2013

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Abstract
There can be no doubt that the cultural study of music is experiencing something of a renaissance. Over the past decade, works by Stephen Marini, Miriam Ghazza, Michael D. McNally, Tricia Rose, David W. Stowe, Mark Slobin, Susan McClary and Michael D. Largey have largely redefined the way that scholars talk and write about the roles played by music in people's lives.

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11. SACRAMENTAL SONG: THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION IN THE RELIGIOUS MUSIC OF AMERICAN PAGANS

Christopher Chase

There can be no doubt that the cultural study of music is experiencing something of a renaissance. Over the past decade, works by Stephen Marini, Miriam Ghazza, Michael D. McNally, Tricia Rose, David W. Stowe, Mark Slobin, Susan McClary and Michael D. Largey have largely redefined the way that scholars talk and write about the roles played by music in people’s lives. No longer the sole province of formal analysis, this “new musicology” incorporates insights from sociology, economics, aesthetics, gender studies, psychoanalysis and theology (for some important and representative works in this field relating to theology, see Largey 2006; Marini 2003; Stowe 2004).

This last point – theology – is the focus of this chapter. But already I have hit a snag, because among Pagans the term “theology” is often viewed rather sceptically. There are good reasons for this, for – whether in a bookstore, a catalogue or an online site – the term “theology” tends to have an unspoken word in front of it. And it is not just any word. It is the word “Christian”; a term to which Pagans often react defensively. But theology itself is much broader than the Christian tradition alone. While there have been scholarly works on topics as broad as Hindu and Jewish theology, academics have also begun to take some of the first systematic assessments of “Pagan theologizing” (for examples, see York 2003; Paper 2005; Harvey 2005). Pagans, like followers of other religions, invoke what Mary F. Bednarowski calls the “theological imagination” (Bednarowski 1989): they engage in questions about the place of human beings in the world, especially relative to other beings – gods, goddesses, nature spirits and/or ancestors; and they make claims and inquiries about death, suffering, morality and the right way to live in the world. These questions are part of what many scholars of religion have come to call the theoretical dimension of religion, alongside the socio-historical and the practical or ritual dimension.¹

This is where music comes so forcefully into play. For those used to thinking about religion as the study of revealed texts, it may not be immediately
apparent that music plays such a central role in religion. But, as David Stowe contends, music is a carrier, a transmitter and a powerful means of inculcating religious doctrines (Stowe 2004: 3). It is also highly contested and contestable; the presence and type of music used in a service can give a student of religion invaluable insight into the power relationships behind different bodies of believers and why they separate from some or congregate with others.

In the umbrella community of Paganism within the United States, this is certainly no less true than for other traditions (Clifton & Harvey 2004: 1). Certain songs have become shorthand for concepts of divinity and gender, for organizational identity and for criticizing other non-Pagan traditions (especially Christianity). It is precisely these forms of discursive “coding” to which I wish to turn, for Pagan music itself openly articulates theological identities and boundaries. To understand the role of popular music in Paganism, we need a sense of the religious claims for truth (and thus claims for power) being made. Obviously, music and its typologies constitute an enormous topic, so we need more clarification as to the subject-matter of this chapter.

The word “Pagan” has also been identified with at least four sets of separate discourses in Western intellectual history, and continues to be used in all these ways by a variety of sources (e.g. Hutton 1999: 4) — some of which occasionally intersect with self-identified contemporary Pagans, among whom Paganism is also an internally contested term. For the sake of simplicity, clarity and consistency, I will focus on those sets of communities that identify themselves as contemporary religious Pagans in the geographical and cultural context of the United States, with the understanding that they participate in an extended set of discourses that is more expansive and extensive than the twentieth century or even the United States itself. Of course, even using this limited scope, I could not begin to analyze in detail the immense scope of Pagan theological discourse. Yet I hope to generate some insight of general thematics and processes to Pagan ideas of “nature religion”, its attendant dialectic of opposition and embrace, and the sociosacred spaces such as the Otherworld and Ocean Mother. These are the concepts I see most at work in American Pagan music today.

