

have allowed for his continued popularity. Whitman's willingness to break out of hegemonic culture and its mores in order to celebrate the mundane and unconventional has ensured his relevance today. His belief in the organic connection of all things, coupled with his organic development of a poetic style that breaks with many formal conventions have caused many scholars and critics to celebrate him for his innovation. His idea of universal connection and belief in the spirituality present in a blade of grass succeeded in transmitting a popularized version of Eastern theology and Whitman's own brand of environmentalism for generations of readers.

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Further Reading

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See also: Bhagavadgita; Emerson, Ralph Waldo; Friends – Religious Society of (Quakers); Nature Religion in the United States; Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; Romanticism – American; Romanticism – Western toward Asian Religions; Transcendentalism.

Wicca

Wicca emerged in 1940s' England as a highly ritualistic, nature-venerating, polytheistic, magical and religious system, which made use of Asian religious techniques, but operated within a predominantly Western framework. It arose from cultural impulses of the nineteenth century, in particular from the occult revival of the 1880s onwards and Romantic literary rediscovery of Classical ideas of nature and deity. Various threads were gathered together and woven into Wicca by Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964), a British civil servant who retired in 1936 and lived in Highcliffe and London, England before moving to the Isle of Man in 1954. He visited archeological sites in the Near East, and joined esoteric groups like the Folklore Society, the Co-Masons, the Rosicrucian Fellowship of Crotona, and the Druid Order. Gardner claimed that the Fellowship of Crotona contained a hidden inner group of hereditary witches who initiated him in 1939 and whose rituals he wrote about in fictional form in the novel *High Magic's Aid* (1949) under the pseudonym Scire. Gardner's writing borrowed from many sources, including the work of magician Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), writer D.H. Lawrence (1885–1930), a ritual magic group called The Golden Dawn, Freemasonry, spiritualism, and archeology, to name a few.

According to Gardner, witchcraft had survived the persecutions of early modern Europe and persisted in secret, following the thesis of British folklorist and Egyptologist Margaret Murray (1862–1963). Murray argued in her book, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921), that an old religion involving a horned god who represented the fertility of nature had survived the persecutions and existed throughout Western Europe. Murray wrote that the religion was divided into covens that held regular meetings based on the phases of the moon and the changes of the seasons. Their rituals included feasting, dancing, sacrifices, ritualized sexual intercourse, and worship of the horned god. In *The God of the Witches* (1933) Murray traced the development of this god and connected the witch cult to fairy tales and Robin Hood legends. She used images from art and architecture to support her view that an ancient vegetation god and a fertility goddess formed the basis of worship for the witch cult.

From the 1940s on many Wiccans believed, based on Murray's work, that they were continuing this ancient tradition of witchcraft. However, since the first appearance of Murray's thesis, historians and other scholars have refuted her evidence and, over time, dismissed most of it. Most, though not all, Wiccans today acknowledge that there is little evidence for a continuous witchcraft tradition, but claim that their religion is a revitalization and re-invention of ancient folk practices that existed in pre-Christian Britain, even if they were not part of any organized tradition. Some Wiccans today continue to identify "The Burning Times," as they call the witch persecutions, as their "holocaust," even though historians have shown that the so-called witches of early modern Europe existed in the imaginations of their persecutors, though many may have participated in folk practices such as herbal healing that were prevalent at the time in the general population.

After the repeal of the 1736 Witchcraft Act in England (an act that made the practice of witchcraft a crime) in 1951, Gardner was able openly to publish accounts of Wicca under his real name in *Witchcraft Today* (1954) and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959). *Witchcraft Today* brought public attention to Gardner and he made numerous media appearances promoting Wicca. Both books contained information on Wicca as it existed at the time and in the following years Gardner initiated many new witches. Covens also sprang up and operated according to the outlines provided by Gardner's books. By the mid-1950s, Wicca had become relatively popular, at least in part because of Gardner's love of publicity, which drew public attention to it. In the early 1960s it was exported to the United States by Raymond Buckland. Gardner died in 1964, but by that time his tradition of Gardnerian Wicca was firmly established.

