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# Sacred Polarities?

- Exploring the Use of Gendered  
Language in Three  
Generations of Contemporary  
Paganism – From 1954 to  
2017

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## Abstract

This thesis is a preparatory study for future research, and explores the use of gendered language within pagan witchcraft movements between the years 1954-2017, with the purpose of establishing if, and how, the understanding of gender, and the use of gendered language have undergone any changes over time, to accommodate for the changes in the gender discourse of Western society overall. Specific focus is placed on the accommodation of transgender and gender non-conforming identities.

The material is made up of written texts paired with qualitative interviews, which have been examined using critical discourse analysis as method, together with Judith Butler's theories of sex and gender as social constructs.

Key findings are that the understandings of gender have in the majority of the cases shifted from an essentialist, binary model based on heterosexual attraction, to a non-essentialist, multifaceted model based on individual self-identification, and that the language used has changed as part of this process. Additional findings suggest that changes in political and social discourses in Western society have affected the gender discourse within the pagan milieu, but that further research on the topic overall is necessary to fully establish the state of gender discourse within contemporary paganism.

**Key words: paganism, gender, transgender, discourse, gender essentialism, polarity, LGBTQ, Wicca, Reclaiming Witchcraft, Radical Faeries, Gerald Gardner, Doreen Valiente, Janet & Stewart Farrar, Starhawk, Harry Hay**

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# 1. Introduction

After spending years navigating the complex social fields of academia and queer spaces, the decision to write this thesis was born primarily out of three observations and frustrations; 1) academic research is lagging behind in the knowledge and study of transgender and gender non-conforming identities outside of ritual settings, 2) there is a large amount of transgender people active within pagan and witchcraft movements, despite those movements having a reputation for being very binary, and 3) few scholars seem to be looking at this, even though there has to be an enormous amount of issues to examine. This thesis, then, is a first venture into the intersection of paganism and transgender identities, and the discourses that shape them, to find a starting point for a larger and more in-depth study later on.

Making the use of language as a carrier of gender discourse a central point of my study followed logically from the decision to focus on transgender identities. Language is the core aspect of transgender issues; the importance of correct terminology to describe transgender and gender non-conforming identities and experiences is stressed again and again. As in most social contexts, new terms are continuously surfacing, debated, and either adopted or discarded by the community depending on how well they represent and describe lives, bodies, and experiences. To put it shortly; words really matter when they have the power to make you visible or invisible in the ruling narrative of society. Words are used to shape the world. To understand how transgender and gender non-conforming people create spaces for themselves within pagan movements, we must first understand what the gender discourse in these movements has looked like over time, and what it looks like now. To do this, we start with language.

## 1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

### Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to examine gendered language in the writings of some of the most influential authors of contemporary pagan movements; how it has been used, and how/if it has adapted to the discursive changes in Western society over time. The thesis is meant to function as a preparatory study for a doctoral research project on gendered practice in pagan and occult movements, and serve as an indicator of the current status of these practices and whether or not more thorough research into the topic is merited and possible. The overall aim

is to explore the relation between language and bodies, and examine how language shapes the social and ritual spaces occupied by those bodies.

## Research Questions

How has the gendered language of pagan movements evolved from 1954 up to present day? More specifically, has there been any changes or adaptations in the use of gendered language to accommodate the broader understandings of gender of our present-day society – specifically regarding transgender and gender non-conforming people?<sup>1</sup> If so, to what degree, and what are they?

Has there, for example, been any changes in the way deities are interpreted within the community from a perspective of gender? Has there been any changes in the way initiations are constructed and performed, or how the gender identities/presentations of the members are handled within the group?

In order to examine this, I have chosen two main theoretical and methodological tools that I will use in my study of the material. The first is Judith Butler's theory of sex/gender as socially constructed (discourse). Butler's theory helps us see and understand how language can affect that which it is applied to; the material aspects of a society, or a religious movement, and so forth. The method used here will be critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is a method designed to locate and analyse different patterns and changes in and of discourse within societies and social groups. In other words, CDA is a method for examining *how* changes happen, rather than *why*. I will give a more detailed account for my theoretical and methodological framework in the sections below.

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<sup>1</sup> *Transgender* is a term describing an individual whose gender identity (who they are), and legally assigned gender (the gender marked on their birth certificate and other legal documents) do not align. A person who is assigned female, but who identifies as male, or as some other gender, is a transgender person. Transgender is an umbrella term for many different gender identities. *Gender non-conforming* is a term describing an individual whose appearance, behaviour, and identity does not follow the norms of their assigned gender, either sometimes or most of the time. They may or may not identify as transgender – there is a significant overlap between these terms, but they are not synonyms.

## 1.2 Theory

To enable as accurate as possible discussion of gender discourse, and how the understanding and categorizing of gender is dependent on time and context, it was important to base my discussion on a theoretic framework that did not hold sex/gender as either synonyms or self-evident, pre-discursive categories, as this assumption limits the possibilities of discussing gender as part of a larger web of discourses and narratives within our society. For this reason, I found the works of the American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler to be the most suitable to pair with my method and material.

### 1.2.1 Judith Butler's Gender Theory

In her book, *Gender Trouble* (1999/1990),<sup>2</sup> Butler made a strong case for the theory of gender as a social construct that is shaped by certain discourses and narratives in our societies. It is a performative, meaning that gender is something we *do* rather than something we *have*. Based on the sex we were assigned at birth, we are sorted into one of two different categories,<sup>3</sup> both with their different sets of norms, rules, and expectations on individual behaviour and character traits. There is, in short, a system of ideas in place, which regulates our gendered lives and sets the rules for how we relate to other genders and their respective system of ideas. These elements, paired with the a priori assumption of mutual attraction between the two categories, make up the heterosexual matrix; the “grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, gender, and desires are naturalized”, which functions to

...categorize a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender [...] that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.<sup>4</sup>

This can become a problem, for instance, when we belong to a gender category that is not recognized by the dominant gender narratives – for example, because our gender category is

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<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 1999 (1990).

<sup>3</sup> This is the male/female, man/woman gender model that is the norm in Western society, and it is this norm that Butler criticizes in her writing.

<sup>4</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 208, note 6.

culture specific,<sup>5</sup> and our current social group is made up by individuals from a different cultural background,<sup>6</sup> or because the terminology for our gender category is too new, and thus unknown to most people around us. Therefore, when we act in accordance with the expectations placed on our gender category, regardless of the relation between our category and others, we uphold and enforce the on-going narrative of our gender – we *perform* that gender.<sup>7</sup>

This, according to Butler, is what gender is: a socially and culturally constructed narrative and discourse which shapes how we relate to ourselves and others, and how we conduct ourselves in our society in different ways depending on our assigned category. Where applicable, I will use the phrase ‘other genders’, and similar phrasings, to mark that the binary gender model is, as Butler states, discursively constructed and upheld. Butler argues that:

...[T]he action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. Although these are individual bodies, that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this “action” is a public action.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, gender is not inherent but applied to us; it is something that we, as a society, continuously construct and shape until it acquires a status of “natural” or “given”. However, since it is still a product of discourse, it can also be subject to change as other aspects of our discourse changes. The constructed nature of the binary sex/gender discourse becomes visible, as Butler points out, not only by looking at the bodies included in its norms, but also by looking at the types of bodies that challenge them.<sup>9</sup>

Butler did receive a fair amount of criticism for her book, the most common point of which seem to have been that her reasoning was too theoretical. By reducing our gendered experiences to discourse, one loses sight of the material reality of our gendered bodies –

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<sup>5</sup> A common example of this culture specific gender category is the Hijras; a trans feminine gender category native and specific to India, Bangladesh, and the surrounding area. They are legally and socially recognized as their own gender, separate from male or female. Gender categories of this kind can be found in many cultures world-wide.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, New York: Basic Books, 2000, 58.

<sup>7</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv.

<sup>8</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191. Emphasis in original.

<sup>9</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 12, 23.



because though our ideas of gender may well be constructed, we do still possess physical bodies and physical sex. Butler's book, critics argued, failed to consider that.<sup>10</sup>

In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (2011/1993), Butler sets out to show that what we consider the natural, fixed category of sex is as much a product of discourse as gender. This is different from stating that there are no bodies, that it is all "just" discourse.<sup>11</sup> What it means is, simply, that the idea of two binary and mutually exclusive categories of sex is a constructed idea that we apply to physical bodies – in other words, "sex" is discourse, *bodies* are not. However, our discourse shapes how we interact with, and relate to, those bodies; they are the canvas onto which we apply the concepts produced through that discourse. This is a continuous process that we, as a collective, perform every day in our interactions with each other, but also in how we relate to our own bodies. According to Butler, "the normative force of performativity – its power to establish what qualifies as "being" – works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well".<sup>12</sup> Our discourse and narrative regarding "sex" states that our bodies are *by nature* divided into two categories: man/male, and woman/female, both of which are associated with certain traits and abilities.<sup>13</sup> If you are X, then by definition you cannot be Y – to be X is to be "not Y", and to be "not X" is by definition to be Y. 'The category of "sex" is', Butler writes in the introduction to *Bodies*, "from the start normative; it is what Foucault called a "regulatory ideal"."<sup>14</sup> This ideal is constructed and maintained through discourse, and one of the most obvious ways in which we do so is through language; how we speak about bodies, about sex and gender, shapes our understanding of the bodies onto which we apply said language. As our language evolves due to the pressure from new influences outside the current discourse, it will also allow competing discourses room to affect the ruling discourse, reshaping it over time. As the discourse is reconstructed and reshaped by new influences, so is our understanding of sex, gender, and bodies. It is not a matter of replacing our interpretative framework, but a matter of expanding and adapting it to allow room for new perspectives.

As with most theories, Butler's writings are not without problems of their own. Any engaging in a discussion about or analysis of discourse always puts the scholar at risk of

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<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2011 (1993), preface.

<sup>11</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 38.

<sup>12</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 140.

<sup>13</sup> *Cisnormativity* is when this view of gender as mutually exclusive opposites is paired with the default assumption that all people born with certain genitalia are a certain gender. For example, that everyone born with a penis see themselves as men.

<sup>14</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xi.

relativism; it is easy to slip into the trap of reducing everything to discourse, thereby losing the important material aspects and effects of that discourse to overly abstract theorizing. Butler herself often comes close to that line, and it is important while reading and using her theories to keep in mind that these concepts do not exist without an anchor in material reality. The bodies that Butler refers to are real bodies, and the effects of the discourse of sex/gender affect those bodies in real life, not just in theory. Further, Butler's perspective on gender and performativity is primarily based on sexuality, and how our gendered behaviours are built on the idea of heterosexuality as the default. Gender and sexuality are not necessarily the same, although they do affect one another in various ways, but it is a common error even among academic scholars to conflate the two. Therefore, any use of Butler's theories in the discussion of sex/gender, and transgender/gender non-conforming identities and bodies, will require some re-working and re-interpreting along with a clearly defined glossary of key terms and concepts to avoid any confusion. Here, the glossary is located in the appendix section of the thesis.

Despite the problematic aspects of Butler's writings and theories, the core ideas and discussions are still both relevant and useful to my research. Butler is, as shown above, focused on language as a means of creating a social reality through performativity and collective repetition of norms, and it is this very process that is the focus of my study. Butler discusses how our views on gender, and how we see and perform gender, are tied to the language we use to speak about it. Furthermore, Butler remains one of the fundamental theorists within the field of gender studies, and her writing is relevant to the discussion today even though both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* were published quite a few years ago. My choice to use Butler's theories of gender in this thesis is based on her focus on discourse and sex/gender as a social construct, and her continued relevance to the study of this topic in general.

## **1.3 Method**

### **1.3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis**

Before we can begin pairing up Butler's gender theories with the use of a critical discourse analysis (CDA) to study the material, a brief discussion about the term *discourse* itself would be prudent. As it is both one of the key terms, and a fundamental part of my theoretical framework, it is important to be clear from the start about how the term will be used

throughout this thesis. Scholar Norman Fairclough, in his chapter on critical discourse analysis in the *Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (2014), offers the following definition:

*Discourse* is commonly used in various senses, including (a) meaning-making as an element of the social process; (b) the language associated with a particular social field or practice [...]; (c) a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective [...].<sup>15</sup>

Taken separately, these three points are not in themselves enough to provide a working definition of “discourse”; discourse is the result of the different levels of interaction between the three.<sup>16</sup> In other words, discourse is not *just* the process of meaning-making, since that process requires a social field or practice in which to take place. The language used in that field or practice serves as a narrative framework upon which we construct a certain social perspective or worldview – but discourse is not *just* the language used within that field. The worldview in turn shapes how we speak about and engage in meaning-making; it dictates and defines the range of ideas and concepts that are available to us in our specific context. We create meaning based on what options our context presents to us, and we do so through the use of language.

Fairclough uses the term *semiosis* to refer to the “first, most abstract and general sense” of the concept of discourse,<sup>17</sup> to illustrate how we apply symbolism (and meaning) to everything around us. It is important to note, however, that although such things as “social relations, power, institutions, beliefs and cultural values” all have a semiotic aspect to them, they are not *just* that.<sup>18</sup> The semiotic aspect exists in correlation with other elements of our social life, and this is what we need to examine. Further, Fairclough describes three levels of social reality, whose relations to each other make up what he calls the social process: social structures, practices, and events.<sup>19</sup> The relation between the social structures and the events, which exists as the more abstract versus concrete levels of social reality, is negotiated by means of our social practices. Events take place within a social field (an organization, a social institution, etc.), and these social fields are made up of systems of different social practices –

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<sup>15</sup> Norman Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, in Gee, J.P., and Handford, M., (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 9-20, 11. Emphasis in original.

<sup>16</sup> Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, 11.

the shape of which will in turn affect the shape of the events. The social field where the events take place exists within a structure that affects and is affected by both the practices and the events of all social fields that constitute that structure. Structures, practices, and events are not fixed categories; they are dynamic processes that are constantly evolving in accordance with the changes in relations between them. Semiosis, Fairclough writes, relates to other aspects of social events and practices primarily as “a facet of action; in the construal (representation) of aspects of the world; and in the constitution of identities”.<sup>20</sup>

Titus Hjelm reminds us that “all descriptions of the world are by definition partial, and the variability of discourse itself is an indicator of the constructed nature of social life”,<sup>21</sup> meaning that any claims at universality can only be so within their context of origin and practice. The fact that discourse – or discourses – exists shows us why we should be wary of any claims of universality, or naturalness, or, for that matter, of so-called common knowledge. These concepts all came from somewhere; they are constructed, and they have most likely evolved and changed shape over time, so that what is claimed as universal truth today might not be the same as what was considered the universal truth a decade or so earlier. Echoing Fairclough, Hjelm defines discourse as both constitutive (creating social reality), and as having the function of both upholding the ruling narrative of a society and of being a tool for bringing about social changes.<sup>22</sup>

Critical discourse analysis, then, “focuses on power and ideology in discourse, and [...], it acknowledges that there is a reality – physical and social – *outside* of discourse that is reproduced and changed discursively”.<sup>23</sup> As established above, it is through language that reality is created and upheld; more specifically, it is upheld by a hegemonic discourse and narrative, and the language connected to its ideological function. The hegemonic narrative dictates not only what is spoken about, it also dictates *how* we speak about it, as well as what we do *not* speak about. The latter is especially important, as that is where we find what a group consider “natural”, or self-evident – in other words, those things that “everybody knows” – and these are just as important in one’s analysis as those subjects that are spoken about. In order for the analyst to ensure that they have the full picture, both perspectives will

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<sup>20</sup> Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Titus Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, in Stausberg, Michael, & Engler, Stephen, (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 134-150, 135.

<sup>22</sup> Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 135.

<sup>23</sup> Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 140.

be needed.<sup>24</sup> We must analyse both what is included and excluded in the narratives we are examining, and pay close attention to the ways in which something is included or excluded; being a part of the narrative does not necessarily mean something positive – something can be a part of a narrative for the specific reason of creating an “Other” against which the group may contrast itself.

But CDA is not a method without limitations of its own, and Hjelm offers a word of caution regarding just that. One problem of using discourse analysis as a method is the fact that it is a method primarily suited to answer questions about *how* things happen, not *why* they happen.<sup>25</sup> Therefore the scholar must make sure that the method fits the type of questions they are attempting to answer. One must also be aware that discourse analysis cannot make any claims to know for certain how any development, interpretation, or competing discourse will look in practice or in the future. What discourse analysis tells us is how the discursive practices within one certain context looks and have looked up until now. From that, we can speculate about how discourse can become visible in practice, but we can make no definitive claims.<sup>26</sup>

In this thesis, then, I will use CDA as the lens through which I examine my material, and I will focus especially on the different ways that the writers and my respondents put their understanding of gender in words. In other words, how they are speaking about men/women, masculinity/femininity, how they gender bodies, traits and abilities, etc., to explore how the gender discourse has been shaped from the 1950s until today.

