

Neowicca: Ceremonial Magical Rituals in Contemporary Québec

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Abstracts

Wicca is a new religious movement within Neopaganism, a larger family of new religious movements. “Magic,” while difficult to define, is part of Wiccan spiritual knowledge. In this project, I study Wiccan ceremonial magical rituals within Neowiccan communities and with individual practitioners in the province of Québec, Canada. Through a series of interviews and observations, I define magic in Wiccan terms and determine the ways in which magic is perceived to work physically and metaphysically. Examining the physical aspects of magic—i.e., the cause-and-effect relations of actions and objects intended by magic—allows for an exploration of performance within ceremonial rituals: Which object is manipulated, at which time, and for what reason? Which incantation is recited, and what are the elements therein? At what time and in which space are the rituals performed? On the other hand, the metaphysical aspects of magic—that is the relation between the individual’s spiritual knowledge with the actions carried out and the objects manipulated—is investigated through the relations of the spiritual significance and the physical details of these rituals. Why are these objects, incantations, spaces, and times important? How are these relations impactful within and without ritual contexts? By examining these finer points, I identify the structure of magic in Neowicca. To be specific, what is Neowicca and how does magic work for Neowiccans?

Résumé

La Wicca est un nouveau mouvement religieux au sein du Néopaganisme, une plus grande famille de nouveaux mouvements religieux. Bien qu'elle soit difficile à définir, la « magie » fait partie du savoir spirituel Wiccan. Dans ce projet, j'étudie les rituels cérémoniels magiques Wiccans au sein de communautés Néowiccanes de la province de Québec, au Canada. Grâce à une série d'entrevues et d'observations, je définis la magie en termes Wiccans, et détermine les façons dont la magie fonctionne physiquement et métaphysiquement. Examiner l'aspect physique de la magie — c'est-à-dire les relations de cause à effet des actions et des objets prévu par la magie — permet une exploration des performances dans les rituels cérémoniels : Quel objet est manipulé, à quel moment, et pour quelle raison ? Quelle incantation est récitée, et quels en sont les éléments constitutifs ? À quel moment et dans quel espace les rituels sont-ils exécutés ? D'autre part, l'aspect métaphysique de la magie — c'est-à-dire la relation entre les savoirs spirituels de l'individu, les actions menées, et les objets utilisés — est étudié par les relations entre l'importance spirituelle et les détails physiques de ces rituels. Pourquoi ces objets, incantations, espaces, et temps sont-ils importants ? Comment ces relations sont-elles efficaces à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur du contexte rituel ? En examinant ces points, j'identifie la structure de la magie dans la Néowicca. Pour être plus précis, qu'est-ce que la Néowicca, et comment la magie fonctionne-t-elle pour les Néowiccanes ?

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Neowicca: Ceremonial Magical Rituals in Contemporary Québec

Neo-Paganism, sometimes called Modern Paganism, is a family of new religious movements that is “generally (although not always) understood by practitioners as an earth-based revival or a reconstruction of indigenous, prehistoric European religions.”¹ It includes such denominations as Druidry (from Celtic culture) and Heathenry (from Germanic roots), among others. Maybe most famous among these siblings is Wicca—sometimes called Witchcraft, modern Witchcraft, or simply “the Craft”²—a new religious movement whose practitioners identify some of their religious practices as magical, and typically identify themselves as magic practitioners, most often under the term “witches.”

“Magic,” while difficult to define, is part of Wiccan religious beliefs and religious practice. The English word “magic” comes from the term “magician,” a direct descendent of the ancient Greek “*μάγος*,” itself from the Old Persian “*maguš*.”³ The term was used by the ancient Greeks to refer to “practitioners of private cults,” specifically in reference to ancient Persian Zoroastrian priests.⁴ Today the use of the term “magic” is somewhat contested in religious studies, but is usually defined as either the ostensibly illicit or illegitimate religious customs of

¹ Zohreh Kermani, *Pagan Family Values: Childhood and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary American Paganism* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 6. The “European” label is one that is applied retroactively; prehistoric Europe denotes a time before Europe existed. The term is used with modern definitions in mind, and specifically regarding the geographical location of these inspirations.

² Joanne Pearson remarks that this last term “is also used to denote Freemasonry and, increasingly, Druidry and is thus very unspecific.” Joanne Pearson, *A Popular Dictionary of Paganism* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2002a), 42.

³ See Jan Bremmer, “The Birth of the Term ‘Magic’,” in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, eds. Jan Bremmer and Jan Veenstra (Leuven: Peeters Publishing, 2002). See also Michael Stausberg, “Part 1: Historical Sources,” in *Defining Magic: A Reader*, ed. Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 16-18. See also Robert K. Ritner, “The Religious, Social, and Legal Parameters of Traditional Egyptian Magic,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015).

⁴ Id.

others (keeping in line with the ancient Greek, pejorative origins of the term), or as something akin to, as Stanley Tambiah calls it, a “conventional-persuasive system”⁵ predicated on cause and effect. Most contemporary scholars of ritual adopt a version of this later functional definition—within which magic and religion lack proper distinctive theoretical boundaries with each other—mostly for its more nuanced lens on the religious practices of Others. As part of such a causal system, magical practices are efficacious by virtue of certain ritualized aspects of their expression. Ritualization is the act, and the surrounding elements, of practicing a ritual; To use Catherine Bell’s words, “ritualization is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities.”⁶ Since the intricacies of magic—or, to use Daniel Miller’s term, “the operational ritual logic”⁷—inform its practice, the ritualization of magical acts must be thoroughly examined to understand the structure of historical and contemporary uses of magic as a causal system.

With this in mind, studying magic in communities that identify their spiritual practices primarily as magical permits a sole consideration of magic in this latter categorization of a conventional-persuasive system predicated on cause and effect. In other words, examining religious practices defined as magical by the practitioners allows for the study of magic as a causal system of persuasion containing both physical and metaphysical elements, often in complementary (and sometimes in unpartitioned) superposition to one another. Wicca is an interesting case study in religious studies precisely because it provides a vivid contrast to

⁵ Stanley Tambiah, “Form and meaning of magical acts: A point of view,” *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 3 (2017): 461.

⁶ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009a), 74. Emphasis added.

⁷ Daniel Miller, “Another Look at the Magical Ritual for a Suspected Adulteress in Numbers 5:11–31,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 5, no. 1 (2010): 5.

Québec's Christian heritage, which "is both personal – in the sense that varieties of Christianity remain the religion in which the majority of witches were raised – and influential in the development of contemporary Wicca."⁸ In the province of Québec, a few branches of renown are active: Isis Hathor,⁹ the Crescent Moon School,¹⁰ and the Wiccan Sacred Circle,¹¹ each with its preferred focus on certain teachings, lineages, and rituals, and its preferred level of openness to the public. These schools of thought are all somewhat popular in their own rights, and they each present their own spin on the more traditional Wiccan lineages through the teachings in their covens, formally defined as "group[s] of witches who have been initiated into a tradition of Wicca or witchcraft and meet regularly for religious festivals and for training."¹² There are, of course, many other circles and covens of smaller sizes and of less renown in Québec; Many individuals find a sense of community through specialized esoteric and occult shops as well as online communities, or come from family traditions. These individuals—who I call Neowiccans—and their ceremonial magical rituals, are the topic at hand.

Through a series of interviews and observations conducted between January and December of 2022, I define magic in Wiccan terms and determine the ways in which magic is perceived to work physically and metaphysically. Examining the physical aspects of magic—i.e., the cause-and-effect relations of actions and objects intended by magic—allows for an exploration of performance within ceremonial rituals: Which object is manipulated, at which time, and for what reason? Which incantation is recited, and what are the elements therein? At

⁸ Joanne Pearson, *Wicca and the Christian Heritage: Ritual, Sex and Magic* (London: Routledge, 2007), 1.

⁹ Isis Hathor Coven, "Welcome," last modified 2014, <http://isishathorcoven.net/>.

¹⁰ Scarlet Jory, "Crescent Moon School of Magic & Paganism," last modified August 13, 2022, <http://crescentmoonschool.blogspot.com/>.

¹¹ Wiccan Sacred Circle, "Welcome," last modified 2008, <http://www.thewicca.ca/wsc/>.

¹² Pearson 2002a, 42. "The word may derive from the French '*couvent*' and the Latin '*conventus*', meaning 'gathering' or 'meeting', but there is no evidence that coven was associated with witchcraft prior to the 1930s." (Id.).

what time and in which space are the rituals performed? On the other hand, the metaphysical aspects of magic—that is the relation between the individual’s spiritual knowledge with the actions carried out and the objects manipulated—is investigated through the relations of the spiritual significance and the physical details of these rituals. Why are these objects, incantations, spaces, and times important? How are these relations impactful within and without ritual contexts? By examining these finer points, I identify the structure of magic in Neowicca. To be specific, what is Neowicca and how does magic work for Neowiccans? Below, I present an in-depth study of Neowiccan ceremonial magical rituals in Québec. Supported by audio-recorded semi-structured interviews of witches belonging to a new wave of Wiccan practices, as well as video-recorded participant observations of ritual practices, this study of Neowiccan ceremonial magical rituals offers insight into the ritualization and operational ritual logic of ceremonial ritual magic in Neowicca.

Chapter Outline

This project is composed of four parts. The first chapter presents the theoretical framework for this research project, which has been broadly summarized above. It consists of a short literature review and working typology related to scholarly writings on the topics of new religious movements, Neo-Paganism, magic, and ritual—with, of course, special interest to Wicca. A section on semantics and proper language usage will clarify the important terminology in play, as well as install the basis of the inquiry.

The second chapter identifies the object of research, Neowicca, through socio-historical lenses. Wicca in Québec will be contextualized within a broader religious landscape, the

creation/revival and the development of Wicca as a new religious movement will be explained,¹³ and Wiccan religious practices will be introduced, with specific attention to Sabbats (yearly calendar ceremonies) and Esbats (moon rituals and lesser ceremonies).

The third chapter clarifies the parameters of the fieldwork and the research protocols, and is supported by additional details found in appendix A. The procedures of the project, from inception to submission, will be presented. The methodology will be explained, and the human experience and factors of working with other humans will be discussed briefly.

Finally, the fourth chapter presents and analyzes the data from the interviews and observations. The data is organized by participants, and their respective breakdown of activities will be discussed in light of the previous chapters. Further analysis brings these individualized, personalized, and respective practices in conversation with each other, and elements of the religious practices studied will be considered within specific, sometimes overlapping, frameworks.

1. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that informed the fieldwork, and which inspired the discussion of findings. Of foremost importance are works in, and approaches to, ethnography, with a focus on new religious movements—specifically Wicca, sometimes Neo-Paganism more broadly. Of secondary (but not accessory) importance is the theoretical work on magic by scholars of humanities and social sciences, as well as theories in ritual studies.

¹³ The use of “creation/revival” is intentional, and will remain the preferred wording, in reference to the origin of the movement, throughout this text. While there is an argument to be made around the possibility that Wicca descends from a pre-Christian, European Pagan tradition, the argument I wish to present here should not be taken as an endorsement of this theory. It should not, on the other hand, represent a dismissal of it. More on this below.

Now, no hard definition of religion is offered here. Many before have tried, some have succeeded more adequately than others, but this is not the place to review linguistic arguments about the nature of what we call “religion.” Suffice to say that, for the population of the Global North, “religion” denotes “organized religion,” typically one of the Big Five, and “spirituality” amalgamates whatever is left unclassified under “religion.” Regardless, most Wiccans affiliate their practice as a spiritual one, rather than a religious one.¹⁴ For this reason, Wicca, aside from its academic classification as a new *religious* movement, will be called a spirituality henceforth. The question of religion v. spirituality v. philosophy (r/s/p), historically ingrained in religious studies as families of thought, is mirrored in the traditional dichotomy of religious v. spiritual v. magical (r/s/m) as families of acts. Archaically classified on a spectrum from civilized religion to savage magic, the only basis for these distinctions (and for its subtle but ongoing reproduction) is a colonial one.¹⁵ In this text, there is thus no true distinction between r/s/m.¹⁶ While they each denote particular embodiments or specific traditions, their essence remains the same; r/s/m practices are acts or intentions with (toward, because of, for, in love of, etc.) the Divine as

¹⁴ Renaude for example, one of the participants in this study, remarks that she “prefers to speak of a spirituality more than a religion, because sometimes the word ‘religion’ can be scary” (Renaude 2022-02-16 Interview 1), most probably, like other people her age, in reference to the Catholic supremacy in Québec during her childhood. “Moi je préfère parler d’une spiritualité plutôt que d’une religion parce que des fois le mot religion peut faire peur.”

¹⁵ See, among others, Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Furthermore, considering ritualized religious acts as magical rituals is frowned upon in the study of world religions by western scholars, going back to the fifth century CE when Augustine of Hippo listed both magical arts and divination as superstition. (Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 80.) The pejorative connotation given to the term “magic” has survived within the Christian Patristic literature, and permeated frameworks in religious studies. Similarly, in the Western philosophical tradition, Plato categorizes magic as *pharmakeia* (“drug or charm”), meaning that magic is poison for the mind. This categorization has somewhat persisted, although magic is rarely at the forefront of Western philosophical thought. See Derek Collins, “Magic,” in *Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies*, ed. George Boys-Stones, Barbara Graziosi and Phiroze Vasunia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 541-51.

¹⁶ I would also argue that there is no true distinction between r/s/p, including ideology, but this argument goes beyond the scope of this paper.

tradition specific, and r/s/p beliefs are understandings or thoughts of (with, for, toward, in response to, etc.) the Divine as tradition specific. Here and below, the term magic is used to discuss some Wiccan practices primarily because the participants self-identified perceivably religious practices as magical, and, incidentally, of the religionization of magic. Still, the distinction of r/s/p as families of belief and r/s/m as families of acts remains restrictive because of its Protestant-centric understanding of ideological systems as strictly composed of beliefs and practices, and of symbols related to (and representing) these “discreet” categories. Nevertheless, (Neo)Wicca has been (re)produced within Protestant-centric and colonial contexts, most importantly in the UK and the USA, even if as a purported resistance to some aspects of it these contexts. Thus, I suggest the use of “spiritual knowledge” and “spiritual path”¹⁷ as less restrictive alternatives here, since, as Joanne Pearson puts it, the term “belief” is itself “a debatable concept within Paganism, since it is deemed to be defunct. Pagans claim not to ‘believe’ in deities or spirits, but to ‘know’ them.”¹⁸ Spiritual knowledge, then, refers to any knowledge from any source (either formal or informal), that is used, either consciously or unconsciously, in creating one’s spiritual path. This includes, for example, both historical information and created knowledge about Wiccan traditions, but also about other r/s/p, as well as religious experiences that might affect one’s understanding of all things related to both r/s/p and r/s/m. In turn, spiritual path refers to the knowledge and information which are directly used, either implicitly or explicitly, in shaping one’s beliefs, practices, understanding of life, relationship with the Divine,

¹⁷ Similar terms have been used by a number of scholars in Neopagan studies. Helen Berger, for example, uses the term “spiritual information”, but since “information” belongs somewhat to a techno-centric understanding of the universe, I prefer the use of “knowledge”, as it denotes both the element learned, lived, or affected, and the agent of this learning, living, or affect, while simultaneously acknowledging the subjective nature of knowledge against the ‘objective’ nature of information. See Helen A. Berger, “Contemporary Paganism by the Numbers,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*, 153-70. Eds. Murphy Pizza and Helen Berger (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009).

¹⁸ Pearson 2002a, 25.

etc. Spiritual knowledge about Wicca can include its historical development, or might instead be restricted to one's experience in a coven; Spiritual path is the way this knowledge informs further contingent objects (including people, events, thoughts). For example, if a particular event happens within one's coven, spiritual knowledge is both the event itself, one's understanding (or lack thereof) of the factors that brought the event, and the ways this event is processed (physically, spiritually, and psychologically) by the individual; the individual's spiritual path is their reaction to the event and to their internal processes. If the event makes them question their faith, then they are on a particular spiritual path that is different from the spiritual path they would take if the event reinforced their faith instead. In turn, each particular spiritual path leads the individual toward novel or alternative spiritual knowledge, and the cycle continues. This makes for a fluid understanding of r/s/p formation and reproduction, while simultaneously informing r/s/m; it also allows for a more holistic understanding of religious systems, particularly those, like Wicca, of a syncretic nature.

Neopaganism, and Wicca

Authors of larger overviews of Neopaganism, such as Stéphane François's and Michael York's respective works,¹⁹ most of the time include at least one chapter on Wicca. These tomes provide an excellent background against which to fall back on, or from whence to start. Individual authors also have their specific foci, notably Ethan Doyle White's expertise on the history of

¹⁹ See Stéphane François, *Le Néo-Paganisme: Une Vision Du Monde En Plein Essor* (Valence d'Albigeois: Édition de la Hutte, 2012). See also Michael York, *Pagan Ethics: Paganism As a World Religion* (Cham: Springer, 2016). See also, although somewhat outdated now, Michael York, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995).

British Wicca,²⁰ Susan Palmer's extensive fieldwork with new religious movements in Québec,²¹ and Joanne Pearson's deep knowledge of Wicca in Canada.²² Background information regarding larger inspirational trends behind Wicca, such as Western Esotericism and (Western) European folklore, are offered by Pearson—who talks about the “Celticisation of Paganism and its festivals”²³—but also by Nevill Drury,²⁴ Glenys Eddy,²⁵ Hugh Urban,²⁶ Henrick Bogdan,²⁷ and Sabina Magliocco.²⁸ Cornerstone authors in Wiccan studies—namely Chas Clifton,²⁹ Ronald

²⁰ See Ethan Doyle White, *Wicca: History, Belief, and Community in Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (New York: Sussex Academic Press, 2015). See also Ethan Doyle White, “Wicca,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 2, 2022.

²¹ See Martin Geoffroy, Dominic Dagenais, and Susan J. Palmer. “New Religious Studies in Quebec Since 1944: A Literature Review.” In *The mystical geography of Quebec: Catholic schisms and new religious movements*, 23-52. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. Susan Palmer has not focused her work on Wicca per se, except for the occasional chapter, preferring to work with other new religious movements.

²² See Joanne Pearson, “Religion and the Return of Magic: Wicca as Esoteric Spirituality” (Ph. D Dissertation, Lancaster University, 2000). See also Pearson 2002a. See also Joanne Pearson, *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2002b). See Pearson 2007.

²³ Pearson 2002a, 31.

²⁴ See Nevill Drury, “The modern magical revival,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*, eds. Murphy Pizza and James R. Lewis (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009).

²⁵ See Glenys Eddy “The Ritual Dimension of Western Esotericism: The Rebirth Motif and the Transformation of Human Consciousness,” in *Esotericism and the Control of Knowledge*, 213-33, ed. Edward Fitzpatrick Crangle (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2004).

²⁶ See Hugh Urban, “Wicca and Neopaganism: Magic, Feminism, and Environmentalism,” in *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements: Alternative Spirituality in America* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 157-78.

²⁷ See Henrik Bogdan, “Modern Pagan Witchcraft or Wicca,” in *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 145-68.

²⁸ See Sabina Magliocco, “Reclamation, Appropriation and the Ecstatic Imagination in Modern Pagan Ritual,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*, eds. Murphy Pizza and James R Lewis (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 223-40. See also Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America. Contemporary Ethnography* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

²⁹ See Chas Clifton and Graham Harvey, *The Paganism Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004). See also Chas Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006). Still interesting, but perhaps less useful in the present context, see Chas Clifton, *Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics*, 1st ed. (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 1992).

Hutton,³⁰ Frederic Lamond,³¹ Margot Adler,³² and Philip Heselton³³—typically focus on British Wicca,³⁴ although some of these older works contain methodological flaws, as pointed by Donald Frew.³⁵ Other interesting scholarly disagreements of note, for example, include Michael York's and Ethan Doyle White's respective answers to Markus Davidsen's critique of contemporary Pagan Studies.³⁶ Nevertheless, multiple authors have repeatedly visited the history and study of Wicca and Witchcraft,³⁷ some specifically about Gerald Gardner's life and influences.³⁸

A substantial number of books have been written by (and sometimes, for) the community. Influential Wiccan writers such as Zsuzsanna Budapest,³⁹ Starhawk,⁴⁰ and Doreen Valiente⁴¹ each present their own vision of Wicca and of its history. Their perspective led to specific

³⁰ See Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1999] 2019). See also Ronald Hutton, "Modern Pagan Festivals: A Study in the Nature of Tradition," *Folklore* 119, no.3 (2008): 251-273. See also Ronald Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy* (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1993).

³¹ See Frederic Lamond, *Fifty Years of Wicca* (Sutton Mallet, England: Green Magic, 2004).

³² See Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and Other Pagans in America*, third ed. (London, UK: Penguin, 2006).

³³ See Philip Heselton, *In Search of the New Forest Coven* (Fenix Flames Publishing, 2020). See also Philip Heselton, *Witchfather: A Life of Gerald Gardner*, Two volumes (Leicestershire: Thoth Publications, 2012).

³⁴ See also, for example, Michael Howard, *Modern Wicca: A History From Gerald Gardner to the Present* (Minnesota: Llewellyn publications, 2018 [2009]).

³⁵ See Donald Frew, "Methodological Flaws in Recent Studies of Historical and Modern Witchcraft," *Ethnologies* 20, no 1-2 (1998): 33-65.

³⁶ See Michael York, "An Intersubjective Critique of A Critique of Pagan Scholarship," *Pomegranate* 15, no. 1/2 (2013): 136–50. See also Ethan Doyle White, "In Defense of Pagan Studies: A Response to Davidsen's Critique," *Pomegranate* 14, no. 1 (2012): 5–21.

³⁷ See, for example, Leo Ruickbie, *Witchcraft Out of the Shadows: A Complete History* (London: Robert Hale, 2004). See also Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics & Pagans* (Thames & Hudson, [1980] 2007). See also Susan Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld: An Anthropology* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2000).

³⁸ See, for example, Lisa Crandall, "Text A: Teasing Out the Influences on Early Gardnerian Witchcraft As Evidenced in the Personal Writings of Gerald Brosseau Gardner" (Master's thesis, University of Ottawa, 2013).

³⁹ See Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser, [1986] 2007).

⁴⁰ See Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1999).

⁴¹ See Doreen Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (London: Robert Hale, 2007).

developments in the tradition, which is not the case for many other Wiccan-written works.⁴²

These later still provide interesting analysis and data to scholarly discourse. Other notable authors on solitary and eclectic Wicca from within the community include Scott Cunningham,⁴³ Raymond Buckland,⁴⁴ and Patti Wigington.⁴⁵

Gender and feminist studies in Wicca are fairly popular, especially given the most recent ‘official’ denominational developments. Strong voices in this field include Shai Feraro,⁴⁶ Tøllefsen Inga Bårdsen and Christian Giudice,⁴⁷ Michelle Mueller,⁴⁸ Chris Klassen,⁴⁹ Jone Salomonsen,⁵⁰ Martin Lepage,⁵¹ and many others. It is also important to mention the impressive number of dictionaries of Neopaganism. James Lewis, for example, published two different

⁴² See, for example, June Johns and Jack Smith, *King of the Witches: The World of Alex Sanders* (London: Pan Books, 1971).

⁴³ See Scott Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, ed. Kimberly Nightingale (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, [2002] 2020).

⁴⁴ See Raymond Buckland, *Wicca for One: The Path of Solitary Witchcraft* (New York, NY: Citadel Press, [2004] 2018).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Patti Wigington, *Wicca Practical Magic: The Guide to Get Started with Magical Herbs, Oils, and Crystals* (Berkeley, CA: Althea Press, 2017). Wigington also runs a blog—along with Mary Fairchild (a Christian Minister), called *Learn Religion*. Although this is clearly not an academic source, the content on the website is factual sound, clear, and unbiased; it remains an good source of spiritual knowledge for practicing Neowiccans (as defined below), and is thus considered as such. See “Learn Religions,” *Learn Religions*.

⁴⁶ See Shai Feraro, *Women and Gender Issues in British Paganism, 1945–1990* (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan: 2020b). See also Shai Feraro. “‘The Goddess is Alive. Magic is Afoot.’: Radical and Cultural Feminist Influences on Z Budapest’s Dianic Witchcraft During the 1970s–1980s.” *Nova Religio* 24, no. 2 (2020a): 59–79. See also Shai Feraro, “The Politics of the Goddess: Radical/Cultural Feminist Influences of Starhawk’s Feminist Witchcraft,” in *Female Leaders in New Religious Movements*, 229–48, eds. Tøllefsen Inga Bårdsen and Christian Giudice (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁴⁷ See Inga Bårdsen, Tøllefsen and Christian Giudice, editors. *Female Leaders in New Religious Movements* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁴⁸ See Mueller, Michelle. “The Chalice and the Rainbow: Conflicts Between Women’s Spirituality and Transgender Rights in US Wicca in the 2010s.” In *Female Leaders in New Religious Movements*, 249–78, eds. Tøllefsen Inga Bårdsen and Christian Giudice (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁴⁹ See Chris Klassen, *Storied Selves: Shaping Identity in Feminist Witchcraft* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008).

⁵⁰ See Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism: Ritual, Gender and Divinity Among the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (London, Routledge: 2002).

⁵¹ See Martin Lepage, “Religiosités queer néo-païennes et la question de l’authenticité dans la Wicca,” *Religiologique* 36 (2018):195–221. Similarly, see also Martin Lepage and François Gauthier, “Les Fées Dansent Sur Le Mont-Royal. Magie Et Négociations Queer Chez Les Néo-Païens De Montréal,” *Anthropologica* 58, no. 2 (2016): 264–76.

reference books (one encyclopedia and one dictionary,⁵² the latter in collaboration with Shelley Rabinovitch).⁵³ Other reference works of note include Peter Clarke's *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*,⁵⁴ and Pearson's *Popular Dictionary of Paganism*.⁵⁵ The latter was chosen for most references throughout this project out of accessibility concerns, but last-minute cross-references with Rabinovitch and Lewis seem to align on most topics.⁵⁶ Examining more recent and local authors is also necessary, especially given the scope of this project. The main scholars of Wicca in Québec focus on institutionalization and the justice system,⁵⁷ the specificity of Quebecer practices,⁵⁸ Techno-Paganism,⁵⁹ and ritual.⁶⁰ Their work, mostly in the format of theses and dissertations in various universities, are progressively being introduced in larger discussions of Wicca, and of Neopaganism in general.⁶¹ Finally, the topic of children and

⁵² See James Lewis, *Witchcraft Today: An Encyclopedia of Wiccan and Neopagan Traditions* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2002).