By “Pagan music”, I mean the broad scope of rhythmic audial culture that members of these Pagan communities either appropriate from outside their own cultural bounds or produce themselves for any number of purposes. In terms of the goals of this specific volume, we also need to characterize the meaning of the word “popular”. In talking about Pagan popular music, this chapter will be not be concerned with music primarily produced for ritual use — although the protean inventiveness of Paganism makes such boundaries semi-permeable at best. The “popular-ness” of Pagan popular music derives from its primary production and consumption at the vernacular level of entertainment and instruction, inscribed within or outside large-scale commercial distribution networks.
Just as contemporary Paganisms are working out their own social, economic, political and other purposes in their cultural contexts, so too do they work through their own theological and doctrinal problematics. Whereas larger institutionally focused traditions such as Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism have had centuries to develop their own forums and vehicles for such debates and contentions, most contemporary Pagan traditions are comparatively new, and few have achieved a geo-specific critical social mass to build such institutions. Where they exist, they are often embryonic in scope. Music – especially popular music outside of ritual – has formed one of these spaces for conceiving and articulating what Benedict Anderson calls “imagined community” (Anderson 1983: 7). As musicologist Christopher Small points out, music, broadly conceived, is inherently social and communicative, involving an ever-widening web of kinship related by production and consumption (Small 1998). As others demonstrate, music and its meanings are also negotiated in the process of reception, and cannot simply be defined as a “homology” of the community from which the music came (Frith 2007: 294). As a means of constructing community, it necessarily posits and argues over socio-historical and theological boundaries. In a religious context such as Paganism, this takes on even more importance, since Pagan religions can be very different from one another despite sharing a number of family resemblances.

NATURE WORSHIP AND OPPOSITIONAL POLITICS AS THEOREtical COMMITMENTS

In the United States, the general Pagan focus on living and practising collectively (and ideally) alongside and in the midst of the natural world (both as a physical church structure and as an environmental partner) has provided a uniquely appropriate vehicle and a habitat for cultivation of religious experience, especially in terms of music. While the Abrahamic traditions generally have focused on word and text as the centre for revelation and contact with sacred power, contact points with “Nature” (as culturally inherited and constructed) is often much more the focus and generating engine for theological engagement. In the United States, Paganism quickly became engrained in an artistic, literary (and, I would contend, religious) impulse that has come to be called “Nature Religion” (Clifton 2006: 42–5).

Rather than a resurrection of ancient historical or ethnic traditions, the American transformation of Paganism found its grounding in the hierophanies of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, and aspects of the mid-twentieth-century counter-cultural movement, especially environmental politics and second-wave feminism (see Albanese 1990: 83–105; Fuller 2001: 87–98). The ideological power and influence of the Transcendentalists and their focus on “Nature” has, of course, been well covered elsewhere, and needs no explication here. But it deserves to be mentioned
that American landscape, identified with the legacy of Amerindian peoples’ alleged stewardship, became a rallying symbol for the counter-culture’s Cold War protest against the possibility of nuclear annihilation and technocratic dominance (see Roszak 1969). It also became a sacramental nexus point for American Pagans who began to understand their primary kinship as to the earth, rather than capitalism, militarism and Establishment-religiosity that enabled the domination of “Nature”.

Songs from counter-cultural artists thus often reflected a diffused spiritual dimension cloaked in a political critique of the dominant culture. Witness 1971’s “Earth Mother” from Grace Slick and Paul Kantner’s Sun-fighter album. Jack Traylor’s closely miced acoustic guitar belts out folk-rock steeped in Fairport Convention-like riffs while a loose chorus sings:

> Once there was a garden  
> It gave us all we need  
> Then it grew so barren  
> All because of greed  
> ...  
> Its not your fault you’re ill now  
> It’s the men who went before  
> Your children are at your side now  
> Don’t worry anymore.  
> (Kantner & Slick 1971)³

While the counter-culture itself changed, transformed and mainstreamed throughout the decade in the United States, ten years later these same concerns would be channelled in a record album alongside powerful statements of gay pride, solidarity with Amerindians and strident anti-nuclear activism. Charlie Murphy’s Catch the Fire practically became a legend in the grassroots American progressive community. Incorporating ritual chant, Murphy wrote “Burning Times”, which tells a traditional narrative of medieval witchcraft persecution by Christians, and links this mythico-historical event to ongoing environmental devastation and pollution of the earth. The song is ubiquitous in the American Pagan community, and has been referenced or covered by many artists. In using Deena Metzger’s Goddess Chant (“Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Inanna”) as the refrain for his song, Murphy played an integral role in the fusing of Wiccan fertility cults and historical representations of specific goddesses with a unified model of divine feminine power (the “Mother Goddess”) and American “nature religion”, giving voice to several discursive impulses at once. Introduced by a short mournful cello vamp and hand-drums beating out an insistent pulse for each beat, Murphy’s descending guitar line accompanies his description of a ritual gathering of witches, and their eventual suppression of the “nature people” at the hands of those worshiping “a dead man on a cross”.