### **1.3.2 Interviews**

While the material for the first part of my study consists of written text, the second part takes the form of a small interview study, where I conducted interviews with members of different pagan groups. Such a study can be designed in different ways, depending on the scholar’s field of research, research questions, and personal preferences. The interviews conducted in this study have been semi-structured, qualitative interviews, where I have focused on my

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<sup>24</sup> Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 141.

<sup>25</sup> Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 145.

<sup>26</sup> Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 145.

respondents' own understandings and interpretations of their experiences and practices.<sup>27</sup> Each informant was given the option to choose to be interviewed via skype link or via email, and I provided a summary of the topic I wished to discuss, and a brief explanation of my thesis. I also explained beforehand that all participation was voluntary, and that they were free to stop participating at any time if they wished to do so. Further, I explained that the interview would be recorded, but that I could also use written notes instead of recording if, for whatever reason, they were uncomfortable with being recorded. Three out of four informants stated that they were willing to be recorded, and one informant requested that I use written notes instead.

To find informants willing to speak to me about their practice from the perspective I'm exploring, I used a search engine to look up lists of different pagan traditions and their respective covens. From there I went through the lists to find covens that appeared to be active, and that were clearly positioning themselves as members of a specific tradition, and not as belonging to a more vague and general pagan label. To those covens and groups that met my criteria, and that had either a contact form, or an email address listed as their contact, I sent a brief email where I explained my reason for contacting them and asked if there was anyone in the group who was interested in participating. In most of the cases, there were no replies, even after regular follow up emails. In some cases, I received a positive first reply, where the person was interested in participating, but after that the person stopped replying to further emails. In one case I received a reply from a group that stated very clearly that they did not wish to have any interactions with academics, or to have their practice analysed by outsiders. The informants introduced below are those who followed through on their offer to sit down for an interview.

## **1.4 Material**

This thesis, as stated above, explores the use of gendered language over time. I have endeavoured to select writers who are representative of their own brand of paganism, and who are also writing from within different time periods and/or social contexts, to provide an accurate timeline between the different texts. This should enable us to see any changes in language and discourse more clearly – especially since many pagan writers have been influenced by each other in different ways.

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<sup>27</sup> Warren, Carol, A. B., 'Qualitative Interviewing', in (Eds.) Jaber F. Gubrium, James A. Holstein, *Handbook of Interview Research: Context & Method*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002, 83-101.

The earliest period of contemporary paganism will be covered by the following four books: *Witchcraft Today* (1954), by Gerald Gardner (1884-1964), who founded modern pagan witchcraft; *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* (1993/1978), by Doreen Valiente, who was Gardner's High Priestess during the early days; and *A Witches' Bible* (1984/1981), by Janet (b. 1950), and Stewart Farrar (1916-2000) two of the most influential members of the witchcraft movement, who are Alexandrian by initiation and Gardnerian by practice.<sup>28</sup>

The second period is represented by: *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1999/1979), by Starhawk (b. 1951), one of the most prominent names among American pagan witches, and the founder of the Reclaiming Witchcraft tradition, together with *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of its Founder* (1996), by Harry Hay (1912-2002) – the person behind the creation of the Radical Faeries.<sup>29</sup>

The third period of pagan witchcraft will be represented by interviews conducted with members of different pagan traditions, where we discussed the existence and use of gendered language within their particular group, and whether or not there have been any changes or discussions within the group regarding the use of language. The traditions represented by my informants are Gardnerian Wicca, Alexandrian Witchcraft, Reclaiming Witchcraft, and the Radical Faeries.

I have chosen to divide my material by generations rather than by years, with Gardner's text as my starting point, and the others following according to how close they are in lineage to him. Valiente and the Farrars connect their texts directly onto his teachings, and they count among the normative works of early paganism. Therefore, I have chosen to count them as the first generation. Starhawk and Hay write from a point in time where paganism has taken on a more solid shape, and where new traditions have emerged from the Gardnerian and Alexandrian majority traditions. They also write from a different geographical and social context. They are, thus, one or more step removed from Gardner, and are a part of a new generation of pagans. Similarly, my informants come from a pagan milieu that has expanded and evolved even further, with more traditions developing across the globe, and therefore I count them as a third generation.

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<sup>28</sup> The terms 'Gardnerian' and 'Alexandrian' will be explained in more detail in section 3.2, 'Gerald Gardner and the early days of the witchcraft movement', on pages 20-22, and 24.

<sup>29</sup> The term 'Radical Faeries' will be further explained in section 3.4, 'Starhawk's Reclaiming tradition, and Hay's Radical Faeries', on page 29.

### 1.4.1 The First Generation – Gardner, Valiente, and the Farrars

#### *Witchcraft Today* (1954)

*Witchcraft Today* is the second book published by Gerald Gardner, after *High Magic's Aid* (1949). Unlike *High Magic's Aid*, which is what we could label a piece of fantasy fiction with elements of pagan witchcraft in its narrative, *Witchcraft Today* discusses the topic of British witchcraft from an anthropological standpoint. Gardner positions himself primarily as a scholar, writing the book with permission from the witches themselves. The foreword written by scholar Margaret Murray gives further credibility to this position.<sup>30</sup> Each chapter of the book is devoted to a specific subject, such as, for example, the God and Goddess, magic, whether witches celebrate the Black Mass, and so forth. There are not many details given regarding rituals and ceremonies, which is hardly surprising given that Gardner positioned himself as a scholar with permission to write the book so long as he did not share the secrets.

#### *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* (1978)

*Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, is the second book on pagan witchcraft written by Doreen Valiente. The book covers a wide range of topics, from the history of witchcraft, the various influences, and coven life, to self-initiation and rituals. It is designed to offer answers and help to those looking to practice themselves, while also providing the necessary background information and some basic rules and elements of everyday life and practice of Gardnerian Wicca.

#### *A Witches' Bible: The Complete Witches' Handbook* (1984/1981)

*A Witches' Bible: The Complete Witches' Handbook* (1984/1981), by Janet and Stewart Farrar, are actually two separate books published together in the same binding; *Eight Sabbats for Witches* and *The Witch's Way*. *Eight Sabbats* makes up the first half of the book, and is concerned primarily with rituals and Wiccan theology. *The Witch's Way* focuses on the practice of magic, the everyday life of witches, and on customs and practical aspects of the craft. The books will be referenced in the notes as their original titles, and can be found in the list of literature and references as *A Witches' Bible: The Complete Witches' Handbook*.

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<sup>30</sup> Margaret Murray (1862-1963), a renowned Egyptologist, whose writings on the topic of European witchcraft had tremendous influence on both research and general attitudes to witchcraft in Europe for several decades. Murray's work will be described in more detail in section 3.1, 'Some key figures in the development of contemporary paganism and witchcraft', on page 19.



## **1.4.2 The Second Generation – Starhawk, and Harry Hay**

### *Spiral Dance* (1979)

*Spiral Dance*, by Starhawk, was a revolutionary book to be published in the developing pagan milieu in the United States during the 1970s. Providing a near complete spiritual and magical system, with chapters on cosmology, ritual material, instructions on how to practice witchcraft, and how to work spells – all based in a clear left-wing, and feminist worldview – the book proved the starting point for the Reclaiming Witchcraft Tradition. Two anniversary editions were published, in 1989 and 1999, in which Starhawk provided an extensive note system where she discusses the text, and the changes in understandings and opinions she has had over the years. The text is an overarching discussion about witchcraft in general, past and present, with sections on the practical aspects of the craft.

### *Radically Gay* (1996)

*Radically Gay*, by Harry Hay, and edited by Will Roscoe, is the odd one out in the collection of material used here. It is a collection of texts written by Harry Hay, with a discussion about Hay himself and his life and beliefs given by Will Roscoe. Hay's texts span a time period of approximately twenty years, from the 1960s to the late 1980s, and are primarily political texts, with the spiritual element woven into Hay's ideological basis. These will be referenced under their original titles in the notes, while references from Roscoe's discussions of the texts will be referenced as *Radically Gay*.

## **1.4.3 The Third Generation – Pagans Today**

### Amoret

Amoret is a practicing witch and priestess within the Reclaiming Witchcraft Tradition, and is based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She has been a practicing pagan since 2000, and is active within the American pagan community on both a local and national level. I interviewed Amoret on June 12, 2017, via Skype link, and exchanged follow up questions and answers via email.

## Walnut

Walnut is a member of the Radical Faeries, and is currently based in Oslo, Norway. He has been active in the Faerie community for a number of years, and while he has a good understanding of and acceptance of the spiritual elements found in many Faerie groups, he is not himself religious or in it for any spiritual purpose. Walnut did not initially wish to be interviewed via Skype link, and the first interview was conducted via email, while the follow up was conducted via Skype link, without recording, on June 15, 2017.

## Yssion

Yssion is a high priest in the Alexandrian witchcraft tradition, as well as the New England Coven of Traditionalist Witches (N.E.C.TW), and is currently active as leader of an Alexandrian coven together with his wife. He has been involved in paganism for around twenty years, and he is based in Rhode Island. I interviewed Yssion via Skype link on October 10, 2017.

## Peter

Peter is a high priest of the second degree of Gardnerian Wicca, and high priest of the third degree in the Swedish Initiatory Wicca (S.I.W.) tradition – a specifically Swedish brand of Wicca, without ties to the British or American lineages. He has been active within the pagan community since 2003, and is based in Uppsala, Sweden, where he is the leader of a Gardnerian coven. I interviewed Peter in person, on October 17, 2017.

## 1.5 Disposition

Having presented the foundation upon which this thesis rests in the sections on theory, method, and material, I will now give a general outline for the main body of this study. In chapter 2, “Previous Research”, I will offer a brief summary of the current state of research within the fields of gender studies and pagan studies. Chapter 3, “Historical Background”, will provide a brief overview of the history of contemporary paganism in Europe and the United States.<sup>31</sup> This overview will include an introduction to some of the key figures of

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<sup>31</sup> There is an on-going, and complex, debate among scholars and pagans alike regarding the proper spelling of the word ‘pagan’. Some argue that it should be spelled with a capital P, to signify that it is an established form of religion, and that it should be recognized as such. Others instead claim that since there are many forms of paganism, capital-P paganism would insinuate that there is only one

contemporary magical practices, with particular focus given to Gerald Gardner, and Janet and Stewart Farrar, all of whom are integral to the early Wicca movement. Regarding more recent pagan groups, focus will be on Starhawk, the founder of Reclaiming Witchcraft, and Harry Hay, founder of the Radical Faeries.

In chapter 4, “Analysis and Discussion”, the material presented above will be examined, and themes and elements from the different sources compared and discussed, and in chapter 5 and 6, “Results” and “Conclusion”, I will present my findings. Then, in chapter 7, “Final Remarks”, I will share some comments on the study, its limitations, and on the possible need of further research on this subject.

## 2. Previous Research

This thesis situates itself by necessity in the intersection between two large fields of research; Pagan studies and Gender studies. For reasons of clarity and accessibility, I will present the previous research from both fields separately. Gender studies is a vast field, that overlaps to great extent with feminist-, and women’s studies, LGBTQ/Queer studies, and the emerging field of transgender studies. Gender and religion is a growing field of research, and there are many scholars world-wide dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge on the topic. The e-journal *Religion and Gender*,<sup>32</sup> can be mentioned as one example of this on-going research effort. The articles published there cover a broad range of religions, with a primary focus on the world-religions. The problem is that here, as everywhere else, the transgender perspectives are largely missing.

Pagan studies is a rapidly growing field, with plenty of dedicated scholars worldwide. While the relationship between gender and religion is a common topic of study here as in other fields, it suffers a lack of research on the matter of gender non-conforming people and their religious beliefs and practices. Indeed, a search through all published issues of the three academic journals, *The Pomegranate: Journal of Pagan Studies*, *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, and *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*

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form. The clash is, also, between the emic and etic perspectives; the capital-P paganism indicates an inside perspective, whereas the small-P spelling indicates an outside perspective. All sides have relevant arguments for their standpoints, and after careful consideration I have chosen to use the small-p spelling, to signify that paganism is not a monolithic religious system, but many different systems, movements, and practices that are too diverse to fully encompass in the capital-P spelling, and the indications it brings with it.

<sup>32</sup> Religionandgender.Org, [http:// www. religionandgender.org](http://www.religionandgender.org) [Accessed: 2017-12-11]

– a total of 138 issues, published between 1997-2017 – yielded only three articles relevant to my perspective.<sup>33</sup> While plenty of articles with a gender perspective could be found, they were for the most part discussing gender from a cisnormative point of view – meaning that there is an a priori assumption that everyone’s gender identity and anatomy aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth, and that this is natural and self-evident.<sup>34</sup> Those articles that were not discussing gender in this way were mainly concerned with gender in relation to sexuality, which, albeit an important topic, focuses on very different aspects of gender. This, I argue, shows why this thesis and this perspective are necessary to the discussion on religion and gender in general, and on paganism and gender in particular.

## 2.1 Transgender and Gender Identity

Anne Fausto Sterling’s book, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (2000), examining the construction of biological sex and sexuality, provides a good insight into the complexities of human biology and politics, and how we apply the concept of gender to bodies.<sup>35</sup> Fausto Sterling discusses how we construct gender, and what some of the consequences can be when we apply a socially constructed idea of ‘natural sex’ to physical bodies, whose characteristics are far more diverse than our understanding of sex and gender. Although Fausto Sterling’s main perspective is the link between categories of sexuality, and how they relate to bodies, the findings and arguments presented in the book are immensely valuable to my area of research as well.

David Valentine’s ethnographical study on the term “transgender”, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (2007),<sup>36</sup> offers a very useful overview of the complexities, possibilities, as well as problems inherent in the use of it, and while the book suffers from a few problems, it is still an important read for anyone intending to conduct research on transgender issues. The small social and geographical context chosen by Valentine does raise the question of how representative his findings are, but I will argue that

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Lepage, ‘A Lokian Family: Queer and Pagan Agency in Montreal’, in *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, 15/1-2, 2013, 79-101; Regina Smith Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism’, in *The Pomegranate*, 12/2, 2010, 159-184; John A. Stover III, ‘When Pan Met Wendy: Gendered Membership Debates Among the Radical Faeries’, in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 11/4, 2008, 31-55.

<sup>34</sup> I give a general definition of this term in chapter 1.2, note 11, as well as in the glossary section of the appendix.

<sup>35</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.

the points made in his discussions are too important to dismiss. These two books make up the foundation for much of the terminology used in this thesis.

In addition to providing the theoretical framework for this analysis, Judith Butler's writings (1999/1990, 2011/1993), have been an important influence on my understanding and use of language and terminology relating to the concepts of sex and gender.<sup>37</sup> While Butler's discussions can be both dense and complex, they do bring the multifaceted grid of concepts, such as gender and sexuality, and their relations to power and oppression, to the surface in a clear and comprehensive way. The subject of sex/gender *is* complicated, and what Butler does is to set up a framework of concepts and terminology that allows us to understand it without veering down the reductionist path. By reminding us that sex/gender is as much a social construct as anything else, Butler also forces us to check our own a priori notions of the world, and to examine what we consider 'natural' or 'given'. Together with Fausto Sterling and Valentine's books, they make a steady foundation to stand on while examining the topics related to sex and gender.

## **2.2 Witchcraft and Paganism**

Ethan Doyle White's (2016) book offers an accessible yet detailed introduction of the history, beliefs, and practices of the modern witchcraft movement.<sup>38</sup> Together with Ronald Hutton's (1999) ground-breaking book on the history and development of modern pagan witchcraft,<sup>39</sup> and Graham Harvey's (2011/1997) extensive overview of the broad spectrum of movements gathered under the umbrella term "contemporary paganism",<sup>40</sup> it provides a good understanding of the movements in themselves, and the complexities within their belief systems and developments over time. Chas Clifton's (2006) book on the development of pagan traditions in the United States offers an important account for the different ways paganism has evolved in North America.<sup>41</sup> Joanne Pearson's (2007) study of Gardnerian,

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<sup>37</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1999; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Ethan Doyle White, *Wicca: History, Belief, and Community in Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Graham Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism: Religions of the Earth from Druids and Witches to Heathens and Ecofeminists*, New York: New York University Press, 2011 (1997).

<sup>41</sup> Chas Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America*, Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006.

Alexandrian, and combined forms of Wicca,<sup>42</sup> their relation to the different forms of Christianity that exist in Europe, and how those relations have affected the beliefs and practices of the Wicca movement adds important historical and cultural context to the mix. These books together offer a broad and cohesive understanding of the topics relating to witchcraft and paganism in general.

Martin Lepage's (2013) article in *The Pomegranate*,<sup>43</sup> in which he studies a group of LGBTQ+ identified pagans in Montreal, and how they navigate the ritual spaces in the Canadian pagan milieu, is the closest in perspective to the aim of this thesis, and provided many useful perspectives. The group members' accounts of how they found different ways to combine and balance the importance of both their practices and their own queer identities, without having to sacrifice one to embrace the other, offered some important insights in the different ways one can negotiate the space one occupies within the group setting. Lepage's own discussion and thoughts was of great value as it gave me another set of angles from which it could be possible to approach my own material.