⁵³ See Shelley Rabinovitch and James Lewis. *The Encyclopedia of Modern Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism* (New York: Citadel Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ See Peter Clarke, *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁵ See Pearson 2002a.

⁵⁶ Unfortunately, I was unable to access a copy of Gerina Dunwich's *Wicca a to Z: A Modern Witch's Encyclopedia* to cross-reference on this.

⁵⁷ See Mireille Gagnon, "Évolution Culturelle et Institutionnalisation de la Wicca au Québec de 1990 à 2010" (Ph. D dissertation, Université Laval, 2013). See also Mireille Gagnon, "Old structures, new faces: The presence of Wicca and Neopaganism in Canadian prison Chaplaincies," in *Religion and Diversity in Canada*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2008b), 149-73.

⁵⁸ See Mireille Gagnon, "La Mouissance Wiccane au Québec: un portrait de la sorcellerie contemporaine" (Master's thesis, Université Laval, 2003). In turn, Gagnon's thesis was turned into a book. See Mireille Gagnon, *La Wicca Au Québec: Portrait D'une Religion De Sorcellerie Contemporaine* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008a).

⁵⁹ See Bill Koulakis, "Demystification and Transmutation: Neo-Pagan Witchcraft in the 21st Century" (Master's thesis, Concordia University, 2005).

⁶⁰ See Nicolas Boissière, "La réinvention des pratiques rituelles dans le néo-druidisme: le cas du sacrifice," *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 46, no. 3 (2017): 433-54. See also Nicolas Boissière, "Célébrer un Nouveau Soi: Rites de passage, créativité rituelle et dynamiques identitaires dans le néopaganisme au Québec," in *Rites et ritualisations*, 79-103, eds. Denis Jeffrey and Martine Roberge (Québec, Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2018).

⁶¹ Although unrelated to Québec per se, Gwendolyn Reece's discussion of impediments to practice in America is still relevant to studies in this province, mainly due to socio-political similarities between these cultural regions. See Gwendolyn Reece, "Impediments to Practice in Contemporary Paganism," *Pomegranate* 16, no. 2 (2014): 150-77.

childhood is of growing interest in recent scholarships.⁶² Helen Berger and Douglas Ezzy offer insight into the identity formation of young Wiccans,⁶³ discussing the impact of mass media on Wiccan identity and the growth of the community using data from 90 interviews of young witches in the USA, Australia, and the UK. The study confirms that “visual media influences young people’s self-identity as witches by helping to legitimate their concepts of ‘moving energy,’ practicing magic, and using Wiccan ethics to frame their life choices.”⁶⁴ They also found that “country, or local culture, has relatively little effect on the practice of young Witches.”⁶⁵ Berger and Ezzy’s 2004 study was somewhat replicated in 2021 in Québec City by Clara Gargon,⁶⁶ who discussed identity formation in Wiccan social circles.

On her own, Berger focuses on solitary Wicca.⁶⁷ Her findings in 2009 demonstrate that some Wiccan communities simulate “some of the characteristics of a new ‘network sociability’ characterized by individualism, ephemerality, intensity, and technology. [...] The cultural resources of movies, books, the Internet, and local social networks give the Witchcraft community a durability and level of integration beyond that suggested by Wittel or Possamai.”⁶⁸

⁶² See Kermani. See also Susan Palmer and Charlotte Hardman, *Children in New Religions* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

⁶³ See Helen Berger and Douglas Ezzy, “The Internet as virtual community: Teen Witches in the United States and Australia,” in *Religion online: Finding faith on the Internet*, eds. Lorne Dawson and Douglas Cowan (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 175-88. See also Helen Berger and Douglas Ezzy, *Teenage witchcraft: Magical youth and the search for the self* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007). See also Helen Berger, Evan A. Leach, and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the pagan census: A national survey of witches and neo-pagans in the United States* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

⁶⁴ Helen Berger and Douglas Ezzy, “Mass Media and Religious Identity: A Case Study of Young Witches,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no. 3 (2009): 501–14

⁶⁵ Berger and Ezzy 2009, 511.

⁶⁶ See Clara Gargon, “Processus De Construction De Nouvelles Identités Générées Dans La Tradition Wicca À Québec” (Ph. D Dissertation, Université Laval, 2021).

⁶⁷ See Helen Berger, *Solitary Pagans: Contemporary Witches, Wiccans, and Others Who Practice Alone*. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2019). Berger 2019 takes survey data used in Berger and Ezzy 2009, and provides further analysis.

⁶⁸ Berger and Ezzy 2009, 512. See Andreas Wittel, “Toward a network sociality,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 18, no. 6 (2001): 51-76. See also Adam Possamai, *Religion and popular culture: A hyper real testament* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005)

This rise of the solitary tradition is mentioned by many authors, ranging from new religious studies to evangelical theology.⁶⁹ Pearson, for example, accounts for it simply as a natural phenomenon, akin to personal religion.⁷⁰ Bruce Douglas Konold, on the other hand, says that “new Wiccan denominations, the publishing of Lady Sheba’s Grimoire, self-initiation and solitary practitioners, environmentalism, feminism, homosexuality, the proliferation of Pagan literature, and Gnosticon conferences were significant factors in the 1970s eroding Gardnerian Wicca as the cohesive center of the modern Pagan movement.”⁷¹ In the end, “modern Wiccans quite consciously appropriate the term ‘witchcraft,’ seeking to destabilize its long-standing negative connotations and especially gendered stereotypes.”⁷² And witchcraft, for most, means magic.

Magic

The history of the term “magic” itself is ultimately irrelevant, insofar as contemporary Wiccans reclaimed the word and use it to describe some of their devotional elements without any pejorative connotation.⁷³ Some theoretical conceptualizations of magic, as well as their associated terminologies, are still worth taking note of, although

⁶⁹ See White 2015 and Clifton 2006.

⁷⁰ See Pearson 2000.

⁷¹ Bruce Douglas Konold, *Defining Twin Cities Wicca: The Emergence of Wicca as a Polyaffiliated Pagan Movement* (Ph. D Dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 80.

⁷² Michael D. Bailey, “The Meanings of Magic,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1, no. 1 (2006): 11.

⁷³ “In many cultures individuals do not typically designate themselves as magicians or practitioners of magic. Those are labels ascribed to them by society, or by specific authoritative elites within a society.” (Bailey, 9). Wicca is one of those exceptions. Magic is rational for the practitioner, as much as religion is for the faithful, or the scientific method for the scientist. “It is a reasoned system of techniques for influencing the gods and other supernatural powers that can be taught and learned... Magic is thoroughly obvious for the magician. However, it is not the property of everyone, but only of those with special knowledge.” (Gabriella Frantz-Szabó, “Hittite Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* 3, ed. Jack M. Sasson et al. (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1995), 2007.) For more on the history of the term, see Stanley Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1990). See also footnote 3.

[t]here is and probably can be no simple methodological solution to the definition or study of magic. A clear understanding of the terminology employed to designate magical acts in any particular context is critical, but a strict adherence to that terminology or even the basic distinctions it draws upon will not be suitable to all scholarly purposes. Moreover, terminology for and concepts of magic are almost universally vague, mutable, and “occult” in the literal sense of hidden or obscured.⁷⁴

The present theoretical framework, then, is taken primarily out of the classical studies of magic in historical magico-religious systems, i.e., the ancient Near East. Seemingly unrelated, Wiccan magical rituals are, nevertheless, inspired by European folklore and European Esotericism, and while the former is in a class by itself,⁷⁵ European Esotericism is heavily based on (perceivably ‘Western’) magico-religious practices self-identified as magical in historical societies, namely ancient Greece, ancient Egypt, and Mesopotamia.⁷⁶

Grand anthropological and sociological theories developed mostly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offer clear structures, and the classic definitions of Edward Burnett Taylor, James Frazer, Emile Durkheim, and others still reverberate through much scholarly work on this topic. While aspects of these theories remain useful, more recent studies have tended to take a much narrower approach, examining the specific forms that magic, magical rites, or witchcraft assume and the issues they create in particular periods and within particular societies.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Bailey, 22-3.

⁷⁵ Which, unfortunately, goes beyond the scope of this paper.

⁷⁶ See “Traditional”. The absorption of magic into religious typology, e.g., Christian theurgy, is also best left for another time and place. For more on Christian theurgy, see, among others, Louise Nelstrop, Kevin J Magill, and Bradley B Onishi, *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009).

⁷⁷ Bailey, 1.

Scholarly works about magic often offer cross-cultural references,⁷⁸ but some academics prioritize phenomena common to a single religion,⁷⁹ or a single phenomenon by itself.⁸⁰ Using frameworks and conceptualization from the study of multiple cultures is thus useful, since they provide tools to analyze contemporary religious movement whose practices are self-identified as magical, insofar as generalizations and reductionism are avoided, and cultural-specific attestations are predominant and emphasized. These tools, while developed for other situations, are still helpful in deploying analytic and descriptive methods onto Neowiccan rituals.

Pre-axial magico-religious systems revolve around the idea of there being no distinction between magic and religion, which is one of the two main points of similarity with modern Wicca (the other being, relatedly and as explored below, the claim to historical roots).⁸¹ “Current research tends to draw no distinction between the two phenomena, but speaks instead of magical religion or religious magic, in the awareness that there is no religion without magic. In fact, so many features of ritual, sacrifice, prayer, faith and intention are common to both phenomena that they appear difficult to separate.”⁸² For all current purposes, magic will thus be considered as

⁷⁸ See, for example, Fritz Graf, “Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual,” in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic & Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁷⁹ See, for example, Daniel Miller, “Incantations in Ancient West Semitic Corpora and the Hebrew Bible: Continuity and Discontinuity,” Ph.D. dissertation (University of Michigan, 2006). See also Joris Frans Borghouts, “Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Egypt.” In *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* 3, ed. Jack M. Sasson et al. (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1995).

⁸⁰ See Richard I. Caplice, *The Akkadian Namburba Texts: An introduction*. Edited by Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati. Malibu: Undena Publication, 1974.

⁸¹ For the theory of the Axial Age, see Karl Jasper, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). For an analysis of the theory and its progress, see Eugene Halton, *From the Axial Age to the Moral Revolution: John Stuart-Glennie, Karl Jaspers, and a New Understanding of the Idea*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Pivot, 2014). For a critic of Axial Age theory, see D. A. Mullins, et al., “A Systematic Assessment of ‘Axial Age’ Proposals Using Global Comparative Historical Evidence,” *American Sociological Review* 83, no. 3 (2018), 596–626.

⁸² Ahmet Ünal, “The Role of Magic in the Ancient Anatolian Religions According to the Cuneiform Texts from Boğazköy-Hattuša,” in *Essays on Anatolian Studies in the Second Millennium B. C. Ed. H. I. H. Prince Takahito Mikasa* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988), 58.

religious, and must therefore be examined as part of a cosmology and of an epistemology. On the former, the concept of cosmic sympathy—originally from Posidonius of Apamea in the second century CE, but later revitalized by Plotinus and his followers—emerges explicitly and in writing.⁸³ It is the idea that “anything that happens in any part of the universe can affect something else in the universe, no matter how distant or unrelated it may seem.”⁸⁴ In other words, it is the understanding of a particular, all encompassing force, which can be harnessed, used, and controlled by the individual, through specific acts, for a particular goal that is unachievable by the natural laws of the universe as deciphered by modern scientific theories. This system of power dynamics, as well as the knowledge thereof and therein, constitutes a specific interpretation of one’s world and one’s place within it. Cosmic sympathy is constitutive of a particular cosmology. On the other hand, magic belongs to a unique episteme, insofar as knowledge is produced, learned, shared, and lost through its practice. Stanley Tambiah’s epistemological assessment system, for example, offers two positive analogies: a scientific predictive system, and a conventional persuasive system. The former “serves as a model in science generating hypotheses and comparisons which are then subject to verification inductively.”⁸⁵ The later “consists in persuasively transferring the properties of the desired [...]

⁸³ See Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi, Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds, A Collection of Ancient Texts* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985). Cosmic sympathy was, without a doubt, extensively present in primal and ancient religions under different appellations. For more on sympathy in the western philosophical tradition, see Eric Schliesser, ed., *Sympathy: A History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). For a discussion of Neoplatonic rituals, see Edward P. Butler, “Offering to the Gods: a Neoplatonic perspective,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 2, no. 1 (2007): 1-20.

⁸⁴ Luck, 5.

⁸⁵ Tambiah 2017, 458. To use Tambiah’s example, the properties of sound are similar to the properties of light, insofar as the properties of sound have a co-occurrent relationship with loudness, echoes, and pitch, while the properties of light have a co-occurrent relationship to reflection, brightness, and color. One may change the categories of properties, and obtain similar results through scientific inquiry; the properties of birds are wings, feather, lungs, while the properties of fish are fins, scales, and gills. “Ultimately of course these predictions should be capable of verification or falsification in terms of observation statements.” (Ibid., 460)

relation to the [object]⁸⁶ which is in an undesirable condition, or in attempting to convert a potential not-yet-achieved state into an actualized one.”⁸⁷ In other words, conventional persuasive analogies transfer—through non-scientific, non-systematically verifiable or predictable means—properties from one object to another. Combining of the ideological and the epistemological facets of magic, one might say that magic is a conventional persuasive system predicated on cause-and-effect and on the perceived interrelatedness of all creation.

Both cosmic sympathy and Tambiah’s epistemology of analogy illustrate how magic is thought to function, but they leave the ‘physical’ logic of this metaphysical object untouched. This is unsurprising, since “little comparative work has been done on how physical objects function in magical rituals or otherwise-designated rites of power. Yet the association of amulets, talismans, wands, and other objects with the invocation, attraction, or repulsion of spiritual or occult natural forces is widespread, if not universal.”⁸⁸ Daniel Miller’s concept of operational ritual logic (hereforth: ORL), “the precise manner through which the ritual’s intended effect is to be brought about,”⁸⁹ addresses this problem; Where cosmic sympathy is the metaphysical aspect of conventional-persuasive systems of cause-and-effect, ORL comprises its physical features. The ORL of magic should be understood as four intersectional lenses: act, goal, temporality, and type. Magical *acts* comprise a series of physical actions committed by the practitioner in order to reach the goal of magic; there are three categories of magical acts,⁹⁰ namely magic by speech

⁸⁶ Including persons and events.

⁸⁷ Tambiah 2017, 461. Again, using Tambiah’s example, “the employer is to his workers as a father is to his children” (Ibid., 460) is a conventional persuasive analogy.

⁸⁸ Bailey, 18.

⁸⁹ Miller 2010, 5.

⁹⁰ This distinction is inspired from ancient Egypt scholar about Heka, the ancient Egyptian divine power. See Borghouts. There is no conclusive evidence for the necessity of an additional category.

(i.e., incantations, prayers),⁹¹ magic by rite (i.e., rituals),⁹² and magic by inherent property (i.e., objects).⁹³ Each subcategorization is non-exclusive and intersectional: magical rituals often include incantations, and magic by inherent property always includes multiple ritualizations. Magical acts are the physical aspects of magic. In turn, the *goal* of magic is the purpose and intent of the magical act, its desired effect and underlying meanings, often of an apotropaic nature,⁹⁴ but also to reinvigorate love or lust,⁹⁵ or to curse.⁹⁶ It is the intention of magic. The *temporality* of magic is the timeline between the act and the goal, usually within two broad temporal categories: reactive and proactive.⁹⁷ Reactive magical acts are practiced as an answer to a portent or past event: for example, one might have practiced divination and received a negative omen, and would thus practice a magical act with the goal to change the outcome of the predicted events. Proactive magical acts address events that have not yet come to pass: for example, one might want protection from snakes for their coming journey through the deserts (or

⁹¹ See Miller 2006. See also, among others, Toshihiko Izutsu, *Language and Magic : Studies in the Magical Function of Speech* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Philological Studies, 1956).

⁹² See below “Ceremonial Ritual”. For an interesting discussion of ritualized acts, although in a different context and framework (but still of some relevance), see Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual : A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

⁹³ The Metternich Stela from ancient Egypt is an example of this. See James P. Allen, *The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt*, ed. James P. Allen and David T. Minnberg (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 63-64.

⁹⁴ See Id.

⁹⁵ During the Mesopotamian ŠÀ.ZI.GA ritual, for example, the *āšipu* imbues power into an animal genitalia, which is then used by a human male for fertility purposes. See Edith K. Ritter, “Magical-Expert (= Ašipu) and Physician (= Asû): Notes on Two Complementary Professions in Babylonian Medicine,” in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday, April 21, 1965*, ed. H. G. Güterbock and T. Jacobsen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 299-323. See also Walter Farber, “Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East 3*, ed. Jack M. Sasson et al. (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1995), 1895-909.

⁹⁶ The curse of king Aššur-nerari V against Mati’ilu is an example of this. Interestingly, it is both destructive and apotropaic, in some sense. See Anne Marie Kitz, “Cursing in the Ancient Near East,” in *The Ancient Near East Today 2*, no. 12 (2014). See also Anne Marie Kitz, *Cursed Are You!: The Phenomenology of Cursing in Cuneiform and Hebrew Texts*. (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021).

⁹⁷ This is based on the basic three tenses of verbal conjugation in English, and a vision of time as linear. Since the present is always already in the past, only reactive (past) and proactive (future) are temporal possibilities. Miller (2006) discusses this at some length.

from rats, for their journey in the subway), and would then practice a magical act whose goal is to change (or in this case, prevent) future events.⁹⁸ Quite self-definitional, the temporality of magic is the temporal relation between the other lenses.

While ORL addresses the ways in which the relationships between acts, goals, and temporality are performed, magical *types* are the broad categories of these relationships. In *The Golden Bough*, for example, James Frazer identifies magic as sympathetic, as the Neoplatonists did, and proposes that it exists in two types: Homeopathic and contagious magic.⁹⁹ “From the first of these principles, namely the Law of Similarity, the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it: from the second he infers that whatever he does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed part of his body or not.”¹⁰⁰ Homeopathic magic functions through relationships of similarity or imitation; If object A is in a particular state, and object B is in a similar state, then ritualized action X done to object A will affect object B in a similar way to object A.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, contagious magic is effective through relationships of proximity; If object B is in an undesirable condition, then object A, through ritualized action X, will rectify the undesirable condition if (and only if) object A comes in proximity or in contact with object B. Multiple

⁹⁸ Whether the goal is to change future events or to prevent future events (effectively changing the future) entail two very different worldview regarding fate, chance, free will, and the power of human’s over divine decisions. Unfortunately, this query goes beyond the scope of this paper.

⁹⁹ Most systems of evaluations and comprehensions of magic were based, until fairly recently, on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, a compilation of studies in comparative religion with an evolutionist perspective. The book has been criticized plenty since then, and new theories have taken the fore. See James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1925).

¹⁰⁰ Frazer, 26.

¹⁰¹ Objects including people, events, thoughts.

scholars have their own classification system for their relationships¹⁰²— Pearson, for example, uses horizontal, vertical, and greater¹⁰³, while Frantz-Szabó (much like Tzvetan Todorov before her) simply uses black and white¹⁰⁴—but Frazer’s flowchart remains one of the most efficacious tools to capture magical types.¹⁰⁵

Thus, the categorization of magic as a conventional-persuasive system predicated on cause-and-effect functions like a phoropter, inasmuch as it needs interchangeable and individual, albeit synchronized and overlapping lenses.¹⁰⁶ As theoretically sound as this metaphor might seem, “a careful examination of the words and concepts used to designate various magical actions”¹⁰⁷ is necessary to understand and discern specific embodiments of magic. Thus, Wiccan magic must be defined in Wiccan terms, using the tools identified here.

Ceremonial Ritual

Magic by rite finds (quite evidently) its nature bound to that of ritual itself. Of particular importance in contemporary ritual studies are the works of Victor Turner,¹⁰⁸ Mary Douglas,

¹⁰² See, for example, Frantz-Szabó. See also Graham M. Jones, “Magic, an appreciation,” *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 3 (2017): 399–407. In turn, these classifications can be subdivided; Caplice, for example, subdivides the NAM.BÚR.BI ritual, a magical act whose goal is apotropaic, into four subtypes: Destruction, Obstruction, Substitution, Simulation. See Caplice.

¹⁰³ See Pearson 2000, 22-25.

¹⁰⁴ See Frantz-Szabó. See also Tzvetan Todorov, “Le Discours de la Magie,” *L’Homme* 13, no.4 (1973) : 38-68. Todorov’s discussion is also interesting regarding magic by speech. Another interesting classification is Mischa Titiev, who classifies calendrical rites against critical rites. See Mischa Titiev, “A Fresh Approach to the Problem of Magic and Religion,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (1960): 292–98.

¹⁰⁵ Otherwise, *The Golden Bough* and Frazer’s evolutionist perspective is less than interesting, other than for its value as an historical artefact.

¹⁰⁶ A machine used by optometrists. It is the one they use when asking “is A better? Is B better?”.

¹⁰⁷ Bailey, 5.

¹⁰⁸ See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. (London, UK: Routledge, [1966] 2017).

Catherine Bell,¹⁰⁹ and Ronald Grimes.¹¹⁰ In order not to dwell on general theories,¹¹¹ let us instead build on the works of Nikki Bado-Fralick,¹¹² Nicolas Boissière,¹¹³ Sabina Magliocco,¹¹⁴ as well as Joanne Pearson.¹¹⁵ The nature of ritual, both mundane and sacred, is better left unexplored here; suffice to say that “most attempts to define ritual proceed by formulating the universal qualities of an autonomous phenomenon. They maintain, however provisionally, that there is something we can generally call ritual and whenever or wherever it occurs it has certain distinctive features.”¹¹⁶

Broadly speaking, the inspiration for rituals in Wicca “have a potent ethnographic imaginary. [Postmodern pagans’] rituals simulate nonmodern and/or non-Western prototypes drawn, for instance, from ethnographic representations of shamanism.”¹¹⁷ In Québec (although

¹⁰⁹ See Bell 2009a. See also Catherine Bell and Reza Aslan, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009b).

¹¹⁰ See Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory*, 1st ed. (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1990). See also Ronald Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982).

¹¹¹ The works of Durkheim, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans Pritchard, Geertz, Douglas, and Lévi-Strauss are left unreferred to here, out of concern for conciseness, although they are each useful (to various extent) in their own rights in the study of rituals. For a more contemporary overview on general theory, see Pamela Stewart and Andrew Strathern, *The Palgrave Handbook of Anthropological Ritual Studies* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). Stewart and Strathern are also co-editors of the *Journal of Ritual Studies*, another important resource in ritual studies. For an overview of ritual theory as a field, see Jens Kreinath, Joannes Augustinus Maria Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, *Theorizing Rituals : Annotated Bibliography of Ritual Theory, 1966-2005* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). Unrelated to ritual study per se, the work of Ray Birdwhistell in the field of kinesics is an interesting addition to the study of rituals. See Ray L. Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context : Essays on Body Motion Communication*. (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010 [1990, 1970]).

¹¹² Nikki Bado-Fralick, *Coming to the Edge of the Circle: A Wiccan Initiation Ritual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹¹³ See Boissière 2018.

¹¹⁴ See Magliocco 2009.

¹¹⁵ See Pearson 2007.

¹¹⁶ Bell 2009a, 69.

¹¹⁷ Jones, 400. Jones is referring to Michael Houseman’s work in ethnographic aesthetics. See Michael Houseman, “Comment comprendre l’esthétique affectée des cérémonies New Age et néopaiennes?” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 174 (2016): 213–37.

not exclusively), this is represented, in part, by the reference to First Nation Indigenous spiritualities.¹¹⁸ Berger and Ezzy present an accurate image of solitary Wiccan ritual:

A typical ritual might involve a young woman in her room late at night casting a circle. One form this takes is her lighting candles in each of the four directions (East, North, West, and South), and then carrying water, salt, a candle, and incense around the circle as she says sacred invocations. The circle is typically sealed by drawing it with a ritual knife [or] her fingers. A specific deity, such as Athena, may be addressed [...]. The ritual itself may involve a variety of practices, often utilizing ordinary household items such as flowers, food, and drink.¹¹⁹

Now, ceremonial magical rituals are magic acts by rite within a ceremonial setting, which usually include magic by speech, and sometimes magic by inherent property. According to Pearson, ceremonial magic is derived “from the Jewish and Christian kabbalahs during the Renaissance [...]. It can thus be strongly religious in character, and seeks to control the powers of nature [...]. The systems are usually complicated and call for a great deal of purification and consecration of both magician, ritual space, and magical tools.”¹²⁰ Here and below, ceremonial is used in this historical sense, insofar as Wiccan ceremonial rituals are inspired by European Esotericism (and Kabbalah, to some extent),¹²¹ but also as a marker of holy days, religious ceremony, and yearly celebrations. Thus, ceremonial becomes a type of magic: it is the relationship between the practice of magic by rite, and the intention of veneration and celebration. The term “ceremonial magical rituals,” then, refers to a particular type of magical act, whose relation between performance, intention, and effect is either the veneration of supernatural entities or to the celebration of holy days. While this type of act has been recorded

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Laurel Zwissler, “New Age, Wicca, and Paganism,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology online*, eds. Hilary Callan and Simon Coleman (Wiley Blackwell). See also Donald Frew, “Wicca, Indigenous Traditions, and the Interfaith Movement,” *The Interfaith Observer (TIO)*, March 15, 2012.

¹¹⁹ Berger and Ezzy 2009, 503.

¹²⁰ Pearson 2002a, 34. For a hefty discussion of sacred space and ritual, see Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place : Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

¹²¹ See below, “Traditional”.

by academics before, the nuances and underlying influences of Neowiccan ceremonial rituals have not. There is thus a need to inspect them closely; in order to do so, a basic understanding of Wiccan history is first necessary.

2. Historical Background and Preliminary Points

This chapter covers Wicca, its development and history—with special interest to key figures and their influences—as well as its different branches and developments. The creation/revival and the development of Wicca as a new religious movement is explained, and Wiccan religious spiritual knowledge will be introduced, with specific attention to Sabbats (yearly calendar ceremonies) and Esbats (moon rituals and lesser ceremonies). Special attention will be given to Solitary and Eclectic Wicca as common forms of Neowicca.