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The song not only reinforces the fusion of witchcraft and nature worship already at work in American Paganism, but also accuses the Catholic Church of killing nine million women as part of the Inquisition. Moreover, Murphy says the harm done to the witches still continues today in the form of environmental damage and exploitation against the earth, which Murphy refers to lyrically as a "witch" and healer, giving today's witches energy and courage. Through constant cover versions from different Pagan musicians and performances at American festivals, Murphy's song has attained the status of common cultural currency. The theological co-identification of the earth and the Pagan community as engaged in a common struggle along religious, gender and environmental trajectories continues today among American pagans. This is not to say impulses towards social accommodation are not also present, but it does mark familiarity with, and performance of, oppositional resistance politics as a core element of Pagan culture in the United States.

**POLARITY: FROM OPPOSITION TO LOVE, FROM DIVISION TO UNITY**

In their embrace of the earth's body as witch, healer and Mother Goddess, American Pagans continued to develop a theme articulated in the deepest heart of its canonical literature. No less an American poet than Walt Whitman foreshadowed much of the same loving devotion to the divine power manifesting in and within the wonders of the natural world that can be seen among contemporary Pagans. In "Starting at Paumanok", he wrote: "was somebody asking to see the soul? ... behold the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern, and includes the soul; Whoever you are, how superb and how divine is your body, or any part of it!" (Whitman 1921: 19).

Indeed, Whitman constructs a song of ecstatic love that would be familiar to most any contemporary devotee of Pagan spirituality:

Lover divine and perfect Comrade  
Waiting content, invisible yet, but certain,  
Be thou my God.  

...  
Or Time and Space  
Or shape of Earth divine and wondrous,  
Or some fair shape I viewing, worship,  
Or lustrous orb of sun or star by night,  
Be ye my Gods.  

(Whitman 1904: 213)

From Whitman's pen, the cosmic frontier becomes a heavenly space where the constituents – even the dimensional possibilities of temporality and extension are invited to take their place in a royal ontology of Being – create
a romantic metaphysics inclusive of both human identity and worshipful submission of the gods. Decades later, in positioning themselves at the vanguard of ecological religiosity and prophetic voice against the exploitation of women and Mother Earth, Pagans held open the possibility of assimilating their enemies within their matrix of extended kinship between themselves, other beings and the cosmos itself as they drew upon the prophetic power of Whitman and others (Ellwood 1994: 34). In these narratives, the invitation can be extended to a friendly observer, but sometimes the visitor is an "inquisitional" antagonist seeking to harm the community or its deity. The religious praxis of the group then serves to convert opposition into allegiance though a hierophany, or even a hierogamy.

In the early 1970s, P. E. I. (Isaac) Bonewits, founder of AnDriaiocht Fein (ADF; 'Our Own Druidry') published "I Fell in Love with the Lady" in the pages of Green Egg, and recorded it for his first album in 1988:

I crept into the woods one night
To spy upon their dance.
I saw happy, holy dance –
I fell into a trance!
I joined into the dancing then
And when the Great Rite came,
The Lady reached out Her hand to me;
She called me by my name!5

Bonewits' character is initially a Catholic witch hunter sent to locate and destroy Goddess worshippers during the "Burning Times". But instead of fulfilling his mission of destruction, he is bewitched by the holy and righteous nature of their dancing, and as a final act of magical enticement, the Goddess reveals her power over the potential antagonist by knowing and calling him specifically into a hierogamous sexual encounter. By the end of the song, Bonewits's narrator confesses that his personal identity has changed and his social allegiance switched, telling the listener that the Jesuits know what he has done and will be coming after him. Nonetheless, being properly connected to the Goddess now, he has faith that they too will "come away with none", just as he did.