The religion described in Gardner's books and spread by his students takes nature as a central aspect of devotional life. Gardner's ideas about god and goddess drew

from British literature and occult circles that promoted Romanticism's fascination with the gods and goddesses of the ancient world. Over time specific deities such as Demeter and Pan were transformed into an archetypal mother goddess and an archetypal fertility god. According to historian Ronald Hutton this process was complete by the 1940s and represented post-war Britain's desire for and fear of wildness: "the domains that civilized humans had traditionally found most alien and frightening; they were those of the two deities to whom the modern imagination, frightened, jaded, and constricted by aspects of civilized living, had turned" (Hutton 1999: 50). The attraction of urban dwellers to deities that embody nature and rituals associated with seasonal changes that many modern people have lost touch with continues to be an important aspect of Wicca and among the reasons for its growth throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. Gardner's rituals also offered an alternative to the modern world in that participants were nude and sexuality and the body were seen as sacred.

Four main rituals were celebrated on the four seasonal festivals described by Murray as the witches' sabbats (Candlemas, May Day, Lammass, and All-Hallows Eve). Most Wiccans today also celebrate four other festivals: winter solstice, summer solstice, spring equinox and autumn equinox. These eight festivals make up the Wiccan "Wheel of the Year." At each of these seasonal rituals the god and goddess are addressed in their aspects appropriate to the season, and they are embodied by the priest and priestess leading the rituals. For instance, on May Day the goddess/priestess as embodiment of giver of life and nurturer of new seeds is most prominent. Many contemporary Wiccans call this festival Beltain, an Irish name for "Bright Fire," and weddings or "handfastings" are often performed at this time. A midwinter ceremony or Yule ritual might celebrate the return of the sun during the longest night and the rebirth of the sun god. Wiccan festivals are intended to remind participants of the cycle of life, of human death and rebirth, and the changes evident around them in the natural world.

Gardner's Wicca was initially described as a fertility cult rather than a "nature religion," although Wiccan perceptions of both male and female deities are linked to nature and regarded as empowering forces for both men and women. One of Wicca's most well-known ritual texts – *The Great Charge*, written by Gardner's one-time High Priestess and collaborator Doreen Valiente (1922–1999) from earlier versions – concentrates specifically on the Wiccan perception of the goddess as the world of nature. The "Charge" describes her as "the beauty of the green Earth," "the white moon among the stars," "the mystery of the waters," and "the soul of nature who gives life to the universe." The goddess' male counterpart is also connected to nature and moves through The Wheel of the Year. He is The Lord of the Greenwood, Sun King, Corn

King, Lord of Life and Death, and Leader of the Wild Hunt.

Wicca is a religion in which the divine is immanent; its goddess and god live in the Earth, the moon, the stars, the bodies of men and women. Humans, nature and gods are all interconnected and sacred. The basic ritual form of Wicca – the circle casting – illustrates another way in which the divine is in the world, not outside it. While different variations on circle casting exist, most circles are oriented with the four cardinal directions and these directions are typically associated with forces of nature: fire, air, water and Earth. Some Wiccans address the "powers" of a particular direction while others address the "winds" while casting their circles. In preparation for ritual work Wiccans shed their clothes or don special robes, then someone marks the perimeter of the circle with a knife or wand and the four directions are greeted and invoked, as a way of asking for the powers that they represent to be present. For Wiccans ritual space is thus oriented in relation to the natural forces identified with each direction, in order to remind participants of their relationship to the world around them.

Since Gardner's first covens, Wicca has spread across North America, northern Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, evolving, and at times mutating quite dramatically. Wiccans have only a few beliefs that most of them adhere to, and these include "The Witches Rede: An it harm none, do what you will," and "The Law of Threefold Effect," the belief that any action a person commits will return to that person threefold. As Wicca has spread to different parts of the world, debates about belief and practice have surfaced. For instance, in the Southern Hemisphere Wiccans disagree as to how the seasonal rituals of the Wheel of the Year should be celebrated, given that winter solstice/Yule in the Northern Hemisphere is midsummer in the Southern. In the United States and Canada, practices borrowed from North American Indians have been adopted by Wiccans and this cultural appropriation has been criticized by other Wiccans as well as by native people. But this debate means little to some Europeans who turn to Celtic, Saxon or Germanic traditions for inspiration, making links to the supposed indigenous traditions of northern Europe. Likewise, feminist Witchcraft, which was shaped by the American feminist movement, has had a profound impact on Wicca in the United States, and is in part responsible for the fact that many Wiccans have dispensed with the god and focus on one great goddess. In the United States in particular a multitude of derivations have developed, including Reclaiming, Faery Wicca, Dianic Wicca and Seax Wicca, all of which have in turn crossed back to Europe.