Regina Smith Oboler's (2010) article,<sup>44</sup> also in *The Pomegranate*, treats the important topic of gender essentialism, and how it appears in beliefs and practices of pagan groups. Essentialism is a pervasive aspect of any discussion of gender in Western society due to our understanding of gender and gendered traits. It is important to be aware of it, and to maintain a critical position when approaching the topic, to avoid taking any claims made as natural or self-evident. Gender essentialism is a perspective that needs to be examined in the same way other perspectives do, and though Oboler focuses mainly on cisgender pagans, the topic is important to this thesis, and the article provides many useful insights that can be applied here as well.

A third important journal article is the article by John A. Stover (2008),<sup>45</sup> examining the debates among the Radical Faeries regarding membership and gender in a way that is relevant and interesting for this thesis. Originally founded exclusively by and for gay cisgender men, the Radical Faeries have since undergone a process of re-evaluating and redefining the rules of membership and admittance, and this process is symptomatic of the wider debates within LGBTQ+ communities regarding gendered spaces and practices. It is also, I will argue, symptomatic of a similar process within pagan movements in general, although the reach and

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<sup>42</sup> Joanne Pearson, *Wicca and the Christian Heritage: Ritual, Sex and Magic*, Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Lepage, 'A Lokian Family: Queer and Pagan Agency in Montreal', 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Oboler, 'Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism', 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy: Gendered Membership Debates Among the Radical Faeries', 2008.

impact of that process has not been researched enough for us to know the exact figures. Stover's article does pinpoint, however, several issues regarding sex and gender in social and religious spaces that have been helpful in my approach to my own material.

### 3. Historical Background

#### **3.1 Some Key Figures in the Development of Contemporary Paganism and Witchcraft**

While magic in Europe has a long history that the witchcraft/pagan movements identify and claim heritage from, the most important influences are mostly found in the early to mid-1900s. Among them, British occultist and magician, Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), is perhaps the most known. His influence can be seen in a vast range of movements, from the Church of Satan, to the witchcraft movements, and various New Age and spiritual groups. It is no secret that Gerald Gardner, the founder of modern Wicca, took inspiration from him and his writings, though to what extent is still being debated. What is known, however, is that a large part of Crowley's magical system was centred upon the practice of sexual magic, and that phallic and sensual imagery featured heavily in his writings – both elements are also found in Gardner's texts.<sup>46</sup>

Margaret Murray (1862-1963), Egyptologist and prolific writer, is another key figure in the development of the witchcraft movement whose influence cannot be overlooked.<sup>47</sup> Her books, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (1921),<sup>48</sup> and *The God of the Witches* (1933),<sup>49</sup> had an enormous impact on the way witchcraft was seen and understood in Europe during the early twentieth century. While immensely popular among readers outside of academia, as well as among scholars without knowledge of the field, the books were heavily criticized by scholars of history.<sup>50</sup> As the years went by, Murray's works and theory about witchcraft gained momentum, and eventually became known as the 'Murray thesis'; the ruling narrative on witchcraft in Britain for many years. According to this narrative, pagan witchcraft in Europe was not a new phenomenon, but instead an ancient, pre-

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<sup>46</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 172, 173; Hutton, 'Crowley and Wicca', 295.

<sup>47</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 194.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 195.

<sup>49</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 196.

<sup>50</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 196, 197.

Christian fertility cult that had survived in Europe for centuries, practicing its rituals in secret, and avoiding persecution from Christian authorities.<sup>51</sup> It was possible partly due to Murray being given the opportunity to write the article on witchcraft in the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, published in 1929,<sup>52</sup> where she presented her own theory as proven fact. Partly, it was also due to her works being used as foundation and key sources by both renowned scholars of the time and by writers of popular fiction. The Murray thesis, then, shaped the entire discourse on magic, witchcraft, and paganism in Britain; providing the historical foundation for Gerald Gardner and his budding witchcraft movement.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.2 Gerald Gardner and the Early Days of the Witchcraft Movement

#### Gerald Gardner (1884-1964)

Gerald Brousseau Gardner (1884-1964), spent most of the first five decades of his life abroad; travelling, or working as a manager of plantations in Ceylon, Malay, and North Borneo.<sup>54</sup> He also served as a customs inspector for a few years, before eventually retiring and moving back to Britain with his wife Donna.<sup>55</sup> After spending the first two years in London, the Gardners moved to New Forest, and it was here that Gardner came to meet likeminded people, and thus begin founding his movement – claiming it as a surviving and ancient witchcraft tradition into which he had been initiated in September of 1939.<sup>56</sup> The person Gardner names as his initiator and coven leader was a woman named Dorothy Clutterbuck, whom Gardner referred to as ‘Old Dorothy’.<sup>57</sup> This person did indeed exist, but her involvement in any pagan activities is questionable, if not flat out improbable. Dorothy Clutterbuck – or Mrs. Fordham, as she went by later in life – was part of the upper spheres of social life in New Forest, and was both an

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<sup>51</sup> Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, 19-20, 22, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 199; “Wicca”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 2016. [accessed 1 November 2017]  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Wicca>

<sup>53</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 200; Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 34.

<sup>54</sup> Doyle White, *Wicca*, 24-25.

<sup>55</sup> Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 27.

<sup>56</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 205–206; Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Jack L. Bracelin, *Gerald Gardner: Witch*, Thame: I-H-O Books, 1999 (1960), 150-151.

Aidan Kelly appears to accept this version of the story in *Crafting the Art*, whereas Ronald Hutton places himself on the more sceptical side. Having considered both their stances, I place myself in Hutton’s corner regarding the details of Gardner’s early magical activities.



active churchgoer and a dedicated Tory supporter.<sup>58</sup> At the time of Gardner's supposed initiation, Dorothy was in mourning following the death of her husband, Rupert Fordham, which does cast some doubt on the details of Gardner's story. It seems unlikely that she would be willing to lead such a ceremony so shortly after losing her life partner.<sup>59</sup> Another issue is that Gardner and Dorothy belonged to different social circles, and had very different reputations within the New Forest community. There does not appear to be a very high likelihood that the two ever met, and even less that they would have been a part of the same secret group. The records on Dorothy's life leave precious little room for secret occult activities.<sup>60</sup>

Though there is reason to doubt Dorothy Clutterbuck's involvement in it, there is far less reason to doubt that Gardner did undergo some form of initiation, or entered into an esoteric group at the time he claimed to have done so. We do know, for example, that he took interest in several different groups during the 1940s, and that research suggests that he joined the Ancient British Church, and the Ancient Druid Order in 1946, followed by an initiation into the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) in 1947.<sup>61</sup> There are no indications that Gardner openly identified himself as a member of Wicca at this time; it was not until later that he chose to don this label as his primary religious or spiritual identity.<sup>62</sup>

Regardless of the validity of the claims surrounding Dorothy Clutterbuck's involvement in his religious practice, Hutton states that Gardner did, in fact, have a magical partner even before he went public with his new religion; a woman whom he referred to simply as 'Dafo'.<sup>63</sup> Her existence has also been confirmed, and time line and circumstances fall in place much better with her as Gardner's first working partner instead of Dorothy. Dafo worked with Gardner as his high priestess in their first coven until around 1952, when she chose to withdraw from the group for several reasons. After that, she seems to have completely renounced the craft, and did not want any part of her involvement in it to be known.<sup>64</sup>

As mentioned above, the extent of Gardner's relationship with Aleister Crowley, and the latter's role in the creation of the rituals used by Gardner, is a complex topic. Over the

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<sup>58</sup> Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 30.

<sup>59</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 210.

<sup>60</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 211, 212.

<sup>61</sup> Ronald Hutton, 'Crowley and Wicca', in Henrik Bogdan & Martin P. Starr (Eds.), *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 299.

<sup>62</sup> Hutton, 'Crowley and Wicca', 299.

<sup>63</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 212.

<sup>64</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 214.

years, many conflicting statements and rumours have spread, most of which are contradicted or refuted by the main source of written evidence in the case, namely Crowley's own diaries. Crowley had a long-standing habit of keeping journals of both his magical and everyday activities, and those journals remain a main source of information regarding people and events in his life. According to his diary, Crowley met with Gardner on four occasions in May 1947, and that during these visits he initiated Gardner into the OTO,<sup>65</sup> but there is no record of Crowley offering or agreeing to write the rituals for Gardner.<sup>66</sup> Nor is there any record of them having met before or after those four occasions, which, given Crowley's extensive journaling, suggests that it is quite likely that these were indeed the only times they were in the same room together. Those parts of Crowley's work that can be found in Gardner's rituals appear to have been borrowed in, along with other material,<sup>67</sup> rather than given, copied, or written especially for him.<sup>68</sup> Kenneth Grant, who worked with Crowley as his secretary in 1945, also dismisses the rumours, saying that no such agreement existed between Gardner and Crowley.<sup>69</sup> Further evidence is provided with the fact that Crowley died in December 1947, and Gardner's rituals were still in the making during the mid-1950s.<sup>70</sup>

It is not improbable that there were other pagan groups that were already established or starting up around the same time as Gardnerian Wicca was taking shape – groups that were not directly related to Wicca. Given that the occult milieu was large and quite active during the first decades of the 1900s, and that Europe in general has a rich literary and cultural history regarding magical and pagan practices, it should be possible for others to have looked at the same source material as Gardner and come to their own conclusions. It would, then, also be possible that some of these groups pre-date Wicca.<sup>71</sup> However, there is a problem. As Hutton points out, Gardnerian Wicca “was not merely the first to surface, but remains the first to be *securely documented*”.<sup>72</sup> This, of course, means that since Wicca is the pagan group that we have the most knowledge of, and since it was the first one that made it into the public eye on a larger scale, it inevitably becomes the one against which we compare all others.

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<sup>65</sup> Hutton, 'Crowley and Wicca', 286.

<sup>66</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 217.

<sup>67</sup> Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 96, 101, 102; Doyle White, *Wicca*, 30; Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007, 167.

<sup>68</sup> Hutton, 'Crowley and Wicca', 291.

<sup>69</sup> Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, 149.

<sup>70</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 218; Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 94, 101.

<sup>71</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 287–288.

<sup>72</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 288. My emphasis.

Over the years, there have been a number of people also claiming to belong to different traditions of hereditary or initiatory witchcraft, often with different but equally strong opinions regarding the origins and history of witchcraft in Britain and Europe. Many of them have been quite negative in their views of Gardner and his closest circle – claiming that Gardner had either stolen ideas from their traditions, or that he simply did not know anything about ‘real’ witchcraft. Though some of the accusations have been quite strongly worded, it is difficult to draw any conclusions due to the lack of proper facts and evidence.<sup>73</sup> But Gardner’s Wicca had barely stepped out into the social and religious arena in Britain before it began to break off into different new traditions, each with their own take on both the rituals and the history of witchcraft in Europe.

### Doreen Valiente (1922-1999)

Doreen Valiente was born in England in 1922, and is said to have taken an interest in magic and the occult from a young age. She continued to study and practice magic throughout her teenage years, and in 1952, she learned about the existence of one Gerald Gardner and his witch cult through an article in the September issue of *Illustrated*, a popular magazine.<sup>74</sup> She contacted Cecil Williamson, the owner of the museum of witchcraft that had featured in the article, and he passed her letter on to Gerald Gardner. After some correspondence, the two met for the first time later that same year, and Valiente was initiated into Gardner’s coven the following year, on Midsummer’s Eve 1953.<sup>75</sup> She was a skilled poet and writer, but she was less than impressed with the material Gardner was putting together at the time of her initiation. She recognized the parts of it that had been borrowed in from Crowley, *The Key of Solomon*, and other material, and when she questioned Gardner on this, he challenged her to rework of all the material if she thought she could do better. Valiente set to work, and the end result of her rewritings became the *Book of Shadows* used by Gardner’s coven.<sup>76</sup> The two worked on a lot of different material together, and even planned to publish a follow up of *Witchcraft Today* as co-authors.<sup>77</sup>

This did not happen, however, as Valiente’s time as Gardner’s High Priestess came to a close in 1957. She and some other coven members had grown increasingly fed up with

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<sup>73</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 298–302, 305–307.

<sup>74</sup> Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 95-96.

<sup>75</sup> Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 96.

<sup>76</sup> Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 101-102.

<sup>77</sup> Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 102.

Gardner's indiscretions and publicity seeking over the past year, and finally decided to form their own, closed coven. While the two covens remained on good terms for some time, Valiente's covens were still strongly opposed to Gardner's penchant for talking to the media about the Craft, and in an attempt to regain some control over the situation, Valiente's High Priest wrote a set of proposed rules for all members of the covens to abide by. Many of them had to do with secrecy, and with not sharing information about the Craft to the media.<sup>78</sup> After sending them to Gardner, and receiving back a reworked version of them, claimed to be already existing craft laws – together with some other, similar incidents – Valiente and many with her took their leave from Gardner's craft.<sup>79</sup> Gardner and Valiente eventually rekindled their friendship, but they never worked together again, and Valiente herself left Gardnerian Wicca in 1964, to enter into another tradition.<sup>80</sup> She continued to practice pagan witchcraft, wrote several books on the subject, and remained an outspoken representative of the craft until her death in 1999.

### A Side Note: Alex Sanders, and Alexandrian Witchcraft

Alex Sanders' journey into the witchcraft community is one of many twists and turns, and for the purpose of this thesis a brief summary will suffice. There are suggestions that Sanders was initiated into a coven in March 1963, but it remains unclear whether that coven was part of the Gardnerian tradition or not.<sup>81</sup> He later erased any and all mentions of such a coven, and, indeed, of most of what he had been doing between 1962 and 1964 – claiming instead that he had been initiated into witchcraft at a much younger age, by his grandmother.<sup>82</sup> This became an important aspect of Alexandrian Wicca; Sanders being able to claim belonging to a hereditary tradition lent weight to his words and to his authority within the community.<sup>83</sup> Along with his wife Maxine, Sanders ran a coven in Manchester, and later on in London, while also being an active and outspoken representative of British witchcraft.<sup>84</sup>

While retaining the basic structure for their rituals, as created by Gardner, Alexandrian Wicca distinguishes itself from the former in several ways. Their rituals were closer to a type

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<sup>78</sup> Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 103.

<sup>79</sup> Doyle White, *Wicca*, 31.

<sup>80</sup> Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, 106-107; Doyle White, *Wicca*, 32.

<sup>81</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 321–322; Doyle White, *Wicca*, 41.

<sup>82</sup> June Johns, *King of the Witches: The World of Alex Sanders*, New York: Coward McCann Inc., 1969, 9, 14-16; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 325; Doyle White, *Wicca*, 41.

<sup>83</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 325.

<sup>84</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 326–327; Doyle White, *Wicca*, 40.

of ceremonial, or ‘high’ magic, with more focus on details in their practice than what Gardner had.<sup>85</sup> To a larger extent than other groups at the time, they also advocated the use of practices and techniques that at first glance might not seem related to witchcraft as a religious practice. But to Sanders, the craft was primarily a practical one, meant to help the members achieve certain effects and results in their own lives. The practice of techniques such as the use of various charms and magical objects, clairvoyance, divination, and similar things fit rather well into a more practical tradition.<sup>86</sup> It was in their favour, also, that unlike Gardner, they saw no problem in accepting members who were also active adherents of other religions – especially Christians. As far as the Sanders were concerned, one could practice Wicca and still be a good Christian; the two religions were not necessarily mutually exclusive.<sup>87</sup>

### **3.3 Paganisms in Contemporary Europe and America**

Scholar Graham Harvey describes paganism as “a polytheistic and/or animistic religion that celebrates life and living”.<sup>88</sup> There is no sharp line drawn between what is considered sacred or profane; all aspects of life, both rituals and everyday activities are considered equally important. The emphasis is on the idea of kinship with the world around us, and of interconnectedness with everything in it. One should be cautious, however, about reading the term ‘paganism’ as designating a fixed, cohesive religion. It is rather an umbrella term meant to cover a broad range of traditions, with as many similarities as differences between them. Paganism as a term is in many ways an externally applied one; some groups who are considered pagan by academic scholars might not, in fact, consider themselves as such. These differences in self-identification can be found within groups as well. Some Wiccans, for instance, may consider their craft to be pagan, whereas others might view the two as separate categories.<sup>89</sup> There are different opinions, even among scholars, as to whether or not Wicca/Witchcraft should be considered among pagan movements; Joanne Pearson, for instance, opposes this categorization, and suggests that it should be reconsidered.<sup>90</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, however, I will follow the example of Harvey and others, and count

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<sup>85</sup> Doyle White, *Wicca*, 41.

<sup>86</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 331.

<sup>87</sup> Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 332.