The role of love - especially the protean power of eros - can also illuminate and mediate other theological dimensions in Pagan music, such as the relationship between humans and sacred places (like the Otherworld) or sacred persons (such as the Goddess). An excellent account of the influence of dreams and love relationships involving the Otherworld can be found in Greenwood (2000: 24–5, 166–7). In 1996, a popular Pagan songbook was written by Hugin the Bard and published by Llewellyn Publications. A Bard's Book of Pagan Songs was divided into several sections, with the first section adapting stories from the medieval Welsh collection known as
PART IV: COMMUNITIES

the Mabinogion. Other sections focus on specific devotions for the different holy days of the Wiccan and Druidic ritual year and other topics. Two important songs, “Love on the Astral Plane” and “They Call Us Witches”, illustrate the role of love in forming bonds between human and “other-than-human” sacred persons. In “They Call Us Witches”, Hugin recounts the mythic “Burning Times” narrative in song. He interweaves the survival and rebirth of the Pagan tradition with restatements of the Wiccan Rede (“We swear to ne’er do harm to any living thing”) and ascribes to witches the activity of the Goddess as described in the “Charge of the Goddess” whether as the Great Mother or the Star Goddess (“We are love, we are love ... Love is all Our Lady asks in due”).

While introducing his ballad “Love on the Astral Plane”, Hugin notes that its origin lay in a conversation he had with Carl Weschcke of Llewellyn Publications. The tongue-in-cheek tune is founded on the common conception that there is a superimposed “Otherworld”, in which unseen but significant activity can take place, such as contact between human and other-than-human persons. Likewise, actions and activities in the Otherworld can lead to productive events in the material realm. In this case, Hugin as narrator has a romantic encounter in his dreams, but instead of dismissing it as mere fantasy, he sets out to locate the person in the material world that he encountered in the spiritual world. Thus Hugin’s theological commitments to multiple realms of possible experience and corresponding mutual influence must be accounted for in attempting to understand his narrative progression.

Much theological discourse within esoteric, occult and Pagan circles is premised on this wider state of consciousness. For Hugin to create music using the Otherworld as a median space for interpersonal relationships, education and romantic love demonstrates multiple embedded spaces of power within Pagan religious discourse without any perceived need for explanation.

In other cases, time rather than space becomes the primary matrix for interacting with the Otherworld. In particular, auspicious times of power such as Samhain (a Celtic fire festival) can become the portal for extended kinship into the Otherworld, especially in the work of Canadian singer-songwriter Loreena McKennitt. McKennitt does not necessarily exclusively self-identify as a Pagan, but has produced a number of works highly regarded in the American Pagan community and often covered by artists at American Pagan festivals. While she seeks inspiration from a variety of religious and mystical traditions (itself a hallmark of contemporary Paganism), she has also used her music to glorify folk traditions explicitly venerated by Goddess worshippers and other Pagans.

In the song “Samhain Night”, found on her 1989 album Parallel Dreams, she sings in the past tense and subjunctive mood of love, which is “not a simple thing”. We learn that all her interactions with her lover are mediated
through aspects of the natural world. She likens touching her lover's body and heart to the ever-distant moon exerting its pull on the earthly tides. The song's namesake is for many Pagans the start of the new year, and a time when the "veil" between the material and spiritual dimensions of consciousness are especially thin, suitable for traversing and communication. In McKennitt's song, influences from and journeys to spaces such as the moon and the sun become vehicles for relation (and thus kinship) beyond the material world. Whereas Hugin's Otherworld lover is waiting to be found in the material world, McKennitt's emotive and phenomenological experience of kinship and natural forces binds her within the natural world to her lover in the Otherworld.

**NATURE WORSHIP FROM OTHERWORLD TO OCEANWORLD: SACRED SEA, SACRED PERSON**

For human beings, oceans occupy a particular ontological space similar to the Otherworld. Both present and distant, long existent in the imago as a space of fecund like and exotic wonder, recently the world of the ocean has come to the attention of academic theologians and other students of religion (Shaw & Francis 2008). As is often the case, Pagan practitioners have been engaged with the element of water more generally and oceans more specifically for far longer.

Pagan and indigenous cultures have long tied themselves to the seas and ocean as a primary way of identifying themselves and their sphere of socio-sacred relationships, especially as articulated in songs of power (J. J. Bradley 2008). Despite much of contemporary American Paganism's common emphasis on seasons and changes in those seasons as theological process, a number of ritual chants and popular devotional songs including water (especially the ocean) have emerged. Alongside this trend, a number of well-known American Pagans have released popular music specifically honouring the seascape as the source of life and power.