Both Gardner and Murray emphasized the importance of polarity, of goddess and god, and identified men with masculine qualities and the god, and women with feminine energy and the goddess. However with the influence

of feminism and gay rights movements many Wiccans today believe that same sex couples can work effective rituals together and that men can embody goddess energy just as women can embody the god. Within Wicca there is much diversity of opinion concerning whether or not masculinity and femininity are essential qualities each sex is born with, and these issues remain controversial in some Wiccan communities.

The increase in Wicca's popularity is partly due to the parallel rise in environmental awareness since the 1970s. Vivianne Crowley, a Wiccan priestess and author of *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age* (1989), notes the changing emphasis within Wicca from nature veneration to nature preservation: "Wicca . . . moved out of the darkness, the occult world of witchery, to occupy the moral high ground - environmentalism" (Crowley 1998: 177). Crowley asserts the centrality of the veneration of nature, which is "considered to be ensouled, alive, 'divine' . . . The divine [being seen] as a 'force' or 'energy' and as manifest in the world of nature" (1998: 170). She further points out that the processes of nature, such as "conception, birth, mating, parenthood, maturation, death" are portrayed in *The Wheel of the Year*.

However, Wiccans demonstrate a wide range of attitudes toward protecting the natural world. Some are radical environmentalists while others view nature more abstractly. The development of Wicca was influenced by idealized views of nature in the writings of English Romantics as well as more recent works of literature such as J.R.R. Tolkien's description of the woods of Lothlorien in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954). Understandings of nature in Wicca also derive from Western esotericism, particularly as transmitted by nineteenth-century Romanticism. Nature, in esoteric thought, is a reflection of a greater divine reality or part of a greater magical totality, and as such it requires a different level of engagement. The esoteric theory of correspondences portrays the cosmos as complex, plural and hierarchical, with living nature occupying an essential place within it. Nature is at once both an intermediary between humanity and divinity, and imbued with divinity itself. "Nature" is often perceived by Wiccans as something different from "the environment." For those Wiccan groups which retain a link to their heritage in high ritual magic and hence the Western esoteric tradition, there is every reason for a focus on inner nature due to the basic law of magical correspondence: humanity is a part of the cosmos, and therefore any operation performed on or in a person will affect the entire universe. In treating the self as well as nature as sacred center, Wicca follows in the wake of esoteric and occult philosophy, in which these are one and the same. While there may be a spiritual and/or magical engagement with nature, this does not necessarily translate into environmental action.

For some urban-dwelling Wiccans, imaginative descriptions of the natural world may provide a more

"real" experience than an actual walk in the woods. Anthropologist Susan Greenwood observed that some Wiccans show no interest in nature other than as a backdrop for rituals, with celebrations held in the woods becoming in effect a celebration of the liberation of the inner self from the domination of the everyday world. "One Wiccan, when invited to go for a walk, cried off because it was raining and he might get his feet wet: 'Can't we just visualize it?' he said" (Greenwood 2000: 113). The Wiccan response to nature is thus often confused, revealing both intimacy and distance as nature is shaped by the Wheel of the Year, sacred circles, and ritual to suit people's needs for relationship with the Earth. There is a turn to nature as a source of revitalization, an attempt to reengage with a nature from which participants feel estranged, to reenchant the natural world which they feel has been exploited and dominated. The veneration of nature, the concern for the Earth, and the pantheism of seeing the divine in all of nature has led to an attitude of reverence for a romanticized wild, untamed landscape on the one hand, and to sadness or revulsion at human estrangement from this ideal, living in towns and cities away from the land, on the other. For some Wiccans veneration of nature and identification as "Wiccan" or "Pagan" manifests as a romantic attachment to the countryside, a dream of living away from towns and nurturing a closer relationship with nature. Some Wiccans do live in rural areas, but most continue to live urban lives and very few depend on the land for their living. Nature and Wiccans' understanding of it are extraordinarily complex, and this is exacerbated by the diversity of contexts in which an examination of Wicca's engagement with nature must occur.