Now, in Statistics Canada’s 2021 Census of Population, 26 385 people (0.3% of Québec’s population) self-identified as “Other religions and spiritual traditions.”¹²² 10 years prior, in the 2011 Census, the number of Quebecers who identified under “Other religions” was 12 340 (about 0.2% of the population), about half as much as there are today.¹²³ This category installs itself as the de facto classification for any religion outside of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, North American Indigenous spirituality, and the “No religion and secular perspectives.” The “Other religions and spiritual traditions” includes 25 other religions or categorizations thereof, one of which being the “Pagan beliefs and spiritual

¹²² See Statistics Canada, (table), *Census Profile*, 2021 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001 (Ottawa, 2023), Released October 26, 2022. The total population of Québec is 8 308 480 (Ibid.).

¹²³ See Statistics Canada, Quebec (Code 24) (table), *National Household Survey (NHS) Profile*, 2011 National Household Survey, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-004-XW (Ottawa, 2013). In 2011, the population of Québec was 7 732 520 (Ibid.). This could be attributed to the complexification and the addition of further religious categorizations within the census program, but this remains to be proven.

traditions.”¹²⁴ It is unclear how much of the twenty-six thousand respondents self-identified specifically with Pagan beliefs (which is broken down into Druidic, Neopagan, and Wiccan);¹²⁵ nonetheless, it is clear that Neopaganism is not widely popular (at least, not officially).

Traditional

Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca are typically viewed as the more traditional versions of Wicca; They are the two oldest recorded traditions of Wicca, and have stricter codes of conduct than Dianic, Reclaiming, or Neowicca. Regardless, these traditions share a few common strands of spiritual knowledge (e.g., the divinity of/in nature, a Westernized view of karma),¹²⁶ although these vary slightly between different Wiccan traditions. For example, Wiccans of all background agree on the Wheel of the Year (the Wiccan calendar),¹²⁷ on the Wiccan Rede (the Wiccan Golden Rule),¹²⁸ and on the use of a Book of Shadow or Light, a “book of invocations, rituals, information and lore”.¹²⁹ This overview of key Wiccan traditions skips over some of their founder’s individual life, rather focusing on their impact and influence on the development of Wicca, making for a more succinct presentation of the particularity of each tradition. Gerald

¹²⁴ For the full list, see Statistic Canada, (table), List of Religions 2021, “8 - Other religions and spiritual traditions,” last modified Nov. 4, 2011 (Ottawa, 2023).

¹²⁵ Data breakdown for these smaller categories has not been released at the time of writing.

¹²⁶ See Patti Wigington, “Basic Concepts of Wicca”, *Learn Religions*. “Westernized” here denotes an understanding of karma akin to luck, qua personal justice, and which affects one’s immediate life, rather than karma as impersonal justice which affects reincarnation processes.

¹²⁷ See below “Wheel of the Year”.

¹²⁸ The Wiccan Rede takes many forms. For an example, see appendix B. It falls in line with another Wiccan way of life, the Law of Threefold Return: “whatever you do, whether for good or bad, will return to you threefold” (Pearson 2002a, 145).

¹²⁹ Pearson 2002a, 40. Gardner met Aleister Crowley, founder and leader of Thelema, in 1947, and found the latter’s spiritual path convincing, to a point where the former eventually found himself overseeing a charter of the Ordo Templis Orientis. (See Valiente, 56. See also Heselton 2012b, “Meetings with Aleister Crowley,” 341-72.) Gardner’s proto-Book of Shadow, *Ye Booke of Ye Art Magical* (See Gerald Brosseau Gardner, *Ye Booke of Ye Art Magical* [unpublished, undated]), “owe a good deal to the OTO; in fact, it is a kind of hybrid between the OTO and witchcraft.” (Valiente, 58.)

Gardner, on the other hand, is covered in more depth given his status as the founder of Wicca, as he is said to have re/discovered the pagan tradition.¹³⁰

Gardnerian

Gerald Brosseau Gardner founded/revealed Wicca in the early 20th century. Born to a rich family in 1884, Gardner was afflicted by a number of health problems throughout his life leading him to leave England in childhood and travelling to warmer climates in the British colonies of Southern Asia,¹³¹ most notably in Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka), Borneo (belonging to modern-day Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia),¹³² and Malaya (part of modern-day Malaysia).¹³³ In Ceylon, Gardner “thought about the meaning of life, and the possibility of reincarnation as preached by the Buddhist monks of the island; and what the principle behind it all might be.”¹³⁴ Reincarnation brought him “spiritual contentment,”¹³⁵ leading him to reconsider the importance of the soul and the afterlife. In North Borneo, he made friends with the local Dayak people,¹³⁶ the indigenous people of North Borneo, observing that they “tended toward the worship of a

¹³⁰ There were many precursors to this movement, as the history of Western Esotericism and occultism indicates. See Edward Fitzpatrick Crangle, *Esotericism and the Control of Knowledge* (Sydney: Dept. of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney, 2004). See esp. Eddy.

¹³¹ See Jack Leon Bracelin [Idries Shah], *Gerald Gardner: Witch* (Thame: I-H-O Books, 1999), 14. The notation [Idries Shah] refers to the original author; out of fear of being associated with witchcraft, Shah published the original manuscript under Bracelin’s name, a bibliographer at the printing company and a friend of Gardner. For more on this topic, see Pearson 2002a, 28.

¹³² Gardner mostly spent his time on the island in North Borneo, now under the control of Malaysia.

¹³³ In adulthood, Gardner worked mostly as a rubber planter in the British colonies, eventually heading such a plantation with funds given to him by his father. See Bracelin 56-63; See also Heselton 2012a, 81-85.

¹³⁴ Bracelin, 27.

¹³⁵ Id.

¹³⁶ For more on the Dayak, see “Dayak,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 24, 2021.

multitude of small and local deities – a feeling [he] regarded himself as instinctively in sympathy. [...] There was no question for them that magic might or might not work. It did.”¹³⁷

In Malaya, Gardner converted to Islam in order to befriend the locals, but his interest in religion quickly shifted toward the magical practices and beliefs that were woven (or inherited from earlier generations) into the local Muslim observances.¹³⁸

In 1927, Gardner began to investigate mediumship in Europe until he found one that, in his experience, actually channelled a spirit and got possessed.¹³⁹ Gardner

had almost always believed in spiritualism, and in the existence of a spirit world. [...] But never before had this touched him directly, nor had he ever been able to prove, to his own satisfaction, the truths of his beliefs. Now he had done so; from now on he had a personal, as opposed to a merely intellectual, conviction that life survives what is called death.¹⁴⁰

He translated his renewed interest in the occult into anthropological and archeological work in South and Southeast Asia and the Middle East, which eventually led him to participate in the First International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences at King’s College in London.¹⁴¹ There, he sat in on two lectures related to “the worldwide cult of the Great Mother – the Cult of the Female Creative Principle.”¹⁴² Both presentations affected him greatly, both on a personal level and a spiritual one.¹⁴³

In 1935, Gardner moved to Highcliffe in Southern England, where he encountered the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship—a group whose spiritual path was based on “Rosicrucian

¹³⁷ Bracelin, 45. Gardner spent his free time in Borneo with the locals, often participating (mostly observing) medium séances and healing rituals. See Bracelin, 42-8; Heselton 2012a, 74-76.

¹³⁸ See Bracelin, 55-62, 80-2. See also Heselton 2012a, 83-4; “Malayan Customs,” 91-102.

¹³⁹ See Bracelin 1960, pp. 125–33; See also Heselton, “Finding Spirits and Love in England,” 2012a, 103-16.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 133.

¹⁴¹ See, among others, J. L. Myres, “240. The International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences: First Session, London, 1-6 August, 1932,” *Man* 32 (1932): 201–2.

¹⁴² Heselton 2012a, 127.

¹⁴³ See Heselton 2012a, 122-8.

tradition, Theosophical ideas and Masonic practices, together with [the founder's] personal contributions"¹⁴⁴—but his interest quickly waned due to the eccentric beliefs of their leader. In leaving the Fellowship, Gardner was brought by another malcontent to Old Dorothy (Fordham, born Clutterbuck),¹⁴⁵ a supposed witch whose spiritual path was closely linked to nature.¹⁴⁶ “He was very amused at first, when he was stripped naked and brought into a place ‘properly prepared’ to undergo his initiation. It was halfway through when the word *Wica* was first mentioned.”¹⁴⁷ Immediately, Gardner became convinced that “the Old Religion still existed,”¹⁴⁸ which reinforced his idea that “the witch cult” (an idea originally from Margaret Murray’s 1921 *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*)¹⁴⁹ had effectively survived in England since the witch trials of the Early Modern period in Europe.¹⁵⁰ Already spiritually yearning, Gardner dedicated the rest of his life to witchcraft, acquiring a ‘witch's cottage’—a 16th-century cottage that supposedly once belonged to a witch—where he would hold a number of ceremonies, performing rituals

¹⁴⁴ Heselton 2012a, 197. For more on the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship, see Steven Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A history of alternative spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2003), 41-45.

¹⁴⁵ See Heselton 2012a, “The Most Interesting Element,” 195-206. See also Hutton 2019, 207-12.

¹⁴⁶ Heselton says that “[s]he was aware of the cycle of the year, the natural markers of the cycle, particularly the « old » festivals, and the entities that embody such seasons, whether they be goddesses, fairies or woodland spirits generally” (Heselton 2012a, 217). There is no historical evidence that Dorothy was indeed a witch. See Hutton 2019, 207-12. Pearson 2002a, in support to Hutton, says: “it seems that she was in fact a pillar of the establishment in the Highcliffe area, and had no known connections with either the Rosicrucian Theatre or with witchcraft.” (Pearson 2002a, 38). Regardless of Old Dorothy’s true identity, and of whether or not she was a witch, and of the historical accuracy of many accounts, the creation myth of Gardnerian Wicca remains.

¹⁴⁷ Bracelin, 165. Italics in original.

¹⁴⁸ Gerald Gardner, *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (Newburyport: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2022 [2004, 1959].), 3.

¹⁴⁹ For more on Murray’s witch cult theory, see Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). The witch-cult hypothesis has mostly been disproven in the academic community. See Jacqueline Simpson, “Margaret Murray: Who Believed Her, and Why?,” *Folklore* 105, no. 1-2 (1994): 89-96.

¹⁵⁰ See Heselton 2012a, 223-8. Academic research on the subject points to the fact that Dorothy’s New Forest Coven was probably formed in the 1930’s, based partly on other esoteric movements of Western Europe (e.g., Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Thelema) and on British folklore. See Heselton 2020. See also Hutton 2019, “Gerald Gardner,” 205-240.

inspired from *the Key of Solomon* grimoire.¹⁵¹ His 1946 *High Magic's Aid*¹⁵² reveals that they were mostly performing

dances intended to promote fertility, and feasting [on] consecrated food and drink. The performers were naked, in the belief that this more easily released magical power from the body. They venerated a goddess and a god, whose names were secret, the former predominant in winter and the latter in summer. They worked in a circle, formed with a consecrated sword or knife and carefully purified, to contain the energy they raised. They held the north to be the most sacred of the four cardinal points, believed in reincarnation, and trained themselves to develop latent psychic powers. The religion was organized in coven, led by a high priestess supported by a high priest [...].¹⁵³

These elements were taught to Gardner by the New Forest Coven, and constitute the basis of what would become Gardnerian Wicca.

In 1953, Gardner initiated Doreen Valiente into the Bricket Wood Coven, Gardner's own coven (and sister coven of the New Forest Coven).¹⁵⁴ She quickly rose to the rank of High Priestess, and helped Gardner to revise his original Book of Shadows, attempting to cut out most of Crowley's influence.¹⁵⁵ After a series of bad journalistic procedures and tabloid propaganda created frictions, "two different factions had begun to form within the main coven";¹⁵⁶ Mostly based on Gardner's violation of the oath of secrecy, but also out of fear of being persecuted for their spiritual path, Valiente and the anti-publicity faction (against the pro-publicity faction, helmed by Jack Bracelin)¹⁵⁷ decided to split up from Gardner's coven after he produced "The

¹⁵¹ See Valiente, 54-5; See also Heselton 2012b, 324. See also Hutton 2019, 226. See Sir Liddell MacGregor Mathers (trans.), *The Key of Solomon the King (Clavicula Salomonis)* (London, England: George Redway, 1889). (Listed under Solomon and S.L. MacGregor Mathers.) *The Key of Solomon* is a work of fiction in the form of a grimoire; Its authorship is attributed to King Solomon from the Hebrew Bible, but there are no historical evidences to support this. This work remains influential in imagination and in depiction for modern Pagan, but also for artists who wish to capture the occult.

¹⁵² See Gerald Brosseau Gardner, *High Magic's Aid*, (Thame, England: I-H-O Books, 1999).

¹⁵³ Hutton 2019, 206.

¹⁵⁴ For more on the Bricket Wood Coven, see their official website listed in the bibliography under "Bricket Wood Coven."

¹⁵⁵ See Heselton 2012b, "New Light and a New Witch," 485-504.

¹⁵⁶ Valiente, 69.

¹⁵⁷ The actual Jack Bracelin, not Idries Shah.

Laws of the Craft,” a series of sexist and patriarchal rules for his coven which would dethrone the High Priestess as the head of the coven, and install him, the High Priest, as the higher authority (effectively contradicting his own claims from *High Magic’s Aid*).¹⁵⁸ Then, in 1954, Gardner published a non-fiction book, *Witchcraft Today*;¹⁵⁹ in it, he claimed support for Murray’s witch-cult theory, stipulating that the Craft was a survivor of pre-Christian pagan beliefs, but he also advanced his own theory “that a belief in faeries in Europe was due to a secretive pygmy race that lived alongside other communities, and that the Knights Templar had been initiates of the Craft.”¹⁶⁰ In all effectiveness, Gardner had started to depart from the original spiritual path he encountered and adopted in the New Forest Coven by including spiritual knowledge he amassed through personal experiences. Inspired by Buddhism, Islam, Dayak indigenous spiritual knowledge, Freemasonry, European Esotericism, the Great Mother cult theory, Murray’s witch-cult hypothesis, and Old Dorothy’s spiritual path, Gardner had founded Wicca, a witchcraft revival movement.¹⁶¹

Before moving on, two points are worth underlining now. First, Gardner’s theology of the Moon Goddess and the Hornèd God remains important in contemporary Gardnerian paths, and

¹⁵⁸ See Valiente, 70.

¹⁵⁹ See Gerald Brosseau Gardner and Margaret Alice Murray, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider and Company, 1954).

¹⁶⁰ See Heselton 2012b, “New Light and a New Witch,” 485-504. Interestingly, Frederic Lamond claims that it is at around that time that the coven started to celebrate the seasonal changes, but the exact date and the exact celebrations seem unclear. I was unable to find other sources that indicate specific dates and practices, nor to confirm Lamond’s claim. See Lamond.

¹⁶¹ For a more detailed exploration of Gardner’s influences, see Lisa Crandall, “Text A: Teasing Out the Influences on Early Gardnerian Witchcraft As Evidenced in the Personal Writings of Gerald Brosseau Gardner” (master’s thesis, University of Ottawa, 2013).

go so far as to inspire, in its binarity, later theological developments.¹⁶² Gardner's final theology proposes that these two entities were presented to human beings in different cultures and times under different names and forms, such as Hecate for the Moon Goddess and Apollo for the Hornèd God,¹⁶³ but that they were ultimately "created by an unknowable deistic divinity,"¹⁶⁴ itself being perceived "as both immanent and transcendent, interspersed throughout nature through the web of interconnections, but also the unifying whole."¹⁶⁵ Second, "Gardnerian Wiccans are those whose initiatory lines descend from Gerald."¹⁶⁶ Modern Gardnerian Wicca is comprised of three degrees of initiation, "reflecting the influence of Freemasonry's three-degree system."¹⁶⁷ The degrees are "a measure of experience and ability attained by individual initiates. However, no standard or benchmark exists against which initiates can be measured before they are given a further degree."¹⁶⁸ The first degree is that of initiate or witch; Coven membership is granted through an initiation ritual.¹⁶⁹ The second degree is that of practitioner, often just called priest·ess, but also "maiden" for women who take the role of deputy and ritual helpers.¹⁷⁰ The third degree is that of high priestess and high priest.¹⁷¹ There can only be one couple of third-level by coven in Gardnerian Wicca, most often restricted to cis heterosexuals, and only third-

¹⁶² More on this below. The Goddess of the Moon is composed of three aspects: the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone. The idea of the triform Goddess most probably comes from Robert Graves' 1948 *The White Goddess*, but was popularized in the Neopagan world by Jane Ellen Harrison. See also Pearson 2002a, 42; 73. The Hornèd God, on the other hand, "is a varied, composite figure, representing a solar and vegetation god," (Pearson 2002a, 80) sometimes called "the Lord of Death" (Pearson 2002a, 50).

¹⁶³ See Pearson 2002a, 18; 75-6. I use these examples specifically because they are pertinent to one of my participants (see below "Liam"), but many (if not all) deities from non-monotheistic, pre-axial religions, are said to be representations of the two Wiccan deities.

¹⁶⁴ White 2022.

¹⁶⁵ Pearson 2002a, 50.

¹⁶⁶ Pearson 2002a, 66. See also Rabinovitch and Lewis, 109-12.

¹⁶⁷ White 2022.

¹⁶⁸ Pearson 2002a, 47.

¹⁶⁹ See Pearson 2002a, 61; 83-4.

¹⁷⁰ See Pearson 2002a, 96.

¹⁷¹ Pearson 2002a, 79.

level members may elevate priestesses to the rank of high priestess, whereas both second and third degree Gardnerians can initiate newcomers into their coven.¹⁷² Both Gardner's theology and Gardnerian initiatory structure were adopted and abandoned, sometimes simultaneously, through nuances, by later branches of the movement.

Alexandrian

Alex Sanders (born Orrell Alexander Carter) was initiated into the Craft in the early 1960s, and eventually went on to establish his own coven, incidentally starting the Alexandrian tradition.¹⁷³ Multiple accounts of Sander's initiation into Gardnerian Wicca exist, some of which have been disproven,¹⁷⁴ but the most probable story is that Sanders was initiated by a Gardnerian named Pat Kopinski.¹⁷⁵ Shortly after his initiation, he quickly rose to the position of High Priest, and like Gardner before him, was very interested in publicizing Wicca in the media. In 1965, Sanders "was elected as "King of the Witches"¹⁷⁶ by his coven, as they claimed he was "directly descended from witches, and equipped with knowledge that outstrips [their own]."¹⁷⁷ This claim evidently created a schism between the Gardnerians and the blossoming Alexandrians when the news reached other covens.¹⁷⁸ In 1979, Sanders published a letter "calling for unity among [Wiccans], asserting that they could rightly claim authenticity for their work whether they used

¹⁷² Pearson 2002a, 133-4.

¹⁷³ See Pearson 2002a, 15. For a more in-depth look at Sander's foray into Wicca, see June Johns and Jack Smith, *King of the Witches: The World of Alex Sanders* (London, UK: Pan Books, 1971).

¹⁷⁴ See Christine Wibberley, *Report on the Ancestry of Alex Sanders 1926-1988*, Alexandrian Witchcraft, November 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Gardner would have initiated Pat Crowther, who in turn would have initiated Pat Kopinski. Kopinski left Crowther's coven, but still initiated Sanders into Gardnerian Wicca. See Pearson 2002a, 44-5.

¹⁷⁶ Johns and Smith, 8.

¹⁷⁷ Johns and Smith, 96.

¹⁷⁸ See Johns and Smith, "King of the Witches," 96-104. See also Hutton 2019, "Royalty from the North," 319-39.

his version of the Book of Shadows, or the Gardnerian, or none”.¹⁷⁹ This—along with Sanders call to accept homo- and bisexual men into the Craft, “breaking down the hostility to homosexuals which Gardner had embedded in the Book of Shadows and which was deeply implicit in the Wicca emphasis upon gender polarity”¹⁸⁰—was the first step toward the future of Wicca.

Just like Gardner before him, Sanders was interested in esotericism; he took inspiration from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*¹⁸¹ and *The Key of Solomon*,¹⁸² but also from *The Book of Abramelin the Mage* (angelic magic, demonology, magic circles and geometric forms),¹⁸³ from the writings Goetia (demonology, Kabbalah),¹⁸⁴ and from those of Eliphas Levi (demonology, elementalism).¹⁸⁵ To this day, this remains the major difference between Gardnerians and Alexandrians: Alexandrian Wicca emphasises ceremonial magic rituals derived from “Kabbalah, angelic magic, and Enochian magic”,¹⁸⁶ whereas Gardnerian Wicca emphasises “folk paganism and natural, rather than ceremonial magic.”¹⁸⁷ Otherwise, Alexandrians and Gardnerians offer similar spiritual knowledge; Members of both traditions meet on new moons, full moons, and during Sabbat celebrations;¹⁸⁸ they both practice magic through intention,¹⁸⁹ have Books of Shadows within which their rituals are inscribed, and venerate the Moon Goddess and the

¹⁷⁹ Hutton 2019, 339.

¹⁸⁰ Hutton 2019, 339.

¹⁸¹ E. A. Wallis Budge, translator, *The Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani in the British Museum* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967).

¹⁸² See Hutton 2019, 320. See also Johns and Smith, 63-68.

¹⁸³ See Hutton 2019, 82. *The Book of Abramelin the Mage* claims to be written in the late medieval period but “may in fact have been composed in the eighteenth century” (Hutton 2019, 82).

¹⁸⁴ See Hutton 2019, 80; 227.

¹⁸⁵ See Johns and Smith, 7. Allister Crowley claimed to be the reincarnation of Eliphas Levi (née Alphonse Louis Constant; see Hutton 2019, 70-1).

¹⁸⁶ Rabinovitch and Lewis, 6.

¹⁸⁷ Pearson 2002a, 66; 15.

¹⁸⁸ Sometimes to varying degree, see “Wheel of the Year”.

¹⁸⁹ More on this in Chapter 4 *General Discussion*, under *Magic*.

Horned God. Both traditions maintain strict initiatory practices and have the three Masonic-inspired degrees,¹⁹⁰ although Alexandrians incorporated an additional degree, called neophyte, whose members are not yet required to take the oath, while still being welcomed to attend a restricted number of ceremonies and rituals.¹⁹¹ Both traditions typically recognize the high priestess as the head of the coven, with the high priest as the second-in-command (sometimes both on equal footing). Today, most Wiccan covens in England, the birth country of these two traditions, are “a synthesis of the Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca, [where] an increasing number of Wiccans are initiated jointly or separately into both traditions, thus tracing their lineage back to both Gardner and Sanders.”¹⁹² This does not mean that original, unmixed spiritual paths do not exist, as the survival of the Bricket Wood Coven indicates, nor that practitioners identify with both founders, but only that the traditions are continuing to change as time goes on.

Dianic

Dianic Witchcraft emerged in the United States of America during the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s, and is sometimes called feminist witchcraft. Its founder, Zsuzsanna Budapest, a Hungarian-born hereditary witch,¹⁹³ was inspired by the Hungary

¹⁹⁰ White 2022.

¹⁹¹ See Pearson 2002a, 15; 61-2; 107. Additionally, while some Gardnerians prefer ritual nudity—to allow “power to flow from the body unimpeded” (Pearson 2002a, 55; 110-1)—naked practices are optional for Alexandrians (see Rabinovitch and Lewis, 5.)

¹⁹² Pearson 2002a, 15; 66.

¹⁹³ Some witches claim to come from the hereditary tradition, wherein their family would have passed down the Craft from earlier generations onto them (whether as Wicca proper, Wiccan adjacent, or other magical traditions centered on nature and spirituality). Someone in their ancestry or immediate family learned the Craft (through specific traditions and teaching) and made some personal changes to it (to accommodate the practitioner); This tradition is then passed down through generations, and modified at will according to the practitioners' relation to ancestry traditions. For more on hereditary witches, see Martin Ramstedt, “Who Is a Witch? Contesting Notions of Authenticity among Contemporary Dutch Witches,” *Etnofoor* 17, no. 1/2 (2004): 178–98.

uprising of 1956 and by the American feminist movements to push her inherited spiritual path toward the future of social movement by embracing “the image of the witch as a symbol of female empowerment, and building on the myth of ancient matriarchy and Gardnerian Wicca”.¹⁹⁴ The name Dianic is said to be inspired from Diana the virgin huntress from Charles Godfrey Leland’s *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches*,¹⁹⁵ but is most probably also associated with, and maybe inspired from, the Roman Goddess of the moon, childbirth, and hunting, Diana.¹⁹⁶

In 1971, Budapest started the Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1,¹⁹⁷ named in honour of the famous suffragette,¹⁹⁸ thus starting the first Dianic coven with six other witches. The movement grew in popularity over the next decade, during which time Budapest opened a shop for her community, named *The Feminist Wicca*, and self-published *The Feminist Book of Light and Shadows*;¹⁹⁹ “The book was a reworking of available Gardnerian witchcraft which excluded all mention of men and male deity and included her own rituals, spells and lore. It was later expanded and published as *The Holy Book of Women’s Mysteries* in 1986.”²⁰⁰ In this book, Budapest proposes her vision of “a woman-centred, female-only worship of women’s mysteries”²⁰¹ clearly and concisely: “We are opposed to teaching our magic and our craft to men until the equality of the sexes is reality.”²⁰² The book also claims that the Goddess is whole, that

¹⁹⁴ Pearson 2002a, 49.

¹⁹⁵ Id. See Charles Godfrey Leland, *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches* (Place of publication not identified: Ezreads Publications, Llc, 2009).

¹⁹⁶ See “Diana,” Encyclopedia Britannica, last edited July 11, 2022.

¹⁹⁷ See Lewis, 79-80.

¹⁹⁸ See Nancy Hayward, “Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906),” National Women’s History Museum.

¹⁹⁹ I could not find a copy of this document to reference, although this is ultimately unimportant in this context, as *The Holy Book of Women’s Mysteries* is the updated version.