In 1972, Gwydion Pendderwen published "Song of Mari" as part of his *Songs for the Old Religion* songbook. Based on a 1970 poem by Victor Anderson (co-founder of the Feri tradition), Pendderwen sung of a Goddess experience to ignite his passion for *eros*, as well as comfort in the face of darkness and death. She arrives to transform him "as sweet as the breath of the sea". Mari's feet are carried on the wave crests, her breath and movement intertwined with the rush of sea waves and the scent of the ocean's brine. She is not explicitly co-identified with the ocean, yet the name of the song reinforces her origin, as "Mari" is the ablative case for the Latin *mar*, or the sea (Pendderwen 1972).

While Pendderwen looked to ocean crests for the coming of Goddess power, Ruth Barrett and Cynthia Smith, in 1993's "Ocean Queen", understand
Mari, the ocean, is located as the source of all beginnings, a beginning predicated on an eternal return “… where I was born and to where I’ll rest”. As teleological and theological mother the nourishment of her “breasts” is the force that moulds and shapes the “islands” (of her human subjects/children. Not only are her children literally surrounded by and existent by means of her royal power, but her ontological positioning affords her of dark secrets given in dreams to her devotees. Barrett and Smith call and call again for Mari to heal them, toss and pull them, thus renewing their life force and purpose via her own (Barrett & Smith 1994).10

A different, but no less celebratory, view comes from the worldbeat acoustic folk ensemble KIVA. On its 1994 release Finding the Balance Within (and later reprised on a 1997 live album), KIVA’s track “Star of the Sea” uses the technique of “recombinant mythology” to weave different cultural names for the divine ocean in a single blessing.11 The term “Star of the Sea” comes from a Medieval Latin title for Mary, mother of Jesus in the Christian and Islamic religions. Many traditional qualities commonly ascribed to Mary, such as “compassion, forgiveness and grace”, are read through the Latin connecting back to “Mother Mari”. Most prominently, though, the song calls upon Yemaya, the Yoruba and Afro-Caribbean orisha of the sea. Accompanied with a prominent Latinized hand drum beat and tin whistle, “Star of the Sea” connects the performers and audience in an extended filial kinship network as the singers see Yemaya’s renowned beauty in themselves, their sisters and kin – all of them Yemaya’s children.12

The Ocean Mother is named, characterized and called under other aspects as well. Recalling the presence of Metzger’s Goddess Chant in Charlie Murphy’s music, the phrase “Isis, Mary, Aphrodite, Salmon Woman, Yemaya” forms a theological matrix for Craig Olson in his trance-worship ballad “Ave Stella Maris”. Closing his 1999 release, Beyond the Cedar Moon, Olson calls his track an “altered-state song of devotion”.13 Olson emphasizes not simply the beautiful aspects of the Ocean Mother, but also her sublime awe as “Lady of the raging storm”. Like Pendderwen and Anderson almost three decades earlier, she is not only mother but “Maiden of the Twilight”, associated with the liminal boundary between land and sea and the cresting waves that such a boundary creates. Olson sets the devotional hymn as a call/response among dancers “on the shoreline” watching the ocean’s transformation of the evening sun into shimmering reflected light. A choir echoes Olson’s calls to Stella Maris, even as Olson sings of the courage her worshippers must have to answer her sublime power.

For other Pagan musicians, the importance of the ocean as manifest sacrality is emphasized through artistic, lyrical and instrumental over-determination (or “over-saturation”) in the element of water and orisha worship. The all-female choral group Libana has produced a number of albums and associated songbooks. In their catalogue, the album Night Passage stands
out for its association with the moon, the sea and other common emblems of Yemayá. While they display a tender awareness of many different musical and religious traditions, they dedicate a repetitive trance-like “undulating chant” to Yemayá. She is “Yemayá of the Ocean ... the Sea ... of Deep Waters ... of all Tears”. Thus Libana connects the human/animal experience of creating salt water through sadness and joy with the protean divine feminine power of the ocean environment. Moreover, the cover art (Moondrift #1), along with the album title, suggests a seascape lit only by moonlight. The liner notes again frame the performers as concerned with life, death, renewal, emotional power and the lunar cycle as they sing “at the ocean’s edge ... from coast to coast”. Other devotional music aimed at the Ocean Mother in an American context also echoes powerful emotional, environmental and healing currents found in the more explicitly popular feminist choirsong.