<sup>88</sup> Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism*, 1.

<sup>89</sup> Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism*, 35.

<sup>90</sup> Pearson, *Wicca and the Christian Heritage*, 4.

Wicca as a pagan movement, as there is enough overlap in terms of history and structure to merit it.

As with most other religions, though perhaps more pronounced here, there is a difficulty finding some set of beliefs or practices that can be said to represent paganism in general. Pagan groups continuously and consistently borrow in and implement elements and ideas from many different sources – from history and folklore, to psychology, to popular media, or each member’s own imagination.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, any definition of paganism will depend very much on who you ask, which tradition they are a part of, and what their local group chooses to emphasise in their practice.<sup>92</sup> Much of pagan religion is an ongoing act of reviving and reconstructing, but also one of re-imagining and re-shaping in order to make their religion work in our contemporary society.

Though British and/or European in origin, it was when paganism crossed the Atlantic and gained followers in North America that it also gained momentum. The people responsible for bringing Gardnerian Wicca to North America were Rosemary and Raymond Buckland (1934-2017). Originally from England, Raymond Buckland served in the Royal Airforce between 1957-1959, and was later employed by a forerunner of the British Airways, BOAC. In 1962, his company placed him in the United States, and the Bucklands settled in Brentwood, Long Island. The couple shared an interest in magic and the occult, and among the books they read together while still living in England was Gerald Gardner’s *Witchcraft Today*, and Raymond and Gardner even exchanged correspondence for some time. After they had settled in the United States, the Bucklands returned to England to undergo training and initiation under the guidance of Monique Wilson (1923-1982), a high priestess who had previously worked with Gardner.<sup>93</sup> When they returned to Long Island, they did so as the first representatives of Gardnerian Wicca in America. They went on to establish their own coven, over which they resided as High Priestess and Priest between 1963-1972, when they stepped down and passed the leadership on to Judy and Thomas Kneitel.<sup>94</sup> Rosemary and Raymond divorced shortly after, and Raymond went on to initiate a new High Priestess to be his magical partner after most of the original coven had stayed with Rosemary. This caused something of a crisis among his former coven members, regarding the issue of lineages and

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<sup>91</sup> Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism*, 172.

<sup>92</sup> Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism*, 173.

<sup>93</sup> Chas Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America*, Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006, 15

<sup>94</sup> Clifton, *Her Hidden Children*, 24.

legitimacy.<sup>95</sup> But this was not out of character for Raymond – he also went against the Gardnerian tradition when in the ‘70s he declared self-initiation as a fully valid form of initiation. This came about after some debates among US Gardnerians about what constitutes a valid initiation into the craft.<sup>96</sup> After this, many other reinterpretations, breaks from tradition, and creation of new traditions took place in the American pagan context over the following decades until today,<sup>97</sup> when the largest and most active groups are in most cases found in the United States – and have, in their turn, spread back to Europe. This has also had an impact on scholarly research, as Pearson points out; American paganism has become the normative form of the practices, and the one which the majority of research is centred upon.<sup>98</sup> British paganism, then, has become the form about which more research is required, despite it being the original one.

Given the turbulent political history of the United States, it is hardly strange that he political and social movements of the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s have had a significant influence on contemporary pagan movements, and issues such as gender and racial equality and community building have become a common focus among both established groups and solitary pagans.<sup>99</sup> Whether they embrace it or dismiss it, there is a strong awareness within the pagan communities of what is happening on the political, cultural, and social arena. We will see further examples of this in the analysis and discussion.

### **3.4 Starhawk’s Reclaiming Tradition, and Hay’s Radical Faeries**

As stated above, the spread of pagan practices and beliefs to the United States proved an important milestone in their development. It timed well with the rise of the larger social justice movements, such as the feminist and gay liberation movements, and the pagan beliefs were picked up by people in those groups, allowing it to reach an even broader audience. As is often the case, when a system of thought or practice encounters a new context it tends to take new shapes, and this was true for paganism as well. Some movements remained, or became more strictly initiatory, choosing not to disclose any part of their beliefs and practices

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<sup>95</sup> Clifton, *Her Hidden Children*, 25-26.

<sup>96</sup> Clifton, *Her Hidden Children*, 22.

<sup>97</sup> Clifton, *Her Hidden Children*, 23.

<sup>98</sup> Pearson, *Wicca and the Christian Heritage*, 7.

<sup>99</sup> Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism*, 71–72.

to non-members.<sup>100</sup> Others chose to become more transparent, incorporating influences from other traditions into their own, and basing membership on criteria other than initiation.

Two movements that originated from very different contexts that are both part of the broader pagan movement today, are the Reclaiming Witchcraft Tradition and the Radical Faeries.

Reclaiming Witchcraft came into being in 1979,<sup>101</sup> and has its roots primarily in the Feri tradition, founded by Victor and Cora Anderson, which is also a Goddess oriented and initiatory tradition, with many influences from a wide array of sources, from Alexandrian Wicca, to Haitian Voudo, and European folklore.<sup>102</sup>

Reclaiming also owes some of features of its practices to Dianic witchcraft, which is a strictly Goddess oriented, feminist type of pagan group, founded in the 1970s by Zsuzsanna Budapest (b. 1940).<sup>103</sup> Originally from Budapest, Hungary, she was first introduced to occult and magical practices by her mother. In the mid to late 1950s, Budapest left Hungary, and eventually settled in the United States – where she studied at the University of Chicago, and then at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. It was during this time Budapest found an interest in pagan witchcraft. Following the divorce from her husband, Budapest left New York for Los Angeles, where she discovered and became part of the growing feminist movements that were gaining momentum in the area at the time.<sup>104</sup> The first Dianic coven was founded in 1971, and was named the Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1,<sup>105</sup> in honour of one of the leading women of the American suffragette movement during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Budapest's new brand of pagan witchcraft was controversial, even within pagan circles, as it openly rejected all male influences, worshiping only the Goddess, and allowing only female members in its covens – thus breaking the more common pattern of practice where covens worship both Goddess and God, and allow members of all genders.<sup>106</sup> This approach was in line with Budapest's feminist politics; Goddess worship was a part of her vision for

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<sup>100</sup> The Minoan Brotherhood, and the Brotherhood of the Phoenix are examples of movements of this type.

<sup>101</sup> Doyle White, *Wicca*, 61.

<sup>102</sup> Doyle White, *Wicca*, 47.

<sup>103</sup> Doyle White, *Wicca*, 59.

<sup>104</sup> Doyle White, *Wicca*, 58.

<sup>105</sup> Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries: Feminist Witchcraft, Goddess Rituals, Spellcasting, and other womanly arts...*, Berkeley: Wingbow Press, 1989 (1980), xviii; Doyle White, *Wicca*, 59.

<sup>106</sup> Hutton, *Triumph*, 346, 360.



overturning the patriarchal structures of Western society, and replacing them with a new, matriarchal worldview instead.<sup>107</sup>

Starhawk (b. 1951), the founder of Reclaiming, was a student of Victor Anderson, and brought many elements of the Feri tradition into the developing new movement. Born Miriam Simos, and raised Orthodox Jewish, Starhawk came into witchcraft while at university, and spent some time with Budapest's coven while in Los Angeles. This was followed by a few years of working as a tarot reader, teaching classes on Wicca, and working with new covens of her own. In the latter half of the 1970s, Starhawk, no longer going by her birthname, met with Victor Anderson, and was subsequently initiated into his tradition.<sup>108</sup> It was the publishing of Starhawk's book on Goddess spirituality, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*,<sup>109</sup> that helped launch Reclaiming as a new tradition. During the 1970s and '80s, Starhawk was an active left-wing anarchist, who took part in many political protests and actions of that time, and the tradition has followed its founder's values, incorporating feminism, anarchism, and social justice activism into its core values and practices.<sup>110</sup> This focus on political activism together with ritual and magical work as a part of the craft sets Reclaiming apart from other pagan witchcraft movements.

The Radical Faeries were also founded by an activist; Harry Hay, who during the 1960s and '70s was an active member of the United States' Gay Liberation movement. There appears to have been a trend within many different activist movements in the 1970s to seek different forms of spiritual or religious belonging, either due to disillusionment, or due to a belief in its beneficial qualities to the political struggles.<sup>111</sup> Over the years, Hay, who also had a great interest in spirituality – particularly of the Native American traditions – had come to develop an idea of gay men as a third gender, balancing male and female aspects within them, and possessing a “uniquely gendered spiritual identity”.<sup>112</sup> The idea of a gendered identity that combines or transcends the male/female binary is commonly found in Native American societies, in the form of the Two-Spirit people. Though different nations have different definitions when it comes to distinguishing a Two-Spirit person from other genders, one could briefly summarize it as a person whose gender identity and sexuality falls in a separate

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<sup>107</sup> Doyle White, *Wicca*, 59.

<sup>108</sup> Doyle White, *Wicca*, 60; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 345.

<sup>109</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 1979.

<sup>110</sup> Doyle White, *Wicca*, 61.

<sup>111</sup> Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 33.

<sup>112</sup> Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 34.

category from heterosexual male/female, and who assumes the social appearance and role of the binary gender with which they identify the most, either some or all of the time. This gender was available as an option to those whose identity fit the category, regardless of gender assumed at birth.

Unlike Two-Spirit people, Hay's third gender category was initially thought of as exclusively for cisgender gay men, and existed in opposition to the norms and ideas of masculinity and heterosexuality that existed at the time.<sup>113</sup> The term 'Faerie' as the name for this third gender came from the call sent out by Hay to his peers, when in 1979 he invited them to join him at "A Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries" – offering an opportunity for gay men to explore their spirituality and how it connected to their identities as gay men in modern society.<sup>114</sup> While maintaining the core principles of 'otherness' and androgyny, the Radical Faeries have over the years come to accept members of all genders and sexuality, albeit not without some difficulties,<sup>115</sup> as we will see in the next part of the text.

#### 4. Analysis and Discussion

As we move onto the analysis and discussion of the material, a short recapitulation of my theoretical and methodological perspective is fitting. I will present each book/source in turn, based on their closeness to Gardner's original ideas – starting, naturally, with Gardner himself, followed by Doreen Valiente and the Farrars, and from there moving on to Harry Hay and Starhawk respectively. I will focus on quotes and excerpts from each source that touch upon the subjects of gender and bodies, and analyse if, and in what way, a particular gender narrative or discourse can be found, in order to establish whether there have been any discursive changes over the decades, and if there are any competing discourses that might have helped reshape the ruling gender discourse over time.

In the chapter on method, I briefly discussed the social process as it is defined by Fairclough; the interplay between social structures, practices within a social field, and events taking place in accordance with social practices. It is through this continuous interplay that we construct reality and meaning on a structural level. Paganism, then, can be viewed as a social field, with its own social practices and events, within the larger social structure of contemporary Western society. This structure is in turn made up of a plethora of different

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<sup>113</sup> Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 34-35.

<sup>114</sup> Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 33-34; Doyle White, *Wicca*, 63.

<sup>115</sup> Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 35.

social fields – each with its own discourses, narratives, and practices. It is not unreasonable, then, to suggest that paganism as a social field will be affected by events and practices within other social fields, since they all affect and are in turn affected by the social structure of which they are a constitutive part.

Butler’s theory of binary sex as discourse applied to bodies belongs on the level of social structures rather than within a social field, as the idea of two mutually exclusive sex/gender categories has been an integral part of the worldview of Western society for a long time. As one of our ruling social narratives, the binary sex/gender system affects the social fields, and their internal narratives, in a subtle but compelling way; it is to a large extent a narrative that goes unquestioned, because it is, in short, one of the things that “everybody knows”.<sup>116</sup> But changes in the narratives and discourses on the structural level will impact the discourses and narratives within the various social fields.<sup>117</sup> It would, thus, be reasonable to suggest also that changes in the sex/gender discourse on the structural level will bring about certain changes in the sex/gender discourse of the pagan social field, which will be reflected in the writings of pagan authors. This will be the starting point for my analysis.

## **4.1 First Generation – Gardner, Valiente, and the Farrars**

### **4.1.1 Gardner – *Witchcraft Today* (1954)**

The goddess of the witch cult is obviously the Great Mother, the giver of life, incarnate love. She rules spring, pleasure, feasting and all the delights.<sup>118</sup>

The starting point of any analysis of Gardner’s view of gender should be his description of the divine. Gardnerian Wicca, while honouring both God and Goddess, does give more focus to the latter. The Goddess is the chief deity, with the God as her consort – mirrored in the coven by the High Priestess as the leader of the coven, and the High Priest as her working partner and/or spouse. The Goddess we see described here is a mother goddess, and a goddess of fertility. Gardner describes her as the “giver of life”, and ruler of spring, the connotations of which allows us to immediately identify the fertility aspect that is primary to her identity.<sup>119</sup> This also communicates that women’s reproductive abilities and organs are an important part

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<sup>116</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 38; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10-11.

<sup>117</sup> Valiente, *Imagining Transgender*, 165.

<sup>118</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 42.

<sup>119</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 125.

of the religious life and practice of this group, because, as Oboler writes, “the female reproductive process is seen as the metaphor for creation”.<sup>120</sup> Gardner also describes her as “incarnate love”, and ruler of “pleasure, feasting and all the delights”. “Love”, “pleasure”, and “delights” are softer words, commonly gendered as feminine (or female), and can be used to convey different aspects of femininity depending on situation and agenda of the person(s) using the language. It is significant that “love”, “delight”, and “pleasure” are situated together in Gardner’s description, as the former two are usually used to convey a purer, innocent type of femininity, whereas “pleasure” is more often found in descriptions of a more sensual, impure type of femininity.

When Gardner describes his view on magical abilities, and how witches train themselves to access these abilities, he states that he does not so much believe that these abilities are given as a result of initiation as much as they are inherent in all people – only needing the right training in order to be accessed – Gardner compares the human magical will to a battery, and to

form this battery of wills, male and female intelligences are necessary *in couples*. In practice, these are usually husband and wife, but there are younger people who often form attachments which usually end in marriage.<sup>121</sup>

From the start, then, we have an indication that there is something specific about the relationship between men and women that is important to the work of magic. Enough so that young couples working together tend to end up marrying each other. There is a sensual, if not sexual, element in the practice of magic, that is not only accepted but considered crucially important.<sup>122</sup> Later in the book, in chapter ten, Gardner discusses the function of the coven, and there he returns to the above analogy, and expands upon it from the perspective of a working coven:

Traditionally, this consists of six perfect couples and a leader; preferably the couples are husbands and wives, or at least betrothed. That is, *they should be lovers*, in sympathy with each other, as this gives the best results.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism’, 163.

<sup>121</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 29. My emphasis.

<sup>122</sup> Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism’, 171, 173; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 30-31.

<sup>123</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 114-115. My emphasis.

Already from these two examples, we can see a clear indication of heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as the basic polarity model for Gardner's battery analogy. To be a woman is, in part, to be emotionally and sexually attracted to men, and to be a man is, in part, to be emotionally and sexually attracted to women.<sup>124</sup> Not only is the gender of the people involved important for the working of magic, but the attraction *itself*, as Gardner stresses when he repeats that those working together should be "couples", "married", or "at least betrothed".<sup>125</sup> Indeed, he states very clearly in the above quote that the relationship itself is key, not only the people forming the working pair. Given that Wicca is from the beginning labelled as a fertility cult, the presence and focus given to sexuality within the cult is logical. What is interesting here is that Gardner's magical system also requires working pairs, or couples, to work – specifically working pairs where one half is a woman and the other is a man. This opens for the possibility of an essentialist perspective as well. That the working pair must be made up of "male and female intelligences" suggests that there is, in Gardner's view, an actual difference in essences between them – otherwise any two people, regardless of anatomy, should be able to form this "battery of wills".

There is one exception to Gardner's coven model of six perfect couples and a leader in the ritual space that is mentioned in the book. It is that during rites where the leader has to be a man, but

[...] a man of requisite rank is not available, a chief priestess belts a sword on and is thought of as a man for the occasion. But although a woman can on occasion take a man's place, a man can never take a woman's place.<sup>126</sup>

There is no clear explanation for this exception, but it is interesting that it exists and that it is strictly woman-to-man, and not both ways, or the other way. It would be logical, perhaps, to assume that this has to do with the woman as representative of the Goddess, and her standing within the coven. It does not, however, account for the indications discussed above – namely, the difference in essences between men and women. What is it about the female essence that allows it to "cross over", and what is it about the male essence that prevents it from doing the same? It also poses the question of whether essence is tied to anatomy. As Fausto-Sterling points out when she remarks that "labelling someone a man or a woman is a social

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<sup>124</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 158, 159.

<sup>125</sup> Oboler, 'Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism', 170.