²⁰⁰ Pearson 2002a, 30. See also Budapest.

²⁰¹ Pearson 2002a, 49.

²⁰² Budapest, 12-13. There is also an ongoing controversy surrounding Dianic witchcraft and accusations of transphobia by the larger Neopagan (and trans) community against Dianic covens, since they do not recognize trans-women as women. For more on this, see Tracey Braun, *Womyn-Only Space in the Dianic Tradition: Lessons from PantheaCon*, (Master’s thesis, Athabasca University, 2014). See also Mueller.

she does not need the God to be complete—as it is in older traditions—that she is the creator of all life, and that all that exists is within her. Dianic Wiccans “worship different forms of the Goddess in her aspects as the Mother, Maiden, and Crone. Even where her male companion is present, he is only as a consort and not an equal.”²⁰³

The movement was the first clear bifurcation away from traditional Wicca, centering womanhood, limiting third level initiations to women, and, in most cases, simply refusing men who would try to join. “Dianic covens stress the worship of the Goddess, sometimes exclusively, and as such are largely feminist and/or matriarchal in orientation. The emphasis is on rediscovering and reclaiming female power and divinity and consciousness raising.”²⁰⁴ Dianic covens still require initiation rituals, and some of them require oaths of secrecy as well, although less common due to the importance given to social justice and social warriorship associated with their ideals. Dianic Witchcraft was an important juncture in the development of contemporary Neowicca, mainly for its reversal of the patriarchal structure of Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca. Budapest also opened the door to further theological changes by standing against the monolith of tradition, although she would probably not warrant this for her own followers. Today, Dianic Wicca is often confused with Reclaiming Wicca, a related countercultural religious movement. They both emerged in the USA during the same time period, and for similar motives, but they have slight theological differences.²⁰⁵ One of the main reasons for this

²⁰³ Pearson 2002a, 49-50.

²⁰⁴ Pearson 2002a, 49.

²⁰⁵ Unfortunately, those differences require ample explanations, which go beyond the scope of this project. One of the main issues, it seems, is that the Reclaiming tradition is not openly transphobic. In the 20th anniversary edition of *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk reminds the reader that “In the 1989 introduction, I wrote extensively about my shift away from a polarized view of the world as a dance of ‘female’ and ‘male’ qualities and energies, and toward a much more complex and inclusive view of gender and energy. That shift continues to deepen as I grow older, and it is still the major change I would make in this book.” Starhawk, 5.

confusion is the fact that Starhawk, founder of the Reclaiming tradition, was trained under Budapest in the Susan B. Anthony coven.²⁰⁶

Reclaiming

Miriam Simos, most commonly known as Starhawk, is an American witch initiated into the Feri Tradition, an American sect of Alexandrian Wicca,²⁰⁷ whose politics greatly influenced the development of Wicca in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.²⁰⁸ In her most influential book, *The Spiral Dance*,²⁰⁹ she presents a number of updated Gardnerian concepts—including her own conception of the cosmology, the afterlife, the myth of the Wheel of the Year,²¹⁰ the duality and non-binarity of divinity, and many other topics—with a deep appreciation of the impact of the patriarchy on women, but also on marginalized communities, and on the environment.²¹¹ Like Dianic Wicca, the Reclaiming tradition focuses on Goddess worship and the centeredness of womanhood—favoring high priestesses over high priests, and being immersed in social justice work—but Reclaiming witches take one step further by distancing themselves from the rigid structures, both of ritual and of membership, of traditional Wicca. Reclaiming Wicca is an “eclectic and loosely structured movement, encouraging creativity and spontaneity and the development of power-from within rather than power-over others. [....] Many groups of women meet and perform rites drawing upon Wicca, shamanism, classical paganism, Native American

²⁰⁶ See Lewis, 279.

²⁰⁷ The Feri tradition (sometimes spelled Faery) is a precursor to the Goddess revival movement. Sect is used non-pejoratively here. See Pearson 2002b, “The History and Development of Wicca and Paganism,” 15-54. See also White 2015, 46-48.

²⁰⁸ White 2022.

²⁰⁹ See Starhawk.

²¹⁰ See below, “Wheel of the Year”.

²¹¹ For more on Starhawk’s life and influences, see Salomonsen. See esp. “Wicca Revival: Starhawk and the myth of ancient origin,” 67-96. See also Inga Bårdsen and Giudice. See esp. Feraro 2017.

[Indigenous] traditions and others to worship the Great Goddess in a context which meets the needs of women in modern life.”²¹²

Starhawk took the opportunity created by Budapest and furthered the inclusivity of Wicca to all who could and would reclaim the tradition for themselves. This development—the free access to information from actual practitioners to the masses, rather than from journalists and propaganda—created a wave of new self-identified witches, which in turn propelled and stimulated multiple Wiccan subcultures. With the eventual advent and acceleration of the age of information—with the digitalization of information on one hand, as well as that of relationships, communities, and consciousness on the other—new forms of Wicca began to form, and to informally distance itself from former traditions.

Neowicca

In the first few decades following Gardner’s death, his legacy spread and morphed into new forms; Gardner had a fairly strict theology, Alex Sanders included esoteric traditions, Budapest reversed the gender dynamic and centered social justice, and Starhawk emphasized the push toward eclecticism by including other Neopagan traditions under the umbrella of witchcraft, as well as inviting community members to be creative in their spiritual associations. As is evident from the Dianic and Reclaiming traditions, Wicca evolved rapidly to include people of all background, which eventually led to the incorporation of spiritual knowledge from many cultures and non-Wiccan traditions.

²¹² Pearson 2002a, 68-9.

In the 1970s, a number of Wiccans from diverse traditions, such as Cunningham and Buckland, made their Books of Shadow available to the public and published “self-help” books on how to follow Wicca outside of coven supervision and initiation.²¹³ In turn, Wicca became “much more individualistic, with the majority of practitioners tending to practice on their own as ‘solitaires’.”²¹⁴ Today, there is a new category of Wiccan practitioners which must be discussed aside from the formal traditions listed above: Neowiccans.²¹⁵ Pearson addresses this briefly, classifying their path as “Hedgewitchcraft,” and referring to solitary practitioners as those who

operate with no hierarchy or organisational structure, do not necessarily regard witchcraft as a religion, and therefore may, or may not, honour gods and goddesses. Where witchcraft is seen as religious practice, a ritual of self-dedication to a particular god and/or goddess may be performed rather than an initiation. Hedgewitches perceive Wicca as the organised form of witchcraft, operating almost as an institutionalised religion [...].²¹⁶

In practice, few of them are solitary or “green witches”²¹⁷ per se, although the idea of a new, non-traditional Wiccan branch, is accurate. Konold, inspired by Pizza,²¹⁸ uses the term “Polyaffiliated Wiccan” as a way to refer to “Pagans affirming Pagans to create whatever sort of individualized belief system they like from multiple Pagan or religious sources. Instead of being initiated into one secret society of Pagans, today, Pagans freely see themselves as affiliating with

²¹³ See Clifton 2006. See also White 2022. See, for example, Cunningham. Gagnon mentions that Cunningham’s work was particularly influential in Québec because “its one of the rare accessible books on Wicca that was translated in French.” (Gagnon 2003, 13.) “c’est l’un des rares ouvrages accessibles sur la Wicca qui ait été traduit en français.”

²¹⁴ Berger and Ezzy 2009, 503

²¹⁵ Admittedly, many other traditions deserve their fair academic and historical treatment, but a skeleton history is useful for the task at hand.

²¹⁶ See Pearson 2000, 69. She uses this term in reference to the Association of Solitary Hedgewitches (ASH), which has since been dissolved.

²¹⁷ Pearson uses this term along with “ditch witches” to refer to this category of practitioners.

²¹⁸ See Murphy Pizza, *Paganistan: Contemporary Pagan Community in Minnesota’s Twin Cities* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014). “Paganism’s cultural norm, I argue, is polyaffiliation, the sort of swearing allegiance to one tradition that was common in decades past is of little interest anymore to modern Pagans.” (Pizza 2014, 75).

multiple groups at the same time, hence, polyaffiliation.”²¹⁹ But how exactly is this different from personal religion? People of all religions and denominations have personal spiritual path; on a personal basis, slight modifications (and the accumulation thereof) to an already established religion does not warrant the attribution of a new denomination. This is true for personal religion, but the phenomenon at play here is larger than the individual practitioners themselves; individuals who subscribe to this syncretic approach to Wicca do it in response to, and in conversation with, other individual practitioners within the same syncretic movement. Additionally, Neowicca has no ritual specialist per se. Maybe more accurately, each and every individual who self-identifies as neo-, solitary, eclectic, or syncretic Wiccan are ritual specialists. In cases of personal religion(s), individuals continue to rely on larger theologies and organizations to delimit the perimeter of the acceptable, and on ritual specialists to dictate proper acts of reverence. Personal practices acknowledge these religious borders, situating themselves against them, often on the periphery of one or another aspect in particular. Neowiccans, on the other hand, discard or modify most theological and organizational elements of Wicca, and (re)create proper methods of veneration. With the rise of eclecticism in the Wiccan community, following (or maybe expanding) Starhawk’s reclamation, a number of witches found themselves brought to the tradition without formal initiation, and the rise of the information era made it increasingly simple to access and share knowledge between individuals and communities.²²⁰ Helen Cornish writes that, “while initiatory covens are still preferred by some, others have embraced solitary or informal group practices. [...] Personified deities remain relevant to many,

²¹⁹ Konold 72.

²²⁰ For more on this topic, see Macha Nightmare and Phyllis W Curott, *Witchcraft and the Web; Weaving Pagan Traditions Online* (Toronto, Ontario: ECW Press, 2001).

but an inspirited landscape is also populated by more animistic and less anthropomorphic inhabitants. Spirits, ancestors, and deities are potentially everywhere, not only when invited into formally prepared ritual spaces.”²²¹ Most Neowiccan practitioners still rely on some traditional Wiccan roots; thus, some still worship the Mother Goddess and the Hornèd God, some do so under specific representations (respecting the duality of divinity, rather than their original Gardnerian forms), but many shifted their focus toward polytheistic views, including deities from other ancient traditions, and stepping away from the binary deities. On this point, Neowiccans disagree on whether “the deities literally exist or are instead symbolic or archetypal figures.”²²² In any cases, Neowiccans inspire their cosmology and mythology from ideas surrounding folk customs (either local or appropriated), human cleverness, and both natural and esoteric magic.²²³ These differences, along with many other points of contention within its associated discourse, is the reason why Neowicca is not a tradition; rather, it is the “none of the above” category of Wicca.

The term “Neowicca” is used here mostly as a way to distinguish the contemporary developments of Wicca against the traditions identified above, but, based on the rhetoric of the community, it also indicates a departure from the initiation rites prescribed by those traditions.²²⁴ Neowiccans are not bound to secrecy by their tradition, like the Gardnerians and the Alexandrians; instead, they are usually self-initiated, without rituals or ceremony, and follow Wicca according to their own perception of reality (rather than from their tradition’s regulations).

²²¹ Helen Cornish, “In Search of the Uncanny: Inspirited Landscapes and Modern Witchcraft.” *Material Religion* 16, no. 4 (2020): 425.

²²² White, 2022.

²²³ See Pearson 2000, 69-70.

²²⁴ See Patti Wigington, “Neowicca Definition & Meaning.” *Learn Religions*.

The most important aspect of spirituality for Neowiccans is not the strict traditional rules of their predecessors, it is the “fluidity of practice: [they] follow a set of beliefs and practices that are adjustable and adaptable to the needs and wants of the practitioner.”²²⁵ Neowiccans are harder to categorize in and of themselves, as they do not have a key figure to relate their spiritual path to (or to transpose from). Rather, they are defined by their syncretic spiritual knowledge and their specific foci within the Craft. There are two broad categories of Neowiccans that are identified in the academic literature, Solitary and Eclectic, although the terms are used relatively interchangeably. Those who found their way into Wicca through their own means, who have not been initiated through a tradition, and who simultaneously adhere to Wicca by themselves typically self-identify as solitary practitioners, but as often as Wiccan (without denominational modifier); on the other hand, those who have been initiated into a tradition, but who have exited their original coven, who have specific views that do not conveniently fit into the formal traditions, and who are not looking to reintegrate a coven under a formal tradition, are called eclectic witches. Thus, Neowicca is an umbrella term to regroup Wiccans from eclectic and solitary lineages that dissociate from the larger traditions, who yet identify their spiritual path as Wicca and themselves as witches. Although “Wicca itself [...] isn't even old enough to have established a ‘neo’ version of anything,”²²⁶ it seems that Neowiccans are proof enough to warrant investigation.

These categories are fluid and without clear boundaries, unlike those that the previous traditions had; practitioners that self-identify under one category might one day identify under another, without it changing the core of their being nor their self-membership in Wicca. These

²²⁵ Patti Wigington, “Neowicca Definition & Meaning.” *Learn Religions*.

²²⁶ Id.

are not categories to be imposed on Wiccans; they are referents or tools to understand their spiritual paths, but not strict classifications.²²⁷

Solitary

“In recent years” Pearson notes “there has been an upsurge in interest in and numbers of solitary witches.”²²⁸ Generally speaking, solitary witches inspire themselves from one of the major Wiccan traditions, but celebrate by themselves, without covens or hierarchical structures—although they usually belong to larger communities of solitary witches, mostly online²²⁹—and do not necessarily adhere to initiatory structures. These solitary traditions are typically self-described, and tend to focus on specific aspects of the Craft, while maintaining a connection to Wicca through the (sometimes perceived) adjacency of spiritual knowledge, in lieu of tradition.

They have little in common with Wiccan history or the myths of feminist witchcraft, but rather regard themselves as the modern version of the cunning man or wise woman. [...] Magic and spells used in this tradition thus tend to be natural, based on a knowledge of herbalism, the phases of the moon, and the seasonal cycle of the earth.²³⁰

Furthermore, solitary Neowiccans do not have ritual specialists. More accurately, every single Neowiccan is a ritual specialist. Whereas High Priestesses are ritual specialists in traditional Wicca (and even in some eclectic Neowiccan covens)—they learn and sometimes create rituals, know the appropriateness of different magical acts, and lead their coven into praxis—solitary

²²⁷ Categorization is an inevitable part of scholarly work: divide and conquer, isolate and study.

²²⁸ Pearson 2002a, 76.

²²⁹ It is important to note that this identification of solitary Witches does not include Wiccans from older traditions that have found themselves temporarily without a coven, since these witches are in the process of finding or founding a new one. Unfortunately, a discussion of the transitional stage from traditional to solitary, and its associated liminality, goes beyond the scope of this paper.

²³⁰ Pearson 2002a, 76. The quote here is, in many aspects, very similar to the one found in Pearson 2000, 69. See footnote 216.

practitioners detach themselves from the three initiatory Masonic degrees, leaving each individual to take the role of their own ritual specialist.

While many types and subtypes of solitary witch exist—each with their own flavor, and each to satisfy a specific need, or a specific type of person or path—there are a few major types of self-described solitary witches: Kitchen witches, Hedge witches, and Crystal witches.²³¹ Nonexhaustive as it is, this list of self-identification labels help to understand some of the more common elements of spiritual knowledge in solitary Wicca. Kitchen witches, as the name might suggest, enact their Craft through cooking and baking, focusing on the magical property of herbs and ingredients, and giving great importance to food and drink offerings, as each ingredient is associated with particular holidays or ritual purpose.²³² “In kitchen witchcraft, meal prep becomes a magical activity. [...] By changing the way you see food preparation and consumption, you can craft practical magic at the stove, in your oven, and at the cutting board.”²³³ Here, the altar becomes secondary and morphic; its essence remains the same, but its location, form, substance, and usage is modified according to one’s need and space. Thus, kitchen witches may “transport” their altar from one environment to another by the simple act of performing or observing their Craft. Hedge witches (also called Hearth and Home witches), on the other hand, wield their Craft to protect their home, focusing on purification and apotropaic rites; their path usually involves focusing on objects used around one’s home, like ritual cleaning (as opposed to ritual cleansing), and the crafting of amulets, talismans, and other tokens (not

²³¹ There are too many self-described categories and subcategories of magical foci to cover all of them here. For the sake of conciseness only three are shared here.

²³² Some of Laura’s practice, for example, seems to be informed by this category of spiritual paths.

²³³ Patti Wigington, “Types of Witches,” *Learn Religions*.

necessarily wearable) for protection.²³⁴ The witch's residence becomes a temple, it is ritually consecrated on a regular basis, and its boundaries (whether a physical hedge or the conceptual edge) are magically sealed and protected. In such instances, the altar acts as the focal point for magical rituals within the temple, which are focused on a holistic understanding of space. Crystal witches, on the other hand, do not focus on space per se; they gather inspiration and power from crystals, rocks, gems, and precious stones, which they manipulate to attract, redirect, amplify, or store magical energy. Each crystal is used for a specific purpose, and each has an associated (yet undivulged) quotient of energy generation, attraction, and refraction.

These categories developed by themselves, through community discussions and engagements, and do not rely on any particular text or historical figure to dictate their tradition or which spiritual knowledge to use; individual spiritual paths come from an amalgamation of other spiritual knowledge—including social constructs and (perceivably) countercultural information—from the practitioners' backgrounds, mostly that of non-traditional Wicca. In this way, solitary Wicca is learned semi-informally: a number of texts of opinion from in-group individuals, including anecdotes of success and failure related to different acts, inform the solitary practitioner, but these texts do not exist under a unified and tailored tradition; they are geographically relevant and culturally tainted by the number of surrounding cultural and spiritual/religious influences, whether digital or physical.²³⁵

²³⁴ See Patti Wigington, "Types of Witches," *Learn Religions*. Amulets are "a protective charm usually worn around the neck or placed in the home, such as an ankh, scarab, udjat eye, charm bracelet or rune. It is distinct from talismans, which are worn to bring benefit rather than protection." (Pearson 2002a, 16.)

²³⁵ The geographical relevance of this type of spiritual knowledge is declining rapidly because of the continuing development of the information era, and especially so since the pandemic. A similar argument could be made for the cultural relevance.

Eclectic

Eclectic witches, in contrast to solitary Wiccans, usually celebrate their holidays in covens, and take inspiration from at least two (sometimes more) pre-axial historical religions, including Norse, Celtic, ancient Egyptian, ancient Greek, and other ancient civilizations' mythologies. These inspirations are usually chosen for their "forgotten" quality; forgotten traditions are considered valid sources of spiritual knowledge based on the view of Wiccan roots as themselves ancient,²³⁶ and in the spirit of the "spiritual revival" of Wicca, itself given legitimacy by Gardner's support for Murray's witch-cult hypothesis.²³⁷

Arguably, the most important point about Eclectic Wicca is its mixed and modified tradition. Eclectic witches "use a blend of beliefs and practices from several different pantheons and traditions. [They] could be [part of] an offshoot of an established tradition of Wicca [...] but with modifications to their practice that make them significantly different from that original tradition."²³⁸ Eclectic witches choose which spiritual knowledge feels natural and good to them, and from which tradition, both Wiccan and non-Wiccan, this knowledge should come. Just like solitary practitioners, they "use a combination of historical sources, information read online, some knowledge from a class they took, and their own personal experience, all rolled together to form one single, practical method of performing rituals and spells."²³⁹ Evidently, then, there is no

²³⁶ E.g., the ancient Egyptian cult to Isis. See, for example, Isis Hathor Coven, "Welcome," last modified 2014.

²³⁷ See Kathryn Rountree, "Transforming Deities: Modern Pagan Projects of Revival and Reinvention," *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 8, no. 2 (2017): 213–36.

²³⁸ Patti Wigington, "Eclectic Wicca." *Learn Religions*.

²³⁹ Patti Wigington, "Types of Witches." *Learn Religions*. Renaude, for example, says that "les invocations, les croyances, c'est différent à chacun. La Wicca c'est ça qui est le *fun*, c'est eclectic, c'est très libre. Il y en a beaucoup qui vont retrouver des choses pour eux, de croire aux dieux celtes ou paganes, ou pas de dieux du tout!" (Renaude, 2022-02-16 Interview 1.) "Invocations, beliefs, it's to each their own. That's what's fun about Wicca, it's eclectic, it's free. Everyone find something for themselves, some believe in the Celtic gods or the Pagan gods, and some believe in no gods at all!"

standard theology in Eclectic Wicca, as each coven or solitary practitioner have their own systems and pantheons. Individual deities “are perceived as expressions or symbols of the divine, usually having a specific area of influence in keeping with their original roles in various pantheons but also taking in modern culture [and] modern needs”.²⁴⁰ Still, some coven grant membership through an initiation ritual, but relations between members of the community are not bound by the Masonic degrees of older traditions, nor is the oath of secrecy maintained. The structures of these relationships are unique to each case; Older members sometimes use the titles High Priest·ess, acolytes, and neophytes, but sometimes go for master and apprentice, or student and teacher.

There are four major differences between eclectic and solitary Neowiccans. The first is their own relation to Wicca. Quite simply, eclectic Wiccans come from initiatory traditions, whereas solitary witches do not. The second is the explanation given to the inclusion of certain spiritual knowledge from non-Wiccan traditions. Eclectics are transparent about the relation of their spiritual knowledge to other spiritual paths, whereas solitaires attune to a more mystical or holistic explanation of spiritual diversity within their path. Thirdly, eclectics are more focused on (self) correct “metaphysical” knowledge—i.e., pantheon, duality, inclusion of other spiritual knowledge—whereas solitaires focus on (self) correct “physical” knowledge —e.g., crystals or herbs.²⁴¹ The fourth resides in their community relations; Both solitaires and eclectics refer to and identify with a larger community in order to learn and produce culture, but the former

²⁴⁰ Pearson 2002a, 69.

²⁴¹ Here, the use of “metaphysical” and “physical” do not denote a rupture or unrelatedness of the two terms. Both perceivable worlds are understood as constantly superposed, in some places and times more than in others; the use of these terms refers to the prevalence of importance given on each world by each category of spiritual paths.

typically performs their celebrations alone (to some exceptions, such as teaching an apprentice, or the occasional group celebration), whereas the latter celebrates both in groups and alone.

Neowiccans are unbothered by these labels, and typically call themselves Wiccans, regardless of their association with other Wiccans or traditions. Witches that have not been initiated into traditional Wicca and who yet belong to eclectic covens do not neatly fit into the categories offered here, but they still call themselves Wiccans or witches. Ultimately, there is one thing that unites Wiccans from all traditions and from all backgrounds, aside from ceremonial magic. One universal constant, one which appears in all traditions, and which all Wiccans agree on: the Wheel of the Year. Incidentally, the fieldwork for this project, detailed below, is centered around observances specific to the Wheel of the Year. Thus, before presenting the research protocols and finding, it holds that it should be presented briefly.

Wheel of the Year

The Wiccan calendar, known as the Wheel of the Year, is divided into twelve solar months, and follows the Gregorian calendar in most aspects of everyday life (i.e., start date in 0 CE, seven days per week, 52 weeks per year, etc.), but its holidays follow both the regular seasonal changes, as well as the moon and the sun cycles; These periods are said to be catalysts of powers.²⁴² The origin of the Wheel of the Year as presented here are somewhat unclear; There are a number of historical and archeological evidence that point to the historicity of some Pre-Christian European agricultural rituals related to the seasonal changes and solar patterns,²⁴³ but

²⁴² Worded in many different ways, this understanding of seasonal changes and planetary events as “catalysts of power” is found in most, if not all, online community resources; my participants agreed, each in their own term, with this broader statement.

²⁴³ See, among others, Hutton 1993. Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain would be of Celtic origin, specifically, whereas the other celebrations are general agricultural and seasonal markers.

the Wiccan format, upheld by later traditions (and most of Neopaganism, for that matter), is a reinvention or reinterpretation of these festivals.²⁴⁴

In the Wiccan calendar, there are two main categories of holidays: Esbats and Sabbats. This distinction was originally coined in Murray's *The Witch-Cult* to "distinguish two types of meetings".²⁴⁵

There were two kinds of assemblies; the one, known as the Sabbath, was the general meeting of all members of the religion; the other, to which I give—on the authority of Estebene de Cambrue—the name Esbat, was only for the special and limited number who carried out the rites and practices of the cult, and was not for the general public.²⁴⁶

Although many have criticized it, both for its origin and for its use,²⁴⁷ the term persisted in the community to differentiate lunar rituals (eventually including other astronomical events, e.g., lunar and solar eclipses) from seasonal and solar rituals. Sabbats, on the other hand, are closely linked with the solar cycles and the seasonal changes and are "based largely on traditional celebrations drawn from different periods of British and Irish history;"²⁴⁸ There are eight Sabbats—Yule, Imbolc, Ostara, Beltane, Litha, Lammas, Mabon, Samhain—each associated with the changing of the seasons, and with equinoxes and solstices. Some traditional Wiccan covens prefer to divide the Sabbats into Greater (Imbolc, Beltane, Lammas, Samhain) and Lesser (Yule, Ostara, Litha, Mabon)—the former celebrate the Earth, in remembrance (and/or practice) of the harvest cycles and quarter days, and the latter celebrate planetary events, such as day length and the associated sunlight and moonlight duration (equinoxes and solstices).²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ See White 2015, "The Wheel of the Year," 131-40.

²⁴⁵ Frew 1998, 42.

²⁴⁶ Murray, 97. Quoted in Frew 1998, 42.

²⁴⁷ See the larger discussion in Frew 1998.

²⁴⁸ White 2022.

²⁴⁹ For more on the Wheel of the Year and individual Sabbats, see Pearson 2000, 317-22.

