful motivation that then inspires one to quietly work on manifesting that idea for the next decade, before bringing it to completion. And thus, these cycles are constant, overlapping each other, existing one within another, unceasingly, combining to form every aspect of our activity and psyche.

The time scales of these cycles may also be considered in the context of entire lifetimes, and multiple lifetimes. On the base Malkuth-in-Assiah sexual level, our human bodies are usually built to physically manifest one half or the other (in most cases). I'm inclined to theorize that because we physically only manifest half, our collective psyches follow suit and assume that we in our entirety can only manifest half, not realizing that we've got everything but our physical bodies in Malkuth-in-Assiah to play with, to manifest ourselves in whole rather than in part. And this is why, I think, traditional gender roles had developed. While humans are physically manifesting themselves as halves in a certain sense, perhaps they have a subconscious need to force themselves and each other into the "appropriate" half, and to not overstep into the boundaries of the other half. Perhaps it might also be one explanation for the mechanism behind the apparently common drive to find the ever-elusive "soul mate" – that is, the drive to find whole-ness with another instead of within oneself.

In addition, the idea of Nuit as the vehicle for manifestation can be extended to a theory on the metaphysical roots of social ills such as misogyny and women's negative feelings for their own bodies; problems which are usually examined through the lens of sociology but scarcely ever through the lens of metaphysics. Perhaps misogyny has roots in existential angst, expressed in a particular way due to our perceived manifestation of cosmological structure; in other words, it may be rooted in the misogynist's revulsion at being alive, at being manifest, and his anger and revulsion is unconsciously directed at the physical representation of that which has made him manifest in his present form. Similarly, a woman who is unsettled with manifestation may be frowning at her own body due to her unconscious discomfort with existing as a physical representation of the source of the manifest.

I find it to be a good exercise to examine one's life and actions with the intent of observing one's flux of Nuit and Hadit. The reason for this is that imbalances become more apparent, both within the self and within interactions with others. As an example, here's how the duality seems to reflect itself in the process of performing my work, which is to paint. The urge to paint is Hadit. Not only is this obvious due to it being the fundamental force of my own motivation, but it even has amusing parallels to the base sexual interpretation. In a sense, my urge to paint is nothing more than the urge to "pollinate" the world with my creative works and to spread the seed of my ideas and efforts, as it were. The actual work is Nuit – the process of manifestation. I find very much that I nurture a painting into being, quite literally. When the painting comes into full, successful manifestation, I can see that I underwent exactly the right proportion of Nuit and Hadit. This, I posit, means that Will is acting harmoniously. When something is not working out, or if there is a lack of either inherent motivation or follow-through, then perhaps this indicates that the intended actions are mis-aligned with Will.

All acts of creating can be described as combinations of these two components. A person who's manifesting the whole can do this themselves successfully and with ease. A person who's only manifesting half cannot, and needs in a certain sense "their other half." This isn't to say that a whole person can't then re-combine with another to create something – that is how collaborative works happen. Just like a molecule that can exist as is, or form bonds with another molecule to create something new – a whole person can do much the same, and the infinite combinations of wholes thereof to create entirely new manifestations can look like Being at its finest!

So, how does all this relate to the Star Ruby, and to ritual in general? One of the many possible delights of playing with duality is any kind of gender play. Transcending one's implied "gender assignment" for the current lifetime, or even one's biological assignment, is one such area of activity that on the one hand is a form of duality play, and on the other hand offers a means of transcending that duality and enacting the whole. This transcendence may encompass recent social developments including Western women eschewing traditionally "female" roles in favor of traditionally "male" roles, as well as those developments that involve sex reassignment. All this activity that blurs the lines of the gender divide (whether they be inherent somehow or socially constructed) and morphs it into a cohesive whole seems well symbolized by Baphomet. However, an entity of wholeness precisely like Baphomet cannot have been made manifest without an initial gender duality out of which

to manifest her/him. And that is precisely the reason why the duality is valuable; it must exist so that it is available to recombine and manifest something new. Therefore, in my understanding, the idea of mixing gender concepts and blurring gender lines exists not so that this sometimes troublesome duality can be destroyed, but so that the duality can be used for a more creative purpose.

In the context of more formalized ritual, one can very intentionally experience and enact many facets of either gender, and then observe and internalize the differences in effect and experience. If, for example, one feels very “male” or very “female” in day-to-day life, then he or she can ritually enact traits of the opposite gender in order to balance themselves. In much the same way that Ceremonial magick might have a practitioner invoke and integrate each of the four Elements one by one in her quest for the quintessence, such a practitioner might also invoke and integrate the two genders for the equivalent purpose of letting a third, new thing arise. Such an operation might involve a similar process of imbalance and rebalance. Oftentimes, the more extreme the imbalance one experiences of each component, the more tension is created and thus the more energy is released to transmute itself into the New Thing formed of the resultant unification, similar to the way an arrow flies further if more tension is applied to the bow. Therefore, ritual or meditative use of extreme gender polarity is very useful, if not crucial, for certain kinds of magickal and tantric processes. In general, many aspects of sex magick and tantric practice seem to hinge on that very tension and energy and desire created by enacting, working, or meditating on such a polarity.

The debate, however, oftentimes hinges on whether or not it is necessary for the practitioners to enact these polarities according to their biologies. I argue that, because each and every one of us is an embodiment of a Whole Tree of Life, our biologies may be helpful for these kinds of practices (due to the aforementioned temporary imbalances), but not necessarily. The salient point is the polarity, not necessarily which characteristics are attributed to which pole. In other words, the required tension created by two people of opposing biological genders can theoretically be created by two people of opposing psychological genders (and in some cases, a distinct “psychological gender” can be induced very transiently for ritual purpose). Furthermore, in order to succeed with certain kinds of inner yogas, it can be said that one must attain mastery over both poles psychologically and energetically within one’s subtle bodies. In essence, the key factor is the ability to wield the polarity, both within and without.

When taken to a more abstract level, Thelema contains within it a very useful symbolism of the gender duality in Nuit and Hadit. The respective natures of Nuit and Hadit can enable the practitioner to ritually experience each polarity in very distinct and complementary ways. Liber AL II:3 and II:4 provide an important clue in this regard: “In the sphere I am everywhere the centre, as she, the circumference, is nowhere found. Yet she shall be known & I never.” The sphere is you, the self-aware being. Your very awareness and motivation is Hadit and is always the centre of your universe, and can never be experienced by you in a direct manner. Nuit is your circumference with an unknowable boundary, but as it is the field of your experience, i.e. the environment from which phenomena arise and pass away, it is the only thing that can be known. And thus, the rituals with which to experience one or the other will look very different.

The degree to which “Hadit” and “Nuit” can be thought of as “male” and “female” becomes very abstract and possibly a source of contention, but if we accept some of the biology and stereotypical attributions of males and females, we can see the metaphysical roots of those stereotypes. Where the stereotypes fail is in assuming that each manifest gender can *only* exhibit one or the other, which as discussed previously, is patently false. And of course, trying to force someone into their perceived gender role is somewhat like telling an apparently Airy person “you are Airy. You must do nothing but sit there and think and follow intellectual pursuits. That is your role.” It would severely limit their experience of Existence and would be an obvious and blatant violation of their personal will.

As an example of a possible biological attribution, Liber AL II:7 describes of Hadit: “...it is I that go.” The forms of male and female anatomy are unavoidably analogous (male anatomy being the thing that “goes” – force – with female anatomy being in a sense a container or field of experience for that; form.) This is also paralleled by the most common male and female sexual behavior in humans and other mammals, wherein the male is typically the gender most driven by sexual motivation, and the female typically will be receptive to that motivation, or not. This is obviously a vast over-simplification and “in real life” often does not work that way, but again, there is a baseline stereotypical behavior that guides the experience, and then some mixture of our own free will and/or personal ratios of Nuit/Hadit may then alter or fine-tune that experience significantly.

One good argument that can be made against this principle is that if gender is purely a social construct, then perhaps this kind

of metaphysic is nothing but an offshoot of that same social construct. It is difficult to argue one way or the other, since in essence this becomes a chicken-or-egg question, and is then just as difficult to prove as any theory that attempts to attribute causation to any phenomena whether that causation be rooted in human interaction, or in something transcendent and ineffable. Although in practice I try to understand phenomena through synchronicity rather than causation, I can say that for the purposes of this essay, my argument is rooted in metaphysical causation mainly to serve as a counterpoint to much contemporary gender thought which is rooted in social construct. Personally, I do not necessarily think that this is an “either-or” question, or even that such a question is very useful. I do think that it is helpful to contemplate the issue from either side and then try to comprehend how the two options might not be mutually exclusive, but somehow co-exist.

Once one accepts those gender attributions (at least for the duration of practice), then one can apply them to ritual and personal growth. Rituals that strengthen or manifest one’s Hadit are very much predominant in Thelema (hence the common refrain that it is “Solar-Phallic”). This is probably due to the fact that Thelema is very much centered around the Will – discovering it, manifesting it, etc. Therefore, the Will, motivation (or in Vajrayana terms, “skillful means”) of Hadit can be developed with rituals such as the Star Ruby. In practice, I would then posit that such a ritual is a good one to perform when one is “feeling too Yin.” For example, if one is feeling perhaps too introspective, or lacking in willpower or assertiveness, or if one is feeling lethargic, depressed, or unmotivated. This may also apply to those who are too focused on others, to the extent that they have lost their own sense of themselves and their own Will.

Given this theoretical framework, I would posit that performing the Star Ruby incessantly would eventually bring about a heavy imbalance in the direction of Hadit or “maleness.” That being said, within the context of its rather “male” forcefulness, the Star Ruby does stress a very solid sense of balance. In other words, in a manner of speaking, it “forces balance.” I find this most striking in the Liber ABA version of the ritual, wherein the Therion/Babalon and Nuit/Hadit polarities are forced into balance, via a certain “balancing act” that requires moving from a roar to a normal speaking voice, to a whisper and then to a bellow, in rapid succession. The requirement to rapidly maneuver oneself between these polarities into this balance is one component that very much sets this ritual apart from the LBRP, since the God Names intoned there simply don’t project that feeling of polarity. As such, invoking these

extreme polarities and then forcing them into balance by making oneself the balance point between them, then following that with an invocation of Pan, makes for quite a powerful and specific raising of energy – the energy of motivation.

In other words, a Hadit-based ritual such as this can bring about our seat of motivation, which should not be confused for the post-hoc rationale that is often mistaken for motivation, also known as Why and Because. Liber AL II:27 warns quite explicitly against this sort of confusion: “There is great danger in me; for who doth not understand these runes shall make a great miss. He shall fall down into the pit called Because, and there he shall perish with the dogs of Reason.” Liber AL II:30 can then be interpreted as suggesting that those very reasons we posit for our motivations lead to the death of that very motivation: “If Will stops and cries Why, invoking Because, then Will stops & does nought.” Therefore, the motivation that is invoked here needs to be understood on a very non-rational level.

If we posit the Star Ruby as a ritual that develops one’s Hadit, force, Will, motivation, etc., what then to make of a counterpart, or Nuit? For a person who is already imbalanced toward Hadit, something like the Star Ruby would be overkill and counterproductive. A person imbalanced that way might be someone who is “too Yang” or “excessively male” (the kind of trait that typically corresponds with too much testosterone), or they may be someone who is too egocentric, and not connected enough with those around them. Or they may be someone who is all motivation and no follow-through; in other words, an individual with a limited attention span who is good at starting things but lacks the ability to attend to manifesting those things. For this sort of individual, a Nuit-based counterpart should be more beneficial.

Let us recollect that Nuit may be thought of as the space of mind, or (in Vajrayana) wisdom or emptiness; the space or environment in which our motivation exists and acts. It is that ineffable thing which nurtures each momentary phenomena that we label as “T” into and out of existence. It is, again, the thing that we can Know, whereas “T” is that which we cannot know (Liber AL II:4 – “yet she shall be known & I never”). As such, if the purpose of a Hadit-based ritual is to bring about that ineffable seat of motivation, then the purpose of a Nuit-based counterpart should focus on that in which the motivation exists; or in other words, the field of experience which allows the motivation to bring phenomena into or out of manifestation. What, then, might such a counterpart look like? Ritual in general, particularly that of the Western Ceremonial tradition, is by nature very active. A Nuit-based practice instead

needs to be passive, so that the practitioner might still their active Hadit nature in order to begin to Know their Nuit. As such, the proper counterpart may be none other than simple meditation! To still the Hadit and simply sit and experience the Emptiness of mind seems the perfect balance to the opposing practice which wakes up the “Go!” The resulting combination of practices can also be regarded as a balance of magick and mysticism.

At this juncture there is one point left to clarify, and that is the nature of this Emptiness. Nuit can sometimes be thought of as a “void,” as I referred to her at the beginning of this essay, but that is an over-simplification. The Buddhist counterpart of “emptiness” is sometimes interpreted as a kind of nihilism, which is not only a misleading over-simplification, but possibly a harmful one. There are a number of ways to describe certain aspects of emptiness, none of which can replace its observation and experience. Lama Yeshe’s “Introduction to Tantra” defines it as “the absence of all false ideas about how things exist; specifically, the lack of the apparent independent, self-existence of phenomena.” This definition alludes to the inter-dependence (or “interdependent co-origination”) of all things.

In other words, the idea may be described as not that a given thing exists or doesn’t exist in any absolute sense; but that it exists or doesn’t exist only in relation to every other thing. Or perhaps: it is impossible for any one thing to exist without every other thing. Emptiness is the realization of that. Liber AL I:27 is one verse that alludes to this essence of Nuit that here is described as continuity: “... let it be ever thus; that men speak not of Thee as One but as None; and let them speak not of thee at all, since thou art continuous!” Foundational Buddhist writings on this emptiness can be found within the works of Nagarjuna. Ultimately, since it is Hadit who is doing the meditating, it is impossible to separate out one from the other; thus the inter-dependent nature may be realized. Therein, the nature of the interaction may be observed. In other words, as an iteration of Hadit operating within the sphere of Nuit, how well does one understand and interact with one’s sphere? How well does one recognize the inter-dependent arising and cessation of appearances within that sphere, and thus fully realize 0=2?

Although one can temporarily work with Nuit or Hadit to better understand and strengthen each end of the polarity, ultimately the essence of being lies in the flux of the two, and the peaks of the experience of that flux lie in the moments of their unification. At its basest, such a peak may be experienced in the orgasm resulting in the unification of male and female (which, again, refers to an abstract concept and not necessarily a biological man and woman).

At the level of the subtle bodies, that same flux and peak may be experienced via various kinds of Kundalini yogas (also alluded to in Liber AL as the serpent and the dove). In the language of Qabalah, the flux between the two pillars reaches a peak of equilibrium and centers in Tiphareth, indicating the full manifestation of Will. And thus, the play of duality is made manifest, moment by moment.

CHAPTER 10

See Me Now?

D. M. Atkins

How do I tell you who I am? How can you possibly see beyond what is in front of you? Do you see my round hips and swelling breasts? How can you see the other me? The me that has always been there too.

Did you know that I was the Lone Ranger? And Tonto too? Did you know that even before that, I was Batman? And I was in love with Robin. I was the hero. I was strong and protective. I sat in the top of the tree in my front yard and knew I was the adventurer in a jungle. I went hand-over-hand over a volcano that was shaped like a swing-set. I rescued not only the damsels but also the gents. And they worshipped me. They saw the real me in my swagger. They saw the hero who stood up to the Nazis in Poland, stealing food to feed the children in the ghetto. They saw the space adventurer with my own ship as I risked everything to save them. I fought alongside Robin Hood and made love to him deep in the forest. His merry men never knew but wondered at the secret smile we shared. We both liked Marion.

Did you know I seduced my first girl with my boy body? It wasn't my budding breasts that brought her off. After a day of adventures in the yard, where I rescued her yet again from bandits, or Indians, or villains of some type. It was the hero she begged to make love to her in the dark. It was the hero who she whispered to. She was eleven and I was thirteen. It was my cock that first entered her long before the fumbling redneck boys of Oklahoma. Kneeling between her legs, my body bucking into hers, I penetrated her and she begged for more.

My first boyfriend like to play with boys. And in me he found a creature like himself. My short hair tightened in his fists as he moaned, trying to stay coherent enough to teach me to suck his cock as the other boy had done. Oh, and he did love to see me in those tall black boots with the thick heels, black pants and gold shirt – with captain's braids. Captain of my own Star Trek club.