<sup>126</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 44.

decision”,<sup>127</sup> this depends on what our beliefs about the nature of gender are, and how we define it.<sup>128</sup>

If a member of the coven, who had previously been thought of as a woman, was to transition medically and socially and come to the circle as the man he had been all along, what would this do to the magic? How would it affect the ritual space? Would this person still be expected to take on the role of woman in the circle, or would he be counted among the men? What of the gender essence of this person? Does he carry the female essence due to the anatomy he was born with, or does he carry the male essence due to the gender he knows himself to be? There are no answers to these questions in Gardner’s texts, nor should there be any expectations of it; the tone and wordings of Gardner’s writing shows us that, to him, the binary gender model was not only the natural one, but the *only* one.<sup>129</sup> However, these exceptions, and the lack of explanations for certain customs and practices, are important for our understanding of the discourse of gender that Gardner is presenting to us. These are the a priori assumptions that must be analysed as closely as the written statements presented in the texts.<sup>130</sup>

Gardner brings up another aspect of this gender polarity, when he discusses the Medieval Knight Templars, and uses them to make a statement regarding initiation and learning the craft. Presenting it as a piece of witches’ law that he was given by the witches themselves, Gardner writes that

the witches tell me: “The law always has been that power must be passed from man to woman or from woman to man, the exception being when a mother initiates her daughter or a father his son, because they are part of themselves.”<sup>131</sup>

Not only is a cross-gender model important for working magic, it is also the correct way of passing the teachings on to new witches. In a parenthesis following the quote, Gardner claims that this is because “great love is apt to occur between people who go through the rites together”.<sup>132</sup> One’s child, then, is safe to teach and initiate since it is considered a part of oneself, and therefore will not upset the order of initiation and teaching. This is, however, as

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<sup>127</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 3.

<sup>128</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xxv, 159; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9.

<sup>129</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 124-125; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 140.

<sup>130</sup> Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 141

<sup>131</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 69.

<sup>132</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 69.

far as I have gathered, the only time a same-sex initiation is allowed, as Gardner continues the quote above, saying that the witches

go on to say: “The Templars broke this age-old rule, and passed the power *from man to man*: this led to sin and in so doing it brought about their downfall.”<sup>133</sup>

Whether or not the Templars practiced this, the message is quite clear regarding same-sex initiation. If you initiate those of the same sex as you, who are not your children, you will cause the downfall of your coven.<sup>134</sup> The sensual and sexual elements of the magic is reserved for those of different, complementary genders; men and women.<sup>135</sup> Gardner was not accepting of homosexuality, but it is also quite possible that his anti-homosexuality helped protect the budding Wicca movement, which was already challenging the patriarchal structures of British society with its celebration of female sexuality, and its worship of a Goddess figure. Denouncing homosexuality would have allowed them to position themselves within the ruling gender/sexuality narrative in Britain at the time, which might help them avoid some troubles with other aspects of Wiccan practice – such as the ritual nudity, and the sexual imagery used in both ritual and teachings. Making heterosexuality not only compulsory for members, but the very foundation of both the magical system and the worldview of his group, would provide at the very least an ‘Other’ against whom they can contrast themselves. There are no mentions in the book of female same-sex relationships, only male ones, but this is not necessarily a strange thing; in many writings in Western society where sexuality is mentioned, female homosexuality tends to be overlooked while male homosexuality is held as the default definition of the term.<sup>136</sup> What we see in Gardner’s work, then, is a binary gender model with a focus on polarity and the harmonising aspects of those poles. There is a clearly heteronormative basis for cross-gender interactions, assuming heterosexuality as the default, and all cross-gender relationships mirror that heterosexual relationship.<sup>137</sup> None of this is in any way strange to find in a book published in 1954, and given Gardner’s own social context

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<sup>133</sup> Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 69. My emphasis.

<sup>134</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 48-49.

<sup>135</sup> Lepage, ‘A Lokian Family’, 83; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9.

<sup>136</sup> Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 163.

In an amendment to the Sexual Offences Act, chapter 60, homosexual acts conducted in private, between two consenting men over the age of 21, ceased to be a criminal offense in England and Wales in 1967. These amendments did not apply to Scotland and Northern Ireland, to the Merchant Navy, or the Armed Forces. "Sexual Offences Act 1967", Legislation.Gov.Uk, 2017

<<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/60>> [Accessed: December 21 2017]

<sup>137</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 85.

and values, these findings are to be expected.<sup>138</sup> They are the original against which we will compare the rest.

What we have not found in Gardner's text, is any obvious mention of a transgender or gender non-conforming person, but, as discussed above, this is expected. This terminology is too new, and the understanding of gender during Gerald Gardner's time was heavily linked to social behaviour and sexuality.<sup>139</sup> For a long time, the closest label that gained any sort of wider acknowledgement was "homosexual".<sup>140</sup> Other terms that are commonly used today, such as "gay" only began to gain wider recognition years after Gardner's books had been published.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, with older sources such as *Witchcraft Today*, one is by necessity sent on a detour into descriptions of (male) homosexuality if one is attempting to locate indications of gender non-conformity or transgender identities.<sup>142</sup>

We will now move on to one of the most important writers in contemporary paganism: Doreen Valiente, Gardner's former High Priestess and friend.

#### 4.1.2 Valiente – *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* (1978)

Doreen Valiente is somewhat more detailed in her use of gendered language, at least in comparison to Gardner. *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* was published twenty-four years after Gardner's *Witchcraft Today*, and Valiente's writing has a much more blunt and uncompromising tone.

Though Valiente parted from Gardner fairly early on, her stances on gender polarity and proper gender balance within the coven remain nearly identical. But where Gardner puts slightly more emphasis on the higher status of women in the coven, Valiente stresses the importance of balance and equality. In a section devoted to the topic of sexuality, and how "the subjugation of woman, the dangerous temptress, has been built into most of the world religions of our day",<sup>143</sup> Valiente states that she does not believe in either patriarchy or matriarchy, instead she says that

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<sup>138</sup> Fairclough, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', 12

<sup>139</sup> Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 40-41, 57.

<sup>140</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 14.

<sup>141</sup> Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 43.

<sup>142</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 30-31.

<sup>143</sup> Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, 135.



I personally consider that neither half of a polarity should be dominant over the other, otherwise the situation is bound to become unbalanced. Working in *true polarity* is a potent magical operation, because each stimulates and brings out the best in the other.<sup>144</sup>

Balance between the genders is key, but the basic gender model remains the binary and heteronormative model we have already seen in Gardner's text.<sup>145</sup> The "true polarity" mentioned in the quote could then be assumed to be Valiente's term for complete balance between genders, but the interesting part is the second half of the sentence. It is stated more clearly here than in the rest of the text *why* this polarity is important. Balance is often considered as almost synonym for stability, something that is firm and solid and reliable. It is a relationship between opposites that is static, almost passive in nature. But here, Valiente offers a dynamic and active perspective, where both halves are reliant on the other to interact with, and draw their best aspects into the work.

While Valiente does provide rituals for self-initiation in the book, she holds that "initiation into a coven should always be received from a person of the *opposite sex*",<sup>146</sup> and that the one exception to this rule is that "a father may initiate his son, or a mother her daughter, because your child is in a sense a part of yourself".<sup>147</sup> Regarding initiation into a coven, then, Valiente follows Gardner to the letter; cross-gender initiation is the correct form of initiation, and Valiente's statement leaves little room for discussion. She continues with a brief discussion about the initiation of a magical partner, in which the reason for the emphasis on cross-gender initiation becomes evident:

If the initiation is of one's own first-chosen magical partner, either man or woman, then the rite should certainly be ended by sexual intercourse within the circle; because it is preferable that the partners should be upon the intimate terms of lovers if they want to be able to work *real magic* together.<sup>148</sup>

As we can see, Valiente is much more explicit than Gardner regarding the relationship between magical partners. In Gardner's writing, it is obviously a romantic relationship he describes, but the focus appears to be more on the emotional and intellectual bond. In Valiente's text, she makes it clear that there is an expectation that the pair should be in a sexual relationship with each other as well. For Valiente, this aspect of the relationship

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<sup>144</sup> Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, 135. My emphasis.

<sup>145</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23, 30-31.

<sup>146</sup> Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, 174. My emphasis.

<sup>147</sup> Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, 175.

<sup>148</sup> Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, 179.

appears vital for the quality and effectiveness of their magical work. It is unclear, however, exactly what Valiente means when she writes “either man or woman” in the beginning of the sentence. On its own, it could be read as an acceptance or approval of same-sex relationships between magical partners, but given that there are no other instances in the book where Valiente discusses same-sex pairs – apart from initiation of one’s own child, which is a different and strictly non-sexual situation – this is more likely to refer to the reader’s own gender.<sup>149</sup> A man reading her book should end the ritual with his female working partner this way, just as a woman reading the book should do with her male working partner. Therefore, I would argue that Valiente defaults this couple to a heterosexual couple – which fits the pattern of the way she discusses gender relationships and magical work over all.<sup>150</sup> Following this, it is logical to assume that she also means that both involved parties are cisgender. In other words, the heterosexual matrix – where a woman is a woman in part due to her attraction to men, and a man is a man in part due to his attraction to women – remains the base line for the magical system, and the social narrative of pagan covens, as far as Valiente is concerned.<sup>151</sup>

Not only is the polarity itself, and the exchange of action and reaction between the poles important, but so is the manner in which the poles are brought together into a union. Valiente writes that

...the Great Work of magic is the union of opposites, of which male and female is one form, and that most potent, wherefore it is sometimes called the Great Rite.<sup>152</sup>

This idea of the union of opposites that Valiente mentions above is another clear sign of the binary worldview that we are seeing not only in Valiente’s work, but in Gardner’s, and other writers as well. This concept operates on the assumption that everything exists in pairs of mutually exclusive but complementary, or balancing, opposites.<sup>153</sup> Gender, then, is only one

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<sup>149</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23.

<sup>150</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 85.

<sup>151</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 159, 183; Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 16-18.

<sup>152</sup> Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, 180.

During the Great Rite, one of the most central rituals of Wiccan practice, centered upon the idea of a perfect union of the male and female opposites, the High Priestess and High Priest enact the union of the Goddess and God through ritual intercourse. This can be done in two ways: either symbolic, in which case the athame and chalice will be used instead of people, and the ‘actual’ Great Rite, when the couple themselves engage in the act as part of the ritual. Only during the symbolic Great Rite is the coven present for the entire ritual.

<sup>153</sup> Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism’, 175; Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 20-21.

out of countless such opposite pairs, and thus its status as “natural” or “given” is safeguarded.<sup>154</sup>

#### 4.1.3 The Farrars – *Eight Sabbats for Witches* (1981), and *The Witches’ Way* (1984)

Janet and Stewart Farrar describe their practice and beliefs as “Neo-Alexandrian”, and/or Gardnerian/Alexandrian – positioning themselves as followers of the more traditional British witchcraft.<sup>155</sup> Their worldview and magical system, like that of their predecessors, is centred upon the idea of male/female as opposite poles, each with their own set of traits and essences, that complement one another through the means of mutual attraction.<sup>156</sup> The Farrars follow Gardner’s example of comparing this to a battery; for there to be a charge that can power the machine, the battery needs a positive and negative pole in order to work.<sup>157</sup> For this reason, the Farrars state, magical partnerships should always consist of one man and one woman, who share some form of bond with each other – romantic love, friendship, or familial bonds, for example.<sup>158</sup>

One of the first things one notices about the ritual language used by the Farrars, is that blessings and invocations are phrased differently for men and women. Sometimes these differences are obvious, other times they are subtle, but they are not difficult to find. For example, the practice known as the Fivefold Kiss, used by many pagan covens is explicitly gendered, and phrased differently for men and women, as demonstrated below.<sup>159</sup> The left column shows the phrasing as it is for women, and the right column as it is for men.

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<sup>154</sup> Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 135; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 85.

<sup>155</sup> Farrar & Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, 17.

<sup>156</sup> Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism’, 159; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9, 23, 124-125.

<sup>157</sup> Farrar & Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, 107.

<sup>158</sup> Farrar & Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, 17.

<sup>159</sup> Farrar & Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, 40-41.

It is interesting to note that in the oldest published version of the Fivefold Kiss, which can be found in Gardner’s *High Magic’s Aid* (1949), the third line blesses the “Organ of Generation”, and the fourth line uses “strength” and “beauty” together – making it gender neutral. The version used by the Farrars is a later, and reworked one. Gardner, Gerald, *High Magic’s Aid*, London: Michael Houghton, 1949, 293.

Blessed be thy feet,  
that have brought thee in these ways.

Blessed be thy feet,  
that have brought thee in these ways.

Blessed be thy knees,  
that shall kneel at the sacred altar.

Blessed be thy knees,  
that shall kneel at the sacred altar.

Blessed be thy *womb*,  
without which we would not be.

Blessed be thy *phallus*,  
without which we would not be.

Blessed be thy *breasts*,  
formed in *beauty*.

Blessed be thy *breast*,  
formed in *strength*.

Blessed be thy lips,  
that shall utter the sacred names.

Blessed be thy lips,  
that shall utter the sacred names.

In it, we see first a focus on the body itself; the entire invocation centres upon the blessing and celebration of different parts of the human body. The first two lines, along with the last, are the same for everyone. The third line demonstrates the fertility aspects of Wiccan beliefs and practices, with its focus on human reproductive organs. But the fourth line is especially interesting, as it is in this line we can see the most clearly defined difference in gendered traits. Here, “strength” is given as a masculine trait, whereas “beauty” is a feminine one. Beauty is also more of an external, subjective trait, which depends on the definitions of the person looking and being looked at, while strength is internal and objective in comparison – at least regarding strength as a physical trait. A person’s physical strength is not dependent on the tastes and views of others; it is about the physical ability to perform certain tasks that are heavy and/or strenuous. This may seem a small detail, but it is important for the overall picture when it comes to discussions of gendered language and practice.<sup>160</sup>

In the ritual of consecration, where the cakes and wine that the coven share after their ritual and magical work is purified is finished, we find another example of gendered language – this time more symbolical in nature. This ritual is also used as the symbolic Great Rite, which is important to remember as it adds further implications to the language used. As the High Priestess lowers the tip of the athame (the ritual dagger) into a cup or chalice held by the High Priest, the following line is read:

As the athame is to the *male*, so the cup is to the *female*; and conjoined, they become one in truth.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Lepage, ‘A Lokian Family’, 86-87; Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 135.

<sup>161</sup> Farrar & Farrar, *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, 46. My emphasis.

This follows a system of symbolism that is found in many societies and religions worldwide, not only in pagan witchcraft. The gendered imagery is typical of religious systems built upon an idea of dualisms or polarity.<sup>162</sup> The athame symbolizes the phallus, and is given the active, taking traits often linked to maleness in Western societies. The cup, then, symbolizes the vulva or womb, and is given the passive, giving/receiving traits commonly linked to femaleness. When they come together, their respective essences/energies become balanced, and the union itself sparks a creative energy – which is what allows magic to work.<sup>163</sup>

Regarding the topic of gender balance in covens, the Farrars state that while the correct practice is to have a balance between men and women, they can make an exception for all-female covens, because of

...the cyclic natures of the members providing the necessary creative polarity. But an all-male coven, in our opinion, would be a mistake.<sup>164</sup>

The cyclic nature referred to here is that of the menstrual cycle, which, the Farrars believe, allows women to channel both aspects of the gender polarity, and it is also a significant aspect of their definition of womanhood. To be a woman is to have a menstrual cycle, and to have a menstrual cycle is to be a woman.<sup>165</sup> This is a typical aspect of an essentialist definition of gender, where the genitalia-equals-gender model is also tied to women's reproductive ability.<sup>166</sup> Men's fertility is secondary; it is the capacity for pregnancy that is central to the practice,<sup>167</sup> something which is clearly reflected in the overall myths and narratives of the movement. Oboler makes the same observation in her article, where she notes that among the pagans she has met, the majority consider gods and goddesses as relatively equal, and in the cases where one was considered more important, goddesses were generally considered more important than gods.<sup>168</sup>

While the Farrars make it clear that their working pairs may have any relationship – as long as they are male and female – the imagery with which they are working is deeply rooted

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<sup>162</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 30-31.

<sup>163</sup> Oboler, 'Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism', 170, 175.

<sup>164</sup> Farrar & Farrar, *The Witches' Way*, 169.

<sup>165</sup> Farrar & Farrar, *The Witches' Way*, 162, 165; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 27; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 159.

<sup>166</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 5, 242-243; Oboler, 'Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism', 163.

<sup>167</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 125.

<sup>168</sup> Oboler, 'Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism', 161.

in heterosexuality and the norms associated with it;<sup>169</sup> as with Gardner and Valiente, it operates on a heteronormative worldview.

## 4.2 Second Generation – Starhawk and Hay

### 4.2.1 Starhawk – *Spiral Dance* (1979)

Starhawk's *Spiral Dance* is in some ways a book which is in conversation with itself. The first edition was published in 1979, and the text remains the main body of the book. Then, for the tenth and twentieth anniversary editions, Starhawk revised the text and added new notes and commentary to it, to inform the readers where, and in what ways, her thoughts and opinions on various matters have changed with time. I will therefore be quoting from both the original 1979 version, and from the added notes, in order to provide the most accurate discussion regarding the book and its content.