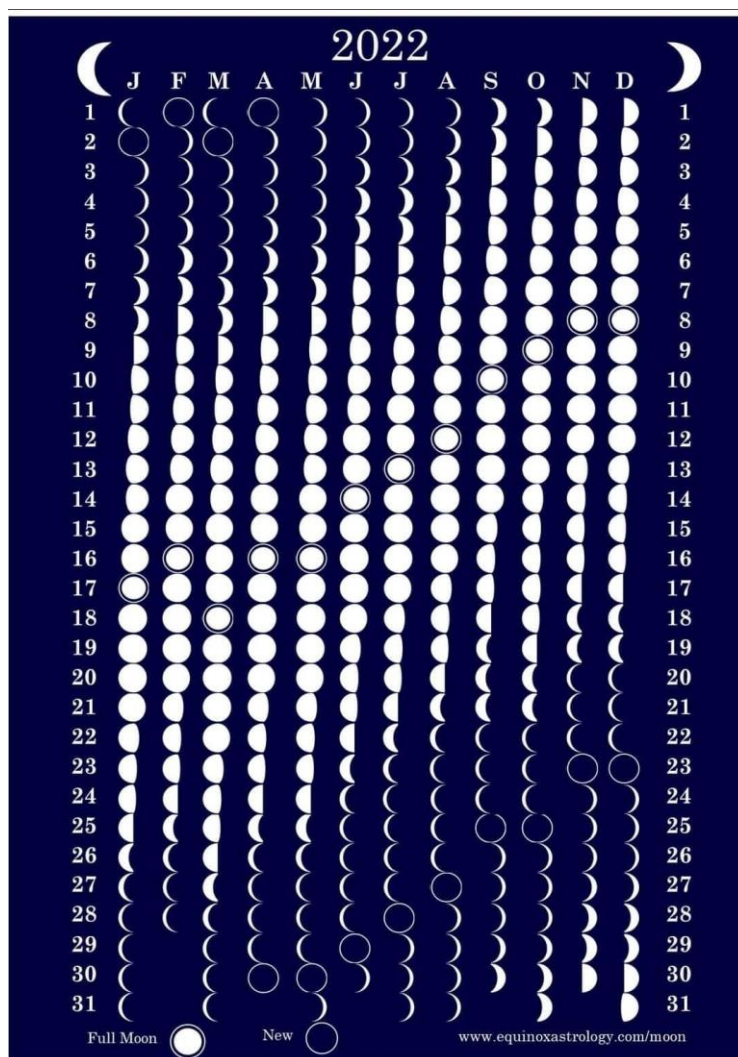


Figure 1: 2022 Moon Calendar. Credits: Robert Currey, *equinoxastrology.com*.

In traditional Wicca, both Gardnerian and Alexandrian, the mythological narrative accompanying the Wheel of the Year revolves around the sacred bond of the God and the Goddess, and on the god/goddess duality: the God is born from the Goddess at Yule, both grow in power at Ostara; The God then impregnates the Goddess at Beltane, both reaching the peak of their power at the Litha. Their power start diminishing at Lughnasadh, and the God passes into the underworld at Samhain, until he is once again born from the Goddess at Yule.²⁵⁰ In the

²⁵⁰ See Drury, 13-80. See also Starhawk, 28-9; 197-213.

Dianic and Reclaiming traditions, the myth associated with the Wheel of the Year disappears with the God, and are replaced with historical links: without the God to be born, to grow up, and to pass on, the myth loses some of its allegorical weight. Instead, the holidays are validated through their pre-Christian historical significance, as they are inspired from ancient traditions, but are not always replicated in their original forms, instead being “an assemblage of materials taken from different sources, all or almost all literary, and put together at a recent date.”²⁵¹ In Neowicca, the myth of the Wheel of the Year simply dissolves, leaving the symbolism without their proper signs. Celebrations share only few resemblances with their historical counterparts, although some symbolism is kept along with the historical names.

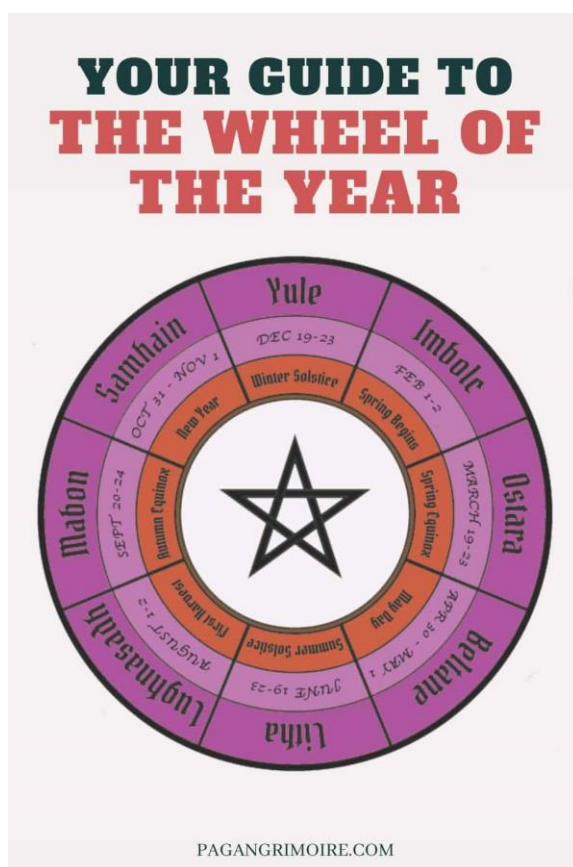


Figure 2: Wheel of the Year. Credits: The Pagan Grimoire, pagangrimoire.com.

²⁵¹ Hutton 2008, 265. See also Drury.

Regardless of ritual and celebratory historicity, these times are regarded as holy, for lack of a better word. The energy of the moon and sun are at their highest, nature is more powerful, supernatural entities are easier to contact, invoke, or solicit. Herb infusions gather special properties when used during certain Esbats, and specific rituals can be accomplished over the course of Sabbats to communicate and bond with deities, to initiate and teach newcomers, to give sacrifices and offerings to the Divine, to request help or guidance from those who look over us all. The rituals performed at these times is a special type of magic, one which has mostly been kept secret under traditional Wicca. With the rise of Neowicca, ceremonial magical rituals practiced over Esbats and Sabbats are more accessible than ever, both through online and in-person communities. Thus, the fieldwork for this project has been centered around Neowiccan ceremonial magical rituals performed during Neowiccan's adherence to the Wheel of the Year.

3. Research Protocols and Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology of the project by explaining the parameters of the fieldwork.²⁵² The data collection was planned for the Gregorian calendar year 2022, but scheduled around a moon calendar, mostly out of convenience and for the opportunity to offer a yearly overview of activities.²⁵³ The ceremonial rituals that were observed are Ostara, Beltane, Litha, Lammas/Lughnasadh, Mabon, Samhain, and Yule.²⁵⁴ Some additional rituals related to the

²⁵² Additional material on the procedures and methodology in effect are offered in appendix A.

²⁵³ Less than one year of observations would not have been as representative as I wished, and more than a year would have been too much data for a project of this magnitude. For the 2022 moon calendar and the Wheel of the Year, see "Wheel of the Year" above.

²⁵⁴ I unfortunately missed the Imbolc celebrations due to health problems, and could not participate and record activities associated with this celebration.

moon cycles were observed; some out of desire to record Esbats, and some out of curiosity (for specific occasions, as explored below).

Through a series of recorded interviews, observations, and debriefs, I hoped to identify and describe the use of ritualized magic in Wiccan ceremonies in three ways; (1) the purpose and intent of the rituals, i.e., the goal of the magical acts, (2) the ORL of Wiccan magic, i.e., how, when, and why the ritual is performed, as well as its perceived effectiveness, and (3) the emotional state and the religious experience associated with one's participation in the ritual. The semi-structured interviews preceded each participant's first observation by a few days, and were centered on the personalized understanding of each participant's spiritual knowledge and path.²⁵⁵ The observations were recorded without my interference through Zoom teleconference; participants were invited to perform in their own time, and were not interacted with until they explicitly signified, verbally or by an agreed upon act (such as a "thumbs-up"), the end of their ritual. Semi-structured debriefs were then conducted, sometimes one or two days after the ritual (depending on participant availabilities), and served to review technical aspects of the ritual observed, but also to discuss metaphysical implications, as well as religious experiences. Further questions that arose during the transcription and analysis processes were addressed in semi-structured follow-up interviews.

This project aimed to recruit participants considered adults in the province of Québec, i.e., at least eighteen years of age. This restriction was linked to the age of legality in the

²⁵⁵ The semi-structured method was chosen over strict questionnaire or unstructured interviews to permit participants to expand on the subjects they found most important, thus granting the study more insight from insiders of the religious movement, while simultaneously covering the questions that I thought necessary in discerning the three elements I was interested in.

province of Québec, which I equated with the responsibility of one's own religious belonging.²⁵⁶

The participant population was not limited by gender or ethnicity, as long as the participants were self-identifying Wiccans and resided within the province of Québec. The participants for this study were to be recruited through social media, specifically through the Facebook group *Montreal Pagan and Wiccan Community*, and happened in two stages (the same method was used, at a later time, for other recruitment pools). The first stage was to contact the administrator of the Facebook page to ask for their consent in making a recruitment call for participants directly in the discussion forum. The second stage consisted of publishing a short text explaining the broader lines of the project and inviting participants to interact with me. Upon communication from the participants, the participants were made aware of the larger scope and details of the project, as well as of the details of the consent form and of a Covid participation form. Although the recruitment campaign was done through Facebook, communication was to be done primarily through emails after the first contact—mostly out of concern for anonymity and confidentiality. In the latter months of 2021, I tested the water for my recruitment process. I first contacted the administrator of *Montreal Pagan and Wiccan Community*, (hereforth: *MPWC*) a private Facebook group of (as the name suggests) Pagan and Wiccan practitioners in the Greater Montreal Area. With their consent, I published a short recruitment post on their discussion forum, but received very little traction. Four people replied on the discussion forum; while most people replied with inquiries and support, I received some private messages from people trying

²⁵⁶ A strong argument could be made that around the fact that the human brain does not fully develop until the age of 25 for most humans, and that this should be the age of legality in most circumstances. See, among others, Sara B. Johnson, et al. "Adolescent maturity and the brain: the promise and pitfalls of neuroscience research in adolescent health policy," *The Journal of adolescent health: official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine* 45, no.3 (2009): 216-21. This debate goes beyond the scope of this paper; for the purpose of simplicity, the legal age of consent in Québec was taken at face value.

to stop me from recruiting Wiccans. Only one person reached out to me via email, offering me some resources to examine as part of my foray into Wicca, although they were ultimately uninterested in participating in the study, feeling that they were too new to Wicca to teach me anything. In the end, nothing more came out of the original Facebook post. Fortunately for me, one of the administrators of the MPWC, Scarlet, offered their help to conduct my study.²⁵⁷

In early 2022, I posted a second ad on MPWC, in the hope that the new year would bring me some new participants. There was exactly zero traction on the Facebook post. Since nothing positive came out of this (other than Scarlet's invitation to her publicly held Esbats), I had to diversify my participant pool. Instead of restricting my participant pool to Wiccan practitioners in Montreal, I broadened the recruitment area to the entirety of the province of Québec, targeting a number of Facebook groups who clearly and explicitly identified their constituents as both Wiccans and Quebecers. While less representative of the development of Wicca in urban settings, it allowed me to recruit participants from a larger spectrum of backgrounds. This brought an additional but important unforeseen change, namely that of working solely with Neowiccans; After interviewing each participant, it became clear that they all, each in their own way, were better categorized as Neowiccans, as will be discussed below. This is not surprising, since the secretive (and somewhat taboo, within Christocentric societies) upbringing of traditional Wicca (e.g., the oath of secrecy) limits its practitioners in broadcasting their spiritual

²⁵⁷ Around the same time, I published a recruitment ad on McGill's Marketplace (also called the Student's Society of McGill University (SSMU) Marketplace). The ad saw an adequate number of visitors, but only attracted some spam emails from other survey and research websites (e.g., Honeybee). I did not see the usefulness of paying for such resources, thus I decided to not pursue these options any further. I published a second recruitment ad In early 2022, at the same time as the second MPWC ad, to no additional success.

knowledge publicly (online), and since Neowiccans are characterized, in part, by their freedom of knowledge distribution.

Regarding anonymity, each participant was assigned a random code name—taken from online lists of popular baby names from recent years, and attributed with a random number generator—and each was offered that their facial and vocal features be blurred from the recorded activities (which only Liam opted for, out of concern for the anonymity of his apprentice). Two specific cases came up regarding anonymity. The first, Renaude, frequently repeated her desire to be named explicitly in the study. When we met in person, she gave me two self-published booklets, and told me to include them in the study. Including her name (as a direct identifier) would remove any possibility of anonymizing her other identifiable data. On the other hand, including material from her published material (either by referring to her under a pseudonym, effectively disconnecting the author from the material, or by vaguely circling the truth) would have been unethical. The second, Scarlet, mentioned their interest in being directly identified in the study, but did not push for it. The issue arose when I had to identify their organisation and publications. Similar issues as Renaude's case arose regarding published material, but another problem became clear: the Crescent Moon School of Magic and Paganism is the largest Wiccan school (opened to the public) in Montréal. Not mentioning the school would be unrepresentative of the Wiccan landscape in Québec, but mentioning the school and not linking it with its founder would be unethical. Thus, I had to renew their consent to participate with a post-facto alteration to their consent. Both participants agreed to have their direct identifiers included in the study.

Thus, the fieldwork for this research was completed in Neowiccan communities, with individual practitioners belonging to either solitary or eclectic forms of the Wiccan tradition. I recruited six participants: Alice, Kelly, Scarlet, Renaude, Laura, and Liam. Below, I present

briefly, and in no particular order, each participant and the activities I undertook with them. A total of 21 observations were made: once for each Sabbat, except Imbolc—with two observations made on Ostara, Beltane, and Litha, one with Liam and one with Laura; two were made as well for Lammas/Lughnasadh, one with Liam and one with Renaude—for a total of 11 Sabbats, in addition to 10 Esbats observations. Although I sometimes participated in ceremonial rituals, I do not self-identify as Wiccan. I position myself as a researcher, with special interest in Wicca, and I try to adopt an emic perspective. My personal faith does not affect my framework and approach, and all participants were made aware of my position as an outsider to Wicca.

4. Research Findings and Discussion of Findings

This chapter presents and analyzes the data from the interviews and observations mentioned above. Further analysis brings these individualized and personalized contexts in conversation with each other, and elements of the spiritual paths studied will be considered within specific, sometimes overlapping, frameworks. Before discussing general trends and observations, it is important to present each participant on their own, and to underline some of their individual comments on particular issues of contemporary Wicca. Each participant is presented briefly, and the activities we performed together are described.²⁵⁸

Possible statistics derived from socio-demographic data are irrelevant, insofar as six Neowiccans from two administrative regions would be unrepresentative of any larger socio-demographic trends. Nevertheless, participants fit larger depictions of Wiccan communities from

²⁵⁸ The majority of participant spoke French. For the sake of readability, their spoken words are presented in English in the main text. These translations are true to the spirit of their original utterances, and smaller quotes are taken in the context of larger questions within the interviews. The original is offered in footnotes.

scholarly writings:²⁵⁹ they predominantly identify as women (85%), and a majority of the participants are from urban areas (50% from the Greater Montreal Area, 35% from other cities), with a minority from villages (15%). All of them are white and of European descent, and are mostly young adults (33% are 18-24, and 33% are 25-34; the remaining is divided equally between 45-54 and 55-64).²⁶⁰ Somewhat representative of the population of Québec in general, 85% of participant preferred French as their language of correspondence.

Alice

Alice (she/her) is an 18-year-old practitioner from the Greater Montreal Area who self-identifies as Wiccan.²⁶¹ She was only interested in being interviewed, thinking her lack of experience and knowledge was unrepresentative of the larger Wiccan community. Although she comes from a predominantly Catholic background, for as long as she can remember, she always had a link with nature.²⁶² One day, a friend of hers initiated her to lithotherapy, the use of crystals and stones for healing purposes,²⁶³ which launched her in a quest for New Age spiritual knowledge. Sometime in the recent past, Alice's mother brought her to a medium, who told Alice that she was "a channel for the spirits who pass on and [that she] had a gift to communicate with spirits."²⁶⁴ Her mother then introduced her to a Reiki master, whom she now sees regularly for spiritual training,

²⁵⁹ See, for example, Gagnon 2003, 57-60.

²⁶⁰ These proportions grow significantly when including tertiary participants, such as apprentices, who are typically (but not necessarily) younger than their teachers.

²⁶¹ All quotes present in the main text under this subheading are taken from 2022-06-06 Alice Interview.

²⁶² For an interesting discussion of the rhetoric of continuity, See Erin F. Johnston, "I Was Always This Way...": Rhetorics of Continuity in Narratives of Conversion," *Sociological Forum* 28, no. 3 (2013): 549-73.

²⁶³ There are no scientific basis for lithotherapy according to academic knowledge. "Of course, due to the unique interactions [...] between each individual endophysiotope and its population commonly shared ecoexotope (Bricage 1997, 2002b), lithotherapy effects are obviously variable in a great range [...] and greater than placebo effects changes". Pierre Bricage, "Use of Chronolithotherapy for Better Individual Healthcare and Welfare," *Journal of Systems Science and Systems Engineering* 26, no. 3 (2017): 352.

²⁶⁴ "un canal pour les esprits qui passent et [qu'elle] avait un don pour communiquer avec les esprits."

guidance, and healing.²⁶⁵ This blend of spiritual knowledge, she considers, is part of her affiliation to Wicca, although she acknowledges that her spiritual path is very different from traditional lineages. She primarily described Wicca as “the link between humanity and nature, and the respect of nature”,²⁶⁶ but most importantly said that Wicca is “very vast, there are no specific beliefs to have. Everyone can make their own mind. [...] It’s adapted to each person, to you, your life experiences, your conditions.”²⁶⁷ Alice’s spiritual path does not include veneration of particular deities, but to an all-encompassing Universe, and to Mother Earth as one of many representations of the Universe. It is with the permission of the Universe that she can use “its resources as [she] sees fit to practice what [she] would call ‘magic’.”²⁶⁸

Like other Wiccans, she follows the Wheel of the Year (giving it importance for its Celtic roots), respects the Wiccan Rede, and has a Book of Shadow, but she did not receive an initiation and does not participate in a coven or a group of like-minded witches. She incorporates spiritual knowledge from a number of other religious and spiritual movements, and has a small group (a close friend and a partner) of Neowiccans with whom to share her spiritual knowledge. They mostly focus their spiritual path on crystals and gemstones, but she also mentioned some of her herbalist practices, such as sprinkling a special herb mix on her pencils in order to attract good luck and success before taking school examinations. Alice does have a main altar in her room, which she regularly fumigates with different incenses, thereby purifying her room and protecting

²⁶⁵ Reiki sells itself as a health science, but this claim has failed to stand to academic investigation. It would be more accurate to classify it as a New Religious Movement. Alice did share some anecdotes about her experience with her Reiki master (see 2022-06-06 Alice Interview). For more on Reiki, see M.S. Lee, M.H. Pittler and E. Ernst, (2008), “Effects of reiki in clinical practice: a systematic review of randomised clinical trials,” *International Journal of Clinical Practice* 62 (2008): 947-954.

²⁶⁶ “Le lien de l’humain avec la nature [et] le respect de la nature.”

²⁶⁷ “Très vaste, il n’y a pas de croyance spécifique à avoir. Tout le monde peut se faire un peu sa propre idée. [...] C’est vraiment adapté à ta personne, à toi, à ton cheminement de vie, à tes conditions.”

²⁶⁸ “Ces ressources à [sa] guise et faire ce [qu’elle] appellerait de la ‘magie’.”

it against negative energies. She uses her altar, a large wooden cabinet, to store her crystals, herbs, and incenses; On it, she crafts protection talismans for her and her close friends,²⁶⁹ and creates “spell jars”, specially made small glass jars filled with numerous symbolic items, sealed with candle wax, and used for magical purposes. She has multiple recipes to crafts a number of these talismans, each containing intentions for its own desired effect, most commonly protection, but also love or self-confidence. They are made to be slept with, under one’s pillow or on a bedside table, or to be carried in one’s pockets or around the neck. In that regard, she understands magic as an action made with intention and toward a specific goal: “You know, if I do a spell jar for self-confidence, and after making it I am more confident in myself, this is the type of thing that I would describe as magic. When I do an action and there is a direct effect on me.”²⁷⁰

Overall, Alice is a solitary witch, whose link to traditional Wicca is softer than most, and who understands her religiosity under terms common to other Neowiccans. Her lack of official initiation and organized coven, combined with the explicit recognition and respect of broader Wiccan tenets and of the spiritual knowledge from numerous non-Wiccan resources, makes her a great example of a crystal witch.

Kelly

Kelly (she/her), 29-year-old, loves celebrating the Sabbats, but often lacks the proper time to celebrate the Esbats; Incidentally, she was only interested in being interviewed.²⁷¹ She was very

²⁶⁹ Talisman

²⁷⁰ “Tsé, si je fais un spell jar pour la confiance en soi, pis après l’avoir fait je vais avoir confiance en moi, ça c’est plus le type de chose que je décrirais comme de la magie. Quand je pose une action et qu’il va avoir un effet direct sur moi.”

²⁷¹ All quotes present in the main text under this subheading are taken from 2022-06-14 Kelly Interview.

open to discuss her spiritual path and personal history, sharing her background in the cultural Catholicism of Québec, her *sortie de la religion*,²⁷² and her foray into Wicca. “I started with divination,²⁷³ then I started to know and learn more about it, but I really only got myself initiated at 16. [...] I modified a ritual, and I followed a rather defined structure, but I like to do things in a way that suits my style, so I am quite free in what I do.”²⁷⁴ She has been in constant learning since then, saying that she experimented a lot by herself, through trial and error, before finding trustable sources of knowledge about Wicca and magic: “Now, I know where to look, how to know right from wrong [information], because there are a lot of things that are... unreliable.”²⁷⁵ Today, she does not participate a coven, self-identifying as a both eclectic and solitary: “Some people have different practices from mine, and that I can conceive, but I chose what I liked best about it. [...] There is no definite model, you decide in which direction you want to go.”²⁷⁶

Kelly belongs to an online community of like-minded witches, and occasionally invites some of her non-Wiccan friends to her celebrations. She tried to teach newcomers to Wicca from her online community, as many were looking for guidance, but eventually gave up on the idea after discovering that most people want teachers to give them answers, not to show them the way of knowledge. For her, Wicca is the manipulation of energies, and is predominantly “based on

²⁷² Marcel Gauchet’s famous conception of the religious exodus of Western Christians away from traditional Christianity. See Marcel Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement Du Monde: Une Histoire Politique De La Religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

²⁷³ Specifically palm reading and tarot readings.

²⁷⁴ “J’ai commencé par faire de la divination, pis après ça j’ai commencé à connaître ça pis à m’informer, mais je me suis vraiment initié à 16 ans. [...] J’ai modifié un rituel, mais j’ai suivi une structure assez définie, mais j’aime ça mettre ça à ma sauce aussi, je suis assez libre de ce que je fais.”

²⁷⁵ “Maintenant, je suis plus capable de savoir où aller chercher le vrai du faux, parce que y’a beaucoup de choses qui sont... boiteux.” The traduction of “*boiteux*” into “unreliable” seemed like a better choice than the literal “lame”; in essence, wobbly or unstable (or even unconstant or discontinuous) would communicate similar meanings.

²⁷⁶ “Y’en a qui ont des pratiques différentes de la mienne, pis je le conçoit, mais moi j’ai choisi ce qui me plaisait le plus là-dedans. [...] Y’a pas un modèle définit, c’est vous qui décidez un peu dans quel alignement vous voulez aller.”

the cycle of the season and on nature.”²⁷⁷ Whatever science cannot explain, she says, can be explained through Wicca. She does not have specific deities that she works with, preferring to call upon them “depending on the vibe”,²⁷⁸ and when she celebrates the Wiccan holidays, she does not have to cast a circle beforehand, because her house (and her altar within it) is already protected and stable, energy-wise.²⁷⁹ Her home has been blessed and sanctified, transforming it into a temple; it is purified regularly through fumigation, and protected by multiple talismans of protection. She often crafts these protection charms, focusing her Craft on the protection of her residence and herself, and writing down her rituals, magical rituals, and enchantments in a Book of Shadow.

Like Alice, Kelly exemplifies Neowicca perfectly; she was self-initiated, does not celebrate with a coven, and yet belongs to a community of like-minded practitioners and follows core Wiccan observances. Her spiritual path is mostly centered around the protection of her home, making her a good example of a hedge witch.

Scarlet

Scarlet (she/them) is a 49-year-old mother of one from Montreal who has been following Wicca since early adulthood from a family tradition.²⁸⁰ In their own words: “Paganism is a nature-based

²⁷⁷ “Basée sur le cycle des saisons et la nature.”

²⁷⁸ “Dépendement de mon feeling.”

²⁷⁹ Magical circles typically delimit the sacred space during rituals. Their usage is common in all Wiccan denominations. “The circle is a magical space delineated by tracing the shape in the air with sword or athame and, sometimes, drawn in chalk on the floor. The casting of the circle symbolically removes the participants from the reality of the ordinary, everyday world (‘the world of men’) into a neutral space in which the Gods can be approached. In Wicca, it is thus spoken of as ‘a boundary between the world of men and the realms of the Mighty Ones.’” (Pearson 2002a, 37-8).

²⁸⁰ They were also my only participant’s whose first language was English.

philosophy of life that some people connect to spiritually (or connect to religiously), but it's not exclusively one or the other."²⁸¹

To me, I don't separate these things, because I grew up with the understanding that everything is sacred, every object is sacred, every human being is sacred, and every action you take should carry this essence of sacredness. Which makes you always think: "Am I doing something with intention, or am I being thoughtless? Is what I'm doing going to be harmful or beneficial?" So, that's part of that "everything is sacred": you take it with that regard. That's how I live my life.²⁸²

They come from a Catholic and Protestant background, but following a religious trauma and their refusal to make confession while on a school trip to a convent, they "started researching women spirituality, [...] feminism, [and] mythologies from all over the world, especially Celtic".²⁸³ These inquiries inspired them to enroll in religion courses in cegep, during which they met a young witch from a family tradition.

While she couldn't initiate me into her tradition, because it's a family tradition, it only gets passed on to girls in her family, she still taught me a number of things and oversaw my first initiation. And so, 1990 was my shift into Paganism and Witchcraft, and within that same year, I found a couple of books, Starhawk's, a book by Susan Budapest, and Scott Cunningham's *Guide to the Solitary Practitioner*.²⁸⁴

They eventually moved on, in adulthood, to Gardnerian Wicca, and were trained as High Priestess of a coven, but has since parted ways to "join" the eclectic tradition, and start their own coven, teaching a spiritual blend of Gardnerian Wicca, Celtic revival, Buddhism, Daoism, and Shinto.²⁸⁵ In their daily life, they blend Gardnerian spiritual knowledge, such as the Fivefold

²⁸¹ 2021-11-22 Scarlet Interview 1.