I remember seeing him for the first time across the room in the Starbase Tulsa meeting and wanting him so much I had a hard-on right then. I remember his shy smile as I held his gaze boldly. I even remember what I wore that night – the red plaid shirt, blue gaucho pants and, of course, those boots. I walked like I owned the world in those boots. I still have them in a trunk in my attic. And when I kissed Michael that first time, he froze, unable to even respond. His blue eyes looked into mine and said simply, “No one has ever kissed me before.” I made sure he was kissed a lot after that. I still remember those kisses and wonder where he is now.

And the other day when I told the beautiful man in the bed to flip over, he looked startled and yet smiled happily, complying with my demand. I massaged his back and then, even with our pants still on, I fucked him. And it felt so good, so right to be in that position. My hands holding his wrists down, my hips grinding into his ass as he moaned beneath me.

When I stare down at the stunning woman who lets me call her my lover, I am so hard I can barely breathe. I want to hold her and protect her. I feel so damn tall and strong. I want to be the hero in the story. She is competent and strong herself, but still I want to be the one who rescues her. Who chases away the bad and then takes my reward in her soft flesh. I want so much to be that hero so badly that I ache with need.

Did you know that in sleep I am all bodies – male, female, both and neither? My flesh shifts from dream to dream. Heroic dreams, erotic dreams, even bad dreams. I am me but I am so many bodies. I am able to be all those things and more. I was nine before I found out that this wasn't something everyone did. In that deep world where this body drops away, I am real and solid and so many things. I am the hero and the villain, I am the damsel and the gent, I am the girl and the boy. I am all at once. I am on my knees between her legs and I can feel my cock sliding deep inside, hard muscled thighs and strong arms hold me up as I pull slowly out and then burying myself deep in her. I can feel my cock along its entire length and shudder at each movement of her hips. I rock back sliding my hands down to hold her wide hips. And as I thrust deeper, I see her mouth gasping open and her blue eyes meet mine. My eyes. My face below me. I wake shuddering to orgasm even as I realize I was fucking myself.

CHAPTER 11

Boys Shorts: an experience of gender and modern paganism

Lance Moore

Video from Harvest Moon Celebration, about 1990, somewhere near Los Angeles, CA.

Press 'Record.'

Perhaps 150 people, at the end of a weekend of ritual and connection (and unsafe sex, by all later accounts). We're separated into lines of men and women. It's dark out.

The women gather in the ritual hall, a big, open space, bare, but our energies have filled it all weekend.

The women are singing a couple of lines from – a chant – we sang a lot of chants.

The men file in, taking places among the women, singing the other lines of the chant; where the sound of the women's voice went quiet, the men's filled in, back and forth, interweaving bodies and song.

It gives me chills.

I think I am in the wrong line. I am a young female adult. To all appearances, anyway. No one would've imagined otherwise. I squirm inside... appreciating every moment of this ritual, and still squirming inside.

Press 'Stop.'

I went to about three Harvest Moon Celebrations. They were so amazing; pagans gathering together in LA! Judith Butler rocked my world with her giant book and her in-depth presentation on the chakras. A woman! I went to a great intensive on runes... the book I was working from was not one of the ones the presenter recommended. Bummer. I recently found the name of that presenter, while going through my rune notes. It was Patrick McCollum. How the wheel turns!

There was no word for 'trans' then. In some ways, I didn't exist.

Video from Priestess School, 1989, on the wonderful grounds of Circle Sanctuary.

Press 'Record.'

I showered late at night; it was plenty warm. Just me under the open shower, wooden fence around, so very many stars above. I saw fireflies!

Later it came out I was the one who showered so late, and the man said 'oh I wondered who that was!'

I couldn't say why I was there, showering in the night, very carefully when no one else was around, though I did glory in the night... that I was completely uncomfortable showering with women.

It was such an honor to take that workshop, to go on an anniversary gift from my spouse, even though we really couldn't afford it. It was magic indeed.

And I was mute.

There was no word for 'trans' then.

Press 'Stop.'

I was a female adult. To all appearances, anyway. I'd never been in Wisconsin before. Madison turned out to be a wee town! I loved the Sanctuary; it was still kinda new then ...I'd had a poem and an article published in Circle Network News so to be there, with those people, was a dream come true. They'd just gotten a fine iron chandelier, big over its table. A girl working there brought in the skin of a skunk which had been squashed on the road that day.

I loved working with a small group of people. We were from all over; I made friends with an English woman and visited her home on the Thames a couple years later.

I did a little pagan teaching; I organized and facilitated a couple of open circles in Santa Barbara where I lived. Rocking my best androgynous clothing. Proud of my accomplishments. And feeling not-quite-real.

Video: The Nineties.

Daily life: Press 'Record,' 'Pause,' 'Record,' repeat.

1992: *Women Who Run with Wolves* was a bestseller. Like so many, I dove deep into story and women's mythology, trying to find examples of people like me.

No Google yet. I searched, without having the word I was looking for. I was always an omnivorous reader and of course loved the myths.

Aphrodite spoke to me. Artemis. Dionysus... that was getting closer...

With my partner and a good friend, I started my first coven, a happy, exploring, men-and-women gay-and-straight group. That friend became closer, when, on first meeting him, I read his cards... "Are you gay?" I asked. The cards knew. The look of surprise in his eyes I will never forget. I'd been very careful in how I asked, but I knew. The cards knew, he was hiding too much.

I started a women's circle, a few years later (the mixed group was also still running); I was hungry to find... something.

We made art. We drew down the moon, the Goddess possessing us on the beach.

Madonna. *Justify My Love*. I moved, further north.

Larger community... nothing fit. I half gave up.

Solitary work. Divorce.

And a motorcycle! Had a picture of one on my bulletin board when I was nine; no hope there, girls didn't ride motorcycles. Ghods, the glory of the M on my license and of that metal horse, corralled in my garage.

The itch got stronger.

Press 'Stop.'

I am Butch, finally. Just Am. Queerness, otherness, can't hide in me any longer. Perhaps it rarely ever did.

Video: The Aughts.

Press 'Record,' 'Pause,' 'Record,' repeat.

I move to the San Francisco Bay Area. Hoping for something more, determined to find community and friends again, though I didn't know the shape community might take. There were many shapes I didn't know.

Leather. Something else I had long sought; I at last find my way into the dungeon world. Sex and ritual... s/m as the path to power, to hearts, to vision.

To avoid craziness, and with the strength of my leather expression to lean on, and the driving despair/hope I felt after finally, really, actually meeting a transgender man as the spark, a person who was like me... I got my body into alignment with the rest of me.

Then, it was time to find pagan community again; I want more of the ritual leather teases, I miss the energy of sharing the gods with others.

Turns out pagan community lives in my back yard. Panthea-Con! With a friend at first, then mostly by myself, I return and return.

I am a man.

Tight shot: PantheaCon, about 2006.

I stand alone in the masses at something called a Feri ritual.

I don't know Feri. I only know the Star Goddess; have worked with Her forever.

Someone tells the tale of the beginning... how She made love to herself, and all was born... and took in two bright spirits... lovers and brothers, or sisters, or one of each... this time: brothers.

Danced by two women, tight side by side, legs extending together; masculine tribal garb.

My pulse begins to race.

And God Herself, blue robes wrapping, unwrapping... supported at a man's height on male-wide shoulders, She danced.

I didn't know what it was, what I was seeing. But I knew it was mine.

As Thorn says, She is pre-gender, and the blended spirits, the great peacock lord; he is post-gender. I feel his touch.

Tight Shot: PantheaCon, 2011.

Maybe fifty of us sit in a circle, to discuss gender and paganism.

It's uncomfortable in so many ways. I hate 'discrimination' as the label on the door; whom does that invite?

But I come. Another short white guy. I want to support my friends, who have organized this, I want to see if I have anything to offer, or what I might learn.

Talking. Too many details from this woman, and that guy never spoke at all. I hope he is listening.

Yea for the talking stick. Finally, I take a turn.

I remember the Dianics. I have tread a few steps on that path, and I know how core that path is to who we are today, all we pagans. Just like all we queers and trans folks stand on our sister's shoulders... as they stand on the shoulders of black resistors before them, and back and back forever and ever.

These are hard questions. Public venue? Harm? Personal religious experience?

We feel our way in the dark, groping empty feminine cauldrons
and wee staffs, with little regard for the humans they are attached
to.

My balls are not yours to judge.

*Your practices are not mine to judge either, save for when they are
in the public sacred space we share.*

Press 'Stop.'

Tempests in teacups, yes. Small pictures, individual lives.

The way change happens.

Everything She touches changes, She changes everything she touches.
Change is.

CHAPTER 12

Walkers Between the Worlds

Michael R. Gorman

When I heard about the controversy at PantheaCon 2011 over the woman's ritual that would not allow MTF (male-to-female) Transgendered women to participate, I found myself both angry and frustrated. I am currently working on a book examining the cultural law, social order, and spirituality of our Celtic ancestors who were such a threat to the Roman hierarchical, patriarchal, militaristic, ownership-based culture of the Roman Republic that Julius Caesar, during his Gallic wars (Galli being the Latin word for Celt), burned the libraries of the Druids in every area of Europe that his armies defeated. He wanted no knowledge of the Celtic egalitarian, nature-honoring, gender-inclusive, pedagogical, innovative culture to survive as an alternative to the Roman paradigm. He was smart enough to know that if people, especially the working classes, knew of this cultural alternative that honored all people equally, they would leave the echelons of the Roman slave and plebian classes in droves. I'm sure Caesar also feared that, exposed to the powerful and independent Celtic women, more than a few Roman women might begin to doubt the right of their husbands and fathers to own them as they owned cattle and land and hogs. The pyramid shaped social hierarchy of Rome depended for its very life on the ignorance and unceasing labor of the workers at the bottom of the system. The Druid belief in universal education would have been the death of Rome and its exploitation of the imposed ignorance of the workers.

Although we have inherited our own American Republic, and much of our world view, from England, arguably the most Romanized of the formerly Celtic European nations, I have always held out hope that, in the Pagan community at least, a more sustainable, peaceful, non-divisive, earth-honoring, diversity-celebrating world view would be reborn into the world. There is no more powerful honor we could offer our tribal ancestors than to find a way to

weave their cultural wisdom and practice into modern philosophy and social organization. The exclusionary actions of the group that sponsored that women's ritual are, contrarily, an affront to those ancestors. To insult a woman because she carries some part of the masculine within her shows a fundamental ignorance of the world view my Druid ancestors worked so hard, and sometimes died, to preserve. Much of the written record of our European ancestors, the 'Paganus' (Latin for the 'country folk' or 'country bumpkins' who kept practicing those old ways), languished untranslated for a over a thousand years only in the libraries of Ireland, as the Romanized Christian church finished the job Caesar began by removing all reference in European academia of any history except the Roman canon Bible. Even then, it took a thousand years for Roman Christianity to dominate Europe rather than Celtic Christianity, a brand of Christianity born out of the Celtic cultural paradigm rather than the Roman.

The book-burning male hierarchy of ancient Rome would have been proud of the exclusion that took place at PantheaCon this year, because Rome did not so much care which side excluded which, as long as two sides were pitted against each other in a triumph of its dualistic, militaristic world view. Divide and conquer, it seems, is something to which we of the Paganus tradition are still sorely susceptible!

One of the most powerful cultural tools our current system has to keep people controlled and passive is our belief in the dualistic nature of life. In a leap of insane proportions, we listen to the propaganda of our culture and believe that every story has two sides: male/female, light/darkness, friend/enemy, for us/agin us, heaven/hell, God/Satan, and ad infinitum! And even worse, this system we are living under teaches us that the wise response to the dualities is to choose one side and fight the other side. In the world of the dualistic mind, if one side is right, then the other side must of necessity be wrong. That's how the universe works in the non-Pagan mind. It is no wonder that our very language is infused with the imagery of war and conflict. We engage in the war on drugs, the war on terrorism, the war on teen pregnancy, the war on poverty, the war on hunger, the war on ignorance, the war on pollution, and the battle of the sexes; and in each scenario we spend most of our energy trying to define the enemy of 'our side,' the one responsible for the conflict, which is, of course, never 'our side's' fault.

In childhood cartoons we are even taught to be at war with ourselves, with an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other. PantheaCon 2011 has demonstrated the tragedy that we are just as prone to blindly follow the dominant cultural paradigm as everyone

else. Otherwise, how is it that we who claim to honor nature can claim, and act upon, the belief that everything has two sides in a multidimensional world? Nothing has only two sides: not religion, not the 24-hour rotation of the earth, not the seasons and the wheel of the year, not the circle of earth, air, fire, and water, and not gender! It is not an accident that one of the primary symbols of our belief system is the all-embracing circle. Perhaps if we left the picture of the Tree of Life on our altars more often and actually spent some time leaning against a real tree, we might laugh at the stupidity of dualism as a way of seeing the magnificent world our divine parents have given us.

Almost all tribal peoples in ancient times had more than two words for gender. They looked at their primary teacher, the natural world, and saw a rainbow of possibilities manifest in every species. In fact, they knew that diversity (we would say genetic diversity) is essential to the survival of any variety of tree or animal, and to any human tribe. Any ninth grade biology student can tell you that limiting the gene pool is death to any species. The more you limit and exclude the possibilities, the more narrow your view of human identity and potential, the more you advocate the death that inevitably follows forced homogeneity. Our blind allegiance to the dominant western paradigm will be the death of our community if we don't wake up. I pray that the transgender women excluded at PantheaCon will be a catalyst for truly embracing the values and wisdom of our tribal ancestors. In our recent shameful Pagan version of the Battle of the Sexes, there isn't even a side for Transgendered people! If that state of affairs continues, know that I will stand proudly outside the community with my Transgendered family members.

Does it not seem irrational to divide the entire human population into two sides, choose one side to honor, and then denigrate and exclude fully one half of the rest of the population? In fact, when we embrace this particular part of the dominant culture, we exclude even more than half of the human population, because there will always be those who join the winning side du jour by hiding parts of themselves, but there will also be those who purposely or inadvertently reveal the 'wrong' parts of themselves and so suffer being booted out. If transgender women are not suitable for a women's ritual, are not lesbians just as inappropriate, given their masculine tendencies? What about male-identified straight women? Are they not traitors to their gender? What about bisexual women? At what point in the Kinsey scale do they have enough womanness to qualify for a woman's ritual? And what of female identified straight men?

Whose ritual do they get to go to? What about effeminate or masculine gay men? Should they have their own rituals... and drinking fountains? What of those who were born hermaphrodites and whose parents chose the wrong gender in the 'corrective' surgery imposed upon a baby unable to speak for himself or herself?

Should we start calculating the percentage of feminine and masculine in such questionable people, the way our not-too-distant forebears in America delineated the percentages of Blackness and Whiteness in mixed-race people? We could make a chart to help us decide who gets to join the female rituals and who goes to the male rituals! Or maybe we should just make the choosing easy by requiring that everyone of an unacceptable degree of maleness or femaleness pack their closets along with their clothes and magical tools, and bring them along to PantheaCon each year. That way we could make hiding our identities easy and our ignorance bliss.

I know transsexual women so beautiful by the standards of our culture that they could secretly join the women's rituals and no one narrow enough to exclude women for their differences would even be able to tell. In fact, I know drag queens who could pass as 'real women.' So is it to be a standard in the Pagan community that those who can get away with lies about themselves should do so? It's not so hard to fool the male and female chauvinists. After all, it has been clearly demonstrated in gender research that men and women who exhibit the extremes of masculinity and femininity as defined by the dominant culture tend to be less intelligent due to smaller areas of synaptic connections between the hemispheres of the brain. Is that biological deficiency genetic, or simply more fallout from blind adherence to a human-unfriendly cultural paradigm? Who cares as long as using that paradigm can whitewash our prejudices?

Don't we Pagans suffer exclusion enough without having to impose it on our own brothers and sisters and brosisisters and sisbrothers and mothers and fathers and children? Ah the children! What are we teaching our children? If we pass on to them the dualistic view of the world, the good guys and bad guys, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, girls against the boys, penises versus vaginas, battle of the sexes mentality, then what reason will they have for not becoming fundamentalists instead of the new generation of children of the universe? Certainly no philosophic reasons learned from us.