In other cases, the focus on Yemayá leads back recursively to a cultural saturation of material language expressed as Goddess aspects. In 1993, Robert Gass and On Wings of Song, a noted choral group, released Ancient Mother, a collection of songs based on diverse cultural and religious traditions. In his liner notes, Gass explains that his work “invokes the Ancient Mother, honoring and celebrating Her spirit with a wide range of musical styles commensurate with Her multi-faceted, multi-cultural nature”. At least three out of the thirteen songs link oceanic aspects and goddesses such as Yemayá with the presence of the Ancient Mother. Yemayá has her own namesake track as the “powerful Mother ... of bottom-most water ... Queen of water ... Yemayá is the owner of rivers”. Other songs, including the bookend tracks “Ancient Mother” and “The Circle is Cast”, call upon either Yemayá and/or other deities traditionally associated with the ocean. In addition, Gass arranges a track originally written by Goddess musician Lisa Thiel, “Lady of the Flowing Waters”. On this track, different environmental regions and biomes, as well as the moons and stars, house the power and presence of the Goddess, literally saturating Nature with vitalistic feminine presence—a feminist restatement of Whitman’s paean to the moons and suns as Gods.

The upshot of this recurrent emphasis on the Ocean Mother is twofold. First, these sets of characteristics reflect and transform concerns of contemporary Goddess theology into musical forms, both in terms of basic description (waves, sea) and also in terms of specific ocean goddesses such as Stella Mater and Yemayá. This is especially true with regard to the focus on movement, rhythm, process and change. The human debt to this cosmogyny can in turn be expressed biologically at times of extreme emotion when ocean water is produced through crying, or by celebrating the presence of oceanic beauty/subliminity (or chaos) within her children. Second, this culturally saturated recurrence presents a sacramental identification with biophillic feminism as identified by theologians. In particular, Melissa
Raphael makes the case that uncontained and uncontestable water evokes the *sensus numinous*, especially for both “patriarchal religion and spiritual feminism” (Raphael 1996: 278). Co-identifying sacramental water with sacramentalist feminism, Raphael says it is the *mysterium tremendum et fasci­nans* of “the ontological fluidity of women who will not stay in their place” (ibid.).

CONCLUSION: PLAY OF DYAD, PLAY OF KINSHIP

From the beginning of this chapter, I have demonstrated the musical involvement of American Pagans in what Bednarowski calls the “theological imagination” (Bednarowski 1989: 3–5) in American new religious movements. Bednarowski understands two main tasks of this “theological imagination”. One, of course, is to draw out the implications of revelations and insights brought forth by the founders of such movements. The other main dimension, she suggests, is to place these insights and their developments within the main discursive model of American theology—dyadic polarities between seemingly exclusive categories (God/World, Sin/Salvation, etc.). The tensions between these polarities, she notes, can be productively stimulating. Contemporary Pagan culture is no exception, as we saw with its dyadic oppositional politics through the early 1970s and 1980s. Then – as now – Pagans often worked socio-historically, theologically and ritually within dyadic polarities such as “past/present” “matter/spirit,” “male/female,” and “nature/culture” to express various insights and carry out their religious practice.17 Early British Traditional Wicca (often called BTW for short) took root as a bitheistic tradition framing both a god and goddess as ultimate concerns, and using a sacramental hierogamy as the culmination of their interaction. This reduction of energetic polarity to an apparent essentialized heterosexual fertility has been a difficult point of contention for some Pagans, who understand themselves as marginalized alongside gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities, rather than in opposition to them.