²⁸² Id.

²⁸³ Ibid, 4.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 5. Although not her own family's tradition, this was still a family tradition that was not denominational. Scarlet's mother, while not Wiccan per se, did have some nature-oriented spiritual knowledge that she passed down to her daughter. I would consider these roots, mixed with spiritual knowledge from a family tradition, as Scarlet's 'family tradition'.

²⁸⁵ Scarlet obtained their Master's degree in religious studies with a focus on East-Asian religions.

Kiss,²⁸⁶ with eclectic ones, such as working with intention in every act and meditating on the spiritual wisdom of their expanded pantheon. Their matron goddess is the Morrigan, “a dark goddess that’s related to the dark moon,”²⁸⁷ and they identify a pantheon of binary deities from various traditions. “Secondarily I have Bridgit²⁸⁸ that [is] also commonly seen as a warrior, standing with a shield and a spear. [...] And then on the male side, I have Cernunnos²⁸⁹ and the Hornèd God, who are hunters, they are warriors in that aspect. [...] My very first deity was Diana,²⁹⁰ who is a warrior goddess. My non-warrior deities are Sophia²⁹¹ and Momiji.”²⁹² They do purposefully identify their deity as “the Divine,” which refers to a single entity whose facets are represented as the named deities themselves, as Gardner’s original theology proposes.

Scarlet is the founder and leader of the Crescent Moon School of Magic and Paganism in Montreal,²⁹³ and through her position as High Priestess, she invited me to assist to her publicly held Esbats, three of which I was able to attend: the Beaver Birch Full Moon, the February New

²⁸⁶ The Five-Fold Kiss is a “Wiccan ritual practice in which the body is kissed on each foot, each knee, the genitals or womb, each breast, and finally the lips. It is derived from the Masonic five true points of fellowship” (Pearson 2002a, 62).

²⁸⁷ 2021-11-22 Scarlet Interview 1. “Goddess of war fury in early Irish tradition, usually spoken of with the definite article, ‘the Mórrígan’. She is part of a trio of war-goddesses called the Mórrígna, with Badb and Macha.” James MacKillop, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), under “Mórrígan”. These three facets of the same deity are sisters, not to be confused with the three facets of the Mother Goddess in Gardnerian Wicca.

²⁸⁸ “Pre-Christian Irish goddess of fire, smithing, fertility, cattle, crops, and poetry.” See MacKillop, under “Brigit”.

²⁸⁹ “An important (perhaps principal) god of the Continental Celts, a lord of nature, animals, fruit, grain, and prosperity.” MacKillop, under “Cernunnos”.

²⁹⁰ “Roman goddess of hunting, chastity, the moon, and open places; counterpart of the Greek Artemis.” MacKillop, under “Diana”.

²⁹¹ Although not a goddess under strict definition, Sophia is presented as the female expression of God in Kabbalah, with roots in Ancient Greek Wisdom tradition (*σοφία*), and most commonly seen in Gnosticism and early Axial Greek philosophical developments. See Michael Williams, “Gnosticism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 3, 2022.

²⁹² 2022-02-10 Scarlet Interview 2. Momiji is a powerful witch in Japanese Folklore, originating from *Momijigari*, a story about a samurai hunting oni during autumn (Momiji is also translates to “maple leaves”) See Matthew Meyer, “Momiji,” last modified 2023. See also Curious Ordinary, “The Tale of Momiji,” *Curious Ordinary – Folklore/Myth/Magic/Art* (blog), n.d.

²⁹³ See Scarlet Jory, “Crescent Moon School of Magic & Paganism.”

Momiji Moon, and the March New Crescent Moon—each name consisting of the month during which the ritual was performed, the cycle of the moon which was being celebrated (or used to channel intention), and either the North American First Nation name for the moon (according to season and month) or the supernatural entity expected to be present. Since these ceremonies were open to the public in virtual space, I was unable to obtain consent from the other members of the circle before recording; thus, I could not record these meetings.²⁹⁴ The structure of the publicly held Esbats, however, remained similar in all three events. These working rituals were centered around one or more values or ideas, which were explained by myth or storytelling, followed by an act through which intention was channelled into an object (in cases when we crafted talismans) or into ourselves (in cases of guided meditations). When asked, we would share our intentions and decisions with the group, and Scarlet would note our answers in their book of shadow, saying “the gods hear our choices.”²⁹⁵ For the Beaver Birch Full Moon Esbat, for example,

We performed a full moon ritual, which is called an Esbat, and it was what we call a working ritual, as opposed to a celebratory ritual. And we were working on two major themes. The first theme being the Beaver moon, which is the Native North-Eastern American naming of the moon. The energy of the beaver is about preparing for hibernation and building up for the winter and self-protection. And then the other theme that we worked on was the birch tree, which was the sacred tree for the first moon of the Celtic year. And November was the first moon of the Celtic lunar year (they start their year right after Samhain or Halloween), so the first full moon that happens after that time. And the birch tree is all about starting new things. So, this was a working ritual to identify the things that we need to do to get us through the winter and to highlight the new projects that we would like to work on. And we embodied that with a craft that we made.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ The following paragraph comes from handwritten notes I took during these events. These notes will be kept with the interview transcript, and are available upon request.

²⁹⁵ Effectively keeping the oathboundness of Wiccan tradition alive, but replacing secrecy for accountability (both to the deities and to the community).

²⁹⁶ 2021-11-22 Scarlet Interview 1.

The beginning of these events was centered around casting the sacred circle, creating sacred space and sacred time through the lighting of candles (representing the presence of the deities in the circle) and incantations (either pre-recorded, from musical artists, or recited by Scarlet themselves), and the ending of these events were focused on closing the sacred circle, giving thanks to our respective deities, and blowing out the candle in sign of closure. During the Esbats, Scarlet had two cameras opened: one centered on themselves, and one aiming at their secondary altar, so that we could see and learn from them. While their primary altar is stable, and contains shrines to the Divine, this secondary altar is used in public Esbats to teach the rudimentary elements and procedures of these rituals to the public.²⁹⁷ Figure 3 shows the secondary altar for the February New Momiji Moon; The table was covered with a tablecloth, on which red maple leaves were set (in the spirit of the Momiji); candles are lit to illustrate the presence of the Divine but also as representative of the element of Fire, incense as that of Air, a seashell for Water, and a rock for Earth. Thus, all four elements are present (five, with the element of Spirit, the Momiji). Scarlet's Book of Shadow takes a center position, as it is the tool with which they would be working in guiding us through this Esbat.

²⁹⁷ Scarlet has multiple shrines to the Divine: "My home [...] already has the Four Corners anchored, what we can call Sacred Pillars for Earth, Air, Fire, Water. Once you cross my threshold, you walk into a temple sort to speak." (2021-11-22 Scarlet Interview 1.)



Figure 3: Scarlet's secondary altar for the February New Momiji Moon

Under the standards listed above, Scarlet's spiritual path sits nicely within Neowicca, as they self-define their spiritual path as eclectic. She had an official initiation into Gardnerian Wicca and belonged to a coven, until she left to pursue her own spiritual path composed of syncretic spiritual knowledge. Most interesting is her founded (proto-)“branch” of Wicca, the Crescent Moon School of Magic and Paganism, whose teachings are slowly permeating the public knowledge available to Wiccans in Québec.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ There are multiple publications available to students at the school; I was able to acquire the learning material for first level initiates. These booklets, 13 in total, cover topics ranging from basic energy work to philosophies of life, and passing by mythology and common practices (both traditional and Eclectic). 1. Basic Energy Work; 2. Introduction to Paganism; 3. Magical Basics; 4. The First Mystery; 5. Basic Ethics & Etiquette; 6. Creative Arts; 7. Éléments, outils, autels et sanctuaires; 8. Moon Lore; 9. Les Sabbat; 10. Health & Healing; 11. The Second Mystery; 12. Intro to Chakras; 13. Connecter à la Divinité. This series of booklet is used by Scarlet when teaching first level initiates at the Crescent School, effectively establishing their own proto-branch of Wicca through this documentation. More advanced material is available to those who chose to follow this spiritual path into second and third levels. Undoubtedly, this material is much more detailed than the original semi-oral, semi-written knowledge of Gardner's tradition, but still takes much inspiration from the Gardnerian tradition.

Renaude

Renaude (she/her) is a 57-year-old mother of three from Centre-Du-Québec. Born and raised in a Christian family, she learned about the Goddess revival movement in early adulthood, at which time she started practicing herbalism and tarot card readings. She developed her knowledge of Neopaganism over the years, and she now lives outside of town, on a farm, where she has ample space to perform her Craft, praying and meditating every day at her altar, and gathering plants from the (easily-accessed) surrounding natural world. She raised her family in the Craft, teaching them astrology and veneration of the Goddess and of the Divine in nature, and her close social circle is very supporting of her spiritual path. Renaude is also known as *Sorcière de Pouvoir*, or *La Renarde*, to her community. She runs a YouTube channel on which she presents her spiritual path as well as offers guidance and teachings,²⁹⁹ she manages an online boutique to provide speciality items to other Wiccans,³⁰⁰ and she self-published two sets of books with oracle decks to bring her spiritual path to her community.³⁰¹ She works mainly with the CelKies,³⁰² powerful womanly spirits inspired from the Selkies of Celtic folklore.³⁰³ There are three categories of

²⁹⁹ See Renaude Savard (Sorcière de Pouvoir), *Sorcière de Pouvoir*, Youtube.

³⁰⁰ See Renaude Savard, *Sorcière de Pouvoir*, last updated 2022. Renaude creates bundles of speciality products (crystals, herbs, oils, herbal teas, etc.) for rituals related to the Wheel of the Year, but also does custom-made bundles for specific purposes such as fertility and protection.

³⁰¹ Oracle decks are similar to tarot decks, but do not contain pejorative, negative, or bad omens. Liam (see below) puts it this way: “I call this beginners cards, because you cannot predict death, you cannot predict a heavy accident with oracle cards. The messages are too positive.” (2022-03-07 New Moon Debrief Liam) “J’appelle ça des cartes de débutant, parce que tu peux pas prédire une mort, tu peux pas prédire un accident grave avec des cartes d’oracle. C’est des messages trop positifs.”

³⁰² The capitalisation CelKies is on purpose, and reproduces the original writing. The “C” is pronounced softly, since the word itself comes from “Celle qui ...”—“She who” (also because of the soft “S” of Selkies). Gaïa, for example is “celle-qui-s’enracine”, “she-who-roots”, and Bridgyt is “celle-qui-bénit”, “she-who-blesses”. Renaude also writes “magie” (magic) as “magye”, in order to “differentiation magic as taking a rabbit out of a hat, illusions and card tricks, from magic, as creator of power.” (Renaude Savard, *Les CelKies*, self-pub., Sorcière de Pouvoir, 2020, 12.) “différencier la magie des lapins sortant d’un chapeau, des illusions et des tours de cartes, d’avec la magye, créatrice de pouvoir.”) This is similar, in some way, to Gardner’s “magick”.

³⁰³ See Sophia Kingshill, and Jennifer Beatrice Westwood, *The Lore of Scotland: A Guide to Scottish Legends* (London: Cornerstone Digital, 2012), 404-5.

CelKies: the Guardians of the World, who protect and guide,³⁰⁴ the Goddesses of Time, who represent the Wheel of the Year and the cosmos,³⁰⁵ and the Powerful Witches, who teach and control magic.³⁰⁶ Each category contains 13 figures, goddesses and spirits inspired from a number of traditions, each with their respective fields and area of expertise or control, but all subordinate to the High Goddess and God.

For her, magic is “a question of intention, of energy and of concentration, and not about the color of candles. To do an efficacious ritual, all you need is to be present, in full consciousness, to focus your energy and to deeply affirm your intention.”³⁰⁷ She gives an example: “I can use plants in a way, which is simply herbalism, herbal tea, compotes. As a matter of fact, I can ritualize these same plants, I energize them, I invoke power over them, and then they become ‘magical’. [...] Plants have magical properties *and* herbal properties.”³⁰⁸ She goes as far as to say that “real magic is first and foremost a question of intention, and *then* of the actions that you will do in function of that intention. The rest is accessory.”³⁰⁹

³⁰⁴ See Savard 2020, 21.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 63.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 107.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 13. “Une question d’intention, d’énergie et de concentration, et non pas de couleurs de bougies ! Pour faire un rituel efficace, il suffit d’être présente, en pleine conscience, de concentrer son énergie et d’affirmer profondément son intention.”

³⁰⁸ 2022-02-16 Renaude Interview 1. “Je peux utiliser les plantes d’une manière, qui est tout simplement en herboristerie, les tisanes, les compotes. Comme de fait, je peux ritualiser ces mêmes plantes, je les énergis, j’invoque le pouvoir sur elles, et à ce moment-là elles deviennent ‘magique’. [...] Les plantes ont des propriétés en magie, *et* ont des propriétés en herboristerie.” This is in reference to the plant’s effect on the body, like chamomile as a natural relaxant, against the spiritual knowledge attributed to the plant by the practitioner. Laura also agreed with this statement.

³⁰⁹ 2022-02-16 Renaude Interview 1. “La vraie magie, c’est d’abord une question d’intention, ensuite d’action que tu vas faire en fonction de cette intention là. Le reste, c’est des accessoires.”



Figure 4: Renaude's Magic Altar

At the end of our interview, she invited me to come visit her residence for a celebration of Lughnasadh, the beginning of the harvest season, with a handful of people from the nearby towns. This is the only ceremony that I was able to attend with her and her community.³¹⁰ I arrived around 9h30 in the morning to a sheep farm in the countryside, about half an hour outside

³¹⁰ While I was able to obtain consent from the other participants present, we had a technical problem with the recording; only the audio was able to be saved, along with a few pictures I took—the video footage was lost. The camera was set up in the wrong way; the only footage available is that of a small garden on a farm, surrounded by large farm equipment.

the city. Renaude was there outside, preparing flower crowns with her adult daughter for the participants that would arrive shortly after me. Among the apple trees was an old metal furnace, upon which were installed a deer skull wearing a flower crown, a metal bracelet, photos of loved ones, and the ceremonial bread (which we were to eat).³¹¹ There was another, smaller metal furnace, in which a fire was burning, and there were also two tables: a picnic table, around which we would gather to discuss and sit in the shade before and after the ceremony, and one ritual table.³¹² The ritual table was dressed with a pink tablecloth, and held the objects we would use during the ritual: a bowl of black witch salt,³¹³ a sage bundle, a glass vial of abundance oil,³¹⁴ a bottle of Moon water,³¹⁵ a golden chalice containing Moon water, Lycopodium spore powder in a plastic jar,³¹⁶ a bowl of seeds and flower buds, a small bell with an anchor-designed handle, as well as some candles and crystals. The four other participants arrived together: One was a young teacher in the nearby city's community, giving courses on divination and other spiritual knowledge at an esoteric shop; The three others were his students. We quickly introduced ourselves before they went to finish building the magic altar; The newly arrived participants added a number of objects on the specially dedicated metal furnace: crystals, rocks, a wand, a feather-tipped miniature broomstick, pictures of and items belonging to loved ones or of those

³¹¹ See figure 4.

³¹² See figure 5.

³¹³ Black witch-salt is a blend of coarse salt with activated charcoal, but is sometimes made with food coloring or ash if it will not be consumed.

³¹⁴ A magical oil to attract abundance and prosperity. It was created from a blend of essential oil, but its composition remains a mystery.

³¹⁵ Water that had been infused with the power of the Moon during an Esbat; According to Renaude, the water was contained in a ceremonial goblet within which an already intention-enchanted quartz resided, so that the gem would amplify the absorption of the Moon energy. The water had been left to gather energy every night for a month, and taken inside during the day. As a note, I capitalize "Moon" solely to underline its magical properties.

³¹⁶ The highly flammable pollen from the lycopodium, also known as clubmoss (a type of short-stemmed fern).

As everyone stood in a circle between the two tables on one axis, and the two furnaces on the other, Renaude went about the exterior of the circle tracing a line of black witch salt around all of us. While doing so, she called upon the protection of the circle, and she ordered negative energies to flee and disperse before us, petitioning the Goddess to witness our gathering. The circle was cast, and the ritual had officially begun.³¹⁸ Renaude picked up the sage bundle and lit it on fire, purifying herself with sage smoke, and inviting us to do the same while passing the bundle to her left. While everyone took their turn fumigating themselves, Renaude talked a bit about Lammas and the traditions: “Lammas, also called Lughnasadh, is the celebration of the first harvests. We celebrate the abundance of harvests by gathering with friends to share a feast. During a ritual, we can then address to the Universe our demands for prosperity for the year!”³¹⁹ Once the sage bundle had been passed back to her, Renaude put it on the smaller metal furnace, leaving it to burn in symbolism for the element of Air. We then engaged in ritual singing, performing a version of “The Earth, The Air, The Fire, The Water, Return” by Libana, an all-woman group known in the community for their inspiring music.³²⁰ Next, Renaude anointed herself with the oil of abundance by rubbing a little drop of oil on her forehead, on her wrists, inside of her elbows, and finally on her neck. Instructing us to do as she did, she handed the oil to her right and told us to put intention into our self-anointment. As we did, she invoked the Goddess and the God, the Angels of Abundance, and her ancestors to come and join us in the

³¹⁸ The presence of the Divine and of the ancestor was implicit in the magic altar, as its constitution was informal, yet its constituents were symbolic. In inviting these entities into the circle, there is an acknowledgement of their already ambient presence (either through individual connection or through the magic altar).

³¹⁹ 2022-07-31 Lammas Renaude. “Lammas, appelée aussi Lughnasadh, est la fête des premières moissons. On célèbre l’abondance des récoltes en se rassemblant entre amis pour partager un festin. Lors d’un rituel, on peut alors adresser à l’univers nos demandes de prospérité pour l’année!”

³²⁰ See Libanamusic, “The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water, Return,” Youtube, video, Feb. 9, 2017. See also See “Libana,” Libana Official Website.

circle, so that we could make our demands to the Universe. As each of us stated our own demands, Renaude thanked us for our demands, fulfilling her role as High Priestess of our circle. She then picked up the Moon water, asked for our consent, and proceeded to go around blessing (sprinkling) us, one by one, with the Moon water from the chalice. As she went counter-clockwise to bless us with the water, the bottle of Moon water passed clockwise, and we all drank from it. Once Renaude was done blessing us, she told us to take a step back, presented us the Lycopodium powder, and threw a handful of it into the fire pit. Flames roared for an instant, burning the powder in a flash; She called on the spirit of Fire, and repeated this maneuver twice more (for a total of three times). We then moved on to the sharing of fresh baked bread; Renaude had baked fresh bread, using ingredients from the farm, and offered each of us a hefty piece of it to symbolize the first harvest of summer grains. There remained one corner of the rustic loaf, which was offered to the fairies and set on the metal altar.³²¹ As we ate the bread, Renaude taught us once more about the tradition of Lughnasadh, subsequently picking up the bowl of seeds and flower buds and throwing three small handfuls toward the center of the circle. Renaude passed the seed bowl to her left, instructing us to do as she did; this would demonstrate to the nature spirits that we have abundance with us, but it would also be a way to share this abundance with them; squirrels, insects, and other small critters would feed on this blend of seeds and flowers in the coming days. Once the bowl came back to her, she threw the remaining seeds in a grand motion, exclaiming “For all!”³²² Finally, Renaude picked up the small bell, rung it a few times, and thanked us all for our presence in the circle. She retraced the circle in the air in front

³²¹ Again, the gift of bread to the fairies through the magic altar, rather than through a ritualized magical act on the working altar or in the circle, is an acknowledgement of their presence and of our respect of them. It implies that supernatural entities are ever present in this material world.

³²² 2022-07-31 Lammas Renaude. “Pour tous!”

of her with her hand, pronouncing that the circle was undone. As the entities and energies dissipated, she instructed us to do as she did in that moment: open our arms in a V-shape toward the sky and bring them inward to our chest, to attract the positive energies, followed by a sweeping motion across the front of our chest from one hip toward the opposing shoulder (on both sides), to chase the negative energies. To mark the end of the ceremony, we held each other's hand in a (now literal, human) circle, and raised our arms in unison threefold.

After the ritual, we reconvened around the working table, and discussed a variety of personal topics (new apartments, new jobs, politics, etc.). One point from the discussions that is worth mentioning is the insistence on openness and inclusivity that the participants prided themselves with. We discussed their position against the more traditional Wiccan lineages, and most of the participants brought up the importance of First Nation and Indigenous spiritual knowledge. They mentioned that the more nature-oriented spirituality of North American Indigenous people inspired them to take a step away from the Christian culture of their ancestors, and toward a nature-based religious movement. Finally, a few of them agreed that the works of Buckland and Cunningham were formative of their spiritual path.

Now, Renaude's spiritual path resembles that of a solitary witch. She never received a formal initiation and never belonged to a coven, which suggests her membership to this new wave of Wicca, and mostly practice by herself, since she lives in a (predominantly Christian) small village in the countryside. She belongs to both online communities and to a small circle of other Wiccans,³²³ identifies the Divine as residing in nature yet has her own pantheon of Goddesses inspired from multiple sources, follows core Wiccan structures (Wheel of the Year,

³²³ Those I met at Lughnasadh do several activities together in the city; Renaude makes the occasional trip into town to participate to fairs and Wiccan markets.

Book of Shadow, Wiccan Rede), and prepares creative and original rituals inspired by symbolism, rather than from tradition. Her entrepreneurship could be a sign of a developing stable source of Wicca spiritual knowledge in Québec, although her published works are not yet stored in large-scale bookstores.

Laura

Laura (she/her) is a 24 witch from Montreal. A student of art and life, she heard of Wicca for the first time at university: “I had a class on cinema and feminism, and the teacher addressed the archetype of the witch in contemporary cinema. And I immediately thought to myself, ‘I want to be that, I want to reclaim my own power’ in this spiritual way. And I did some research afterwards and I ran into Wicca”.³²⁴ Thus, she did not receive formal training in all things magical, and did not pass any initiation; she taught herself what she needed to know through online means, learning about Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca, but ultimately favoring resources made by (and for) other Quebecers.³²⁵ Regardless, she does adhere to the traditional mythology of the binary God and Goddess, she follows the Wheel of the Year closely—although she periodically skips over Esbats due to lack of time and energy—and she performs magical rituals that she prepares in her Book of Shadows. “There is also the practice of magic which is quite important in Wicca. Energy manipulation, centering, grounding. Everything that

³²⁴ 2022-02-13 Interview Laura. “J’avais un cours sur le cinéma et le féminisme, et la prof a abordé l’archétype de la sorcière dans le cinéma actuel. Et je me suis dit tout de suite: ‘je veux être ça, je veux reclaim mon propre pouvoir’ de cette manière spirituelle là. Et j’ai fait quelques recherches par la suite et je suis tombé sur la Wicca”.

³²⁵ Laura mentions the blog “Les Sorcières du Fjord”, but this resource seems to have been deleted since the last time she used it. We tried scouring the internet for it, to no real success.

manipulates energy to reach some esoteric goal.”³²⁶ She meditates every day on the God and Goddess who inhabit her and every living and non-living thing, and takes care of her body in reverence to the Divine. “If Wicca stuck with me, it’s because of I love my God, and I love my Goddess as well.”³²⁷ For her, Wicca is “mostly a personal practice. I never met other Wiccans, but I have a lot of friends who practice witchcraft.”³²⁸

Together, we did a total of eight observations: five Esbats and three Sabbats (Ostara, Beltane, and Litha). For the Esbats, she performed a number of intensive rituals, each for a different purpose: vows of abstinence, cursing someone, blessing and cleansing inanimate objects, enchanting her tattoos, and attracting financial success. When we first met, Laura was tired of short-term connections and was looking for a serious romantic relationship. She thus asked the help of the God and Goddess—first by using the magical energy of salt, sage camomile, and lavender, then by inviting the deities to join her, and finally by praying to them—to help her in a vow of abstinence until she would find a stable partner. During our time working together, Laura also lived with a roommate, who had been intimidated and bullied by their employer for their gender. For our second Esbat, she offered to curse her roommate’s manager to lose his job in retribution to the evil of his ways.³²⁹ Thus, after casting her circle, she wrote an incantation on the back of a printed photo of the manager,³³⁰ cursing him verbally in the

³²⁶ 2022-02-13 Interview Laura. “Il y a aussi la pratique de la magie qui est assez importante dans la Wicca. La manipulation d’énergie, le centrage, le ‘ground-age’. Tout ce qui est manipulation d’énergie pour atteindre un certain bût ésotérique.”

³²⁷ 2022-02-13 Interview Laura. “Si la Wicca est resté avec moi, c’est parce que j’aime mon Dieu, j’aime ma Déesse aussi.”

³²⁸ 2022-02-13 Interview Laura. “surtout une pratique personnelle. J’ai jamais rencontré d’autres Wiccans, mais j’ai beaucoup d’amies qui pratiquent la sorcellerie.”

³²⁹ Most participants in this study presented black magic as relatively taboo and frowned upon in their respective communities. Nevertheless, Laura seemed unconcerned.

³³⁰ “Je te maudit pour ce que tu as fait à [roommate’s name]”. 2022-02-18 Dark Moon Ritual Laura. “I curse you for what you did to [roommate’s name]”.

process,³³¹ and inserted the photo into a green lime cut into an X shape.³³² As she continued to chant the curse continuously as she poured red pepper flakes into the picture,³³³ sealed the object using black candle wax,³³⁴ and wrapped it with red yarn so that it would hold together.³³⁵ I do not know whether this person lost their job or not. For the following Esbat, Laura focused her energy on cleansing the negative energy away—residues from her black magic ritual—using a salt bed and sage smoke. She then blessed two goblets that would be utilised in future rituals, and went on to enchant an amethyst with serenity, so that it would help her keep her vow of abstinence. The enchantment of her tattoos was a rather unique magical act, theoretically speaking; the tattoos themselves became inherent property magical items, but they are physically bound to the person. Thus, for our forth Esbat, Laura started by creating an Oil of Power³³⁶—avocado oil infused with rosemary, nettle, and sage—which she then massaged on some of her tattoos while reciting a prayer to the God. Next, she used a different oil (an Oil of Beauty, crafted at a prior time through similar means but with other ingredients) to massage some of her other tattoos while reciting a prayer to the Goddess. She finished by saying: “With the help of the God and the

³³¹ “Je refuse de te laisser faire plus de mal. Honte à toi. Pour conséquence, tu vas perdre ta job, j’en ai décidé ainsi.” 2022-02-18 Dark Moon Ritual Laura. “I refuse to let you do more harm. Shame on you. As a consequence, you will lose your job, I have decided so.”