My Druid ancestors were often called 'The Walkers Between The Worlds' because, when they saw a duality, they did not make it the template for their greater vision of the world. Instead, they took it upon themselves to walk the line between the sides, observe

and seek to understand both sides, and then build bridges of understanding between them so that they could come together and be seen for what they are: two halves of one wonderful wholeness. This is the message of the yin and yang symbol that so many of us wear so proudly. Showing the two sides of that sacred symbol separately would be a fundamental misunderstanding of that visual metaphor for spiritual reality. Even the yin side has a dot of yang, and the yang side has a dot of yin. Separating out the duality into two clearly delineated sides would require a regular hatchet job on our pendants and necklaces and tattoos!

I was drawn to the Druid path for many reasons, not the least of which was the revelation that as a gay man, I was born a walker between the worlds and had before me, not the exclusion and denigration offered by the guy-girl mainstream culture, but the honor of my ancestors as one of the ones with that sacred in-between role in the culture bestowed from birth. No matter how often I am confronted with heterosexual privilege, no matter how often others try to use exclusion, homophobia, and heterocentrism to make of me a second-class citizen, my ancestors understood that I was one of the special ones born from the womb into a sacred role in the society, walking between the worlds. In that, I have a great deal in common with my transgender brothers and sisters, my lesbian family, and those bisexuals with enough courage to acknowledge their own 'inappropriateness' in the eyes of our Roman Empire bred born culture.

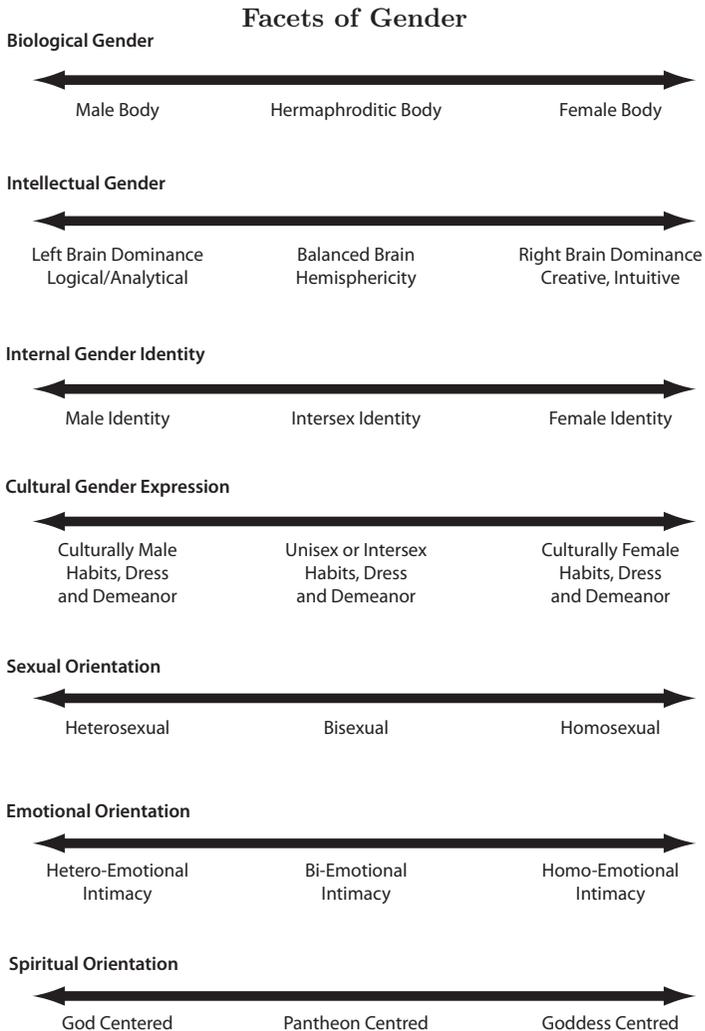
I believe with all my heart that we Pagans, straight, gay, bi, transgendered, female-identified, male-identified, hetero-emotional, homo-emotional, bi-emotional, butch, fem, transvestite, bubba, hermaphroditic, biologically male, biologically female, female gender-identified, male gender-identified, intersex, transvestite, asexual, culturally male, culturally female, culturally unisex, culturally defiantly ambiguous, left-brain dominant, right-brain dominant, Goddess-centered, God-centered, Pantheonically Centered, and good old FDD – Fiercely Dressed in Drag, are the one community with the potential to cross all the lines and show the world that there is a better way to live and love. There is a reason the Celts, stretched as they were at their height across a wide swath of Europe, and as diverse as they were, called themselves one tribe, one Tuatha. When we do the opposite, when we cave to the pressure of our unbalanced, exclusionary, hierarchical, patriarchal culture, I weep with the disappointment of it. I also renew my determination not to be assimilated into a culture, however familiar, which requires me to lose my individual fabulousness in all of its multifaceted sides, insides, and implications!

I am sorely tempted, should this discrimination at PantheaCon continue, to call on every enlightened Pagan man and woman attending PantheaCon next year to dress in drag and quietly line up beside our transgender sisters for entrance into the women's ritual and make them have to parse us out. We could expose the Romanized paradigm for the lunacy that it is, and force those who discriminate to reject us one by one, Goddess loving Pagan by Goddess loving Pagan, brother by brother, and sister by sister.

Addendum

*From The Celtic Philosopher's Stone
by Michael R. Gorman
(Used by permission)*

(What do modern westerners include when they say Male or Female? Below is a chart of gender related human characteristics, all of which exist on a spectrum, but which are simplistically summarized in mainstream Western thinking with just two categories: Male and Female.)



Author's Note. Given only these seven easily identified gender related characteristics, each on a continuum, there are an infinite variety of variations possible in the human population. Great pain and injustice is created by our culture's attempt to take only the two extreme sides of each characteristic, or even only one side as in the case of heterosexuality, lump them all together into two artificial sides, and then cram every human being into these ludicrously narrow confines. This is not the product of the Pagan mind, nor should it be any part of the Pagan cultural paradigm. Pagan culture teaches that all parts of the natural world are divinely created and therefore are sacred. Pagan wisdom recognizes the ecological reality that lack of diversity is a threat to the health and survival of any species, and of any ecosystem. In its purest sense, Pagan culture embraces the sanctity of every characteristic related to gender, as well as entire spectra from which those characteristics are manifest.

CHAPTER 13

God as Multigender Deity

Philip Tanner

People in Abrahamic societies generally have some awareness of human creation as told in the Torah, the Holy Bible, and/or the Qur'an. Each states that God created Adam first and then God created Eve afterward – or so most people think – but even a quick glance across the Book of Genesis reveals basic internal contradictions on this point. Modern scholars believe that Genesis, as we know it, begins with a patchwork of creation stories from several groups who later coalesced into one ancient people, yet that still leaves us with a profound theological quandary: is God telling Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – all of which recognize Adam & Eve – to engage in theological doublethink by believing the contradictions as equal truth? Maybe, but there is still an important lesson in one of the Genesis creation accounts regarding the gender of God.

Let's start with where the Hebrew texts of the multiple creation accounts in Genesis agree. First, the accounts use the verb *bârâ'* for the act of creation – not surprisingly since *bârâ'* is reserved exclusively for *divine* creation. Secondly, the accounts state that humans were created from the actual likeness – the *d^emâwth* – of God. *D^emâwth* carries a wide range of meanings, all focused on *template* – all the Genesis accounts agree that we were created as a *reflection* of God, with the *actual essence of God as a template*. And that is where Genesis Chapter 5 jumps forward for consideration.

Elsewhere in Genesis the text states that God *first* created Adam *then* created Eve, but the Hebrew text of Genesis 5:1-2 unequivocally states that God created Adam and Eve *together* (and yes, this contradicts Eve-from-Adam's-Rib in Genesis 2:21-23). This leaves us with an unmistakable conclusion: despite the use of the male pronoun, the account of human creation in Genesis 5 is valid *only* if the essence of God is multi-gendered. Genesis 5:1-2, as rendered in the New International Version (2011):

When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them.

It would be easy to look past Genesis 5 as a statistical outlier, since it disagrees with all the other creation stories, but Genesis 5 stands out for one simple reason: it is from Genesis 5 that we go from Adam to Seth; the lineage of Seth gives us Noah, Abraham, David, and ultimately Joseph the husband of Mary – the mother of Jesus. Perhaps, then, we should pay closer attention to Genesis 5.

In order for human creation in Genesis 5:1-2 to make sense, God's essence must be multi-gendered; otherwise we would be exclusively male. From that it is a simple logical extension to the following: if God's very essence is multi-gender – or at least not just male – then who are we to conclude that any one particular definition of gender brings anyone closer to a divine template than anyone else? If we believe that God is sovereign, and God's essence is both male and female in a way beyond our mortal comprehension, then who are we to make assumptions regarding the status of God's children who do not match one extreme of the traditional gender-binary continuum? Indeed, could it be that the ones of us whose gender expression is closest to God's actual essence are those who identify as multi-gendered themselves?

CHAPTER 14

The Third Voice

Raven Kaldera

I lift my arms to the vaulted darkness of the Underworld, and call on my spirit-ancestors. "Kurgarra, galatur, those who walked the Third Path and rescued Goddess from Goddess, guide me on this journey." For I will most certainly need every ounce of your aid.

I am a shaman in the Northern Tradition. Within the praxis of Northern Tradition Shamanism, I'm a particular type of shaman. There's a word for me in Old Norse: *ergi*, *argr*. There's some debate about exactly how that should be defined historically, but anthropologically it's part of the same package as the male-bodied Siberian shamans a little further east who wore skirts, took husbands, and channeled female spirits as part of their spiritual path. When scholars throughout the ages have interviewed gender-crossing spirit-workers around the world, they ask them why they did it ... and the answer is never "I was uncomfortable in my body." When they actually get an answer, it tends to be "The spirits told me that I had to do it or I would die."

I'm also a transgendered intersexual. I was born with an intersex condition - congenital adrenal hyperplasia - and raised female until the age of 30 when I chose to take testosterone and transition to a male presentation. I did it for a variety of reasons. One of them was straight-up nasty old body dysphoria. One of them was the fact that estrogen made me physically worse and testosterone made me significantly better. But the biggest reason was that the Gods and spirits told me that I had to do it.

When the many grad students who have interviewed me hear me say that, they get a funny look in their eyes. It's the same look that they get when I talk about how Gods and spirits talk to me, work with me, help me to do the work that I do with the clients who come to me. And yet, for me, my gender situation is entirely wound up with my religious beliefs and practices. I couldn't

have one without the other. I am a Neo-Pagan, not because I once thought that it was a cool religion that wouldn't tell me that I was sinful for being what I am, but because the Gods came for me and I had no choice ... in getting sex reassignment or in becoming a shaman. The two processes are remarkably similar, although not the same.

Eighteen years ago when I was working towards transitioning from female to male, there was hardly anything about transgender in Pagan spirituality. When one transwoman wrote hesitantly into Green Egg magazine (this was before the age of the Huge Internet, and magazines were a big deal back then, children) about whether there was a spiritual place for her in Neo-Paganism, she received a raft of flak from people of both end-spectrum genders, telling her that there were men and there were women, like the God and Goddess, and she was clearly delusional. My anger at that mail exchange pushed me to write the book *Hermaphrodities: The Transgender Spirituality Workbook*, the first book ever written on our spiritual paths, which has now gone into its second edition and is still selling steadily. The main message was simple, and is one that I still believe in: we are sacred, just as we are.

I didn't know that this road I was traveling would lead to my becoming a third gender shaman. I didn't know that I would face clinical near-death and meet my Goddess; that I would come back with Her orders ringing in my ears. *You are the shaman for the tribe of those like yourself, those in the middle. There are enough of them now that they merit a shaman, and so I have given them ... you. Whether you like them, whether you agree with them, whether they like or agree with you, they are still your people. Serve them as you can, in the way I have shown you.*

I asked the Gods Of Gender Transgression to come to me and teach me their mysteries, and they did - Baphomet, Lilith, Shiva, Dionysos, Aphrodite Urania, Athena, Obatala, Ellegua, Loki, Coyote, Jormundgand, and many others. As I write this article in the wake of a controversy stemming from a ritual to Lilith, some of them stand forth and speak, and I write down their words as fast as I can.

In the northeast, Lilith comes, in her transgendered form of the hairy goddess. That's what they called her in ancient times - the hairy goddess, covered in hair like the ass and goat and other animal forms she takes. Bringer of lust, bringer of infertility. Baby-killer. In this form, no one is quite sure what is between her legs. People try to deny this side of her, the side that so resembles the hairy, lustful,

infertile intersex condition that I was born with. She whirls like a dervish, her curved sword slicing the air like the desert scirocco that is her symbol, and her owl-golden eyes meet mine. Her voice is like the lash of a sandstorm.

Woman's power? Yes, I am woman's power ... and one of women's powers is to step halfway away from being a woman, just as the opposite is true for men. I am also the power of truth, and of speaking that truth. There are truths here that women need to speak. The first one is this: We do not want you in our space, No-Longer-Man, not because we fear your chromosomes or your resculpted bodies. It is because we fear your upbringing, and that you will not have fully shed it ... and as we do not wish to fully shed ours, why should we not assume that for you?

This is the first gate, the gate that no one speaks of, the gate that is not biology but culture. Women's culture, the messy, slurry mix of women still only halfway out of all they have been taught that they should be, and only halfway to what they could be, and still unsure of where the lines should be drawn. You fear the woman who does not understand what it is to be raised female in this culture, who may say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing, assume an entitlement that they were raised to expect, and that you have not yet convinced yourselves that you can demand. And yes, they will do this sometimes, because that is the way of things.

This is the first gate, O Women-Raised-Women, not the second one which is the mysteries of the body, of the womb that gives forth blood and babies. You point to the second gate and bar it, while pretending the first gate is not there ... and then cry out when No-Longer-Man walks through the first gate unknowing. And to teach them how to pass that first gate? You would have to face how divided you are, how far each of you has left to go. You would have to go back to arguing amongst yourselves about what parts of how a woman acts should be - or can be - discarded. And this is the first mystery of Those In Between: They force Those Who Are Not to look at their own flaws, whether they will or no. Honor that Mystery, if you would have them honor yours.

And there is one more truth that must be spoken: the second gate, the gate of the womb mysteries, is not open to all who were raised women. Some have no wombs. Some have no connection to their wombs, nor is it their path to do so. To speak that this mystery is open to everyone with a vagina is to hurt those sisters of yours for whom it is not. Better, instead, to speak the truth: that no mystery is open to everyone who claims a certain word, but instead that Spirit cries out to like Spirit, and it is Spirit who should choose.

In any religious argument, there are three voices. The first two are the ones that everyone thinks when they imagine a theological argument: “But this is the way we’re used to doing it, and we believe the religious information spoken and written by others in the past which tells us this is the right way to do things!” and “But this practice upsets/disempowers/damages some people, and it would be more fair to them to change it in this way over here...” The traditionalist and the reformer are usually the two who go toe to toe with each other, and can deadlock for hours or years or centuries over their points ... which may be equally valid in their own ways.

The third voice is that of the mystic, and it is universally hated by the other two. It’s the voice that says, “Well, I talked to God/the Gods/the spirits/the ghost of the dead guy last night, and I was told this...” Neither of them wants to hear the mystic’s voice, because it is elitist. It suggests that the Gods/spirits are talking to the mystic and not to them. (Which, historically and unfortunately, is sometimes true.) The mystic’s voice rarely says things that are comforting, and rarely says things that seem fair. There’s also that Neo-Pagans, in a religion largely of converts, are extremely distrustful of anyone who claims to be a mystic, or more of a mystic than every Pagan is promised that they can be if they only try. That voice is disliked equally as much as the Third Voice of Gender, the one who stands between male and female. Both force people to confront what they believe, and what possibilities the Universe may hold that they cannot yet see.

I am that Third Voice in both those contexts, no matter where I go. As the ergi shaman, it’s my job, and I do it because I cannot do otherwise ... no matter how uncomfortable it makes everyone feel.

Instead of moving around the circle, I pass through the center, where Baphomet sits enthroned. There are some who say that he is the brother (or brother/sister) of Lilith. Goat-horned, goat-footed, hairy breasts

and enormous erection with a toothed cunt beneath it, his yellow eyes are slitted dangerously at me. His voice is gravelly, like a she-male whore who has smoked for a thousand years, and he crooks a scarlet-nailed finger at me.