Some Wiccans have become involved in environmental struggles as a way of putting their beliefs into practice. One of the most vocal of these is the American Starhawk, whose writings have been heavily influenced by feminist and environmentalist movements. Starhawk's popular book *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1979) is largely responsible for spreading feminist Wicca in the United States. Starhawk has also been the most vocal American Wiccan in promoting activism of all kinds and has involved herself in numerous protests that range from anti-nuclear demonstrations, to forest activism blocking logging in old-growth redwood groves in northern California, to anti-globalization resistance. Although much of her environmental activism has been in high-profile protests, she has also organized workshops combining watershed conservation and forest ecology with magic and ritual. Other environmentalists also hold Wiccan beliefs and practice "eco-magic," such as organizations like the Dragon Environmental Group in England and both British and American Earth First! radical environmentalists. While Wicca and environmentalism do not automatically go hand in hand, although some Wiccans argue that they

should, in practice Wiccans live their relationship to nature in different ways.

Wicca has become a global phenomenon and significant Wiccan communities can be found in most countries inhabited by significant populations of people of European descent, including Great Britain, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa, but Wicca has also spread to countries such as Japan that are closely linked to Western cultures by the global economy and media. Gardner's original prototype of a coven meeting in the woods and dancing naked under the trees retains its attraction as a fertility religion that allowed men and women to feel closer to the natural world and to pass on their knowledge by secret initiation, but today it is as likely to be spread through internet sites and how-to books that can be ordered from online stores, even while it maintains a focus on nature.

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- See also: Animism; Animism – A Contemporary Perspective; Aradia; Astrology; Circle Sanctuary; Donga Tribe; Dragon Environmental Network (United Kingdom); Druids and Druidry; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Ecofeminism (various); Eisler, Riane; Feminist Spirituality Movement; Freemasonry; Gimbutas, Marija; Goddesses –

History of; Golden Dawn; Indigenous Religions and Cultural Borrowing; Middle Earth; New Age; Pagan Calendar; Pagan Festivals; Paganism – Contemporary; Pantheism; Polytheism; Radical Environmentalism; Reclaiming; Shamanism (various); Starhawk; Wicca – Dianic; Z Budapest.

Wicca – Dianic

Dianic Wicca, sometimes called feminist Witchcraft, began in Southern California in 1971, when Z Budapest and five friends met to celebrate the Winter Solstice. The time was ripe for a meeting of Wicca and feminism. Both were gaining in visibility. By 1969, "Marion's Cauldron" was being broadcast over the airwaves regularly in New York City, and Central Park was the site of a 1970 "Witch-In" attended by over 1000. In the same year, some 50,000 people marched down Fifth Avenue in support of the Women's Liberation Movement. A few years earlier, a small group of radical feminists calling themselves W.I.T.C.H. had publicly and theatrically linked the image of the witch to women's empowerment. Arguing that all oppression, including the abuse of nature, was due to male domination, they saw themselves as resistance fighters, and proceeded to use Halloween costumes and guerilla street theater to get their message across with drama and humor. Their success led to autonomous covens of W.I.T.C.H. springing up in major cities across the country.

W.I.T.C.H. was decidedly political, not spiritual. Like other feminists critical of religion, Budapest argued that the spiritual *was* political. She claimed that patriarchal religions had colonized women's souls and her unique contribution was to embrace the image of the witch as a symbol of women's empowerment and use it to create a feminist version of Wicca. Building on the then-popular belief in ancient Goddess-worshipping matriarchies, she called her new tradition Dianic Witchcraft after the Goddess of the Witches in Charles Leland's *Aradia*. That the Goddess Diana was independent of men added to the attraction of the name. Presented as a new religion with ancient roots, the Dianic Craft incorporated many elements of Gardnerian Wicca, so many that it is considered a Wiccan tradition.

Dianic Witches do a radical feminist analysis of gender and power, seeing women's oppression and environmental abuse as intimately linked and firmly rooted in patriarchal religions, in hierarchies that privilege the spiritual over the material, the mind over the body, and men over women. Like other Wiccans, they celebrate the Earth and the turning of the seasons. Unlike them, Dianics also celebrate women's "blood mysteries" – birth, menstruation, birth/lactation, menopause and death – which are understood as women's ability to create life, sustain it, and return it to the Source. In doing this they attempt to link what they