Yet, at the same time, theologians in contemporary American Paganism have not been completely comfortable working within and between dualistic set of conceptions, especially given that the parameters of such dualisms were originally set by traditions (like Christianity) that many Pagans perceive both as hostile to their own religiosity and as tool of technocratic exploitation. Some, like Isaac Bonewits, have embraced the playful pluralism of Pagan traditions as multiple modes of religious work. In this form of religious play various theological assumptions are valid for the given system being used at any given time. And within these orthopraxic traditions, practitioners embraced as many traditions as called to them, as few Pagans see protean supplies of universal power and energy limited by any single system (Bonewits 2006: 126).
Bonewits's own religious organization “Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship” emphasizes three other-than-human sources of power and influence: “Shining Ones” (gods and goddesses), nature spirits and human ancestors, all of whom form a matrix within which members understand their lives and ritual workings. Other traditions represented by American adherents (like Asatru) tend to emphasize forms of polytheism. Even within Wicca, the model of the triple goddess (embraced especially by eclectic Wiccans) suggests an irreducible theological complexity, a refusal to be bound by the American dyadic tradition. True to form, American Pagans have demonstrated creativity working within and without the dyadic paradigm. In terms of gender, Pagan men have sought to construct spiritual masculinities outside what they see as constricting and oppressive models from the dominant culture.

Earlier I noted the importance of Charlie Murphy's song “Burning Times”. No doubt it has made his dominant musical impression in the Pagan community. But his entire album Catch the Fire is deeply concerned with patriarchy, Amerindian liberation and a fierce defense of queer liberation. On the track "Under Capricorn" Murphy (and lyricist Jerah Chadwick) boldly reclaim sacramental male power as an ally to female power. Out of the realm of “patterns of male domination and alienation from self, each other, and the natural cycles of the Earth” they seek a veneration of universal masculine form. Male bodies with hands, arms and genitals are all aspects of a single Horned God, but are invoked by specific names as “Pan, Woden, Baphomet, Cernunos and Osiris”. Rather than constructing a binary opposition with a "feminine", the co-equal pre-patriarchical male divine is “the god of choice, chance and death in the service of the life force”. Lyrically, Chadwick’s masculinity is a project seeking to undermine rather than reinforce binary oppositions. It is an agent of transformation through the “god of the crossroads, crossed fingers”, climbing and crossing thresholds. Even the distinctions between God and Goddess are playful, protean and shifting, as the Horned God is "represented by ... the crescent moon of the goddess".18

It is within this community of poetic play that theological commitments in contemporary American Pagan music find their home. The “Ocean Mother” sacramentally points towards the greater unbounded ocean of existence in which humanity (as child of the mother) finds its ancestral link to all evolutionary life, from plants and animals to Mother Earth and Father Sun and the stars. Theologically speaking, love is the action by which both eros and agape occurs within this universal matrix, both within the human family and beyond to other-than-human persons. Embodied in flesh through the processes of generative creation and caretaking, Pagan theological imagination seeks to attune human consciousness towards becoming what philosopher Glen A. Mazis calls “earthbodies”, or “sensual, perceptual and feeling conductors through which richer meaning flows than we can grasp intellectually” and through which communication with other animals and telluric
forces is possible (Mazis 2002: 1). Others, like counter-cultural critic and intellectual historian Theodore Roszak, have come to call this type of consciousness “ecopsychology”, an acknowledgment that at the deepest level the human “psyche remains sympathetically bonded to the Earth that mothered us into existence” (Roszak 1995: 4–5). We spoke earlier of commitments to multiple realms of experience and spaces of mutual influence. In different aspects, through Otherworld, Oceanworld and other realms, Pagan sacramental song gives voice to and defends Whitman’s, Mazis’s and Roszak’s consciousness of deep evolutionary and cosmological kinship. To take a cue from Whitman: in the context of moons, suns, and oceans as manifest gods and goddesses, Pagan sacramental song embraces a dialectic of erotic generation and worshipful care towards the cosmos and its myriad inhabitants.

NOTES

1. In invoking these categories, I am of course indebted to the great historian of religion, Joachim Wach, who coined this schema. Wach’s matrix tends to emphasize the role of religious experience, an approach I find helpful in discussing this topic. Bedarnowski herself does not use this schema; rather, she is concerned with comparative theology across the spectrum of new religious movements (see Bedarnowski 1989).


3. In personal communication, Traylor notes that the song was explicitly written as a “teaching tool”. “Earth Mother” music and lyrics are © Jack Traylor 1971. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

4. “Burning Times” can be found on Murphy’s album Catch the Fire (1981). Murphy’s original track is widely available on the album The Best of Pagan Song (2004). As if a precursor to Murray, 1979 saw the publication of The Spiral Dance, one of the landmark texts of American Paganism, especially in its eclectic, environmental and gender-sensitive role. The author, Starhawk, makes the connection between abuse of Native spaces, technocratic exploitation and environmental destruction as a religious call to arms, as well as the claim of Catholic genocide against women (see Starhawk 1999: 22).