It is the same for the men's side, you know. Those No-Longer-Women might come in with assumptions about how things are to be done. They might not understand how important the physical urges are, how much priority is laid on the cock and its desires. Having struggled so much with culture when they loved as women, they might remonstrate with men for not doing the same, at least not where they can see it. The truth that is spoken here is: You have no cock, not like ours. The truth that is unspoken is: You who say you want to be a man, how dare you come into this place and tell us that our male way of doing things is not right? How dare you tell us what our cocks should and should not want? Those are women's words. It is not your place to say these things. But this is not spoken aloud. And how is change to be made if truth is hidden?

Sex is in it too, you see. Man or woman, it does not matter - Those In Between confuse the cock, the cunt, and because they are not fully listening with their whole bodies and their whole minds, they do not see how much of the discomfort comes from their fetish becoming confused, half-fulfilled and half-denied. Is desiring a male body, a female body, a fetish? I say it is. I say that all desire is fetish. I say also that until everyone faces the mumbling voice of the genitals, faces how much secret power it has over their response to the Third, we will never have true honesty or real change.

The story of Neo-Paganism may not start embryonically with British Traditional Wicca, exactly, but it marks its birth with that denomination. The whole theology of traditional Wicca is based on the sacredness of gender polarity, a duotheism of Lady and Lord. When it appeared, it was hailed as a huge improvement over a single male-only divine monotheism, sometimes with an ambivalent underclass-polytheism of male and female saint-figures who submitted to the male Godhead, and sometimes alone except for a son/avatar/gentler second self. The whole idea that God could be

conceived of both male and female equally - and of equal importance - in a loving and erotic embrace was a stunningly heretical idea ... and still is in many other subcultures.

Eventually, Neo-Paganism would fracture and spread and develop versions of Goddess-only monotheism, ungendered or multiply-gendered pantheism, and a host of vigorous polytheisms based partly on recreating ancient religions more closely and partly on a blossoming of personal contacts with the plural divine. To those who hailed a bicolor flag over a monochromatic one, the rainbow-watercolor blendings of pantheism and the vibrant many-textured patchwork of polytheism may seem like a confusing swirl, especially given what both of them say about the gender of the holy and the holiness of gender.

It's been said that the Lord/Lady gender duality of traditional Wicca is such an overwhelming theological truth for Wiccans that it is equivalent to the resurrection of Christ for Christians. This makes it challenging for transgendered people in many Wiccan-based groups ... and since Wicca is still the single largest Pagan sect (the comparison has been made of "Wicca is to Neo-Pagan as Catholic is to Christian"), it's statistically likely that this is what the new seeker will encounter. To be clear, I am not suggesting that Wicca should ditch its Holy Grail. Instead, I'm suggesting that there should be religious materials for well-meaning but bewildered high priests and high priestesses who find someone transgendered in their circle. Perhaps they can be treated as someone who can play both sides and learn both mysteries. Perhaps they can be seen as a blending of Lord and Lady, the fifth point of the pentagram. Perhaps they are binary-identified enough to be fine with being seen as just another kind of man or woman. At worst, perhaps the clergy member in question can have the contact information for local non-Wiccan Pagan groups on hand. There's a great deal of honor in saying, "You're not right for us, but I'll make it my business to help you find a place that's right for you."

I cross to the southwest, and I face Dionysos. Long hair tosses and girlish lips laugh at me in a boy's face. His slender body is wrapped in a purple woman's chiton, with a leopard-skin thrown over his shoulder. The chiton slips down, revealing one nipple on a flat, hairless chest. His feet are clad in red buskins with built-up wooden heels - the first high heels, representing the bull-footed god. Sacred drag queen, her breath is the first pressing of sweet wine in an Attic grove, or perhaps the whisky-sodden fumes of an alcoholic slumped down in the alley

behind the bar. He'll take them all, he doesn't care. Her voice is musical, charming, like the hazel eyes that tease me.

Ah, my Third Children. What will you do when you think you have all the answers, and then all the questions change again? That is what happens when you mess with Mysteries. By their nature, Mysteries are not open to everyone. By their nature, Mysteries are not fair. By their nature, Mysteries are terrifying, frustrating, dangerous, transforming, and never what you expect them to be. When you rip off the veil and expose them to the light, they vanish, and you are left with a pile of ashes that is not worth fighting over.

Coming to a Mystery of any kind with the merest hint of the thought in your head: "This will validate some part of my identity; this will prove to myself or others that I am this or that" - it is a guaranteed way to make the Mystery refuse to show itself to you. Coming to a Mystery with the thought of "I am entitled to this; I should be allowed in on principle" will make the Mystery run from you. No one is entitled to a Mystery. Even those who are allowed in may not be shown its ways. There is no guarantee. The only attitude to have when approaching a Mystery is: I am ready to be torn apart, however You choose to do that. If you cannot come to the ritual with nothing but this in your mind, you should not be there. Go clean and stripped of desires, or the Universe will teach you something the hard way.

Remember that your own mysteries - and you do have them - can tear apart the single-gendered just as easily, if they were to come to them in other than a humble manner. Remember that there are many powers in the world, all worthy of respect, and sometimes respect means lowering the eyes and keeping a distance ... and that includes the reaction of another to your own Mystery, even if you are the only one who holds that particular space. But, of course, you are never the only one.

The first time I ever ran into the issue of transfolk at a single-gender Pagan event was more than twenty years ago. I hadn't gotten the courage to look at my gender issues yet, and I was one of

the three priestesses doing a women's ritual at a major Pagan gathering. There was a transwoman present, and during the after-ritual discussion she wept and thanked several of the nontrans women present for vouching for her, standing up for her, making sure that she got in. At the time, I didn't know that years later, we would date and eventually marry. I didn't know that she would show me, with her hands and body, that it was possible to be who I really was and still be loved.

I didn't know that no one with gender dysphoria can sleep every night with a transitioned transsexual and not be forced to deal with their issues. Especially when the Gods are after them. Then I had to look at all these issues close up, and realize that I had to make choices. I would never again walk into women's ritual space, especially after testosterone had irrevocably changed my face and voice and body. I would not walk into any men's space where I was not known and welcomed by all. When "women and trans" spaces appeared, I realized sadly that I couldn't go there either. A space predicated on the concept that all people raised male and choosing to remain that way are uneducable and cannot ever be trusted is not a worldview I can honestly immerse myself in. This restricts me to pansexual space and various trans-only spaces (and only if the boundaries around the trans-only spaces are self-selecting; a matter of "you are one if you say you are one and are willing to be treated that way, if only for now"). I'm not mourning this, however. After all, it does give me the whole rest of the world.

But I also have faith in myself to be able to hold the energy of any space that I create, and to keep it tolerant and open in spirit. In our Pagan church, we have a large segment of queer and trans people - and we also have folks who aren't. We have farmers who appreciate the cycle of life and to whom "fertility" means not human procreation but plants and animals, and city people who have never experienced any of that. We've learned to walk the line between honoring the biological mysteries (which we all take part in, if only because we were born, and we eat food) as well as the mysteries that sidestep or override them. We've learned to honor both the "standard" and the "exception" when it comes to the sacredness of bodily reality. We've learned ways to include everyone at least some of the time, and calmly put forth that it's impossible to include everyone all the time, and that this is fine. We've found that having areas of sincere and real inclusivity can go a long way toward tolerance of occasional rituals with a more limited demographic.

An example of this is our yearly Beltane ritual. We've been doing this for almost two decades now, and we can't imagine doing it any other way. The men hunt for the pole, the women clear out the hole and make offerings into it, and the third gender people form a human chain to bring the two groups together. This gives the fertility rite an extra dimension: it also becomes a magical act to bring together the male and female principle all over the world, and binds that to an earthy reality. We also make it clear that the three groups are self-selecting; people can choose which energy they want to embody any given year, but they have to actually work at embodying it. (We've had teens in our church float from group to group over a period of years, finding themselves and their identities.) At the same time, our Green Man and May Queen are a gender-normative and anatomically-normative fertile male-female couple, because they embody the biological mystery of procreation and earthly fertility. By honoring both sides, we create a full spectrum of reality where people don't put all their energy into resentment or personal mourning. In twenty years, all we've had are compliments.

I move widdershins around the circle to the south-east and face Shiva, sitting cross-legged on his mountaintop. The black hair on one side is drawn up into the neat coil of a high-born woman; the other side hangs long and tangled like a forest hermit. His eyes are closed, including the third one in the middle of his forehead, but as I approach the lower two slowly open. I am fixed, paralyzed, by the intensity of his stare. The snake wound around his shoulders lifts its head as he does, adding its gaze to his. The voice that comes from his blue-scarred throat is like the echo in a deep cave.

Illusions. These are illusions, these lines that are being drawn. They do not come from the deep truth. And the idea that there are no lines is an illusion as well. How is this so? Because in the end, it is the body of energy - not the body of flesh, not the mind, not the ideas, not the heart and its emotions - that counts.

You cannot see the body of energy? Learn. If you would learn the truth, learn how. Until then, begin to burn your illusions. Do not concern yourself with how they came to be. Just take your most cherished ideas about gender ... and, one by one, see if you can live without them for a week, a month,

a year. One at a time, consign them to the cremation ground. Those that survive a year of fires, they are real. All others are illusions. One at a time. It is a lifetime's worth of honorable work.

What would it be like if our first questions in this matter were not political but religious? What would it be like if our first line of questioning was not to debate, or to research, but simply to pray? Imagine if the whole lot of us humbly knelt and asked, "Holy Powers, I cannot be objective about this matter. It burns in me too strongly; it touches too much old pain. Please, help me to get past that pain. Help me to see things as they really are, however that is. Help me to see things as You see them. Help me to see beyond myself and my limited horizons." And then imagine us all listening, really listening, to what is said in the not-so-empty spaces between our self-involved thoughts.

What would it be like? If this last question has made you profoundly uncomfortable, that's good. It means that you're getting ready to look hard at what it means to have a faith, rather than a subculture or a philosophy or a political movement or a social group, or even a personal spiritual practice. Because of our unscrutinized theology, the question of gender is intimately tied up with the question of faith. Modern Neo-Paganism continually shies away from questions of theology, because people might disagree with each other, and what would we all do then? Most of our models for theological disagreement come from a history of murder and torture over the issue. We don't have good rules for peaceful disagreement, and we are not yet ready to take on that challenge, so our solution has been to pretend that we don't have theologies, or that we all have basically the same theology, so why bother to talk about it? Until, of course, they collide ... and even then we pretend that the question is political or personal, not theological.

I cross the center again, but it is a bridge over a dark chasm. On the opposite side - the northwest - stands a figure clad in shimmering robes of blue-green, ocean shading to tree shading to starry heavens. Her face is that of a beautiful woman, but she wears a full beard like an echo of a sideshow lady. Her eyes and lips are painted, and her graceful hands are tiny and feminine, decorated with henna. Her voice is warm and sweet as honey, and she touches my arm gently. She is Aphrodite Urania, the Bearded Aphrodite of Cyprus, She Who Builds Bridges And Crosses Boundaries. She is a light in the darkness which has grown around me

as I have walked the path of this problem, and I am grateful.

I beseech you, do not forget Love in all this! Do not forget that one never knows where the heart may land ... or, rather, no one knows but me! Do not forget that it is always more honorable to build a bridge than to storm a gate, and that doing it with Love is the best way - Love, not pride, or determination, or anger, is the gentle water that will slowly erode the stone, almost without its notice. Be that water; be the ocean who yields unhurt when struck, but then flows again gently to fill all space. Do not let your pain overcome your ability to love, or you have already lost. Wherever there can be compassion on both sides, there the people have actually triumphed.

Also, do not forget the sacred work of those who take on loving those of your tribe. Let there be places in your rites of love not just for the couple of opposites and the two couples of sameness, but for all the beautiful combinations that mixing with your tribe creates. The sacred stories of those combinations were never written down, and so you must rewrite them. Where is the story of how the bonfire, sitting still in one place and unchanging save for its lifetime, drew to it the lightning that constantly transformed itself, and how they fell in love? Where is the story of how the moth who chrysalized loved the fly who did not? Where is the story of the two dragonflies and how they taught each other how to grow from larvae? If they are gone, reinvent them. That way you'll know how they end, and will have something to strive for.

I am the Love that crosses all boundaries, even those which are most carefully kept. I am the most terrible of them all, for no one can resist me when I seize two who are far apart and bring them together. And yes, sometimes I do put people in a position where they must choose between their community and their heart ... because the best way to change that situation is to tell that story, over and over again. Be assured, when I call you to my altar, you will choose for your heart. You will not

dare to do otherwise ... and all must see that Love triumphs over politics, inevitably and inexorably.

We may not always know what to do when we are faced with the great tangle that is Divinity and humanity and Nature and culture. We may hurt ourselves and each other figuring it all out. We may take many decades and many tears to work our way around it. But the Gods are watching us, make no mistake. They are watching, and this is a test ... for everyone involved. This issue is more core to our future than we dare understand. Where our religion goes from here will depend on whether we pass or fail.

CHAPTER 15

Twenty Years in the Dianic Traditions

Ryiah Nevo

Yes, I said Dianic traditions. Traditions. Plural. With an “s”. I’ll be even more blunt: Z. Budapest’s Dianic lineage is not The Dianic Tradition. It is one Dianic tradition: the Budapestian Dianic tradition, if you like. But there are many other Dianic traditions and lines.

Z. Budapest’s website admits that there are McFarland Dianics and another Dianic tradition started by a woman named “Ann Forfreedom.” [5] Both of these are Dianic groups that admit men. The non-authoritative but nonetheless illustrative Wikipedia reports that there is also a “Living Temple of Diana” which “admits male, female, and transgendered members,” and a tradition of:

(Non-Wiccan) Dianic Witches, who may have been inspired by Z Budapest, the New York Redstocking’s W.I.T.C.H. manifesto, or woman’s spirituality movements, who emphasize self-initiation, womanism and non-hierarchical organization. Most Dianics fall into this category, even if some acknowledge Z. Budapest as a foremother, because they do not participate in the initiation/ordination lineage of Dianic Wicca.

In my twenty years with women-only Dianic communities in eight states (East and West Coasts, North and South, red and blue states), only three of those groups were led by High Priestesses initiated by Z. Budapest and so self-defined within the Budapestian line. The other Dianic groups, in the other six states, claimed no direct or indirect Budapestian lineage.

Budapestian Dianic groups are likely the most widely known; they are the most public and have the largest online presence. Most other Dianic groups I have been involved with have been either small covens or local groups, which didn’t participate in regional and national pagan events (such as Sister Spirit in Portland, Oregon). So

I'm not surprised when, upon meeting a new pagan and identifying myself as Dianic, they assume a Budapestian lineage.

To be clear, I meet the criteria for Budapestian Dianics. I study ceremonial magick and Feri witchcraft, and circle with people of all genders at rituals in which all manner of deity are invoked, but in my personal practice I work with the Goddess only. I acknowledge the God(s) as Her child, son, lover, consort, and/or another aspect of Her, but I do not work with Him/Them directly. The Dianic circles I attend have always been women-only. And, even more importantly to Budapestian Dianics, I pass the crucial test: I was declared female at birth and have never felt inclined to question that designation.

I don't differentiate myself from Budapestian Dianics because they have rejected me, but because I reject their outdated, gender-essentialist notions of womanhood and feminism. I believe in separate space for women's mysteries (and men's mysteries and transgender mysteries and the mysteries of any other group of people who want to explore collectively whatever energy/identity/quality they share) – for all self-identified women.

I'm not interested in arguing about someone else's gender. I'm equally uninterested in defining anyone's race for them. The legal standard in the U.S. used to be the "one drop" rule: one drop of Black blood, one Black ancestor somewhere down the line, and a person was legally classified as Black. Now, race and ethnicity are understood to be more complicated and more of a societal construction than a biological reality. Likewise, gender is no longer conceived of as a biological binary of male/female, but rather a multifaceted interweaving of numerous physiological, psychological, and sociological elements. It's 2011. Our President is biracial. I have no more desire to be part of a women's group whose notions of gender are stuck in the 1970s than I have to be part of a group that excludes "negroes."