Starhawk discusses the role of the Goddess in *Reclaiming Witchcraft*, after a recapitulation of the role of witches throughout history which largely follows the narrative set up from the Murray thesis.<sup>170</sup> After a brief discussion about male images of deities, especially those of Christianity and Judaism, and the power of symbolism, Starhawk gives this summary of the Goddess:

The symbolism of the Goddess is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The Goddess does not rule the world; She *is* the world. [...] She does not legitimize the rule of either sex by the other and lends no authority to rulers of temporal hierarchies. [...] Deity is seen in our own forms, whether female or male, because the Goddess has her male aspect.<sup>171</sup>

While the Goddess is the main deity of *Reclaiming Witchcraft*, which is logical given the influence on the movement by Dianic Witchcraft – which is Goddess-centric – Starhawk follows Valiente in advocating gender balance instead of one gender ranking above another. Neither within the religious practice nor in society in general, is gender a basis for hierarchical structures. They exist as equals, and the Goddess should not be used as a justification for gender imbalance. But Starhawk goes one step further than Valiente, in stating that the Goddess of *Reclaiming* is gender balance in herself because of her possessing

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<sup>169</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 85, 140, 183.

<sup>170</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 26-32.

<sup>171</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 33. Emphasis in original.

a male aspect within herself. Though she is outwardly female, she still possesses maleness as a part of herself, and that part is not less important. Men can worship her just as well as women can, since she represents them equally. As we can see, then, the binary gender model continues here, but with a different focus. With Gardner, Valiente, and the Farrars, the male aspect of the Goddess is the God, whom she gives birth to. The Goddess herself is not male in these traditions; he exists in a state of dependency on her ability to give birth to him. With Starhawk, the birth has been replaced by a different type of essentialism, where the Goddess can contain both essences in herself as she is, not as the personification of one and birth-giver of the other.<sup>172</sup> She continues the discussion of polarity and essence, going on to stress that

The polarity of the Female and Male principles should not be taken as a general pattern for individual female and human beings. We each contain both principles; we are female and male both. To be whole is to be in touch with both forces – creation and dissolution, growth and limitation.<sup>173</sup>

Though Starhawk accepts the existence of a male and female essence, or principle, she still considers these essences to exist equally in all human beings, whether they are women or men, and that both are needed for an individual to be able to be complete.<sup>174</sup> We can also see that she does not appear to place the same importance on individual women and men manifesting or expressing the traits associated with these principles in their own lives as we have seen in the writings of the first generation. This is because Starhawk does not link these essences to gendered traits in the same way. She writes that

it is important, however, to separate the concept of polarity from our culturally conditioned images of male and female. The Male and Female forces represent difference, yet they are not different, in essence: They are the same force flowing in opposite, but not opposed, directions.<sup>175</sup>

This is a clear step away from the earlier essentialist models that we have seen above. Here, Starhawk draws a line between the view of maleness and femaleness in our Western society and culture,<sup>176</sup> and the Male and Female essences – which are not actually different, but simply represents difference. One could see the Male/Female forces as the opposite sides of a coin; they are both equal parts of that coin, they merely have different motifs stamped into

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<sup>172</sup> Lepage, 'A Lokian Family', 85; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 125.

<sup>173</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 52.

<sup>174</sup> Lepage, 'A Lokian Family', 84.

<sup>175</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 50-51.

<sup>176</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 243-244.

them. Removing one is not possible without damaging or destroying the coin. While we are still being presented with a model of gender polarity, it is less rigid and less explicit than earlier models. The polarity has also been relocated, from an external relationship between men and women, to an internal dynamic exchange between male and female essences within each individual person.

In the tenth anniversary edition, however, Starhawk's own view of polarity in general, and especially polarity between genders, has undergone some changes. In her notes on the text, she states that

earlier, I saw this myth as a teaching about *polarity*, the magnetic attraction of opposites, the dynamic tension of differentiation, and I saw the primary differentiation as female/male. The unexamined model in my mind at the time, I believe now, was of erotic attraction between women and men as the basic pattern for understanding the energy dynamics of the universe. Polarity can exist between women and men, female and male, and when it does it is a powerful force. [...] It is one valid way to understand energy – but it is only one way.<sup>177</sup>

Here, we see how Starhawk's position has shifted from a heterosexual and largely hetero-, and cisnormative baseline – with erotic attraction between men and women as primary model of opposites for the structure of the universe – to a baseline that, while still largely binary and based on polarity, allows the specifically gendered polarity a place only as one among many.<sup>178</sup> The polarity still exists, and Starhawk still holds it as a powerful dynamic, but it is no longer shaping the view and understanding of how the universe works.<sup>179</sup> This is an important difference for our discussion. The room in which to navigate gender becomes much smaller if it is considered the basic dynamic tension of the universe itself, versus when gender polarity is only one option among many different types of polarity that can be called upon in one's practice and used in constructing one's worldview.

Sex and polarity, of course, arise in many different ways among those who are like us and unlike us in many ways – gender being only one of them. Perhaps instead of “polarity” I might today say that “the manifestation of the driving life force of the universe” is *desire*, attraction, the pull toward pleasure and connection and union.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 234. Emphasis in original.

<sup>178</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31, 125.

<sup>179</sup> Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism’, 175.

<sup>180</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 243. Notes on the tenth anniversary edition. Emphasis in original.



Here, Starhawk takes another big step away from the gender polarity models presented above. While she still acknowledges the existence and potential in the dynamic relationship between opposites of various kinds, she has moved away from the term “polarity”, and instead names desire and attraction as the primary forces behind the relationship and balance between these opposites. “Polarity” as a term itself, suggests a binary, or a dualistic model where you are one or the other, and where little room – if any – exist for any other option than the two poles. By stepping away from this term, and replacing it with the terms “desire” and “attraction”, Starhawk opens a much wider range of possibilities in interpreting the world and the complicated web of tensions that exist in it. Implicitly, this also creates an opening for a broader interpretation of gender than the binary male/female model, where the original text left no such opening.

I no longer believe we each have a female self or a male self. Instead, I would say that we each have a complex and multifaceted self that embraces the possibilities inherent in many different forms, including that of gender. [...] Why should our imagination be limited by the shape of our genitalia?<sup>181</sup>

Not only does Starhawk move away from the term “polarity” in the tenth anniversary edition, but she also moves away from the idea of a male and female essence in each person. The gendered aspect of our self becomes merely one facet out of many by which we define ourselves. There is still a link here, as we can see, to the cisnormative idea of genitalia equalling gender, but together with the rest of the excerpt there is still a very clear distance put up between the previous gender essentialist ideas, and the idea of the complex self which is not determined or limited by the gendered aspect of itself.<sup>182</sup>

Regarding the main social arena of Reclaiming, the covens, Starhawk’s views also undergo some changes during the ten years between the first edition and the second. In the 1979 edition, Starhawk has this to say about the gendered aspects of coven structure: “covens may include both men and women or be limited to women only”.<sup>183</sup> This is similar to what we have seen in the writings of the first generation – the Farrars, in particular – and given Starhawk’s own background in left-wing, feminist circles, it would be logical to give special focus to woman-exclusive spaces, while not giving focus to, or even disapproving of man-exclusive spaces. The idea of woman-exclusive spaces, based on the idea of shared

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<sup>181</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 245. Notes on the tenth anniversary edition.

<sup>182</sup> Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, 12.

<sup>183</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 60.

experiences of womanhood, is important to Starhawk in the first edition, and it continues to be so in the tenth and twentieth anniversary editions. However, her views on the importance of man-exclusive covens does change, as we can see in the quote below:

In the loose community around Reclaiming, individual covens, *whether for women, for men, or mixed*, often meet for full moons or for regular weekly or bimonthly meetings.<sup>184</sup>

It is quite possible that this shift in views is tied to the general shift in views and understanding of gender that Starhawk displays between editions. Both the relocating of the polarity from external to internal, and the blurring of the edges between what would be the female and male essences, opens for a broader interpretation of the gender category of “man” – one that is less tied to older essentialist notions of maleness.<sup>185</sup>

This is an important detail in the discussion. Our understanding of gender as discourse is not only linked to the relationship between different genders, but to how each gender itself is understood and defined. Meaning that, as Fausto-Sterling writes, “labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision”,<sup>186</sup> and that the narratives underlying this definition, like other aspects of discourse, are not static but fluid. As the social narratives change, so does the understanding of gender, and comparing the two quotes above with first generation understandings of men and maleness in pagan witchcraft, we can see that something has indeed happened here.<sup>187</sup> Gardner and Valiente are strict advocates of man/woman covens, and even though Valiente also accepts solitary practitioners of any gender, she is – as seen above – adamant regarding the correct gender balance within the coven. The Farrars hold the man/woman structure to be the most appropriate one, but will accept all-woman covens on the basis of their menstrual cycle which allow them to channel both male and female energies. They explicitly disapprove of all-man covens, because men – according to their gender model – cannot channel female energies. Starhawk’s view on gender balance in covens, then, appears to follow the model of the “complex and multifaceted self” which she presents in the tenth anniversary edition. In short, Starhawk appears to have moved from a binary, internal-essentialist understanding of gender, to a still somewhat binary, but non-essentialist understanding where genitalia is still linked to gender, but not determined by it.

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<sup>184</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 238. Notes on the tenth anniversary edition.

<sup>185</sup> Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism’, 168, 169.

<sup>186</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 3.

<sup>187</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 175, 176.

#### 4.2.2 Hay – *Radically Gay* (1996)

Immediately when one begins to read *Radically Gay*, the foundation of thought that Hay builds his worldview on becomes clear. Hay was a Marxist for the greater part of his life, and the impact of this on his ideas of community building and social ethics is undeniable. Further, his own identity as a gay man, and his work in the Gay Liberation movement of the 1960s and '70s, is strongly connected not only to his political views, but also to the shape of his spiritual outlook, which later evolved into the movement known as the Radical Faeries.<sup>188</sup> This book is not only highly political, but written exclusively from a gay male perspective, which sets it apart from the books analysed above, and Hay's discussions of magic and spirituality are most often interwoven with discussions about the struggle for gay rights.

As mentioned in chapter 1.4, Hay was inspired to a high degree by Native American spirituality, and of the different ways gay and/or gender non-conforming individuals have been given a place within Native American society throughout history.<sup>189</sup> Hay considers the gender category Two-Spirit (sometimes called Berdache), to which those belong whose gender presentation and/or sexual attraction fall outside the binary man/woman model,<sup>190</sup> to be a form of magical people – a priesthood of sorts – that exist on the fringes of their society, in the liminal spaces. This idea is profoundly important to his definition of a gay community, or a gay consciousness of the world.<sup>191</sup> Gay men – Hay makes it clear that he cannot speak for gay women, as their experiences and consciousness differ from his own – are their own gender category.<sup>192</sup> They are an “Other”, a third gender, similar to that of the Two-Spirit people, and they are spiritual people due to their otherness and their position as outside the ruling gender model.<sup>193</sup> This position on the fringes of not only their society, but on the edge between the material and the magical world allowed them to take on the role of either trickster characters, or priesthood – or both.<sup>194</sup> Hay states that

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<sup>188</sup> Fairclough, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', 12.

<sup>189</sup> Roscoe (Ed.), *Radically Gay*, 12-13; Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 34.

<sup>190</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 108-109.

<sup>191</sup> Roscoe (Ed.), *Radically Gay*, 47.

<sup>192</sup> Hay, 'A Position Paper', 1976; Roscoe (Ed.), *Radically Gay*, 247.

<sup>193</sup> Fairclough, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', 12; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xxviii-xxix, 140, 158-159.

<sup>194</sup> Roscoe (Ed.), *Radically Gay*, 49-50; Hay, 'The Homosexual's Responsibility to the Community', 1967.

throughout our millennia we were, and are now, in faithful service to the Great Mother – Earth – Nature, and in loyal service to her children – the people who preserved the Great Mother’s ecological harmonies, both psychically and materially, in the ritual of their everyday lives. To those of the communities who granted us respect and acknowledged our integrity, we gave loyalty beyond ordinary measures of endurance [...].<sup>195</sup>

As we can see, Hay views gay and gender non-conforming people as having a unique connection to nature, and that this connection has historically allowed these people to contribute to, and participate in, their societies in certain ways. As long as their identities and roles were acknowledged and respected, they formed a social group, or class, of their own, and helped safeguard the survival of their community. Hay bases this model primarily on pre-Christian and non-Western agricultural societies, where the religious practice was largely nature-based – such as, again, the Native American societies of North America.<sup>196</sup> Hay, like the writers analysed above, uses the term “Great Mother”, but in Hay’s writing, it seems primarily to function as an indicator of the sacredness of nature, rather than as a synonym for a goddess figure. This idea of gay and gender non-conforming people as a magical and/or priestly group within their communities is closely tied to the relationship between the people who make up this group of ‘Other’. To Hay, being part of this group means to be able to experience a form of complete equality, which Hay describes in terms very similar to language used by Christian mystics in reference to ecstatic union with God:

What is it that we know of ourselves that no Heterosexual as yet has begun to perceive? It is that we Homosexuals have a psychic architecture in common, we have a Dream in common, man to man, woman to woman. For all of us, *and for each of us*, in the dream of Love’s ecstasy – the God descends – the Goddess descends – and for each of us the transcendence of that apotheosis is mirrored *in the answering glances of the lover’s eyes*. FOR WE SHARE THE SAME VISION – Like to Like. Heterosexuals do not partake of such communion of spirit. Theirs is... other. And – in this mating of like to like – what is it we seek? [...] We seek union, *each with his similar* – heart to mirroring heart – free spirit to free spirit.<sup>197</sup>

Here, Hay is making a strong statement. Gay people, because they are different from heterosexual people, can experience a “communion of spirit” between one another – an experience they can have because they are mirrors of each other. They can see each other as

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<sup>195</sup> Hay, ‘Western Homophile Conference Keynote Address’, 1970. Emphasis in original.

<sup>196</sup> Roscoe (Ed.), *Radically Gay*, 217.

<sup>197</sup> Hay, ‘Western Homophile Conference Keynote Address’, 1970. Emphasis in original.

subjects, while heterosexual people – in Hay’s view – cannot, since they view other genders as objects.<sup>198</sup> This likeness between gay people is what allows them to connect with and experience the divine. What we see here, then, is the opposite view from much of the first generation; Hay considers magic and ritual work as directly linked to a gay and/or gender non-conforming identity, while Gardner, Valiente, and the Farrars link it to a balance of attraction between two binary genders. According to Hay, magic is worked together with those who are *like* oneself, whereas with the first generation of writers, magic is worked through the balancing of *opposites* – whether external, such as men and women, or internal, such as male and female essences within the self.

What Hay means with this idea of “Like to Like” is his model for how we look at another person; do we consider them an object onto which we project our wishes and desires, or do we consider them a subject just like us, where we do not need to project since our shared likeness means we already share those same wishes and desires. Hay writes that

subject-SUBJECT is a multidimensional consciousness which may never be readily conveyable in the Hetero-male-evolved two-dimensional, or Binary, language to which we are presently confined. [...] We need working models, a whole new mathematics, perhaps new poetry – allegories – metaphors – a music – a new way of dancing. *We must re-examine every system of thought heretofore developed*, every Hetero-male-evolved subject-OBJECT philosophy, science, religion, mythology, political system, language – divesting them of their binary subject-OBJECT base and re-inserting a subject-SUBJECT relation.<sup>199</sup>

This inter-personal relationship model is, as we can see in the excerpt, not confined only to a romantic or sexual relationship context. Rather, Hay looks to remove the current dominant narrative (subject-OBJECT) – in which the heterosexual man is the norm and the subject,<sup>200</sup> and everyone else are objects existing in relation to the norm – and replace it with the, in Hay’s view, equal and multi-dimensional narrative (subject-SUBJECT) that is based in a gay experience and worldview.<sup>201</sup> No system of thought can be left as it is: in order to bring our society to the point where no one is viewed as an object by another, every social field and

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<sup>198</sup> Roscoe (Ed.), *Radically Gay*, 210, 258-259; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 140.

<sup>199</sup> Hay, ‘Towards the New Frontiers of Fairy Vision... subject-SUBJECT Consciousness’, 1980. Emphasis in original.

<sup>200</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 25.