³³² “En espérant que la souffrance que cette lime t’apporte va te faire réfléchir aux conséquences de tes gestes.” 2022-02-18 Dark Moon Ritual Laura. “With the wish that the suffering of this green lime makes you reflect on the consequences of your actions.”

³³³ “Par cette poudre de chili, je vais te faire souffrir encore davantage. Tu vas ainsi réfléchir à ce que tu as fait. J’en ai décidé ainsi.” 2022-02-18 Dark Moon Ritual Laura. “By this chili powder, I will make you suffer more. You will reflect on what you did. I have decided so.”

³³⁴ “Finalement, cette chandelle noire va sceller ton sort. Tu souffriras donc longtemps. J’en ai décidé ainsi.” 2022-02-18 Dark Moon Ritual Laura. “Finally, this black candle will seal your fate. You will suffer for a long time. I have decided so.”

³³⁵ “Par cette ficelle rouge encore je scelle ton sort. Tu ne pourras plus te défendre. Ça te fera encore réfléchir aux conséquences de tes gestes. J’en ai décidé ainsi.” 2022-02-18 Dark Moon Ritual Laura. “By this red yarn I seal your fate once more. You will not be able to defend yourself. It will make you reflect on the consequences of your actions. I have decided so.”

³³⁶ “Huile de force, de puissance.” 2022-04-16 Full Moon Enchantements Tattoo Laura.

Goddess, I will become stronger, more powerful, and more beautiful. I have decided so. Thank you.”³³⁷ Summer came along, and Laura, an artist by trade, told me she had landed a place at an art exhibition gallery, and was hoping to sell some paintings. For our final Esbat together, she performed a ritual to attract financial gains related to her paintings. At the end of her ritual, she recited an incantation that summarizes it succinctly:

With this candle, this incense, these oranges, these cinnamons [sticks], this salt, these calendula flowers, this peppermint, these Tarot cards, and my money, I invoke a monetary income of \$400 due to the sale of my paintings by the end of the week. Please. I need to feel valued by my painting. I need it. I invoke the God and the Goddess to help me fill this request. So be it. Thank you.³³⁸

Additionally, Laura invited me to witness three Sabbats with her, namely Ostara, Beltane, and Litha. The ceremonies, in themselves, had a similar structure and essence to the Esbats: Laura cast her sacred circle, meditated, fumigated her sacred space with incense, and then proceeded to perform her ritual, usually by asking her deities for help. When she was done, she thanked the God and the Goddess, at which point the celebration was completed. Interestingly, Laura’s observation of the Wheel of the Year did not include sacrifices and offerings to the Divine per se.³³⁹ In the spirit of rebirth and the renewal that spring brings, Laura celebrated Ostara by focusing on her creativity. She crafted a sigil—a symbol of magical power—on an eggshell, within which soil was packed and a seed was sown. The sigil was composed of a sheaf

³³⁷ 2022-04-16 Full Moon Enchantements Tattoo Laura. “Avec l’aide du Dieux et de la Déesse, je vais devenir plus forte, plus puissante, et plus belle. J’en ai décidé ainsi. Merci.”

³³⁸ 2022-06-14 Full Moon Rituel Financier Laura. “Par cette bougie, cet encens, ces oranges, ces cannelles, le sel, les fleurs de calendule, la menthe poivrée, les cartes de Tarot, et mes sous, j’invoque une rentrée d’argent de 400\$ dû à la vente de mes toiles d’ici la fin de la semaine. S’il-vous-plait. J’ai besoin de me sentir valorisé par ma peinture. J’en ai besoin. J’invoque le Dieu et la Déesse pour qu’ils m’aident à remplir cette demande. Qu’il en soit ainsi. Merci.” I had the chance to meet Laura in person at this exhibit, and I was delighted to learn that her magical ritual worked as intended.

³³⁹ As mentioned above, Laura views her body as a vessel for her Deities. Thus, taking care of it daily is her offering to the God and Goddess.

of wheat, to represent creativity, two crescent moons for femininity, and tree roots for a solid base out of which things will grow.³⁴⁰ The eggshell was to be planted in a larger pot, where the shell would act as a fertilizer; The plant which would emerge from it was to be a symbol of her renewed creativity, growing day after day.



Figure 6: Creativity Sigil on Eggshell

Shortly before Beltane came around, Laura met someone and started a romantic relationship. No longer in need of abstinence, she chose to celebrate Beltane by ritually breaking her vow, and channelling her energy “to ensure a good sex life, a renewal. Like the flowers that bloom in spring, I want to rediscover myself in my sexuality and happiness.”³⁴¹ To do this, she decided to infuse vodka with magical ingredients in order to bring passion, luxury, sensuality, love, energy,

³⁴⁰ See figure 6.

³⁴¹ 2022-05-01 Beltane Laura. “pour assurer une bonne vie sexuelle, un renouveau. Comme les fleurs qui éclosent au printemps, je veux me redécouvrir moi-même dans ma sexualité et dans mon bonheur.”

and a healthy sexual life to those who would drink it. Specifically, she used rose and jasmine smoke (that she trapped inside the jar), apples, pears, orange skins, rose petals, star anis, hibiscus flowers, and cinnamon sticks; these ingredients are not magical in themselves, but each was accompanied by an incantation as she was pouring them in the jar.³⁴² She would repeat similar incantations with slight modifications for each of the elements that were put in the jar (e.g., apple with passion, pear with sensuality). The vodka was left to infuse for a few days before being strained, and was eventually drunk by Laura and her partner. When Litha came around, Laura announced that she was leaving for the summer to live with her parents, and that she was moving to another region of the province to pursue her studies. It was thus our last ceremony together. She also shared that she had been working on creating her own set of tarot cards, one that she would eventually paint herself and use in her practice. During her celebration, she asked the God and Goddess to bless her work, and to give her inspiration to finish it. She fumigated her sketchbook with sage, before thanking the Divines.

Overall, Laura might be the participant who came closest to traditional Wicca, and although she was not initiated and did not belong to a coven, she did follow Gardnerian theology, as well as the more traditional idea of the body as a vessel for the Divine. Her lack of offerings during the rituals is counterweighted by her daily offering of her body to the deities through self-preservation, self-love, and bodily health. Regardless, her veneration of the God and Goddess in

³⁴² E.g., “Je commence avec la pomme, l’élément principal de mon rituel. Pour infuser ma vodka, je te demande de me prêter passion, luxe, et une bonne vie sexuelle. Je te transmets un peu de mon énergie pour m’aider dans cette démarche. Merci.” 2022-05-01 Beltane Laura. “I start with the apple, the principal element of my ritual. To infuse my vodka, I ask you to give me passion, luxury, and a good sex life. I give you a little bit of my energy to help you help me in this process. Thank you.”

solitude, mixed with a preference for local sources of spiritual knowledge over the importance of tradition, is enough evidence to say that Laura was a solitary witch.

Liam

Liam (he/him) is a 25-year-old man from Centre-du-Québec who comes from a very strict Catholic background, and although he later found out about some of his extended family member's esoteric spiritual paths,³⁴³ his blooming sexuality in young adulthood clashed with his family's worldviews, causing him to disconnect from Christianity entirely. In a quest for spiritual meaning, he researched different religions, but did not find what he was looking for until he visited a newly opened esoteric shop whose proprietor introduced him to Wicca. He was invited to witness a Wiccan ritual by a local coven, although he decided not to join due to their insistence on nakedness during ceremonies. From there, he elected to venerate the Divine in nature by himself, inspiring his spiritual path from local sources of spiritual knowledge as well as online research. This reverence changed after a difficult time in his life, at which point he asked the Divine for guidance, and his deities revealed themselves to him. Keeping with the traditional duality, but originating in ancient Greek mythology, Liam's divinities are Hecate and Apollo³⁴⁴—respectively the Goddess of the Moon and the God of the Sun—although he also works closely with nature spirits as well as the spirits of the dead, and occasionally with the

³⁴³ Two of his removed aunts belong to a cult of the Santa Muerte, and that side of the family navigates a variety of esoteric movements. For more on the Santa Muerte, see R. Andrew Chesnut, *Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³⁴⁴ Interestingly (and whether this was intentional or not), Hecate is often represented as one-in-three, like the Gardnerian Moon Goddess. See "Hecate," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, January 3, 2023.

angels and demons of Kabbalah.³⁴⁵ Additionally, Liam believes in the Universe, an external force unrelated to the Divine which maintains cosmic order through both personal and impersonal justice. Like other Neowiccans, he candidly verbalized his syncretism, saying that “Wicca is such a beautiful spirituality, you can take what you want, but you can also leave what you don’t want.”³⁴⁶ For him, Wicca is also about “discovering our power. Because Wicca, at its core, it is intentions, it is magic.”³⁴⁷ He makes use of both magic and divination on a regular basis,³⁴⁸ and it is through oneiromancy that Hecate instructed him to participate in this study. Liam’s spirituality is ever-present in his life. He meditates in front of his altar on a daily basis, and has a very close relationship to his divinities, praying to them—in the form of open conversation—every day.

Compared to before I was in Wicca, [now] all the little things that are going to happen to me I’m going to be more grateful. You know, even finding a dime on the ground, I’m going to say: ‘thank you Hecate for putting this in my way’. Even the negative events—like recently I had a big heartache and everything, and it was really terrible... But I said that to Hecate, I said ‘Thank you for putting this in my way, so I can learn something’.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ Liam also mentioned occasionally working with “les douzes anges de la Kabbale” (“the twelve angels of Kabbalah”) He uses these terms, along with paradise and hell, “not necessarily because I believe in these places, but because its easy to refer to this way. If I say ‘paradis’, everyone will now that I’m speaking of angels and cherubim and whatnot. And if I say ‘hell’, they will understand that I speak of demons.” (2022-07-12 Liam Interview 2.) “Pas nécessairement parce que je crois à ces endroits-là, mais parce que pour moi c’est plus facile de me référer. Si mettent je dis ‘le paradis’, ben tout le monde va comprendre que je parle des anges, des chérubins, tout le kit. Pis si je dis ‘l’enfer’, y vont tous comprendre que ces les démons.” Thus, he uses these terms as cultural referents, more than as titles or name for these entities.

³⁴⁶ 2022-02-21 Full Moon Debrief Liam. “La Wicca, c’est tellement une belle spiritualité, tu peux prendre ce que tu veux, mais tu peux laisser ce que tu veux aussi là.”

³⁴⁷ 2022-02-11 Liam Interview 1. “Découvrir la puissance de soit même. Parce que la Wicca, à la base, c’est des intentions, c’est de la magie”.

³⁴⁸ Liam primarily practices divination through cartomancy and oneiromancy, and occasionally (only during rituals) pyromancy and crystallo-mancy (this last one only during new moon Esbats).

³⁴⁹ 2022-02-11 Liam Interview 1. “Comparé à avant d’être dans la Wicca, toutes les petites choses qui vont m’arriver je vais être plus reconnaissant. Tsé, même trouver un 10 cents à terre je vais dire ‘merci Hécate d’avoir mis ça sur ma route’. Même dans les événements négatifs—là récemment j’ai eu un gros chagrin d’amour pis toute, pis c’était vraiment terrible... Mais j’ai dit ça à Hécate, je lui ai dit ‘Merci de m’avoir mis ça sur mon chemin, pour que j’apprenne quelque chose’.”

Community-wise, Liam offers tarot readings and spiritual guidance consultations, both online and in person, and has recently taken an apprentice (a term he prefers over ‘disciple’ or ‘initiate’). They met through a common friend, and they immediately connected on a deeper level. Since then, they have regular meetings during which she brings him questions about his spiritual path and his trove of spiritual knowledge.



Figure 7: Liam's Altar after the Altar Cleaning Esbat

Liam has a large altar, divided in three portions, for the three parts of his veneration. The left side is dedicated to Apollo; there resides a small statue of his God, along with his offerings to him. Similarly, the right side is dedicated to Hecate, with a statue of the Goddess, along with offerings. In the middle, an area reserved for the Divine in nature and their spirits, sits a massive

selenite—a crystal said to generate, catalyze, and amplify energies—as well as space to work during celebrations. For Liam, “Having an altar to the glory of Hecate or to the glory of Apollo, that makes it so a small part of their energy resides there, and that will make it so this place will be sacred.”³⁵⁰ He typically celebrates alone in his room, which he had purified by a First Nation shaman, who bounded a spirit named Samuel within the room to shield it from negative energies.³⁵¹ Liam speaks mentally to Samuel every day, just like he does his deities, saying that he recognizes when the spirit talks to him whenever he hears a voice different from his own in his head. He delegates protective spiritual measures to him, as the spirit emanates an authoritative and powerful energy, but he doesn’t need to make offerings or to consecrate an altar to it to maintain his relationship with Samuel, since the spirit is bound to the room.³⁵² In his ceremonies, Liam relies on Samuel for energy purification as well whenever he creates a sacred space within his room, as the spirit acts up through the process of fumigation. Regarding protection, Liam also took a number of magical measures to ensure the spiritual well-being of his household. Most interesting among them is the use of railway nails, planted at the four corners of his yard. “Because sometimes, there are negative energies that can come out of homes around us, and sometimes those energies don’t know where to go, so they throw themselves on the first open door. And these nails, they just prevent these energies from coming inside.”³⁵³ Liam also

³⁵⁰ 2022-07-12 Liam Interview 2. “Le fait d’avoir un autel à la gloire d’Hécate ou à la gloire d’Apollon, ben ça va faire en sorte qu’une petite partie de leur énergie va résider-là, pis ça va faire en sorte que ce lieu-là va être sacré.”

³⁵¹ The shaman left instructions to Liam on how to take care of the spirit, and how to maintain the bond once he would pass away. Liam mention feeling the death of the shaman before learning of it, and the spiritual maelstrom of Samuel’s reaction to it.

³⁵² Liam takes care of the protection against negative energies, while Samuel acts as a barrier against spirits or entities.

³⁵³ 2022-07-12 Liam Interview 2. “Parce que des fois, il y a des énergies négatives qui peuvent sortir des résidences autour de chez nous, pis des fois ces énergies-là savent pas où aller en tant que tel, faque ils se garrochent sur la première porte ouverte. Pis ces clous-là, ça fait juste éviter justement qu’on aille pas ces énergies-là qui rentrent.”

installed protective talismans—small cloth bags filled with herbs and minerals such as salt, green aventurine, milk thistle, vervain, and birch bark—near windows and doors, which he recrafts, along with protection sigils, and reinstalls every year around Beltane (given that this holiday represents renewal). He believes that it is important for humans to protect themselves against negative energies, because receiving an attack, so to speak, when unprotected can lead to mental health issues such as mood swings, self-esteem and self-confidence issues, and even depression.³⁵⁴

After our first interview, Liam invited me to celebrate a year's worth of Sabbats with him, which we did in addition to three different Esbats: a full moon ritual, a new moon ritual, and an altar cleaning ritual. The full moon ritual was, ultimately, very similar to his Sabbat celebrations. Since his room is already consecrated, he does not have to cast a sacred circle, instead jumping right away into welcoming the presence of his deities. He offered herbs to his divinities by burning them, renewing his vows of devotions to them, and asking for their blessings. He recited a long incantation, one of his own creations, before giving grace to Hecate and Apollo once more, including this time the spirits of nature. He then presented them with fruits as offerings, and thanked them for their presence. For the new moon Esbat, Liam wanted to make a special request of protection to his deities. Similarly to the full moon ritual, he invited Hecate and Apollo to join him, gave them proper reverence through prayer, incense, and material offerings, and then asked for them to watch over him. Once his veneration was complete, instead of thanking them, he instead addressed them, pleading for justice and for their involvement into the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

³⁵⁴ Liam does remark that not all mental health issues are related to supernatural attacks, only that sometimes they are the catalyzer or the cause. For him, depression itself is not the goal of supernatural attacks, but a side effect of it.

Great deities of war and peace, Moon and Sun. Today, here, on this Black Moon, on this Black Moon of March 2, 2022, I conjure and I banish all forms of malice, all forms of unhealthy desire, all forms of violence. Be they replaced by benevolence, communication, and the spirit of community. I invoke sickness upon all who will fight in the name of injustice. I invoke bad luck upon them. I invoke the evil eye upon them. I invoke restless sleep on them. I invoke sickness on their families. If a soul takes a life, they will have to pay the price. For those who fight for the noble cause, I send them my strength, my energy, my courage. May these brave and courageous soldiers fight the Russian enemy and show them that a country is always very powerful. So with the power of Hecate and the strength of Apollo, I enchant this candle that I have made myself, so that it may try to restore order. I don't expect the war to end tomorrow morning, but I expect the children, the women, and the innocent men to stop dying. We all know that this cause is unjustified, that this invasion is unjustified. So with your help, you—two great gods, goddesses: Let the breath of death stop. Let peace return. And let injustice be overcome. At the end of that road, we have to find a possible solution. The solution would be for people to stop suffering. But you, deities of balance, I know you're doing the right thing, so whatever you want, I'll respect it. So as long as this candle burns, my intentions, my words, and my energies will go where they are needed. And if one day I have to fight in this war (we hope not), I will fight on behalf of my country. So, I leave you this candle. Thank you in advance for any action you will take.³⁵⁵

Both a curse against the Russian military and an incantation of protection toward the civilians of the warzone, this prayer was accompanied by a homemade ritual candle (infused with magically enhanced oils and herbs, and crafted during a prior Esbat), which was to burn for 40 hours. He

³⁵⁵ 2022-03-02 New Moon Liam. “Grandes divinités de la guerre et de la paix, Lune et Soleil. Aujourd’hui, ici, en cette Lune Noire, en cette Lune Noire du 2 Mars 2022, je conjure et je bannis toutes formes de malice, toutes formes de désir malsain, toutes formes de violence. Qu’elles soit remplacée par la bienveillance, par la communication, et l’esprit de communauté. J’invoque, sur tous ceux qui combattront au nom de l’injustice, la maladie. J’invoque sur eux la malchance. J’invoque sur eux le mauvais oeil. J’invoque sur eux un sommeil agité. J’invoque sur eux la maladie dans leur famille. Si une âme enlève une vie, elles devront payer le prix. Pour ceux qui se battent pour la noble cause, je leur envoie ma force, mon énergie, mon courage. Que ces soldats, courageux et valeureux, puissent combattre l’ennemie Russe, et leur montrer que un pays est toujours très puissant. Donc, avec la puissance d’Hécate et la force d’Apollon, j’enchanté cette bougie actuelle faite par moi-même, pour qu’elle puisse essayer de rétablir l’ordre. Je m’attends pas à ce que demain matin la guerre s’arrête, mais je m’attends à ce que les enfants, les femmes, et les hommes innocents arrête de mourir. Nous savons tous que cette cause est injustifié, que cette invasion est injustifié. Donc, avec votre aide, vous—deux grands dieux, déesses: Que le souffle de la mort arrête. Que la paix revienne. Et que l’injustice soit vaincu. Au bout de ce chemin, y faut qu’on trouve une solution possible. La solution serait que les gens arrêtent de souffrir. Mais vous, divinités d’égalité, je sais que vous faite le bon choix, donc, peu importe votre volonté, je la respecterais. Donc, tant que cette chandelle brulera, mes intentions, mes paroles, et mes énergies iront à l’endroit où elles seront nécessaire. Et si un jour j’ai à combattre dans cette guerre (on espère que non), je combattrai au nom de mon pays. Donc, je vous laisse cette bougie-là. Je vous remercie d’avance pour toute action que vous allez effectuer.” I translated “divinité d’égalité” into “deities of balance”, because the implication is not equality or equality, but justice (and the balance thereof).

then recited an incantation from his Book of Shadow, and finished his ritual by thanking the Divine. The third Esbat Liam and I did together was an altar cleaning ritual. Liam deconstructed his altar—leaving the furniture bare, hand washing his altar cloth with moon water and salt, dusting the statues, cleaning the crystals—and reconstructed it in a ritualized way, praying and dialoguing with his deities, and exposing his methods and thought processes as he went along. He reconsecrated each part of his altar to his deities and to the spirits of nature, offering them crystals, flowers, and other symbolic materials. He finished by including symbolic items for the four elements, and giving thanks to his deities.

Now, Liam invited me to follow his observances and complete a cycle of the Wheel of the Year with him, which we tried to do; unfortunately, we were not able to celebrate Imbolc together. Nevertheless, we celebrated the seven other Sabbats. The celebrations were structurally similar to one another—with the themes, offerings, and demands changing according to the Sabbat in question. At Ostara, for example, the theme was the return of light and of longer days that come with spring, the contemplation of new life that emerge once more after the long sleep of winter, and the forethought of things to come (with the spirit of agriculture in mind, of planting grains for the summer). Liam offered milk and honey to Apollo and cinnamon sticks to Hecate; these respective offerings had revealed themselves to him in a dream the night before. He then demanded that his deities imbue their power into a specially brewed tea of magical ingredients, to transform it into a liquid “bearer of love, strength, health, friendship, and protection toward enemies.”³⁵⁶ In contrast, Mabon’s theme was the return of longer nights, the moment of the year to get rid of unnecessary burdens in order to prepare for the harsher months,

³⁵⁶ 2022-03-21 Ostara Liam. “porteuse d’amour, de force, de santé, d’amour, d’amitié, et de protection envers les ennemis.”

and a time of thanks to the Divine for a bountiful harvest. Liam offered wheat and apples, two products that are harvested around that time of the year, as well as homemade pastries, and demanded help from Apollo and Hecate to erase certain energy-consuming aspects of his (social) life. To do so, he wrote a list of things on a piece of paper, which he then ripped in half and burned using candles situated in front of each divinity's statue.

<u>Order of ritual phases for each Sabbat observation with Liam</u>							
Ceremonial Ritual Phases	Ostara	Beltane	Litha	Lammas	Mabon	Samhain	Yule
Purification of sacred space.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Invitation/thanking of deities and spirits.	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
Offerings (with explanations).	3	4	4	2	3	3	3
Demands (with magical practice).	4	3	3	—	4	4	4
Thanking of deities (closure).	5	5	5	3	5	5	5

Figure 8: Order of ritual phases for each Sabbats observation with Liam.

Each celebration started with the purification of the sacred space, usually through fumigation of different incenses (sometimes in combination with sound bowls or enchanted perfumes as well), followed by inviting the deities and the spirits to the celebration and thanking them for their presence. Liam then explained the signification of the Sabbat and of its theme in relation to the offerings he was about to give. As he presented the offerings, he would pray and give thanks to his deities, followed by a demand to them (also in relation to the Sabbat's theme), enacted in the form of a magical ritual. He always finished by thanking the divinities, and re-purifying the space through the same methods he had used earlier on. A few exceptions to this ritual structure occurred, as shown in Figure 8. Both at Beltane and Litha, demands were made before the offerings. This might be, for the former, that the demands were analogous to those of prior years; as mentioned above, Liam reinforces the magical protections of his household every Beltane, and would thus have been eager and confident about his demands. Similarly for the latter, the matter of protection played a central role, as he asked his Deities to bless the railroad nails at Litha. Both of these ceremonial magical rituals were apotropaic by inherent property, and

temporally ambiguous, which is indicative of the special significance given by Liam to magical and spiritual protection, as mentioned above.³⁵⁷ At Lammas, Liam's apprentice was present in order to learn how to celebrate the Sabbats properly; thus, both the purification of the sacred space and the initial thanking of the Divine were simultaneous, and so were the explanations of the Sabbat's theme and the offerings. They decided not to make any demands, since Hecate and Apollo are Liam's personal deities, and his apprentice do not typically work with them. These alterations to the structure of ceremonial magical rituals demonstrate that the structure itself is important, in regard to efficacy, only insofar as the sacred space's temporal thresholds are respected. It also indicated that the presence of the core elements of the ritual structure is more important than their order of operation.

Generally speaking, Liam is perhaps the closest participant to Alexandrian Wicca due to his inclusion of Kabbalistic knowledge, and to his witnessing of a Wiccan ritual as a neophyte of sorts, although he is ultimately better categorised as a solitary Wiccan since neither of these elements feature predominantly in his spiritual path. Liam did not receive an initiation into traditional Wicca and does not celebrate with a coven, and he does not maintain the traditional oath of secrecy, although he does adopt Wiccan spiritual knowledge such as the Wiccan Rede. His personal deities, while binary, are taken from ancient Greek mythology, but his larger 'pantheon' of supernatural entities includes the Divine in nature, in the form of forest spirits, as well as the spirits of the dead, and Samuel, a personal spirit of protection. His celebrations follow certain ceremonial guidelines, but his rituals and offerings, inspired from syncretic sources, are

³⁵⁷ I say temporally ambiguous here because, while the ritual is conducted with a proactive goal (the protection, from this point onward, of the household), it is also reactive (at Beltane) to Liam's perception of the decrease in effectiveness of other apotropaic amulets previously crafted or (at Litha) to Liam's affect of ambient magical energies of his neighborhood.

self-created and self-significant; their meaning and meaning-making methods are not abstracted from lineal authority figures.³⁵⁸ He typically perform rituals alone in his room and sometimes outdoors, and shows signs of an experimented witch on the topic of hedge, crystal, and kitchen witchcraft, demonstrating the fluidity of Neowiccans' spiritual paths.