I'm not afraid of a transgender menace. I'm not afraid that transwomen are patriarchal Trojan horses who will unleash their male privilege in Dianic circles across the country to thwart the feminist revolution. (I'm also not afraid of the homosexual agenda.) Unlike most Budapestian Dianics, I have actually circled with transwomen in Dianic space. Sometimes even clothing-optional space. Sometimes with women in the circle who were sexual assault survivors. And guess what? We cast a circle, we called the quarters, we invoked the Goddess, we danced, we chanted, we worked magic...we affirmed that true sisterhood is powerful. Powerful, not fearful.

Budapestian Dianics argue that transwomen were not raised as female from birth and so had different experiences from cisgender women who were. Absolutely true. And tomboys had different experiences from gender-conforming girls, and queer girls had different experiences than straight girls, and women of color had different experiences than white women, and poor women, rural women, non-able-bodied women, immigrant women...all women have unique experiences because we are not solely women. "Woman" is not a monolithic, all-inclusive term, but rather a self-descriptor that must be claimed to have any meaningful currency. Anyone who self-identifies as a woman is asserting that she has something meaningful in common with every other self-identified woman. I would much rather tease out and build upon the threads of commonality with that woman than cut her out of the circle because of the ways that we are different.

Budapestian Dianics also argue that transwomen do not menstruate and therefore cannot fully understand or participate in the blood mysteries. Not all ciswomen menstruate or produce their own hormones. Space has always been made in the blood mysteries for women who are without ovaries or a uterus, for women who choose to be mothers and women who choose not to. Space has already been made for the blood mysteries of surgeries. I have participated in beautiful rituals for women who experienced abortions and hysterectomies, and I would be honored to participate in rituals for women who experienced the blood mystery of gendercorrective surgery.

I am not the woman or the witch that I was 20 years ago. Back then, I was a freshman in college and had just been introduced to feminism, lesbianism, and witchcraft – a trifecta that I did not untangle for over a decade. I believed as I was taught: that the best/real feminists were lesbians and the best/real witches were women-born-women. In the early 1990s, third-wave feminism had yet to reach Tallahassee, Florida.

After graduation and my first interstate move, my horizons expanded. Over the years, my butch girlfriends taught me about their masculine identities; I witnessed their struggles around possibly transitioning to male and their relationships to the women's community and women-only space. Through them, I was introduced to others in the trans community, including transwomen. I eventually realized that the vestigial women-born-women policies were outdated, reactionary, exclusionary, and unnecessary.

It seemed so obvious to me: just as feminists refused to allow patriarchal society to dictate what a woman should or shouldn't

do and just as lesbians refused to allow patriarchal society to dictate what gender a woman's lover should or shouldn't be, lesbian-feminist witches should refuse to allow patriarchal society to dictate who is a woman. Women have the right to choose! Women have the right to sleep with women! Women have the right to self-definition as women! I was confident that if I shared my epiphany with my Dianic sisters, they too would understand and move towards inclusion of all self-identified women. Well... let's just say that I was wrong.

That was almost 10 years ago. I was living in Madison, Wisconsin and was involved in a Budapestian Dianic community. In my naiveté, I assumed that decision-making in a feminist group would be egalitarian and consensus-based, at least in principle, and especially in regards to core principles. Instead, I witnessed the hierarchy of Budapestian lines, a hierarchy that is openly acknowledged.³ Although lip-service is given to consensus, the crucial decision making power is reserved for Z. Budapest and her ordained High Priestesses. For example, the transphobic, women-born-women rule (and a bizarre condemnation of all consensual adult BDSM sexuality) had already been established by the leadership and was not open to debate [1].

That was the last of my affiliation with Budapestian Dianic groups. Since then, in every community I have lived, I have sought out the non-Budapestian Dianics. I have found them, without exception, to be more open – both to transwomen and to new ideas – perhaps because they are not attached to a lineage or a hierarchy or a proscribed tradition. Regardless, just as the Westboro Baptist Church does not represent the ideas or practices of all Christians, Budapestian Dianic Wicca does not represent the ideas or practices of all Dianics. As Wikipedia states, most Dianics are not part of the Budapestian lineage. This Dianic witch certainly isn't.

CHAPTER 16

Snapshots: Musings on Polarity and Flow

T. Thorn Coyle

God Herself, the great Zero, primordial flow and flux, unfolds throughout and beyond, with, within, and outside space and time and consciousness. Stretching, moving, and in stillness, finally Ze catches a reflection in the curvature of space. Self.

A pink fluffy-skirted four-year-old at a family gathering gazes at me solemnly and states, "You look like a boy." "Why? Is it because I have short hair?" She nods. "Girls have long hair." "Girls can have short hair," I reply. "No," she says. "Boys have short hair and girls have long hair." "Sometimes boys have long hair and girls have short hair." "No."

And so it begins...

Ze reaches out to touch hir face. Ze is beautiful, and so inspired, makes love to that which is forming from the fecund void. Ze impregnates with possibility. Ze seeds the sky with stars.

Riding my bicycle in jeans and a loose t-shirt, hair short because my thick curls were too tangled otherwise, I stop in the park near some other kids. "Are you a boy or a girl?" one shouts in a sneering voice.

And so it begins.

The Limitlessness of God Herself becomes particle and wave, hot and cold, earth and air. The Divine Twins separate out from hir being, becoming beings of their own, and yet, they are still ze.

While washing my hands in a public toilet, the door opens and I hear a gasp, and glimpse a woman beginning to back out of the room. I call out "It's OK, you're in the right place." As if there were a wrong place to be. But in her world, there must have been an obvious ordering. Less so in mine. And so it continues...

Ze moves in every human, star, insect, drop and stem. All things move apart in separation from the whole, causing diversity, polarity, multiplicity. Some things are this. Some become that. Still other things are in a vastness in between.

Sitting on a panel at a large conference, some masculinity-bashing began to occur amongst some members of the audience. I spoke up to try to counteract, saying “As a masculine woman...” to which another panelist stated, “You are not a masculine woman. Believe me, I know masculine women and you are not one.” And so it continues...

Light struggles with dark, air pushes earth away, particle crashes against wave, center and circumference push and pull.

Light kisses dark, air embraces earth, particle joins up with wave, center and circumference become one.

A man approaches me and asks, “Is this ritual for women only?” I reply, “I am not woman only, and neither is this ritual!” And so it continues...

As the sacred struggle shifts to sacred love, The Divine Androgynous of Many Names is formed. The coming back together. The syntheses of thesis and antithesis. The third harmonic of Pythagoras. The Holy Reconciling. Baphomet. Melek Taus. Hermaphroditus. Holy One.

Troubled by events in which ciswomen exclude some cismen and transwomen from a ritual, I write a long reply and am told by some that the trouble with my article is that I am a ciswoman. And so it continues...

There is no one right way to be in the unfolding flow of God Herself. The sacred is seeded and born, born and seeded, in and from within each particle of each of us. Some of us hold poles that seem far distant from each other, still others, the continuum. Some of us manifest the spaces in between.

Some of us are men or women. Some are men and women. Some are other. Some are cissexual but not cisgender. Some are transgender or transexual or transhuman. Some simply are, seeded here by God Herself. All are reflections of the unfolding creativity of time. We shine like stars, and smell of this sweet earth.

CHAPTER 17

Religious Freedom: A Dianic Perspective

Ruth Barrett

I respectfully contribute to this project holding the intention to foster greater understanding, peaceful coexistence, and mutual respect between the transsexual community and women who practice Dianic Wiccan religion or participate in other exclusively female-only rituals. As a Dianic elder and High Priestess, my contribution to this project provides some contextual her-story¹, cosmology, and philosophy about what the Dianic tradition is and whom our tradition serves², and addresses the issue of excluding male-to-female transsexual people (aka. trans-women) in genetic female-only space for our religious rituals. These are people whose "brain gender is different from their physical gender, often taking the form of seeing one's self as a 'woman trapped in a man's body,' a need to express one's 'feminine side,' etc."³

I am traveling in moon waters
I am flowing in moon waters
I am growing in moon waters new woman in moon waters
Standing at holy doors
open up open up
and I shall enter
Honor to my mothers blood honor to my sister's blood

¹Although unrelated to the etymology of the possessive pronoun his, in "history", I use the word herstory as "her-story" throughout this writing to emphasize the feminist point of view on Dianic historiography.

²There are two branches of Dianic tradition that began around the same time in the early 1970's. The Dianic feminist tradition of female-only rites was revived by Z Budapest. The other Dianic tradition, now called McFarland Dianic, is a co-gender tradition largely based in Texas. The Dianic tradition I am discussing is in the goddess and female-centered tradition that is practiced in female-only circles.

³From an article "What is Gender and Who is Transgendered? By Carl W. Bushong, PhD, LMFT (the originator of a long-distance transsexual and transgender services having helped hundreds fully transition. Found on his website www.transgendercare.com)

Honor to my own blood⁴

It's 2011 and I'm at a west coast pagan conference, sitting in a circle in a room designated for a pass-the-talking-stick discussion called, "Gender Discrimination in Magical Circles." I am attending as an elder and High Priestess in the Dianic Tradition, a genetic female-only ritual tradition. I'm curious to hear points of view from transsexual male-to-female people about being excluded from my tradition's rituals and many other genetic female-centered circles. As I look around the room, I'm listening to the people in the circle share personal stories of being abused for feeling different. They discuss issues of being victimized, histories of being denied work, and about the often painful physical journey of transitioning from the physical presentation of male to female. They also suggest that being denied participation in Dianic circles is somehow connected or contributing to their abuse.

The stories are horrific and sad, and I empathize with them. No person should be treated with such cruelty. As a lesbian I can empathize with being a person who doesn't "fit." As a feminist working in women's communities for decades, I have heard countless stories from women about their physical and sexual abuse, homophobia, work inequity, and denial of their basic human and reproductive rights. These experiences are the reason women worked so hard to develop the feminist movement, and to create the Dianic religion in the first place.

So, in this context, I can understand how trans-women feel when they are excluded from the Dianic Tradition and other women-only spaces, and why the discussion was titled the way it was. With the facilitators framing the discussion as "gender discrimination," the sharing would most certainly be replete with accusatory stories of discrimination. As the discussion ensued, I heard trans-women accuse Dianics of practicing the same kind of gender discrimination that genetic-women experience every day in the male-privileged, patriarchal world. This accusation is one I will acknowledge and address below, but for now I want to stay in the moment of the discussion as it evolved for me. I continued to listen. I heard the desperate cry for understanding, "...but we ARE women! In fact, we are more women than you are because we chose to be women!" Then it suddenly dawned on me: this discussion has nothing to do with the spiritual, ritual, or magical needs of trans-women; but everything to do with the need of trans-women to feel legitimized as women by genetic women, in genetic women's rituals and spaces.

⁴From "Bloodflower" (a first bloods song i.e. menarche) by Carolyn Hillyer, from her CD, Old Siverhead.

Suddenly, I felt like I was hearing the same old demands that genetic men have always made of genetic women - total access to all aspects of genetic women's lives. This time though, it was coming from ex-men. Still, the attitude and the demand is the same, that genetic women continue meeting everyone's needs except their own. In many ways I believe that this demand is the same patriarchal argument that women have heard for centuries. "You women must give us what we want! And we want access to your ways, your rituals, your magic, your bodies, your minds, your time, and your labor to revive your ancient traditions, and furthermore, you must change those traditions to include us."

By the end of the meeting, two things were clear to me. First, these trans-women knew little of the religion they were asking to be included in; not its herstory, its meaning, or its practices. Second, they knew nothing about what it means to grow up female in a patriarchal and misogynist⁵ culture that consistently devalues genetic girls and women. As I left this meeting I knew these two issues needed to be addressed, but that they couldn't be in the context of a "Gender Discrimination" discussion. However, there was something else that was nagging at me, but at that time I couldn't quite put my finger on what that "something" was. So, when I returned home I began asking my feminist friends (and women's studies scholars) to help me tease out the missing components in the above discussion. With their help, I was able to get to some of the real questions and possible solutions.

Therefore, I will begin by offering a brief section on the herstory, meaning, and practices of the Dianic Tradition. The second section will provide perspectives on what it means to grow up female in a patriarchal world, and how these perspectives are different from those who grew up male. Finally, the third section will offer perspectives on why the Dianic Tradition is not suited to meet the spiritual needs of transgendered/transsexual people. Along the way, I will include portions of conversations that I had with my Dianic/feminist/women's studies scholar friends/sisters/priestesses.

What is the Dianic tradition and whom does it serve?

The Dianic Tradition is a Goddess and female-centered, earth-based, feminist denomination of the Wiccan religion, which was revived and inspired by author and activist Zsuzsanna Budapest in

⁵The hatred of women as a sexually defined group.

the early 1970s⁶. Dianic Tradition is a vibrantly creative and evolving Women's Mystery tradition. As such, Dianics are inclusive of all genetic girls and women. Practices in what is sometimes called Dianic Witchcraft include celebrating and honoring the numerous physical, emotional, and life-cycle passages that genetic women share by virtue of having been born female. Contemporary Dianic Tradition recognizes the greater or lesser effects and influences of the dominant culture on every aspect of women's lives. Since the modern Dianic movement's founding in the early 1970s, the tradition has inspired and provided healing rituals to counter the effects of living in patriarchy, and has worked to understand, deconstruct, and heal from the impact of the dominant culture wherein we live and practice our religion. Dianics generally define patriarchy as the use of "power-over" thinking and action to oppress others, both institutionally and within the personal sphere of our lives⁷. Dianic Wicca has its roots in the continuing struggle of genetic women to define our spiritual realities and our power in a patriarchal world⁸. Our Dianic tradition is about and for genetic females who live and identify as women.

Dianic religion centers on a spiritual reclamation of the Goddess as Creator/Creation, and for some genetic women this means a journey to uncovering the lost, forgotten, ignored, erased, and eradicated legacy of our foremothers from earliest times. An important part of reclaiming the Goddess is restoring a sense of sacredness about the female body as deserving of religious reverence. Although this may be heresy to many patriarchal doctrines, it is essential for genetic women healing from centuries of lies, oppression, and violence. To see specifically female imagery on an altar, a place of religious reverence, is to begin reclaiming ourselves as sacred, born in Her divine image⁹.

Central to the cosmology of Dianic tradition is the perception and experience that the Source of Life is symbolically, metaphorically, physically, genetically, and literally female. This monist cosmology is sometimes misunderstood since it contrasts with most

⁶Z Budapest widely acknowledges that she did not originate what she called "Dianic", but "revived" it. Still, Dianics acknowledge Z as a source point for the feminist spirituality movement in the United States, amongst many other beloved pioneering foremothers, who contributed to what became the Goddess Spirituality Movement.

⁷Barrett, *Women's Rites, Women's Mysteries: Intuitive Ritual Creation*, 306.

⁸Patricia Monaghan, from her keynote address at *Daughters of Diana Gathering*, 2007.

⁹Barrett, *Women's Rites, Women's Mysteries: Intuitive Ritual Creation*, 295.

other Wiccan traditions in which the cosmology and religious practices are based on a dualism of the Goddess and the God. When Dianics say "the Goddess," we are saying that life is interdependent and whole. To say "the Goddess" is to affirm the existence of one interwoven web of life. Manifestation emanates from and is borne of Her; we live upon and are sustained by a female planet. The Goddess is all the seen and unseen forces, and like gravity, She holds us to Her in an eternal embrace. All things are birthed from Her and must return to Her¹⁰.

The Goddess is metaphorically¹¹ understood as the Triple Goddess in Her aspects of Maiden, Mother, and Crone or She Who Creates, Sustains and Destroys; there is nothing that She is not. She is creator and creation. She is an all-inclusive source, the one who is and contains all the parts. The Goddess doesn't think things into being, She births things into being. She created Herself through the process of parthenogenesis: the process of impregnation and creation without sex (as humans have come to define it), thus emanating diverse life forms from the center of Her spiral self. Millennia later She created a variation of Herself, which we call "male," to add greater diversity of genetic material for the survival and evolution of Her many life forms. Propagandized over recent millennia as separate from Her, He is a variation of Her: not "other," not the "opposite" sex, but a variation of the Goddess and Her creation. Simply put, females and males are both variations of the Goddess¹². Unlike most Wiccan denominations, the cosmology and magical practices of the Dianic tradition are not based upon a male/female duality.