<sup>201</sup> Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 135-136.

system of thought must be re-examined and re-invented.<sup>202</sup> In regard to religion and spirituality, Hay writes that

re-working all previously developed systems of Hetero thought will mean, of course, that all the data we previously have gathered concerning Shamanism and Magick must also be *re-examined*, *re-worked*, and *re-organized* along subject-SUBJECT evaluations [...].<sup>203</sup>

Magical and spiritual practices are important enough to Hay, it seems, that they merit their own additional mention. As we have seen above, the idea of gay and gender non-conforming people as their own separate gender category that is closely linked to magic and divinity remains a core belief in the centre of his otherwise mostly political work. Here, we have further indication that this is as important to his worldview, and the vision he strives to make reality, as anything else. Magic and spirituality is not separate from politics or gay experience – it is a part of them. The question could be raised, though, if Hay’s gender model is not also essentialist, albeit of a slightly different type, given Hay’s emphasis on gay men as a distinct gender category, with specific traits and abilities linked to that category.<sup>204</sup>

We can contrast Hay against Starhawk, who is also a left-wing feminist and activist, and who also implements aspects of her political views in her magical system. With Starhawk, magic comes first, and the political aspects are woven into the system in a much subtler way. Her language is more restrictive where political terminology is concerned – it is mostly the patriarchy that is mentioned – but is much richer and more nuanced regarding magic, divinity, and spiritual practices. Hay is almost her opposite. The separation between different social fields that we see in Starhawk does not exist in Hay.

### **4.3 Third Generation – Pagans Today**

We have now gone through the text sources that make up the first and second generation of pagan movements for this analysis. Some changes in language and understanding of gender appear to have taken place, to varying degrees and in varying ways, but in order to understand how these sources are interpreted and used today, we must turn to those who practice pagan witchcraft today. The interviews analysed below have been sorted to follow the order in

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<sup>202</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xxii, 176, 177.

<sup>203</sup> Hay, ‘Towards the New Frontiers of Fairy Vision... subject-SUBJECT Consciousness’, 1980. Emphasis in original.

<sup>204</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 158-159.

which the texts from first and second generation were presented above; we will begin with a member of Gardnerian Wicca, and move on from there – finishing with a representative of the Radical Faeries. Naturally, with a sample this small, we cannot make any claims at having answers that are representative of the movements overall – such claims would be erroneous, if not flat out irresponsible. As has been the intention of this thesis as a whole, the purpose of these interviews is to scratch the surface of this matter, to see if there are indications of changes that can provide a foundation for further research.

### 4.3.1 Peter – Gardnerian Wicca

On the topic of gender and bodies, and how this has been treated in the Gardnerian tradition in Europe, Peter says that most of the Gardnerian covens, as far as he has experienced, remain fairly strict about the genitalia equalling gender-model of the early days of the tradition, but that some covens are breaking away from that. For them, gender is tied primarily to an inner sense of self:

If you're going to look at a physical body and say 'that's a penis, and that's a vagina', you know, for us that's not, you know, the same as being a man and a woman. Because a lot of it is up here in the head.<sup>205</sup>

These different understandings of gender and bodies can lead, and has led, to some difficulties regarding initiation of new members. One example mentioned by Peter is the issue of correct procedure for the ritual of initiation itself; who should initiate the person, and based on what criteria?<sup>206</sup> This is a core issue for our discussion of the changes in gender discourse, as it forces both the ruling discourse and the competing narratives to confront the practical aspects of their definitions of gender.<sup>207</sup> Should the new initiate decide between the High Priestess/Priest, according to whom they feel most comfortable being initiated by? Or should the coven leaders decide on the basis of the person's gender presentation? Should the person's anatomy feature into the process at all, and if so, in what way? In most covens, even the issue

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<sup>205</sup> "Om man nu ska titta på en fysisk kropp och säga 'ja, men det där är en snopp och det är en snippa' liksom, för oss är inte det liksom lika med att vara man och kvinna. För att det sitter mycket här i huvudet." Peter, Gendered Practice in Gardnerian Wicca, personal interview, October 17, 2017.

<sup>206</sup> Peter, Gendered Practice in Gardnerian Wicca, 2017.

<sup>207</sup> Fairclough, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', 11, 12, 15; Hjelm, 'Discourse Analysis', 135.

of same-sex initiation between two cisgender persons is highly controversial. The matter is further complicated when gender non-conforming, or transgender people enter the mix.<sup>208</sup>

Around seventy-five percent are still very strict that it's supposed to be man/woman, man/woman, but they're having problems focusing and defining what happens when a person who is a penis-bearer doesn't think of themselves as a man, but as a woman, or non-binary, or intersexual, or whatever it may be called.<sup>209</sup>

What we can see signs of in this statement, then, is that there does seem to be a clash happening between the essentialist view that we saw in the texts from the first generation, which focuses on male and female polarity based on a model of heterosexual attraction,<sup>210</sup> and a new and non-essentialist view that focuses on gender as an aspect of identity, and that carries with it a broader range of gender options aside from male/female.<sup>211</sup> Peter continues:

And I suspect that many actually turn these people down, and I know some covens who do that; 'no, you're non-binary, so we won't initiate you', which I think is absolutely terrible if this person is right [for the coven], you know. Who am I to deny a seeker, if the gods have brought them to me?<sup>212</sup>

A non-binary identity challenges the cis-, and heteronormative world model, as it not only breaks up the genitalia-equals-gender model, like most transgender and gender non-conforming identities, but disregards it entirely.<sup>213</sup> A way for the group to remain in control of its own gender models, then, could be to simply exclude those bodies that challenge it, as we see in Peter's statement above.<sup>214</sup> It is interesting to note here, also, that the deities are given a more active role in the shaping of coven life. In the first generation, seekers are admitted based on personal suitability as well as on anatomy and sexuality, since the worldview and

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<sup>208</sup> Lepage, 'A Lokian Family', 80; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 158-159.

<sup>209</sup> "Cirka sjuttiofem procent är fortfarande väldigt strikta med att det ska vara man/kvinna, man/kvinna, men de har problem att fokusera och definiera vad händer när en person som är snoppbärare inte upplever sig själv som man, utan som kvinna, eller non-binary [sic], eller intersexual eller vad det nu kan kallas." Peter, *Gendered Practice in Gardnerian Wicca*, 2017.

<sup>210</sup> Oboler, 'Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism', 159; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 183.

<sup>211</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 3.

<sup>212</sup> "Och jag misstänker att väldigt många faktiskt säger nej till de personerna, och jag vet vissa covens som gör det; "nej, du är non-binary, så vi kommer inte initiera dig", vilket jag tycker låter helt fruktansvärt om den här personen är rätt [för covenet] liksom. Vem är jag att neka en sökare om gudarna har fört den personen till mig?" Peter, *Gendered Practice in Gardnerian Wicca*, 2017.

<sup>213</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 95-97.

<sup>214</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 8; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 140.



gender model demand it. But here we see an idea of the gods sending suitable persons to the covens, which also circumvents the earlier idea. If the gods have chosen a person, how could a regular human deny them that claim? The emerging new gender narrative, then, has also been accompanied by a shift in claims of authority. Whether or not these shifts run parallel or interlaced with each other is beyond the scope of this analysis to answer, but it should be noted, nonetheless.

Peter says the vast majority of covens seem to remain strict regarding proper gender relations in the covens, “but things are starting to move forward now. There are several covens that are actually performing same-sex initiations”.<sup>215</sup> This does indicate that a change in the gender discourse within Gardnerian Wicca could be beginning to occur, with the loosening of the previously rigid rules for gender relations quite possibly functioning as a precursor to a redefining of gender categories on a larger scale.<sup>216</sup> Peter continues with a comment on the way gender is handled in the ritual setting in general, and regarding the invocations of gods and goddesses in particular: “If you’re good at it, do it. It doesn’t really matter if you’re a man, woman, or non-binary”.<sup>217</sup> For his coven, and many covens with them, there is no compelling reason for why only women should be able to represent the Goddess, or why only men should be able to represent the God – instead, they consider it a matter of personal suitability and talent for it. Gender – and particularly the essentialist definition and understanding of it – has, it seems, moved out of the rituals of many Gardnerian covens, at least in Europe.

There is still a strong connection to the origin of the tradition, and what Gardner himself taught and practiced. It is not at all strange to Peter why gay people – and most LGBTQ people by extension – were excluded in the early days of Gardnerian Wicca.<sup>218</sup>

...Gardner himself was a child of his time, and, you know, with the ‘homosexuals shouldn’t be Wiccans’, you know – that was his standpoint. But it was also illegal in his time, you know, it carried a death sentence, so... [...] But

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<sup>215</sup> ”Men det är nu på g att det börjar röra på sig. Det är flera coven som faktiskt genomför same-sex initiation.” Peter, *Gendered Practice in Gardnerian Wicca*, 2017.

<sup>216</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 60; Hjelm, “Discourse Analysis”, 135.

<sup>217</sup> ”Om du är bra på det, gör det. Sen spelar det ingen roll om du är man, kvinna, eller non-binary [sic].” Peter, *Gendered Practice in Gardnerian Wicca*, 2017.

<sup>218</sup> Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism’, 171; Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 145.

it changed pretty quickly after he died. People after him began initiating gay, transgender, bisexuals, the whole LGBT scale, you know.<sup>219</sup>

This seems typical of new movements after the death of their founder and/or original leader. Some groups, such as the majority groups Peter mentions, will remain loyal to the original teachings, or even become more conservative as an effort to preserve their tradition. Others will change and reshape parts of their beliefs and practices in accordance with what they believe will benefit the group, or what they believe to be the better way to teach and practice.<sup>220</sup> Gardner's dislike of homosexuality was typical of its time and context, but as time went on it became challenged by new discourses on sexuality and gender, and it found itself outdated – something Peter also touches upon during the interview:

We've had an enormous liberalization of Gardnerian Wicca. There's nothing unusual about meeting gay people in the circle, it's more the rule than the exception. It would be weird if there wasn't anyone who was, you know, and transgender and non-binarys are a part of our circles today. So, it must be hard to be conservative, and not think they have belong with us, because we're already in the circle, and we're already initiated.<sup>221</sup>

What he suggests here, then, is that Gardnerian Wicca has gone from a movement of exclusively heterosexual, cisgender men and women as valid members, to a movement with large numbers of members that challenge this binary worldview in different ways.<sup>222</sup> It would be reasonable to assume that the increasing numbers of LGBTQ people within Gardnerian covens may have – whether intentionally or not – brought with them the competing gender narratives that have, over time, caused the changes Peter speaks of to occur.

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<sup>219</sup> "...Gardner själv var ju ett barn av sin tid och så här, med "homosexuella ska inte bli Wiccaneer", liksom, det var ju hans ståndpunkt. Men det var ju också förbjudet på hans tid, det var ju liksom belagt med dödsstraff, och... [...] Men det förändrades ganska snabbt när han dog. Människor efter honom började initiera homosexuella, transgender [sic], bisexuella, ja men hela HBTQ skalan, liksom." Peter, *Gendered Practice in Gardnerian Wicca*, 2017.

<sup>220</sup> Fairclough, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', 12.

<sup>221</sup> "Vi har haft en enorm liberalisering av Gardneriansk Wicca. Det är inget konstigt att man träffar homosexuella personer i cirkeln, utan det är mer regel än undantag. Det skulle vara konstigt om det inte var någon som var det, liksom, och även transgender och non-binarys [sic] är en del av våra cirklar idag. Det måste vara jobbigt att vara konservativ och inte tycka att de har hos oss att göra, för vi är redan i cirkeln, och vi är redan initierade." Peter, *Gendered Practice in Gardnerian Wicca*, 2017.

<sup>222</sup> Oboler, 'Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism', 162, 176; Lepage, 'A Lokian Family', 98.

### 4.3.2 Yssion – Alexandrian Witchcraft

From the interview with Yssion, there were some indications that the current shape of the gender discourse in the Alexandrian tradition is very different from that in the Gardnerian tradition. Yssion is from the beginning very clear that

Our tradition, Alexandrian, is like by definition binary. But! I'll qualify that: It's binary meaning that we call ourselves a fertility cult. So we look for couples, we look for the balance of males and females in our groups. But we each seek for balance in ourselves, so it depends on what level you're talking about. Down here, in the physical world, we're binary. When we go up the planes, and you think about more archetypal things, we think of ourselves as... It becomes more and more non-gender, to the point where gender goes away at the top.<sup>223</sup>

From the start here, we can see stated very clearly which gender model and worldview we are working with. The Alexandrian tradition, like the Gardnerian, is a fertility religion, where the focus on the relationship between man and woman is at the centre of practice. But Yssion also divides the gender model into different levels, as we see in the quote above. In the material world – in the coven – there are two genders, man/male, and woman/female, that should exist in equal numbers within the circle.<sup>224</sup> One of the core teachings of Alexandrian Wicca is that each person also carries male and female essences within them, that should also be balanced – which adds a second layer to the discussion. Then, there are the inner, spiritual levels where this gender essence gradually transforms until it no longer contains gender – becoming purely essence. Yssion continues by explaining that “we acknowledge our maleness or our femaleness, but we're not attached to the concept that that defines us in a higher-world sense”.<sup>225</sup>

While there is an essentialist, heteronormative baseline to the gender model Yssion presents us with, the polarity between mutually exclusive gender categories is not all-encompassing as it still contains a gradual shift away from gendered concepts overall. Here in the material world, as said above, the binary gender model is central to practice, and it is kept in place by means of strict rules concerning the correct forms of gendered practice within the coven.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Yssion, Gendered Practice in Alexandrian Wicca, Skype interview, October 10, 2017.

<sup>224</sup> Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 3; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9, 11; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 159.

<sup>225</sup> Yssion, Gendered Practice in Alexandrian Wicca, 2017.

<sup>226</sup> Fairclough, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', 11; Hjelm, 'Discourse Analysis', 141.

He [Alex Sanders] wrote into his teachings that you don't do same-gender initiations. So it's really fundamental to our practice to not... Even if you're two men, it's kind of really not... It's frowned upon, if not completely not okay to have a male group. Gay, trans, cis, or anything – it's always male to female. So the teachings are male to female, female to male.<sup>227</sup>

The focus on tradition, and the original teachings of Sanders, remain important. Practice must take place in a cross-gender structure, to maintain the balance of the gender polarity within the group. The man/woman polarity would still be possible with transgender people in the coven – many trans men and trans women do fall within the gender binary – given the idea of male and female essences within each person, but it would ultimately depend on the amount of emphasis given to the genitalia-equals-gender model.<sup>228</sup> This emphasis appears to be strong, as Yssion points out when he says that “even the most, you know, masculine of females still takes on a priestess role within my groups”.<sup>229</sup> It could be argued that the “masculine female” here could be representative of a gender non-conforming person, which would point further to a strict categorization of masculine/feminine traits often linked to an essentialist gender-model. It could also suggest a lesbian person, whom by means of her sexuality also challenges the heterosexual baseline of the Alexandrian worldview – regardless of which, when she enters the circle her place is already given.<sup>230</sup>

Gender presentation, then, does not trump assigned gender; the shape of your anatomy will dictate your role in the coven. It would be logical to assume then, that the same would be true for gender identity, if it contradicts the assigned gender and anatomy of that person.<sup>231</sup> We saw this in the first generation as well, and to a degree in Starhawk's writings. Gardnerian covens today are battling this same issue, so this is by no means strange, or limited to the Alexandrian tradition.<sup>232</sup> The topic of the binary, genitalia-equals-gender model is raised more explicitly here, as it comes to a more defined point in this interview than the others. The topic of transgender people in covens is, according to Yssion, rarely, if ever, mentioned in the larger Alexandrian community in which he is active. When asked if he himself has noticed

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<sup>227</sup> Yssion, *Gendered Practice in Alexandrian Wicca*, 2017.

<sup>228</sup> Oboler, 'Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism', 169-170; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 30-31, 124-125.

<sup>229</sup> Yssion, *Gendered Practice in Alexandrian Wicca*, 2017.

<sup>230</sup> Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 41, 46, 63.

<sup>231</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 176, 178; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 95-97; Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 76.

<sup>232</sup> Oboler, 'Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism', 171.

any changes in the use of gendered language, or the views on gender within his tradition, he states that:

It has not surfaced. It has not manifested. It's, you know, still a little bit of a question about how to deal with homosexuality. [...] I mean, Alexandrians, we try to have an equal balance, and if we were to line up around the circle, we would go male, female, male, female, male, female. Well, you don't always have a perfect balance of male to female, so what do you do? Well. If you've got an extra female, and she tends to be on the, you know, bullish side, she may actually just sit in that spot, but that's kind of as far as it ever goes.<sup>233</sup>

This suggests that, at least in parts of the Alexandrian tradition, no other gender narratives have so far gained enough foothold within the larger community to be able to challenge the ruling discourse represented by the cis-, and heteronormative gender-model from the early days of Alexandrian Wicca.<sup>234</sup> However, more research is necessary to determine the status of the gender discourse on a larger scale, and to examine whether the situation presented here is representative of the current state of Alexandrian gender discourse overall.