5. The melody is taken from folk artist Tim Hardin’s 1969 “The Lady Came From Baltimore”, later covered by Joan Baez and Johnny Cash. Apart from the fact that Bonewits loved to publish new “Paganized” songs based on existing melodies, his indebtedness to folk and popular music is clear here. Released on Isaac Bonewits and Friends, Be Pagan Once Again! cassette, Association for Consciousness Exploration, 1988, CD, 2003. Lyrics © 1974 Isaac Bonewits. All rights reserved. Used by permission of the Bonewits estate.


7. For Weschcke’s continuing influence and significance, see Weschcke (2009: 14–19); Weschcke (1974: 1, 4).

8. Medieval Irish sagas tend to emphasize the prevalence of other-than-human persons (such as elves) on Samhain, while the nineteenth-century British folklorist James Frazer
wrote of Samhain as a time for deceased human spirits in particular to abound. See Rogers (2002: 19–20).

9. Paradigmatic examples would include Zsuzanna Budapest, “We All Come from the Goddess” (this chant originated in the published work of Budapest's Dianic coven in the late 1970s); Oothoon, "Evocation of the Goddess"; Selena Fox, “Song of the Witch” in Jim Alan and Selena Fox, Circle Magick Songs.

10. Barrett and Smith's language echoes a tone remarkably resonant with Theodore Roszak's Gnostic call for a personal and cultural "apocatastasis", a spiritual renewal that embraces the broken, heals and refashions anew. Roszak traditionally has been heralded as a prophetic voice for contemporary Paganism. See Adler (1997: 27–8); Roszak (1973: 421–3).

11. Here I am drawing upon the work of Michael Largey, an ethnomusicologist and scholar of Vodou, who defines "recombinant mythology" as the selective reassembly of culturally saturated mythological figures and historical narratives in order to create a usable past for specific moral and ritual uses. See Largey (2006: 70–73). As will also be seen in the music of Craig Olson, Mary is one of several sacred persons who is claimed within contemporary Paganism as an expression of divine feminine power. KIVA, "Star of the Sea", Live at the Forest Inn: Volume 1, self-published, 2006. Lyrics © KIVA 1995. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

12. For an excellent short discussion of Yemayá in an American context, see De La Torre (2004: 36, 45, 54, 72–4). Although it cannot be fully discussed here, the reader is advised that American Pagans have often addressed, interacted with and drawn upon Afro-Caribbean theology as part of the Pagan revival. See Buckland (1971: 123–31); Murray (1996: 23–5).


14. For examples, see Arthen (1993: 25); Murphy, “Mother Ocean”, Catch the Fire. “Yemaya” lyrics are © Marytha Paffrath 2000. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

15. The liner notes of the album Ancient Mother are © Spring Hill Music 1993. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

16. There is a growing movement to identify Goddess discourse as "thealogy" rather than "theology", to reflect the ultimate concern with gender and embodiment in the titular language of the discipline. See Reid-Bowen (2007). I am very sympathetic to this trend, but I have used the more conventional term here to minimize confusion.

17. Set to Richard Wagner's overtures, Alex Sanders's infamous 1970 album of ritual initiation, A Witch is Born, exemplifies strict attention to gender dyads as a necessary ceremonial component both for him and his prominent students Janet and Stewart Farrar. Dyads have worked across each other as well. In Llewellyn Publishing's short-lived journal New Dimensions (1963–4), Gareth Knight explains the significance of "The Empress" in the Tarot as part of a regular column (Knight 1963: 13–14). Knight identifies her "lower" (material) aspects as the female consciousness of the Earth's planetary being, similar to the concept of "Mother Nature". But the terrifying experience of encountering the enormity of this consciousness is tied to masculine elemental forces of the god Pan. Participation with this consciousness is therefore framed along the kinship dyad of "Mother/Father" and its further implication for the worshipper as "Parent/Child". Knight explains the "higher" or spiritual aspects of "The Empress" as the Qabalistic Ain Soph- the "great unmanifest feminine principle". The dyad of "material/spiritual" is thus again interwoven with "female/male".