Dianics celebrate and ritualize that women embody the Goddess as Creatrix. Physically, women embody the power of the Goddess in Her capacity to create and sustain life. Our wombs are the living metaphor of Her creative potential and thus are the very source of our creative power. Even if a genetic woman has had a hysterectomy, she has known the power of her womb, and she will continue to carry within her womb space the energetic potential and power of creativity. Inspired by the ancient mythic cosmology of the Goddess, wherein She draws Herself out of Herself in the original act of creation, many Dianic women embrace the metaphor of spiritually giving birth to themselves and each other. Within Dianic Wiccan rites, the focus is on each woman's own experience, opinions, ideas, and feelings, and not those of her spouse, lover, family,

¹⁰Ibid, 296.

¹¹I use the term "metaphor" as defined by Judy Grahn: a metaphor is a figure of speech using measurement, comparison, for the purpose of transferring power. *Blood, Bread & Roses*, 19.

¹²Ibid, 296.

or friends. Within Dianic circles, women have the opportunity to discover their true selves, apart from the constraints of patriarchal culture¹³.

In discussions with Laurie J. Kendall, she shared her view that feminist's goals are at odds with trans-women's goals:

While Dianics are working to 'deconstruct' the ways women are defined by patriarchal constructions of feminine presentation, trans-women are striving to 'construct' their new identities within those very strict, patriarchal definitions. In fact, men who transition into female forms must, by necessity, hyper-feminize themselves (hair, make-up, jewelry, walk, talk, high fashion) in order for them to be possibly recognized as 'women' by men. So from the simple issue of exterior/physical presentation, our needs are at odds with the needs of trans-women on the social level. However, the differences in needs are much deeper than physical presentation since in the spiritual practices of the Dianic Tradition, everything begins within the genetic female body¹⁴.

I must emphasize that the Dianic Tradition and its practices are based on the biological experiences and processes of the genetic female body, not only on a presentation of a female form. The Dianic tradition ritualizes the life cycle passages of genetic females, through what we call the "blood mysteries" and other female-embodied experiences. From our first breath, it's about the experience of being a genetic female child growing physically and psychologically into genetic womanhood in a misogynistic society. It's about the womb and bleeding every month. It's about the potential to give birth if we chose to, and eventually the end of uterine blood as we age. A transsexual woman cannot become a biological mother, cannot feel those stirrings in the womb. And although not all Dianics choose to become mothers, how could the Dianic Tradition serve the needs of those who cannot ever experience this? Simply acquiring a female form does not equate with being genetically female. How can the Dianic tradition possibly meet the needs of trans-women? And as Laurie said, "their spiritual needs do need to be met! But from the Dianic perspective, this is like going to the dentist to remove an appendix. One specialty is not suited to do the job of another¹⁵.

The consistent primary theme through time, and all the years of crystallizing our 40-year Goddess-and genetic female-centered tradition, has been Women's Mysteries. This focus has always been the

¹³Barrett, *Women's Rites, Women's Mysteries: Intuitive Ritual Creation*, 3.

¹⁴Laurie J. Kendall, Ph.D. From personal discussions with Ruth Barrett, May 2011.

¹⁵Ibid.

foundation and centerpiece of our tradition and our Dianic rites. Women's Mysteries is the place of origin, the deep, primary, underground stream that arises from the past, and the place where genetic women drink to know ourselves. These Mysteries are embodied throughout the entirety of the genetic female being and explored through our magic and ritual; within our very cells are revealed our birthright to our sacred past, present, and future. These Mysteries acknowledge and honor the ability of genetic females to create life, sustain life, and return our bodies to the Goddess in death. Whether or not a genetic woman births children, all genetic women pass through the Mother phase as they choose life paths that sustain and protect our species or other life forms. Our tradition's name-giver, the Roman goddess Diana (and her processor, the Greek Artemis), presided over Women's Mysteries. Both goddesses were guardians of women and nature. Artemis was not only a goddess of the hunt, but attended women in childbirth as a midwife. Her temples were sanctuaries for genetic girls and women.

I use the word "mystery" as defined by Caitlin and John Matthews, Celtic scholars of the Western Mystery Tradition, who say that the word mystery comes from the Greek *myein*, meaning, "to keep silent."¹⁶ According to the Matthews, "the real secret about the mysteries is that they cannot be communicated by one being to another," and "while keys and guidelines to this knowledge can be given, the actual knowledge is revealed to the initiate by personal experience and revelatory realization,"¹⁷ (*italics added*). Mysteries are experiences wherein specific wisdom is deeply embedded.

Mystery is truth-that-can-be-known only through personal experience. However, similar to something hidden that is revealed as layers of veils are lifted, the truth becomes clearer. Yet it often remains just out of reach, awesome, elusive, and enigmatic. Like a snake shedding her skin, consciousness reveals, unfolds, and expands with each experience of mystery. This knowing cannot be captured or compartmentalized, so while we can have access to the knowledge inherent in the mystery of our genetic female body, its totality is always just out of our reach. By experiencing our own body as sacred, natural, beautiful, and whole, we are able to access all the resources within the body of the Goddess since we are a reflection of Her. Women's Mysteries are genetic female rites of life-an organic, natural, and unfolding process. Dianic rites reclaim

¹⁶Matthews, *The Western Way*, Vol. 1, 37, and Barrett, *Women's Rites*, *Women's Mysteries*, 4.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

what are naturally ours as genetic females: our bodies, our wisdom, our intuition, and our power¹⁸.

Besides honoring the uterine blood Mysteries, we empower ourselves by becoming conscious about how growing up in a patriarchal culture affects our daily lives, our female identity and self-perception including the epidemic of female self-hatred. With our spiritual focus and ritual practices being with, for, and about the genetic female experience of living and the many ways that our genetic female bodies inform our life experiences, the Dianic Tradition explores and celebrates genetic female embodiment as a sacred source of creativity, oracular inspiration and power that is sourced literally from our very cells.

Embodiment, as I define it, is experiencing the totality of being/knowing through the revelatory experiences of our cellular female senses. To embody is to move slowly or at the speed of light through our sensory being, which includes inner and outer sights, sounds, and "feelages" (taste, touch, vibration, temperature, weight, texture, etc.), and to develop the skill to bring this sensory information to conscious awareness. We must experience something to really learn it, to fully know it. The ability to embody can become a strong magical skill that can help us come into deep resonance with another person, creature, or other sentient being. When the spiritual experience is physically embodied in the genetic women who are participating in a ritual, a fundamental intention of Dianic tradition can be realized: to re-sanctify the genetic female body as a manifestation of the Goddess, the source from which all things emerge and return.

Our genetic female holy mysteries are revealed as we experience them together in our circles or alone under the moon. For Dianics, Women's Mysteries are the doors by which we know ourselves as Divine. These Mysteries become known to us through revelatory experience and the ability to create a connection to Goddess through that experience. The door into this Mystery is our genetic female body, and the language of skin, taste, sight, and sound are Her messengers. We are an embodied Women's Mystery tradition that is sourced from ancient roots, from the beginning of the beginning to this moment and beyond. Our intuitive knowledge, crafted into skills that can be taught and passed on to other genetic women and our genetic daughters, is our Holy Book.

Dianic Women's Mysteries rituals support and celebrate female bonding, and other significant personal milestones and transitions in genetic women's lives. The Dianic Wheel of the Year rituals celebrate the mythic cycle of the Goddess in the earth's seasonal cycles

¹⁸Barrett, *Women's Rites, Women's Mysteries*, 4-5.

of birth, death, and regeneration. Our seasonal holy days focus on the mythic cycles of the Goddess alone as she eternally transforms throughout the year. Her seasonal dance of transformation becomes a metaphor for genetic women's lives as they correspond and overlap with genetic female life-cycle transitions from birth (Nymph) to menarche (Maiden), to giving birth (Mother/Creatrix), to menopause (Crone), death (Hag), and rebirth.

The Dianic Tradition has its roots in the continuing struggle of genetic girls and women, to define our spiritual realities and our power in a patriarchal world. Dianic rites and practices were never designed to serve or speak to the needs and life experiences of male-to-female transgender or transsexual people. The Dianic Tradition does not address the trans-woman's experience, or what it means to her to identify herself as a "woman." Nor can the Dianic Tradition speak to the experience of being socialized as a male, which also starts from the first breath. Our tradition has nothing to do with the male-to-female transition process of "feminization."¹⁹

The Dianic Tradition doesn't function the way trans-women need it to function, and becomes meaningless within the context of gender transitioning. Trans-women need to create ways of ritualizing their own experience and making the transition experience sacred within its own context. Dianic women can't do that for trans-people, any more than Catholics can create rituals for Jews. These are different experiences, different cultures, and different spiritual needs. And it's the highest form of male privilege to demand that Dianics do so²⁰.

Male Privilege

So what is "male privilege"? Socialization for both sexes starts from birth, but for males this socialization is extremely difficult to expunge. Carl W. Bushong, PhD, LMFT addressed this issue in the male-to-female transition process:

It has been my observation that the female self needs little help in growing up and developing... However, the transgender (male to female) individual has spent years, decades developing, reinforcing and living in their male role. Dismantling the male persona takes a great deal of time, effort and outside help²¹.

¹⁹Term used in an article "What is Gender and Who is Transgendered? By Carl W. Bushong, PhD, LMFT, www.transgendercare.com

²⁰Laurie J. Kendall, Ph.D. From personal discussions with Ruth Barrett, May 2011.

²¹From an article "What is Gender and Who is Transgendered? By Carl W. Bushong, PhD, LMFT (the originator of a long-distance transsexual and transgender services having helped hundreds fully transition.) www.transgendercare.com

For males, it is relatively easy to appropriate visible female characteristics, but it is much harder to rid themselves of the invisible, unexamined self-entitlements that male privilege affords them (and especially white male privilege), which is totally invisible to those who have it handed to them on a daily basis since birth²². Peggy McIntosh describes male privilege as:

an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, code-books, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks...²³

[A] man's sex provides advantage for him whether or not he approves of the way in which dominance has been conferred on his group. A 'white' skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us²⁴.

The unexamined male privilege of insisting upon access into Dianic religious space is a point of contention between trans-women and Dianic women. When genetic females who wish to practice their rites with other like-females say "no" to people who were born male, this act of female resistance brings the ire of many trans-women. The trans-woman has only recently emerged from a world made in their image, and have lived for decades with the unexamined "right" and expectation that genetic females will meet their needs. The needs of genetic females in the male-dominant and trans-world are just not considered that important. This insistence reveals that our reality is invisible to them.

Just because a man has appropriated female form by investing in surgery to remove his male member does not mean that he is willing to divest himself of his male privilege, even if it is invisible to him. This may be the only power he has felt in his life. After all, transitioning is all about power; the power to control one's body and live differently. For the male, he feels powerless in his body, so the only power he does experience is male privilege. Why would

²²"For those who have male privilege is like a person wearing strong perfume. Rarely can the wearer smell it, but those around begin to leave the room." (Patricia Monaghan)

²³White Privilege And Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies by Peggy McIntosh <http://www.feministzine.com/feminist/modern/White-Male-Privilege.html>

²⁴Ibid.

he want to give that up? For the female, she feels powerless in her female body, and by appropriating the male form she hopes to gain that all inclusive male privilege; that invisible power that she has never felt but is so keenly aware of. Transitioning is all about power; how to get it and how to keep it. Trans-women have no personal interest in dismantling the only real power they have, nor would they use their power tools to do the job. In many ways, we are talking about the same thing Black feminists have written about when they discuss white privilege. Audre Lorde, a Black feminist, wrote a lot about racial discrimination and the tools of oppression. Her now famous words, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,' still ring true on many levels²⁵. The master, whether in racial, gender, or sexual terms, is personally invested in his power and has no reason to dismantle the systems that grant him power. He built the house, and only he has the power to dismantle or change the floor plan.

But why would he want to dismantle them? These systems have served him so well that he does not even have to think about them. They are simply embedded in his subconscious and he is operating on auto-pilot, even if he has now appropriated the female form. And though the tools of oppression and discrimination are the same regardless of which subordinate group they are used against, the actual experience of oppression is different for each subordinate group. This means that each subordinate group must deal with its experiences differently as it seeks to make life meaningful in the physical and spiritual worlds²⁶.

For instance, though the tools of oppression are the same, as a white, Jewish, lesbian, Dianic priestess, the way I experience oppression is different from the way a Black, Christian, gay man experiences oppression. Furthermore, although we can acknowledge his discrimination, the Dianic Tradition cannot speak to or legitimize his experience. Nor can his tradition speak to or legitimize my experience. All we can do is acknowledge each other's discrimination, and respect the spiritual traditions that each of us has created to make our experiences sacred and meaningful.

Because of this, I support the right of women of color to gather in their own sanctuary at a women's music festival apart from the majority of white sisters. In this way, women of color can connect and renew themselves in their own space and ritual practices. I also support the right for men to celebrate their Male Mysteries apart from women. At a different multi-gendered festival I support

²⁵Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press, 1984.

²⁶Laurie J. Kendall, Ph.D. Personal discussions with Ruth Barrett, May 2011.

gay men for creating their own sanctuary space. And finally, I support the right for trans-people to gather with others who have been through a similar journey and share similar experiences.

Yet, I wonder if gender differences are only a matter of socialization, or if there is more to it. I feel my gender is so much more than simply having been socialized as a female. How important are sex differences really? How do sex differences affect female and male reality? I grew up with the information of the day, that the only difference between genetic males and females was our reproductive organs and hormones. This was contrary of what many genetic females experienced - that our female "knowing" was not limited to our genitals. Now we have new science to support what many genetic women already know, and have always known.

What makes us female is in our cells

While modern feminists have focused on the plasticity of the human body, the fluidity of gender, and the centrality of performance and identity in one's gender experience, science is beginning to reveal that the biological sex of the human body is central to many aspects of personal experience that we had presumed to be part of socialization²⁷. These insights were part of many vigorous dinner table discussions with Dr. Denise Saint Arnault, whose research focuses on the intersections between the body, culture, and society. What our discussions reveal is that the body is the foundational platform upon which culture and society act, and reinforce the notion that the body is the critical starting point to understanding all experience, and genetic female bodily experience specifically. Two new fields have emerged in the past 20 years: genetic female physiology and genetic female medicine. In a 2001 publication of a broad study by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), the task of answering the questions "does sex matter, and how does sex matter," was taken on by the Committee on Understanding the Biology of Sex and Gender Differences²⁸. The researchers reported that for the past two thousand years the female body was not studied except for the female reproductive organs. Women were routinely excluded from clinical trials²⁹. It wasn't until the early 1990s, due to more women elected to Congress, that all funded medical studies and research (with the

²⁷Denise Saint Arnault, PhD, personal discussions 2009-2011

²⁸Discerning the terms "sex" and "gender": the sex of a male or a female really reflects their reproductive organs and the chromosomes that led to that reproductive status, whereas the gender of an individual male or female would more reflect how that person identifies, how they see themselves, and how society views that individual.

²⁹Phyllis Greenberger, head of the Society for Women's Health Research, in an interview with Gwen Ifel's interview with Dr. Sally

exception of the reproductive organs) had been done exclusively on men. We now have the initial studies about just how different we actually are, and how these differences impact the making of life and death diagnoses and treatments of diseases. The research is focused on sex differences in non-reproductive areas of biology. The IOM report urged that sex differences be taken into account more broadly on all levels in biomedical and health research³⁰. During a television interview, Dr. Sally Shaywitz, a professor of pediatrics at the Yale University School of Medicine said:

For the first time, we have solid evidence that sex matters, that sex is an important biologic variable that affects the health and well-being of people and that it becomes important to study sex differences. In the past, we've learned about sex differences as a byproduct of other research. But we've now been able to gather a corpus of evidence that shows that there are sex differences in the cell, at a molecular level, in organs, in organ systems, and sex differences that affect the health and well-being of people, so that we have matured enough in the study of sex differences to say that now is the time to really begin to study sex differences as important in and of themselves³¹.

These findings argue that there are multiple, ubiquitous differences in the basic cellular biochemistry of males and females that can affect an individual's health. Many of these differences do not necessarily arise as a result of differences in the hormonal regime to which males and females are exposed but are a direct result of the genetic differences between the two sexes³².