Conclusion

While it remains unclear how much importance Gardner, Sanders, Budapest, or Starhawk placed on intention as the key aspect of magical rituals, all participants agreed that intention is at the center of their individual magical acts, and that magical energy is something that can be physically felt. Scarlet puts it this way: "If we think of magic as non-gendered, non-colored (it doesn't have those things to it), magic is just an energy that we can connect to, that we manipulate, and bend with our will, and fill it with our intentions in order to achieve a particular goal."³⁵⁹ Agreeing with Scarlet, Kelly puts it this way: "We really are a conduit. Because energy is everywhere. It travels in the ambient air, and in the environment around you quite easily, but you are a channel toward the goal of energy."³⁶⁰ Magical energy is also spoken about in terms of resources; Liam expressed it in terms of (re)charging, (re)directing, and discharging, and in terms of high and low amounts, as well as strong and less strong (but never weak)—as a quantifiable

³⁵⁸ He quantified it this way: "75% of it are my personal creations" (2022-02-21 Full Moon Debrief Liam), saying the rest is standard information such as the phases of the moon, and the cycles of the season (which can hardly be, he agreed, created anew). "75% du stock est là parce que c'est des créations personnelles".

³⁵⁹ 2021-11-22 Scarlet Interview 1.

³⁶⁰ 2022-06-14 Kelly Interview. "On est vraiment un canaliseur. Parce que de l'énergie, y'en a partout. Ça se promène dans l'air ambient, pis dans l'environnement autour de toi assez facilement, mais toi t'es un canaliseur vers le but de l'énergie."

object of thought that is yet impossible to measure precisely.³⁶¹ Both Liam and Kelly described the feeling of energy manipulation like a magnetic field around their hands.³⁶² Similarly, Laura insists that magic is only magical when it is the manipulation of energy with intention, when there is a clear goal to the (ritualized) magical act.³⁶³ Spiritual knowledge of the specific impact of particular ritual elements were highly varied; Laura and Liam stated the importance of the color of candles for specific rituals, for example, while Renaude denied the significance of color in her rituals.³⁶⁴ The key element, all agreed, is the intention behind the act or the choice.

Obviously, six Neowiccans are not representative of the larger (Neo)Wiccan community, nor of particular regional differences. Additionally, only customs related to the Wheel of the Year have

³⁶¹ E.g., “When the moon is waxing—from the new moon to the full moon—that’s where the energies recharge. So I tend to take out my crystals, take out my work tools, clean my altar, give offerings. And when you go from the full moon to the new moon—the waning moon—that’s where you’re going to purify. So if I ever have objects that are too negatively charged, I will put them outside, and the energy of the moon will empty them, so that in the next cycle I will be able to recharge them.” (2022-02-11 Liam Interview 1.) “Quand la lune est montante—dans le fond de nouvelle à pleine lune—c’est là que les énergies rechargent. Faque je vais avoir tendance à sortir mes cristaux, sortir mes outils de travail, nettoyer mon autel, donner des offrandes. Pis quand on passe de la pleine lune à la nouvelle lune—la lune descendante—c’est là qu’on va purifier. Faque si jamais j’ai des objets qui sont trop chargé négativement, je vais les mettre à l’extérieur, pis l’énergie de la lune va les vider, comme ça au prochain cycle je vais pouvoir les recharger.”

³⁶² Kelly said: “I feel like my hands are magnetized, energy is really everywhere and I feel it.” 2022-06-14 Kelly Interview. “J’ai l’impression que mes mains sont magnétisées, vraiment que l’énergies est partout et je la sent.” Liam said: “The vibration, you’re going to feel it deep inside you, and an energy is a feeling that’s going to be around your being, it’s not going to be something inside.” 2022-07-12 Liam Interview 2. “la vibration, tu vas la ressentir au fond de toi vraiment au plus profond, pis une énergie c’est une sensation qui va être autour de ton être, ça seras pas quelque chose à l’intérieur.”

³⁶³ Laura answered yes when asked “Do you consider the use of an orange candle to help your creative process as magical work?” (“Est-ce que tu considères l’utilisation d’une bougie orange pour aider ton processus créatif comme du travail magique?”), but answered no to “Do you consider your tea drinking ritual as magical work?” (“Est-ce que ton rituel de consommation du thé tu considères ça comme du travail magique aussi?”), saying that she “does not necessarily manipulate energy while doing this [tea drinking]. It’s more about réflexion and meditation than magic in particular. Because when I light an orange candle, I mark the start and the end of an artistic ritual. But when I drink tea, I’m only thinking to myself, I don’t have a goal in that regard.” (“Je manipule pas nécessairement d’énergie en faisant ça. C’est plus un travail de réflexion et de méditation qu’un travail magique en particulier. Parce que quand j’allume ma bougie orange, c’est peut-être juste allumer une bougie, mais je marque un début et une fin d’un rituel artistique, en gros. Tandis que, quand je bois mon thé, je fais juste réfléchir à moi-même, j’ai pas un but par rapport à ça en particulier.”) (2022-02-13 Interview Laura).

³⁶⁴ Although she does agree that color plays a role on our psychological perception of things, and insists that each have their own practice, thus that giving importance to such elements is acceptable and expected.

been addressed here, and although some participants discussed other topics in various depths, the focus of interactions always came back to ceremonial magical rituals.

At its inception, Gardnerian Wicca is inspired by a number of religious traditions, most importantly South and Southeastern Asian traditions as well as European Esotericism, and has been in constant development ever since its founding in the early 20th century.³⁶⁵ Traditional Wicca, namely Gardnerian and Alexandrian, has been overshadowed in North America by both Dianic and Reclaiming Wicca, two branches of the tradition that focus on social justice and feminism, incidentally sparking a revolution of the popular understanding of Wicca. These changes encouraged the Wiccan community to grow more inclusive of various minority groups and more syncretic with other religious and cultural influences. Today, we observe the pinnacle of this prospering movement in North America: the loss of traditional Wiccan lineage authority and group structures, with the simultaneous adherence to other overarching Wiccan structures, and the gain of syncretic spiritual knowledge. This, in turn, divorces some newly (un)initiated Wiccans from traditional Witchcraft. There is thus a need to better understand this new wave of Wiccan practitioners, which I (conveniently) call Neowiccans. While Wicca is too recent to have a neo- form of itself, especially under academic definitions of new religious movements, it is impossible to deny the differences between Gardner's original vision and 21st century Neowiccans in Québec.

³⁶⁵ European Esotericism has not been treated directly in this project out of concern for conciseness. Some resources that were considered are found in footnotes 25 and 130. Some scholars, such as Hutton and Heselton, offer more extensive reviews of European Esoteric influences on Gardner's personal life and his theology. An investigation of the role of Esotericism in Neowicca would be an interesting avenue of inquiry. Admittedly, other Gardnerian Wiccan roots have not been covered in much depth as well, since other prominent authors focus on this elsewhere.

In order to better understand this group, I have interviewed six self-identified Wiccans who do not identify with the traditional forms of Wicca. These interviews led, in four instances, to field observations of ceremonial magical rituals. These interviews and observations reveal that Neowicca could, in fact, be considered as a separate movement from other Wiccan traditions. Furthermore, the analysis of these field observations unveils a common structure to ceremonial magical ritual among the four observed participants, who did not know each other, who live in different regions, and who come from a variety of white Quebecer backgrounds. This implies that Neowicca, while new and relatively undefined, has a core structure underlying its ceremonial magical rituals, one that can be associated with other traditional forms of Wicca. Given the fluid nature of the movement, little can be said about rituals in Neowicca other than their structure is usually composed of an introduction, a particular devotional element, and a conclusion. Much more can be said, on the other hand, about ceremonial magic in ritual settings. Either in the form of Sabbats or Esbats, Wiccan magical ceremonial rituals are a unique model of (religio-)magical acts aimed at impacting, either implicitly or explicitly, both in- and out-group individuals. They require preparations—both of the physical and metaphysical perceptions of the self—as well as an appropriate knowledge of intentions, visualization, symbolism, divine power, and cosmic sympathy, and of the interactions thereof and therein.

On the other hand, the diversity of spiritual paths and of sources of spiritual knowledge among participants in this study demonstrates the lack of established theological and methodological core within this new wave of Wicca (at least in Québec), and points toward an absence of general structure, both in terms of spiritual knowledge and path. This is exactly what enticed all of the participants: the syncretic aspect of (Neo)Wicca. Nevertheless all participants followed the Wheel of the Year, performed ceremonial magical rituals during Esbats and

Sabbats, and had a Book of Shadow to write their personalized incantations, rituals, and observations—all of which are devotional elements present in traditional Wicca. They all identified North American First Nations as one of their sources of spiritual knowledge that supports their spiritual path, all mentioned practicing meditation and ritual purification, and they all, in their own way, recognized the Divine with nature. It is evident that traditional Wicca remains at the center of Neowicca, yet the core theologies and mythologies of older denominations are either modified or discarded on an individual level, effectively qualifying each personal path as pertaining to a larger contemporary movement of Wiccan religiosity.

Further work on Neowicca needs to be completed in order to increase awareness of this new religious movement, and should definitely include a redefinition of what “coven” means in Neowicca. The formal definition of a coven necessitates initiation and regular meetings, and Neowiccans are either uninitiated or unaffiliated to formal traditions;³⁶⁶ In cases like Renaude’s or Scarlet’s (and even Liam’s), ceremonies are sometimes (but not always) performed in groups of uninitiated Wiccans who self-identify under similar, overlapping, or identical spiritual path. Further research on socio-spiritual bonding, consistency of group interactions, and group-structures modelling would be an interesting next step. Additionally, one of the most fruitful avenues of scholarly inquiry on Neowicca in Québec might be every participant identified North American Indigenous spiritual knowledge as formative or constitutive of their individual spiritual paths. Whether this is lip service, appropriation, or appreciation is yet to be determined; Colonialism and its (ongoing) ramifications was not addressed in the interviews, and neither was the issue of cultural appropriation. As an oversight, the participants were not asked for their

³⁶⁶ “group[s] of witches who have been initiated into a tradition of Wicca or witchcraft and meet regularly for religious festivals and for training.” (Pearson 2002a, 42).

positionality, nor about their self-consciousness regarding the syncretic nature of their spiritual path. To what extent North American Indigenous spiritual knowledge is decontextualized in Quebecers' Neowicca, or whether the superposition of spiritual knowledge reproduces—directly or indirectly—a pattern of colonial privilege and supremacy over local and Indigenous spiritualities, was not addressed properly.³⁶⁷ There is also some evidence that point toward the participants' self-understanding of religion as Protestant-centric, most probably due to the cultural Catholicism in Québec. This is interesting, given the Christian background of individual practitioners, the cultural Catholicism of Québec, and the acknowledgement (by the participants) of the influences of Indigenous cosmologies on their spiritual path. These issues must be addressed directly in future studies that work closely with this community.

Some other questions still remain unanswered: Is this a trend unique to Québec? Probably not. Preliminary evidence from non-academic sources such as blogs and social media seem to indicate that Neowicca is growing in popularity in North America, and Canadian Census data show a slight (if minimal) rise in popularity of Wicca in general. Whether this is the case in

³⁶⁷ Some works that point toward a need for such an inquiry include Zwissler and Magliocco 2009. See also Kathryn Gottlieb, "Cultural Appropriation in Contemporary Neopaganism and Witchcraft" (Honors thesis, University of Maine, 2017). See also Rachel M. Park, "Cultural Appropriation or Religious Syncretism? An Analysis of the 'Tarot of the Orishas'" (Honors thesis, Arcadia University, 2022). See also Harvard Divinity School, "Cultural Appropriation in Neopagan and New Age Religions: A Conversation with Sabina Magliocco," YouTube, video, Dec. 14, 2021. See also Helen Berger, "Sage, sacred to Native Americans, is being used in purification rituals, raising issues of cultural appropriation," *The Conversation online*, Feb. 23, 2023. See also Andrei Znamenski, "Sources of Inspiration: From Native Americana to European Pagan Folklore," in *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and Western Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also Myke Johnson, "Wanting to Be Indian: When Spiritual Searching Turns to Cultural Theft," in *Belief beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age*, 277-93, ed. Joanne Pearson (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002). See also Susan Mumm, "Aspirational Indians: North American Indigenous Religions and the New Age," in *Belief beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age*, 103-31, ed. Joanne Pearson (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002).

For some readings on colonialism and religious studies, I point the reader toward Masuzawa (see espec. chapt. 9, "The Question of Hegemony"). See also An Yountae, and Eleanor Craig (eds.), *Beyond Man : Race, Coloniality, and Philosophy of Religion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021). See also Walter Mignolo, and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality : Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

England is unclear and would require further investigation. Is this a trend unique to Wicca?

Again, probably not. Neopaganism is already somewhat syncretic in its creation/revival, and is not impervious to other religious influences. Will the increase in Neowiccan activities and eventual (i.e., inevitable) mediatization have a serious impact on traditional Wicca? That much is clear, yes. History has shown, within Wicca but also elsewhere, that new religious movements and new sects of established religions created cultural changes. Whether traditional Wiccans will gatekeep their religion from those who “borrow” their name or call for more inclusivity and transparency within their rank remains to be seen.

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Appendix

For the sake of conciseness, interview and observation transcripts are not included here. All transcripts and external notes are available upon request. Please submit your request before May 1st 2030, at which date all transcripts related to this project will be deleted according to McGill University's *Regulation on the Conduct of Research*, under the provisions of article 4.6.1, and according to SSHRC's *Research Data Archiving Policy*. Send an email to Alexandre Duceppe-Lenoir at alexandre.duceppe-lenoir@mail.mcgill.ca or at a.duceppe@hotmail.com for additional details on how to access the transcripts of activities.

Appendix A: Additional Details on Research Protocols and Methodology

With the completion of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS 2: CORE 2022) and the acquisition of the Research Ethics Boards' *Approval for Research Involving Human Participants* (which was eventually renewed according to ethical and academic standards in order to conclude the scheduled fieldwork), I was ready to start my recruitment process.

Originally, the project was planned as bimodal with an inclination toward in-person activities; All interviews and observations were to be conducted in person, unless health safety restrictions could not be respected, in which case activities would be conducted through Zoom, or simply postponed. As the data collection started, it became clear that most of the activities would be conducted virtually because of the ongoing health crisis, and because of the expansion of the participant pool. The only possibility for doing in-person activities would be those performed outdoors—thus, only during late spring, summer, and early autumn.

All activities were thus audio-recorded through Zoom, which facilitated the transcription of interviews, debriefs, and other discussions—both for analysis purposes and to improve the questionnaires themselves. In addition to being audio-recorded, observation sessions were video-recorded to permit reviewing of the technical aspects of the rituals that might have been missed during the original ceremony. The interviews and the debriefs were not filmed for two reasons (although, because of the nature of Zoom, recordings of interviews and debriefs were audio- and video-recorded at the same time, but the video-recordings were deleted at once, while the audio-recordings were kept). First, I did not consider it informative to the data set. In the instances that the participants would show something of interest to the camera during the interviews, I would sketch it in my notebook and ask for a verbal description of the object (which would then be

written in the transcript). Otherwise, having video recordings of participants' faces seemed unimportant to the goal of the project, and would not have added additional useful information which was not already audio-recorded. Second, it presents less of a risk for anonymity.³⁶⁸ Regardless of the precautions I took in protecting the data, keeping video recordings of participants' facial features (and of their rooms in the background of the recordings) seemed like an unnecessary risk to their anonymity. For transcription purposes, direct identifiers of anecdotal mentions and tertiary participants (such as names and places) were redacted, and place of residence was recorded through region (instead of city).

Another important change to the original methodology was made shortly after the beginning of the fieldwork. Originally, the plan was to perform the three activities one after the other (interview, then observation, then debrief). This would have been ideal because the interview would have provided a relevant context for the observation, and because performing the debrief directly after the observation was the best time to discuss emotional states of religious experiences. In practice, partly due to the activities being virtual, this was not the case. Interviews took much longer than anticipated; participants were eager to share their personal stories and to teach their spiritual path (and maybe even just to socialize during a time of restricted social outings). Because the interviews were lengthy, I chose to forward the interviewing process by at least one day before the initial observation, removing the time

³⁶⁸ All data collected was encrypted, and saved in separate password-protected folders on an external hard-drive, itself also password protected and locked in a personal safe. This level of precaution was taken in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, to apply REB protocols, and to respect the TCPS2:CORE recommendations for confidentiality and anonymity. In accordance with McGill's Regulation On The Conduct Of Research, under the provisions of article 4.6.1, and with SSHRC's Research Data Archiving Policy, all anonymized data (transcripts and demographics) is preserved on a password-protected external hard drive for a period of seven years (until April 2030) by me. All other identifiable data have been destroyed, including consent forms, contact information, recordings, and all other signed documents. After that seven year period, the remaining data will be destroyed.

constraint associated with the approaching ritual. In turn, the interviews became a storytelling tool for the participants; while the semi-structured interview method worked adequately, it shifted the focus away from the ritual to be performed and onto the personal experience and religious upbringing/flowering of the participants. With more time to explore the different aspects of their spiritual path and the events that shaped their worldviews, the conversations often deviated from the subject at hand.

Otherwise, the observations themselves were ultimately unchanged by the virtual environment. They were restricted by the field of views and quality of the participants' cameras, but the viewpoint that the participants chose for the video recordings were more than adequate, effectively putting the camera where I would have been present for the observations. The main issue with performing online observations was the lack of interpersonal connectedness (as it is in most virtual spaces), which hampered the participants' willingness to share their religious or emotional states in the debriefs. I could have better deduced the participants' state had I been in the same physical space as the participants. Because of that initial impersonal relation, constructed in a non-physical space, participants were often unenthusiastic (quite understandably) in being emotionally vulnerable with me. To correct this, I decided to divide the observations and the debriefs, giving the participant between one and three days to recapture their thoughts after the observations. While this detracted from the data the value that an immediate verbalization of the religious experience would have brought to the project (the value itself being already deteriorated by the virtual environment), the debrief became a tool to revisit certain aspects of the ritual. Since I now had a few days to review the video-recording of the observations, I had time to write down a number of questions, therefore transforming the debriefs (focused solely on religious experience) into follow-up interviews: still containing questions

about religious experience, this time with a focus on the introspection following the ceremony, but with the addition of other questions about ritual-specific objects (including events, person, etc.), as well as some allotted time for personal anecdotes. While less representative of the impact of religiosity on the individual, it permitted me to forge better relationships with the participants, in order to engage in deeper conversations in the forthcoming interactions.

Ultimately, this became a remedy to the initially impersonal/virtual connection, which translated into a more relaxed and trusting relationship between myself and the participants.

The final change to the original procedures is related to the participant pool. Initially, I had identified four larger (or, at least, more well-known) covens that were supposedly active in Montréal: Isis Hathor, the Northern Cougars Coven and Clan, the Crescent Moon School, and the Wiccan Sacred Circle. Only one of these covens was accessible to me during the time I was able to conduct interviews: Scarlet's Crescent Moon School. I had also originally planned to focus my study on Wiccan communities that are active in Montréal, but my plans quickly had to change due to low participant responses. Because of a lack of response from the organizations I had identified or out of their private nature (oath of secrecy, closed to outsiders, etc.), I had to expand to other groups and to individual practitioners. In all actuality, very few groups actually identify themselves as both Wiccan and Quebecer on social media. On Facebook, I was able to find a number of larger groups that are mostly active in the United States, most of them private—some are actually blends of American and Canadian practitioners, for people who live close to the borders. Some smaller groups (2-5 people) seemed to be independent covens without geographical identifiers; contacting them all one by one in the hope of finding a group of Quebecer witches would have been harduous. Of those that identified themselves as both Wiccan and Quebecers (both French and English-speaking communities), two communities (*Cercles*

Wiccan du Québec - forum and *Wicca Montréal*)³⁶⁹ had been inactive for some time (the last posts respectively dated from October 2015 and September 2019).³⁷⁰ I did not contact the administrators of these groups and pages, due to the unlikeliness of recruiting participants in inactive groups. I found seven (eight in total, counting MPWC) other groups (ranging from 650 to 14250 people), some covering specific municipalities (Montreal, Québec City) and others the whole province of Québec (including one that was covering Ontario and Québec). Through these eight communities, I was able to recruit the participants in this study.

MPWC (approx. 1400 members)³⁷¹—originally the only group I planned on working with—accepted me in their private group and agreed that I recruit participants on their discussion forum, but the recruitment posts received very little traction (which I attribute first to the pandemic, and second to my external standing from the community). I did three rounds of recruitment (November 3, 2021; February 1, 2022; June 2, 2022); each post got a few visits and a few comments. I received some emails which entertained some level of conversation, but which eventually went without further responses from the participants. My only true success with this community was Scarlet, who invited me to their public Esbats. Through these Esbats, I met two other participants who showed interest in conducting interviews, but they seemed to have difficulty managing their online presence; with no responses, despite numerous follow-ups, the interviews never happened. *Wiccan du Québec* (approx. 6400 members)³⁷² welcomed me in their private group and accepted that I post recruitment ads. I did two rounds of recruitment (February

³⁶⁹ See “Cercles Wiccan du Québec - forum,” Facebook, accessed October 24, 2022. See also “Wicca Montréal,” Facebook, accessed October 24, 2022.

³⁷⁰ At the time of writing.

³⁷¹ “Montreal Pagan and Wiccan Community,” Facebook, accessed October 24, 2022.

³⁷² “Wiccans du Québec,” Facebook, accessed October 24, 2022.

10, 2022; June 2, 2022). Each post got a lot of traction and visits, and a number of people commented on them (many of whom were supportive of the project). I recruited Renaude and Liam from the original post. The second post got many responses, but few emails; I asked participants to reach out to me by email (for anonymity and confidentiality purposes), but most insisted that we conduct our business through Facebook Messenger (the messaging app internal to Facebook). I eventually convinced most of them to send me an email, but some simply never went through. I suspect this is because of the simplicity of a single platform for all communications (as the rebranding of Meta might alert), coupled with the difficulty of managing the virtual landscape for older participants. Finally, I recruited both Alice and Kelly from the second post in this group. The administrators of the *Wiccan, pagan franco Québec* community page (approx. 1200 followers)³⁷³ accepted that I recruit in their virtual space, but warned me that the page was seeing very little action these days. I posted a recruitment ad on February 10, 2022, but the post received only a few visits. One person showed interest by email, but the discussion stopped after a few exchanges. I went back on the page to ask the administrator for their consent in trying to recruit participants once more, only to find that my original publication had been deleted. I understood this as their disinterest in my project, and, given my lack of chance in this group before, decided not to push the matter any further. *Witches, Wicca, Pagans Ontario & Québec* (approx. 1800 members)³⁷⁴ is a private group for witches from Ontario and Québec. I decided to recruit through this group regardless of the population from Ontario, thinking I could simply specify that my interest was with Quebecer witches. Unfortunately, I never received

³⁷³ “Wiccan, pagan franco Quebec,” Facebook, accessed October 24, 2022.

³⁷⁴ “Witches, Wicca, Pagans Ontario & Quebec,” Facebook, accessed October 24, 2022.

approval to recruit. The *Wicca_Québec* (approx. 130 followers)³⁷⁵ page is a public page with no administrator. I tried contacting the email provided in their contact information, but to no avail. Although the page is fairly active (a few posts per week), I received no response from them. *Les Sorcières De Montréal (Wicca_Québec) Région 06* (approx. 620 members)³⁷⁶ is a small private group for practitioners in the city of Montréal. I received consent from the administrator of the page to publish a recruitment post on their page, but got very little traction. Fortunately for me, Laura was one of the two people who commented on the ad (the other mentioned the oath of secrecy and their inability to participate). *Wicca, Sorcellerie et Paganisme au Québec* (approx 2800 members)³⁷⁷ is a private group for Wiccan and other Neopagan practitioners. I did two rounds of recruitment (February 14, 2022; June 2, 2022); both received adequate traction and some good discussions. I received a number of emails from interested participants, but nothing came out of it. The last group I considered engaging with was *Ésothérisme, Spiritualité, Sorcellerie, Wicca Etc... marketplace Québec* (approx. 390 members),³⁷⁸ a buy and sell page for magic practitioners in Québec. Although not a community page, I thought I could still recruit Wiccan practitioners interested in sharing their spiritual path. Unfortunately, I never received an answer from the group administrator and could not obtain consent to publish the recruitment ad.

³⁷⁵ “Wicca_Quebec,” Facebook, accessed October 24, 2022.

³⁷⁶ “Les Sorcières De Montréal (Wicca_Quebec) Région 06,” Facebook, accessed October 24, 2022.

³⁷⁷ “Wicca, Sorcellerie et Paganisme au Québec,” Facebook, accessed October 24, 2022.

³⁷⁸ “Ésothérisme, Spiritualité, Sorcellerie, Wicca Etc... marketplace Québec,” Facebook, accessed October 24, 2022.

Appendix B: The Wiccan Rede

Bide ye Wiccan laws ye must,
 in perfect love and perfect trust
 Live ye must and let to live,
 fairly take and fairly give
 Form the circle thrice about,
 to keep unwelcome spirits out
 To bind the spell well every time,
 let the spell be spake in rhyme
 Soft of eye and light of touch,
 speak ye little, listen much
 Deosil go by the waxing moon,
 sing and dance the Wiccan rune
 Widdershins go by the waning moon,
 chanting out the baleful tune
 When the Lady's moon is new,
 kiss the hand to her times two
 When the moon rides at Her peak,
 then the heart's desire seek
 Heed the north wind's mighty gale,
 lock the door and trim the sail
 When the wind comes from the south,
 love will kiss kiss thee on the mouth
 When the wind blows from the west,
 departed souls will have no rest
 When the wind blows from the east,
 expect the new and set the feast
 Nine woods in the cauldron go,
 burn them quick and burn them slow
 Elder be the Lady's tree,
 burn it not or cursed you'll be
 When the wheel begins to turn,
 soon the Beltain fires will burn
 When the wheel has turned to Yule,
 light the log the Horned One rules
 Heed ye flower, bush and tree,
 by the Lady blessed be
 Where the rippling waters flow,
 cast a stone and the truth you'll know
 When you have and hold a need,
 hearken not to others' greed
 With a fool no season spend,
 nor be counted as his friend
 Merry meet and merry part,
 bright the cheeks and warm the heart
 Mind the threefold law ye should,
 three times bad and three times good
 When misfortune is anow,
 wear the star upon thy brow
 True in love you must ever be,
 lest thy love be false to thee
 These eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill,
 An Ye Harm None, Do What Ye Will

Figure 9: Wiccan Rede, Source: <https://www.sacred-texts.com/bos/bos312.htm>.