The study also discussed how sex affects behavior and perception. "Basic genetic and physiological differences, in combination with environmental factors, result in behavioral and cognitive differences between males and females. Sexual differences in the brain, sex-typed behavior and gender identity, and sex differences in cognitive ability should be studied at all points in the lifespan. Hormones play a role in behavioral and cognitive sexual dimorphism, but are not solely responsible."³³ There are sex differences in the female

Shaywitz, on the News Hour with Jim Lehrer, April 25, 2001 http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/health/jan-june01/gender_4-25.html

³⁰ I would think this information is imperative for transsexual people to know in caring for their health as genetically different from their gender-identity.

³¹From Gwen Ifel's interview with Dr. Sally Shaywitz, on the News Hour with Jim Lehrer, April 25, 2001 http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/health/jan-june01/gender_4-25.html

³²From The National Academies Institute of Medicine Summary of Report Vol. 10, Number 4, 2001 that can be found online: http://books.nap.edu/html/sex_matter/reportbrief.html

³³Ibid. Copies of Exploring the Biological Contributions to Human Health: Does Sex Matter? are available for sale from the National Academy Press; call

heart and the whole systemic response system. Other examples of sex differences beyond the reproductive system include differences in immune function, differences in symptoms, type, and onset of cardiovascular disease, differences in brain organization, and differences in sensitivity to pain³⁴.

The conclusion of the IOM committee was, "sex does matter. It matters in ways in which we did not expect."³⁵ While many of us will agree that gender is largely socially constructed, our genetic sex is not. "Being genetically female is a real experience that is informed by and acted upon by society, culture, power, and patriarchal institutions. While individual experience is central, the shared genetically female experience in groups is also real and true."³⁶ And it is for this reason that genetic females worked so hard to make their lives meaningful in a sacred way.

Dianic her-story

It's the early 1970s, and we are called "Satan's Daughters" by bible thumping preachers as we leafleted on campuses against rape and other violence against women. We marched to support the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (which was never passed), equal pay for equal work (women today still make less than men for the same job), and reproductive freedom (which is currently under increased attack by conservative Republicans). Many of our early circles evolved out of the growing feminist consciousness-raising groups of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The early Dianics were beginning to reclaim, reinvent, and recover a lost herstory of goddess traditions just beginning to be unearthed by archeologists like Marija Gimbutas and others. We didn't know that we were remembering and reviving ancient traditions of female-only rituals found in cultures throughout the world that had nothing to do with feminism. Female-only rites were, and are, the foundation of spiritual practices that are about the lifecycle of the genetic female body and how our bodies inform our lives and inspire our magic and art. We began to recognize that there were ancient and primal genetically female experiences that transcended race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class.

(800) 624-6242 or visit the NAP home page at www.nap.edu. The full text of this report is available at <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/10028.html>. This study was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

³⁴Ibid, 21, 22.

³⁵Mary-Lou Pardue, Phd., from the preface of *Exploring the Biological Contributions to Human Health: Does Sex Matter?*

³⁶Denise Saint Arnault, Phd. From personal conversations with Ruth Barrett, 2008.

From my perspective, the entire reason a Goddess Movement emerged, and within it a feminist Dianic Wiccan tradition, was precisely because there needed to be other spiritual choices beside male-dominated religions to address the needs of genetic women working for reproductive rights, equal rights in the workplace, in the laws of the land, and freedom from oppression within our own souls. During this time we challenged the status quo for civil rights, women's rights (especially equal pay for equal work, reproductive freedom, and an end to violence against women and children), and civil rights for lesbians and gay men. We challenged gender stereotypes and fought with our lives on the line to expand the narrow confines of gender. The role models of what it was to be a woman were undesirable to many of us. Many of us rejected the female role models of our mothers and the 1950s-1960s television examples of the doting and disempowered housewife as the norm for a "normal" woman. Many of us felt that "if this is what I'm supposed to be, there must be something wrong with me," and "if that is what it is to be a woman, it just doesn't fit who I am. I want no part of being a woman." As a personal example, I told my parents that I didn't want to be a girl. At that time, being a girl meant after a certain age not climbing trees any more like my two brothers, and being encouraged to play with dolls that I hated. My mother took me to a child psychiatrist for several sessions where we played Candy Land and talked. The antidote/cure the therapist advised my mother was to take me to a beauty parlor. Later it was charm school. Needless to say, I was a charm school dropout, but I did learn some very important skills, such as how to get into a car without opening my legs and how to light a cigarette against the wind.

I, like many others in the 1970s, set forth on an uncharted journey of self-discovery and self-definition apart from our socialization as girls and young women. The early feminist spirituality movement empowered us to metaphorically give birth to one another and ourselves. We saved each other's lives, literally and emotionally. Many of us paid dearly for being first to challenge the status quo of gender stereotypes. We spearheaded societal changes that benefited the generations of women who came later. We challenged enforced heterosexuality as many of us explored our sexuality as lesbians and bisexuals. Every day, we challenged with our lives the right to be the kinds of women we were, whether by wearing pants or a dress. For this we were beaten, raped, and taken off to jail (where we were beaten and raped by the police). We would not conform to the narrow confines of gender. We wanted a different world, and we still do.

It's the 1970s: at a pagan festival the husbands of women participating in a women-only ritual are coming to "get their women" out of the circle of sisters celebrating the Goddess and the female mysteries. Some gay brothers guarding the circle from a distance keep the irate husbands at bay.

It is the early 1980s: I am a newly ordained young High Priestess in Los Angeles, facilitating a seasonal ritual in a mountain canyon under the moon with around thirty-five women. We are singing to the Goddess, praying, speaking truths with sacred witnessing. Our ritual is interrupted by several male voices screaming at us from the darkness of the canyon. They are screaming that they will set fire to the canyon and we will all burn alive. I leave the circle to speak with them. They have vanished deeper into the canyon. This was the last time our circle met out of doors in nature where Goddess could kiss our brows with her ocean and sage scented breezes.

It's the mid 1980s: because of our female focus, feminist politics, and non-dualistic cosmology, many from the general Craft community call us "unbalanced" and "man-haters," noting that we don't include the horned god in our devotions or include men in our circles. After all, what could these women be doing without men? Perhaps the Dianics are turning their women into lesbians! How could their magic work without males to "balance" the female energy? They must be plotting against men when they gather without male supervision, presence, or guidance. When the lens through which one sees the world is male-centric, it is inconceivable from that perspective that our female gatherings were simply not about them!

It's the mid 1990s: I've just completed teaching a beginning six-week series of classes in the Dianic tradition. One of the students is a male-to-female transsexual whom I suspect as such, but I decide it would be less disruptive to the other women to let the transwoman finish the class series (although I did get a few calls from students who felt uncomfortable with their classmate's energy and did not understand why). I consult with my elders. After the class series ends, I call this student and say that I no longer am able to continue being his teacher. I offer to refer him to teachers of the Craft that would welcome a trans-woman as a student. The tirade begins, and I'm called "patriarchal," "sexist," and then some. His unforgettable final words to me proclaim that he is "the ultimate Dianic" because he "chose to be a woman" and I was "only born this way." The floor drops from beneath me. I'm being one-up'd by a male who has had extensive plastic surgery, lives on female hormones, and is telling me he's a better woman than I because he

chose to be! For me, this declaration is the ultimate in misogyny, male privilege, and male ranking. He is no "sister" of mine.

It's the later part of the 1990s: I am finally relishing the hard-won efforts, and it seems that there is some understanding and acceptance (or at least tolerance) amongst the larger pagan community for Dianics or female-only ritual space. There seems to be more understanding that the cosmology of the Dianic tradition and our rites are not based on a male/female duality as most other Wiccan traditions are. Some festivals actually include women-only space in their scheduling because there begins to be recognition of the need of female participants to gather together to celebrate the life cycle rites of women. These rites are facilitated by genetic women that do not identify as Dianics, but who have benefited from Dianics who brought forward more conscious attention to genetic female rites of passage.

I believe that the exclusion of trans-women in genetic female-only ritual circles is an issue of religious freedom. Dianic tradition is a religion for genetic females. Under the federal law governing separation of Church and State we have the right and the freedom to practice our religion. We get to define what "woman" means in our tradition. I support freedom of religion for everyone, even for those faiths with whom I may profoundly disagree. Dianics get to have our religious traditions just as Catholics, Jews, and Muslims do. Freedom of religion cuts both ways. I want the freedom to practice my religion in genetic female-only space without being threatened with physical violence, personal ruin, and professional loss, as I have been for the past several years. I want a world where no person is oppressed, violated, beaten, caused to hate themselves for being the kind of male he is, or the kind of female she is. I want a world where no child's self-image is limited by the binary confines of gender, and a society that honors all of our diversity. I hope to live long enough to see an end to self-hatred no matter what its source.

It's May 8th, 2011: Today a young woman in our community named Gwen recently experienced her first menses. We gather in ritual space to welcome Gwen into the circle of women. Present is her mother, two of her girlhood friends, and the circle of members who witness and support this Women's Mysteries sacred transition. Gwen's body is changing. Forty years ago the transition from girl into woman was most often a passage fraught with shame, embarrassment, fear, and disgust, as she tried to meet the expectations for her future programmed from birth into this tight box called "womanhood," a future once so narrow that a young woman was given few options for what that meant and what kind of woman she could be. But today young Gwen, dressed in jeans and a red top

hat, presents herself as she has been supported to be: herself. The girl, now transforming into a woman will define for herself what kind of woman she will be, with full support by all in the circle. Gwen has already "come out" to her parents as lesbian, and a fine butch lesbian she is becoming.

Forty years ago a ritual like this would not have been possible, both for honoring our uterine bloods and for being lovingly accepted for who we are in our sexual identities. The Dianic tradition was just being revived, and genetic female rites of passage that had been long buried beneath societal "norms" were just reconceived. We were just realizing how our minds had been colonized in the distant past, and we were just awakening to ourselves and our female power. This was a spiritual revolution that restored a sense of the sacred to our self-perception and that of our sisters. Dianics were the tip of an arrow striking consciousness into our own souls. We blessed our bodies, we bless that we were born female, and we showed one another our own reflection in the mirror of Venus. We dared to love ourselves in our female diversity, and for standing in our power as holy women made in Her image.

The Dianic tradition was and continues to be rooted in feminist ethics and activism. With our focus on the rights of genetic women, we support the fundamental rights of all humans to be treated fairly and compassionately. Do not confuse our advocating for genetic female space in our religion with trans-oppression or transphobia. Labeling us this way ends the discussion, creates hostility, and overemphasizes divisions within the greater pagan community. It also turns the focus away from the needs of genetic females to gather together, celebrating our Mysteries, our rites and holy days. Labeling our tradition as transphobic if we do not recognize trans-women as equivalent to genetic females denies our biology and female reality, informed by the very cells within our bodies. It is our right to gather as we will.

Furthermore, the need of some trans-women to use intimidation and scare tactics to gain entrance into Dianic ritual space is oppressive and harmful to us. As I said earlier, I have been personally threatened with bodily harm and professional loss for my defense of genetic female-only space. Perhaps more importantly, while trans-women are spending time fighting Dianics for inclusion in genetic women-only spaces, they are neglecting their own spiritual and social needs, and the needs of future generations of trans-folk. This issue was the one that kept nagging at me during the "Gender Discrimination in Magical Circles" workshop that I mentioned at the beginning of this article. Where was the discussion about the spiritual needs of trans-women? There was none.

Where was the discussion about how trans-women were spiritually honoring their transition into new female forms? There was none.

While the Dianic Tradition could say that the trans-identity is a legitimate identity that needs to be made sacred in a ritual process, this is not the argument trans-women are making, probably because they know that the Tradition is based on the blood mysteries of genetic women who were born women and bleed as women. This is not something the Dianic tradition is capable of doing without reworking every ritual and magical practice! And if it did so, then it would no longer be the Dianic Tradition that trans-women are fighting to be included in. To ask that the Dianic tradition make a fundamental change to the very core of its practices is a misogynistic idea and a patriarchal power play by ex-men who are still psychologically embedded in their own male-privilege. Moreover, trans-people are neglecting their own spiritual needs when they try to force their experiences into a Dianic ritual format.

The Dianic tradition was not designed, and cannot meet the spiritual needs of those who have made a gender transition and now appear in female form. It was designed, and exists now, to meet the needs of genetic women and girls who were born, raised, and socialized as females in a world that dishonors the female blood mysteries, and who have suffered the religious, economical, social, legal, and political consequences of having been born and raised female. The dynamics of genetic girls' and women's experiences are quite different from the experiences that trans-people choose during adulthood³⁷.

The question I think we have to ask is, "is their call for acceptance into Dianic circles and genetic women's ritual spaces based on spiritual needs at all? Are they really asking to participate in Dianic rituals that celebrate and make sacred the five blood mysteries (birth, menses, childbirth, menopause, and death) that women experience throughout their life cycle?" Certainly trans-women experience two of these mysteries (birth and death), but they will never experience the core blood mysteries celebrated within our religion, nor be able to perform our magical practices that are based on the natural and physiological cycles of the female body from birth to death and as they correspond to the natural cycles of the earth.

So then we have to ask, "What is it that these trans-women are really asking of the Dianic tradition or other genetic female-only circles?" I think the answer is that trans-women feel the desperate need to have their gender identities legitimized in a spiritual

³⁷Laurie J. Kendall, Ph.D. Personal discussions with Ruth Barrett, May 2011.

and ritualized way. This is important for all people, and it is why women created the Dianic Tradition in the first place. But the reality is that, just as genetic women had to create their own rituals that would make their experience meaningful and sacred, so must trans-women. There is no way around this. Only trans-women understand the depths of their spiritual experience and identities. Only trans-women can create spiritual practices and rituals of the transition process. Only trans-women will know how to create transitional rituals that are meaningful to them, and develop these practices into a unique tradition that can be handed down to future generations of trans-people. This is not a difficult concept to understand, but so much time is spent arguing with Dianics about their spiritual practices, that many trans-people are sacrificing their own spiritual needs in the process. This argument is a constant source of pain and frustration for Dianics, but may be ultimately more harmful to the spiritual lives of trans-women who are neglecting their own experience as spiritually unique³⁸.

A possible solution

As a Dianic priestess and elder, I believe that one of the most important changes that need to happen is for trans-people to start creating a tradition that makes their experience sacred in rituals designed for their community. I believe that we all need and deserve a spiritual home. Sometimes we need to create it for ourselves. This is what feminists of the second wave did, and continue to do. It is my hope that people who make the choice to transition from one gender to another will create a spiritual tradition that honors them and addresses their unique needs and life experiences. This journey will be a rewarding one, leading to a deepening of spiritual connections with self and world.

I also think that it would be vital and constructive for festival and conference organizers who are open to the wider pagan community to be more specific in describing for whom a specific ritual or workshop is intended. I don't believe that anyone enjoys having to turn someone away from the door and sometimes causing hurt feelings. This idea is already in place at many pagan gatherings, and organizers of rituals or workshops must be more careful to define their parameters as part of the application process, and in notice given to attendees. Most pagan conference ceremonies and workshops are "Open to All" and may be described as "universalistic" compared to "specialty" ceremonies. Specialty ceremonies are not uncommon, and are for people who have specific things in common,

³⁸Laurie J. Kendall, Ph.D. Personal discussions with Ruth Barrett, May 2011.

and can include initiates of a given spiritual tradition, heritage, sexual orientation, age, sex, or gender. These specialty ceremonies are already accepted as part of the greater pagan community as we honor our diversity, as we celebrate those things common to us. To put it simply, it could be posted as, "The focus of the ceremony is for ____." Because the words, "sex" and "gender" have been, and continue to be, used interchangeably, organizers of pagan gatherings as well as participants who offer rituals or workshops need to become more specific, to avoid needless uncomfortable or hurtful interactions. For example, "women-only" is now confusing for male-female transsexuals who wish to attend rituals according to their gender identity, and are sometimes turned away at the door. Perhaps this could be avoided if the notice said, "female-only" or "for genetic females only," or "for genetic women and girls," which would include both sex and gender. I adopted this idea throughout this chapter to illuminate and discern gender and genetics.

While all of these phrases can be confusing, the mother in me invokes patience as we all work together toward greater understanding and mutual support. Our collective best spiritual practice is to honor our differences and honor the wishes of each group to have their own identities made sacred in specialty rituals. I will honor the transition experience of trans-women and the ways they will eventually ritualize and make their life experiences sacred. In the same way, I will also continue to honor and support genetic women's right to gather as we need to in order to practice our sacred traditions. May all who desire it, find their spiritual home. May we all live beside one another in a true peace. May it be so!

(c) Ruth Barrett, 2011

With excerpts from *Women's Rites, Women's Mysteries: Intuitive Ritual Creation* (Llewellyn, 2007). Used here with the publisher's permission.

Afterword

Sarah Thompson

I am writing this at the end of a long project, as the typesetting of this book draws to a close. My experiences at Pantheacon in 2011 and of the writing, editing and book production process have been quite a ride.

At the beginning of the book project, I was determined to offer a neutral platform for all sides of the debate to put their stories forward – essentially, a literary talking stick debate. The authors were not allowed to see each other’s submissions quite deliberately, because the idea was for them to have their say, not rip holes in each other. It is fair to say, however, that I am not an impartial observer. I have a vested interest in a particular outcome – one, ideally, that allows me to practice spiritually as I so choose, free from persecution. I think it’s pretty clear that every single author in this anthology wants exactly that – religious freedom – though we differ considerably on how it should be achieved.

I’m a member of a minority whose two most statistically significant causes of death are transphobia-incited murder and suicide – avoidance of bigotry in general, and the avoidance of transphobia in specific has been necessary for my literal survival for much of my life. I do not ask to be admitted to a Budapestian Dianic circle. I have no more interest in that than a black person might have in joining the KKK, and assuming that I started all of this because I was annoyed about being excluded is completely missing the point. I have never attended, or attempted to attend, a Dianic circle – I have more than enough to occupy me in my existing practices.

Therefore, my parting summary is simple: take all the religious freedom you need. But if in so doing you are perpetuating bigotry, if you’re perpetuating transphobia, think twice. Think hard. If that isn’t the kind of person you want to be, then do something else: work to bring change to your path, or leave and find another

one. The ability to look at yourself in the mirror and truly know, deep down, that you are doing the right thing, is worth it.

Cupertino
January 2012

Glossary of Terms

- Cisgendered:** The logical compliment of *transgendered*; someone whose gender identification aligns with their birth gender.
- Cissexual:** Someone whose sexual characteristics align with their sexual characteristics at birth, *i.e.*, someone who is not transsexual.
- Cross-dresser:** An individual who dresses as member of a gender other than their societally-assigned gender. The term is generally used more broadly than *transvestite*, *drag queen* or *drag king*, and does not connote any particular reason for dressing or indeed the gender orientation of the individual concerned.
- Drag King:** The female-to-male compliment of *drag queen*.
- Drag Queen:** A (usually) gay (usually) male-identified individual who cross-dresses (usually) for entertainment purposes.
- Female to Male:** An individual who identifies as male who previously or currently has been identified by society as female.
- FTM:** See *Female to Male*
- Transgender:** The class of phenomena pertaining to identification as a gender that differs from that which has been societally assigned either currently or previously. Historically, *transgender* has been a wide catch-all term that includes a wide range of gender-variant identifications and behaviours. Note that to describe someone as, ‘a transgender,’ is widely regarded as a pejorative term and should be avoided.
- Transgendered:** An individual may be said to be *transgendered* if they have gender-variant self-identification.
- Tranny:** A contraction of the terms transgendered, transsexual or transvestite, normally regarded as pejorative and highly offensive. As with the N-word, someone who identifies as transgendered might choose to use this term to refer to themselves, or privately to refer to other people

who also identify as transgendered, but anyone else using the term is likely to be regarded as way out of line.

Transsexual: Typically, an individual may be described as *transsexual* if they have a gender identification that is not conformant with their body. It is not necessary for them to have sought out medical intervention in the form of hormonal or surgical treatment in order for them to be regarded as transsexual.

Transvestite: Traditionally this term has been used to refer to a (usually, but not exclusively) male-identified individual who chooses to dress in female clothing for fetishistic purposes. In more modern usage, the fetishistic aspect has been largely decoupled from the term, and the boundary between transvestism and transsexuality has become increasingly blurred as it becomes more societally acceptable to define oneself as one sees fit. Note that describing someone who identifies as *transsexual* as a transvestite will often be regarded as offensive.

Male to Female: An individual who identifies as female who previously or currently has been identified by society as male.

Man: The broadest term encompassing all who identify as men, including both cisgendered and transgendered individuals.

MTF: See *Male to Female*

Woman: The broadest term encompassing all who identify as women, including individuals who are cisgendered and transgendered. Note that using the term *women* unqualified in a context that really means *cisgendered women but not transgendered women* will be regarded as offensive by many transgendered people and their allies.

Woman born woman: A term coined by the second-wave feminist movement to describe cisgendered women. It is increasingly regarded as a pejorative and highly offensive term within the transgendered community.

Author Biographies

D. M. Atkins

D.M. Atkins is an author of both non-fiction and fiction. Atkins' latest novel is *Faewolf*, co-authored with Chris Taylor, is an erotic fantasy from Circlet Press. A journalist and anthropologist, Atkins has edited several anthologies on LGBT topics, including *Looking Queer*, *Lesbian Sex Scandals and Bisexual Women in the 21st Century* and is the former editor of both *Locus* and *Shadows Of...* magazines. Atkins is also the Publisher at ForbiddenFiction.com.

Ruth Barrett

Ruth Barrett is an ordained Dianic Wiccan high priestess, ritualist, educator, and award winning recording artist of original goddess songs. Ruth is author of *Women's Rites, Women's Mysteries: Intuitive Ritual Creation* (Llewellyn, 2007). Ruth is a contributor to *Daughters of the Goddess*, (ed. Wendy Griffin, Alta Mira Pub, 2000,), and to *Lesbian Rituals and Dianic Tradition*, for *Lesbian Rites: Symbolic Acts and the Power of Community* (ed. Ramona Faith Oswald, Harrington Park Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc. 2003). Ruth served the Los Angeles women's community as co-founder and religious director of Circle of Aradia for two decades, creating, teaching, and evolving a Dianic curriculum and providing open seasonal rituals with women of her community. In 1997 Ruth was honored as recipient of the L.A.C.E. award for outstanding contributions in the area of Spirituality from the Gay and Lesbian Center in Los Angeles. In 2000, Ruth relocated to the Midwest where she founded Temple of Diana, Inc., a 501 (c) (3) national Dianic religious organization with her life partner, Falcon River. Ruth recently retired from over thirty years of community service and continues to teach Dianic ritual arts, and give musical performances.

T. Thorn Coyle

T. Thorn Coyle is a magic worker.

An internationally respected teacher and mentor, she is the author of *Kissing the Limitless* and *Evolutionary Witchcraft*, hosts the Elemental Castings podcast series, writes a popular weblog, *Know Thyself*, and has produced several CDs of sacred music. Her spiritual direction practice - which includes soul reading, and body/spirit coaching - reaches people all over the world. Pagan, mystic, and activist, she is founder and head of Solar Cross Temple and Morningstar Mystery School and lives by the San Francisco Bay.

Thorn's unique body of work has touched the lives of many. Her clients include ministers, professional athletes, coaches, artists, activists, parents, and business owners.

She works with Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Atheists on environmental and social justice issues. She has spoken on homelessness and the death penalty in Catholic churches and led services at Sojourner Truth, the first African American Unitarian congregation in Washington DC. Thorn has presented at the Parliament of the World's Religions and the National Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans. She speaks at conferences and teaches workshops worldwide, and is a member of Spiritual Directors International.

Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone

Janet Farrar. A native Londoner, Janet was initiated by Alex and Maxine Sanders in 1970. It is here she met her husband to be and co-author, Stewart Farrar, who initially became involved around Alex Sanders as a reporter for the *Reveille*, and was then asked to write *What Witches Do*.

Janet Owen (later Farrar) became involved in the Craft after a friend started regularly visiting the Sander's. Janet, being from a Christian background, went along to dissuade her friend from becoming involved, but was impressed by the moral structure that Wicca had and joined the Sander's Coven.

Stewart and Janet first met when Stewart was asked to script and narrate *A Witch Is Born*. After receiving their Third Degree's from the Sander's they left Alex and Maxine's coven to form their own. They had found much of Alex's teaching sparse in content and developed their own ritual structure as well as training methods during this time. They married in 1972 and moved to the Republic of Ireland in 1976. Stewart passed away in February 2000 following a series of illnesses, but Janet has continued her work as a Priestess and Author

With her late husband she has written over a dozen books on the Craft to date. Titles which include *Eight Sabbats For Witches*,

The Witches' Way (one of the first books to suggest the southern hemisphere turn for festivals in Australia), *The Witches' Goddess*, *The Witches God*, *Spells and How They Work*. Janet has also had one book published jointly with Virginia Russel, *The Magical History of the Horse*, and with her current partner Gavin Bone, three books; *The Pagan Path*, *The Healing Craft*, *The Dictionary of European Gods and Goddesses*, and their latest work *Progressive Witchcraft*.

Their books have become some of the most influential in Witchcraft and have set the mould for modern Craft writers worldwide. They have lectured both in the United States and the Netherlands and are now exploring the field of Video as a way of presenting information on the modern pagan movement.

Since her initial introduction to the Alexandrian Craft with Stewart, she, with Gavin Bone has developed her own unique brand of Witchcraft and have been honorary initiations into several other traditions, including traditional Italian Strega. She prefers just to be called witch rather than be considered of any specific tradition. In 1999 she became ordained as third level Clergy with The Aquarian Tabernacle Church, and is the Religious affairs officer for The Aquarian Tabernacle Church in Ireland.

Janet strongly believes in the idea of Wicca being both progressive and dynamic, while remaining a clergy of those dedicated to serving the God and Goddess.

Gavin Bone. Born in Portsmouth, Gavin Bone was originally initiated into Seax-Wicca in 1986. He trained as a Registered Nurse, is a practising Spiritual (naturally empathic) Healer and a trained Reflexologist.

He developed a fascination with the theory that Wicca's roots are in tribal shamanistic healing traditions rather than medieval ritual magic and their related secret societies. He has studied shamanism in a Northern European context, with particular focus on the Runes.

He met Janet and Stewart Farrar in 1989 at the Pagan Link conference in Leicester and moved to Ireland in 1992 after accompanying them on a tour of the United States. He co-authored *The Pagan Path*, *The Healing Craft* and *The Complete Dictionary of European Gods and Goddesses* with Janet and Stewart.

In the UK he was both a Pagan Link and Pagan Federation contact in early '90's and this led him after his move to Ireland to set up the Pagan Information Network; a contact network for pagans in the Republic and the North of Ireland.

Like Janet, he is an honorary member of the Strega tradition, and ordained third Level Clergy with the Aquarian Tabernacle Church.

Both Janet and Gavin tour regularly doing intensive workshops in the United States and Europe, as well as past tours in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. They have study groups in the US and Italy. They believe strongly in the idea of Wicca being both progressive and dynamic in nature, while remaining a clergy of those dedicated to serving the Gods and Goddesses. Their recent work, *Progressive Witchcraft*, is their most radical to date emphasizing the non-dogmatic creativity of Wicca, and is being re-released as a second edition in 2012. Their major area of work at present, is teaching deity connection and trance-prophecy, and are responsible for creating a network of like-minded covens both in the US and Europe.

Helix

Helix (Christine Kraemer) is an initiate of the Anderson Faery tradition and chair of the Theology and Religious History department at **Cherry Hill Seminary**, which provides distance education for professional Pagan ministry. Her current book project is a Pagan theology of touch.

Raven Kaldera

Raven Kaldera is a Northern-Tradition Pagan shaman, herbalist, astrologer, FTM transgendered intersexual activist, homesteader, and founding member of the First Kingdom Church of Asphodel. He is a speaker for the dead of the trans tribe, and has been presenting internationally on Paganism, transgender, and alternative lifestyles for many years. He is the author of too many books to list here, including *Hermaphroditities: The Transgender Spirituality Workbook*, *Pagan Polyamory*, *The Northern Shamanic Herbal*, and *Double Edge: The Intersections of Transgender and BDSM*. His hub website is <http://www.ravenkaldera.org>. *T'is an ill wind that blows no minds.*

Anya Kless

Anya Kless is a dual-tradition, polytheistic pagan priestess, godspouse, and spirit worker. She is the primary author and editor of *Lilith: Queen of the Desert* and is at work on an upcoming book on the godspouse path. She writes regularly at her blog, *The Fruit of Pain*, and is one of the leaders of the online community *Lilith's Tribe*.

Kat Lunoe

Kat Lunoe is a Thelemite, a member of the Circle of Cerridwen and the Open Source Order of the Golden Dawn, and a practitioner of Buddhism primarily in the Vajrayana tradition. She is also a professional artist with five years of fine arts education, along with a degree in psychology. Her primary medium is oil paint, and her work can be found at <http://www.nondualelf.com>.

Amethyst Moonwater

Amethyst Moonwater, aka Patricia Kevena Fili, is a Trans Woman, Activist, Writer and Pagan Priestess. Executive Consultant with Oakland Pride and Team Community Builder, she facilitated gender identity and expression non-discrimination protections before the Oakland City Council and the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. Commissioned by the Goddess to fight Transphobia, she is waiting for the day when full equality is achieved.

Lance Moore

Lance has been active around transgender issues since beginning his own transition, more than a decade ago. He founded and continues to facilitate the trans men's support group at the Billy deFrank LGBT Community Center in San Jose. He also volunteers with PFLAG as a speaker at schools, and has given invited talks at the local Transgender Day of Remembrance. This past year, he organized the first Trans Day of Visibility, a happy event of art and celebration.

Lance has been a pagan his entire adult life (and to his youth, though he didn't have that word then), and often participated in community life. He is currently working in the Anderson Feri tradition.

Ryiah Nevo

Ryiah Nevo is a Jewish witch and aspiring Buddhist magician, who lives, works, and plays in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Calyxa Omphalos

Calyxa Omphalos has been interested the craft for 33 years, starting out working as a solitary and mostly theoretically. She joined the Grey School of Wizardry after PantheaCon of 2008, and joined the Circle of Cerridwen not long after 2011's convention. She is best known for creating the Elemental Hexagons oracle deck, which is loosely based on both the Tarot Major Arcana and the modern Periodic Table of the Elements. The deck

is hexagonal in shape and consists of 60 cards which covers about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the stable elements. Learn much more about this deck at <http://www.squidoo.com/elementalhexagons>.

Jacobo Polanshek

Jacobo Polanshek is a member of the Circle of Cerridwen in the Open Source Alexandrian tradition. He is also active in the Open Source Order of the Golden Dawn. His exoteric training is in cognitive psychology. He maintains a special interest in the magical and practical uses of the classical art of memory, among other related topics.

Gina Pond (Little Crow)

Gina Pond is currently a full time Master of Divinity student at Pacific School of Religion, a film producer for Unsubtle Films (<http://unsubtlefilms.com>), a blogger (<http://worthyadvisor.wordpress.com>), a wife, and co-servant to two very adorable cats. She's also a potter, singer, and in her previous career incarnation, a biochemist. She is a third degree witch in the Open Source Alexandrian tradition and member of the Circle of Cerridwen.

Philip Tanner

Ronald-Philip Tanner, MEd is an MDiv student - at the Pacific School of Religion (Graduate Theological Union) in Berkeley, California - who believes that the world will be better off when Christians embrace our mystical non-Roman roots and begin fixing the mistakes we have made in God's Holy Name over the past 2000 years. Philip's mission is twofold: 1) preach a radically inclusive and love-centered exegesis of the Christian New Testament from *Ελληνιστική Κοινή* [Koine, the Greek language of the original text]; and 2) open a peaceful dialogue with other faith traditions, freed from attempts to divert them from their individually formed quests for the Divine. Philip identifies as an Islamic Christian who follows Jesus Christ The Quantum Manifestation of an absolute truth whose name is "I Am."

Sarah Thompson

Sarah is a 3rd degree witch and cofounder of the Circle of Cerridwen and the Open Source Alexandrian redaction of the Alexandrian tradition of Wicca. She is also a member of the Open Source Order of the Golden Dawn. Her pagan interests include eastern and western esotericism as well as traditional witchcraft. Her religious calling is to teaching, interfaith dialogue and to the cause of radical

inclusion. For fun, Sarah is a filmmaker (writer, director, producer, editor and visual effects artist) and is currently working on her first feature film, *The Abbess*, based on the life and times of the 16th-17th century queer stigmatic visionary nun, Benedetta Carlini (see theabbess.com).

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