#### 4.3.3 Amoret – Reclaiming Witchcraft

Reclaiming Witchcraft finds itself in a different situation than Alexandrian Wicca, as is made clear in the interview with Amoret. As we saw in Starhawk, the tradition comes from a different time and context, and a very different perspective, than Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca.<sup>235</sup> While originally also based on an idea of polarity, both in terms of the genders of the deities, and in terms of the relationship between genders within the covens, Amoret states that change is happening within the tradition:

There was a big shift in our statement of values, our principles of unity, a few years ago when we added the Mysterious One to our description of divinity. So instead of just saying 'the Gods and the Goddesses', this idea that there are ones that have no gender identity necessarily, or if they do we may not understand it, and sort of allowing and celebrating that is a huge part of our culture as

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<sup>233</sup> Yssion, *Gendered Practice in Alexandrian Wicca*, 2017.

<sup>234</sup> Lepage, 'A Lokian Family', 86-87; Hjelm, 'Discourse Analysis', 141; Fairclough, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', 12; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 140, 183; Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 46, 63.

<sup>235</sup> Hjelm, 'Discourse Analysis', 145.

Reclaiming witches, and that we want to make sure that *our divinity reflects our humanity*.<sup>236</sup>

It is interesting to see this shift in the view of the relationship between humanity and divinity. Instead of tasking the humans with bearing the likeness of, or representing their deities, Reclaiming has put the task of reflecting and representing on the deities. By broadening the spectrum of gender among the deities, there is a shift away from earlier notions of polarity, and by stating the importance of divinity reflecting humanity, the tradition is acknowledging a broader spectrum of gender, and are actively re-shaping their gender narrative accordingly.<sup>237</sup>

Much of the activities and community building work done during gatherings is done through the acting out of stories, and working with the morals and messages told within them. This storytelling is a deliberate queering and re-interpreting, to ensure that not only is there representation of minority groups in the casting and themes, but that the enacting of the story also teaches the audience about the topics.<sup>238</sup> This is done to include and empower the members of the group and/or community, but also to teach the importance of inclusion and acceptance.<sup>239</sup> This is because:

You might be straight and never really given a lot of thought to this, and how can you not only understand but embody these values, and learn more about, for instance, appropriate gender identification for individuals, how to use the right pronouns, what to say when you forget and use the wrong pronouns. And how are we kind to each other but also firm in that we need to do better around these topics?<sup>240</sup>

As we can see, the effort of re-shaping the gender discourse within Reclaiming, from the initial polarity model to a more diverse and non-essentialist one today, appears to be a collective one. There also appears to be a general will to hold each other accountable for what is said and done within the community, while still recognizing that people will come into this discourse from different contexts, and that understanding can in some cases take time. This is a stark contrast to the Alexandrian example above – and, to an extent, also to the Gardnerian example – where efforts to challenge the ruling gender narrative comes from minority

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<sup>236</sup> Amoret, Gendered Practice in Reclaiming Witchcraft, Skype interview, June 12, 2017. My emphasis.

<sup>237</sup> Oboler, 'Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism', 162, 167; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 178.

<sup>238</sup> Amoret, Gendered Practice in Reclaiming Witchcraft, 2017.

<sup>239</sup> Fairclough, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', 12.

<sup>240</sup> Amoret, Gendered Practice in Reclaiming Witchcraft, 2017.

groups,<sup>241</sup> if it exists at all. Amoret summarises this collective practice of queering and/or re-interpreting stories and traditions, by stating that “we don’t hold up white, heterosexual, cisgender lives as being the norm”.<sup>242</sup>

The reason why this collective effort to re-shape the gender discourse within the movement is, according to Amoret, possibly due to the difference in self-definition between Reclaiming and other traditions, like Gardnerian. Reclaiming does not label itself a fertility cult, and therefore the sensual and sexual elements are not as closely tied to notions about male and female as they are in traditions where being a fertility cult is a main aspect of the self-definition of that tradition.<sup>243</sup>

We’re ecstatic, and this idea that the sex is for ecstasy more so than it is for procreation. So I think that, at the beginning, really fed into where the tradition has gone in terms of feminism, and in terms of gender expression, and really celebrating all of that.<sup>244</sup>

Being an ecstatic tradition, then, allows for a different gender narrative to take shape; since sexuality is not tied to fertility there is no reason for why it should be restricted to only one form, nor is there a reason for why the binary gender model should be the dominant one.<sup>245</sup> This also reflects the feminist worldview that is also a fundamental part of the origins and practices of Reclaiming.<sup>246</sup> Later in the interview, Amoret points out again the efforts of the community to practice what it preaches, and actually maintain an inclusive gender discourse in its magical practice: “...how do we work so that our magic isn’t reinforcing a binary culture that we don’t actually support, and hasn’t been for a long time.”<sup>247</sup>

Language, not only in regard to gender, is profoundly important in Reclaiming; intra-community efforts to hold themselves and each other to a certain level of inclusiveness and acceptance, is tied not only to the general worldview, but to the central aspects of the magical, social, and political practice:<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 176.

<sup>242</sup> Amoret, *Gendered Practice in Reclaiming Witchcraft*, 2017.

<sup>243</sup> Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism’, 170.

<sup>244</sup> Amoret, *Gendered Practice in Reclaiming Witchcraft*, 2017.

<sup>245</sup> Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism in Contemporary Paganism’, 160; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 24.

<sup>246</sup> Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, 12.

<sup>247</sup> Amoret, *Gendered Practice in Reclaiming Witchcraft*, 2017.

<sup>248</sup> Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’, 11; Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 141.

If we say that we're in a magical space, and we're stepping between the worlds, and we're going to impact the world with magic, then our words are very important. And our actions, even small, like saying 'I stand with you', is important – it's what we're weaving in the world, and it's what we're shifting as we step out into the world too, so if I get used to that language in my magical community, it's the language I bring into other areas of my life.<sup>249</sup>

This is a clear example of the connection between discourse and practice. The words used within the community will shape the practice of that community – it will dictate who and what is included or excluded – as Amoret shows with her example.<sup>250</sup> The problematic word there is “stand”, as it helps uphold a discourse of ability where those who cannot stand are often rendered invisible. By choosing a different phrasing, such as 'I am with you', you avoid playing into that discourse without losing the message.<sup>251</sup> This same rule applies to most discourses, gender included, which is why it is important for members of the Reclaiming community to be mindful of the way they use gendered words. Because, as stated in the quote, language and discourse is rarely connected exclusively to one social field; Reclaiming is a social field within a larger social structure – the language used within this social field will be influenced by other social fields, and will, in turn, influence others.<sup>252</sup>

This emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and the re-shaping and questioning of older narratives and practices, in the magical and social practice of the Reclaiming community follows a larger shift among left-wing and feminist movements – both of which Reclaiming positions itself as – in contemporary Western society.<sup>253</sup> Amoret sums it up by saying that “it's not that you need to identify as queer, but the magic is”,<sup>254</sup> meaning that magic is not dependent on the discursively created concepts of our society, but exists outside and independent of labels.

#### 4.3.4 Walnut – Radical Faeries

While Reclaiming Witchcraft is, as we have seen above, promoting and working towards diversity and inclusion, the Radical Faeries have taken it even further, as Walnut makes evident when he states that

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<sup>249</sup> Amoret, *Gendered Practice in Reclaiming Witchcraft*, 2017.

<sup>250</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23, 24.

<sup>251</sup> Hjelm, 'Discourse Analysis', 135, 136, 141.

<sup>252</sup> Fairclough, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', 11, 12; Hjelm, 'Discourse Analysis', 135, 141.

<sup>253</sup> Lepage, 'A Lokian Family', 98-99.

<sup>254</sup> Amoret, *Gendered Practice in Reclaiming Witchcraft*, 2017.



...the identification and in fact celebration of queer identity and Otherness is very central. At times (particularly in the past or in some communities), this has been exclusionary to mainstream identities or even other genders (i.e. welcoming only male-bodied persons to certain gatherings, or more commonly, excluding heterosexuals). I would say that this is really uncommon now, and certainly among European faeries essentially never happens.<sup>255</sup>

Echoing Hay, he puts the celebration of Otherness at the centre of the Faerie community, but also discloses some of the consequences this chosen separation from the mainstream has had. Given Hay's view of gay men as a third gender category, these exclusionary tendencies are not surprising.<sup>256</sup> The queer identity and Otherness originally at the centre of the Faerie community was based on gay cisgender men – in other words, men who had been assigned man at birth – who, by being gay men, challenged the norms regarding both masculinity and sexuality.<sup>257</sup> Maintaining a strict policy of separation from the majority group could likely have functioned as a means of protecting the community, and that is not unusual for minority groups of different kinds.<sup>258</sup> But something has happened, as we can see, that has moved the community away from this exclusionist practice. Geography, it seems, plays a role; the European community differs from other communities – primarily, we could assume, from the original American community – in that it contains a vast number of different cultures and languages, and must attempt to form a basis of understanding that includes all the different perspectives.<sup>259</sup>

The faerie community is loosely connected through friendships and other relationships between faeries in different areas, and many of them are active in other pagan groups as well, and the primary form of interaction between larger numbers of faeries is through the attending of gatherings, either in one's own local area, or on a national or international level.<sup>260</sup> These gatherings usually take place at a location, called a "sanctuary", that is situated away from inhabited areas. These gatherings, Walnut says

are totally "radically" inclusive. All are welcome. Trans persons are particularly welcomed – and it has taken quite some effort to move on from certain "old

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<sup>255</sup> Walnut, *Gendered Practice in the Radical Faeries*, written interview, June 8, 2017.

<sup>256</sup> Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 38.

<sup>257</sup> Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 38, 40-41; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 24, 180-181, 185-187; Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 51-52.

<sup>258</sup> Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 102.

<sup>259</sup> Walnut, *Gendered Practice in the Radical Faeries*; Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 45-47.

<sup>260</sup> Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 32.

fashioned” gay identity politics to ensure the inclusion of trans persons in a way that is unburdensome [*sic*] to them. On the other hand, I would say that when we are joined by heterosexuals [...] it can feel somehow disruptive. In the worst cases it feels exploitive, and I have seen it cause disruption in an otherwise normal gathering.<sup>261</sup>

The inclusion of transgender people, it seems, has gone from being considered undesirable to being considered something positive. It is likely that the “identity politics” Walnut mentions stem from the period between the 1960s and 1980s, when there was not yet a united LGBTQ community to speak of, but instead different – and often clashing – groups of activists fighting on their own.<sup>262</sup> It took many years for cisgender gay people, and transgender people of all sexualities to reconcile and acknowledge each other as equal parts of a larger community.<sup>263</sup> With such a history, it is hardly strange that the inclusion of transgender members among the Radical Faeries took time. But it is interesting to note that despite the radical inclusion, heterosexual, presumably cisgender, people are still not as accepted in Faerie spaces.<sup>264</sup>

When asked if there had been any changes in the use and handling of gendered language within the Radical Faeries that he himself had noticed, Walnut says that he has noticed certain patterns, which he links to wider societal and generational changes:

[T]here are big changes in how gender and pronoun use is treated in faerie space. There are a small number of really vocal critics of faerie culture [...] who make accusations that it’s exclusionary in one way or another. [...] I happen to disagree – where they see exclusion to push back against, I see simple generational and wider social change. Faerie culture in the 1980’s and 1990’s was of course necessarily very different and had different priorities (namely, writing obituaries and processing unfathomable loss – not worrying about vocabulary).<sup>265</sup>

What Walnut suggests here, is that there is a generational shift happening, where the older generation and the younger seem to lack a middle ground. The younger, Millennial generation is focused on topics of inclusion and diversity from the viewpoint of today, where discursive practices look very differently from the 1970s to the 1990s,<sup>266</sup> while the older generation

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<sup>261</sup> Walnut, *Gendered Practice in the Radical Faeries*, 2017.

<sup>262</sup> Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 56.

<sup>263</sup> Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 42-43, 48-51.

<sup>264</sup> Stover, ‘When Pan Met Wendy’, 32.

<sup>265</sup> Walnut, *Gendered Practice in the Radical Faeries*, 2017.

<sup>266</sup> Stover, ‘When Pan Met Wendy’, 46-47; Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 43-45; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 177-178.

collectively suffered the trauma of the AIDS virus, which decimated large numbers of the LGBTQ community. This forced their focus onto other matters than inclusion and diversity,<sup>267</sup> and maintained the idea of the gay community as a separate social space. It is not unlikely, then, that some of the criticism directed at the Radical Faeries has to do with this gap between generations.<sup>268</sup> Walnut elaborates:

As we (Millennials) have begun facilitating gatherings, we are ourselves radically changing the culture. Faeries, like any subculture, can exist outside mainstream culture so far as is possible. Particularly with regard to language, things change and they change naturally and generationally – and sometimes very quickly. In the course of just the last 5 years our pronoun usage has changed very radically.<sup>269</sup>

Again, there seems to be a pattern of change here that is linked to generational change; the Millennial generation has grown up with different discourses, because their context has been influenced by different things. The discourse of gender and sexuality overall has changed in Western society, and it is logical that this same change will follow in the different social fields inhabited by this generation.<sup>270</sup> What Walnut says at the end of the quote, that there have been radical changes in pronoun usage over the last five years, is fully in line with the changes in Western society in general over this period of time. This follows the general focus on the “otherness” that is central to the Radical Faeries, and how this can manifest in a more material sense, through the use of clothing and other similar identity markers:

Many of us “play” with the idea of being totally free from any rules about how one ought to look. This extends, I believe, from the universal experience of young queers. [...] But particularly for queer boys, though I think certainly for a certain extent for queer girls in Western culture, a universal early life experience is being told that the type of cross-dressing play in which they’d like to engage is inappropriate. It probably marks one of the earliest moments in a queer person’s life of being ‘otherized’. So in faerie spaces we throw this away entirely.<sup>271</sup>

This practice of discarding all perceived rules regarding gendered clothing stems from Hay’s day is usually referred to as “drag”, but not to be mistaken for the more commonly used

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<sup>267</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179-181.

<sup>268</sup> Hjelms, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 135, 145.

<sup>269</sup> Walnut, *Gendered Practice in the Radical Faeries*, 2017.

<sup>270</sup> Oboler, ‘Negotiating Gender Essentialism’, 160, 162; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 175, 176.

For example, see also the debate in Sweden regarding the inclusion of the gender-neutral pronoun ‘hen’ into the Swedish language.

<sup>271</sup> Walnut, *Gendered Practice in the Radical Faeries*, 2017.

definition of the more strictly gendered performances seen in drag shows.<sup>272</sup> What we see here is a dismissal of gender categories and norms altogether, that could also possibly function as a critique of the heavily gendered norms regarding physical appearance in Western society.<sup>273</sup> This continued practice of playing with notions of masculinity and femininity, and the disconnecting of gender from appearance could possibly have contributed to the process of shifting from the more essentialist, three-gender model of Hay's day, to the "radically" inclusive and non-essentialist view of gender we see today.

## 5. Results

As we have seen, the imagery used in the texts presented by the first generation is largely essentialist in nature, meaning that it assumes the existence of a 'truly male' and 'truly female' essence inside each person, and that this essence is linked in varying degrees to certain traits/abilities, behaviours, and social roles. Further, it assumes an attraction of some form between man and woman; Gardner and Valiente promote a romantic and/or sexual relationship as the proper form of this attraction, whereas the Farrars consider familial or platonic relationships as equally valid. As is not unusual when it comes to essentialist gendered imagery, the symbolism invoked in these texts is also cisnormative. It assumes that all people identify as either man or woman, and that all women have a womb, and that all men have a penis.

In other words, the discourse on gender that we have explored in the first generation is built on the assumption 1) that there are two gender categories only, and that anatomy is the same as gender, 2) that these two gender categories have two different, and complementary sets of traits, and 3) that the relationship dynamic and assumed default attraction between the two categories mirror the relationship between opposites elsewhere in nature – such as light/dark, good/evil, life/death, and so forth. This discourse is upheld through the ritual language, but also through the practices and mythology of pagan groups.

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<sup>272</sup> *Drag* is commonly used to refer to a performance art, where Western notions of maleness/femaleness are brought to an extreme point as part of an act of entertainment and/or competition similar to that of beauty pageants. A *Drag queen/king* is an individual who takes on a persona of the "opposite" sex, where all gendered aspects of that persona – clothing, hair/make-up, manners, language, etc., and perform on stage or runway as that persona. This person may or may not also be transgender.

<sup>273</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 186-187; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 177; Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 73-74, 80-81, 84.

The gendered language and narrative of these earlier voices is also typical of Western society at the point in time when they were written; much of the terminology for making sense of gender in today's society did not exist when *Witchcraft Today* was written, and had only begun to emerge when *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, and *A Witches' Bible* were published.

In the second generation of pagan writers, the essentialist and binary understanding of gender is gradually being challenged, as the writers bring the developing feminist discourse on gender into their spiritual and magical practices. Starhawk's first edition of *Spiral Dance* built directly on the established, essentialist gender polarity model constructed by Gardner and Valiente – but with a clear influence from the woman-centric, feminist practice of Budapest's Dianic Wicca. The polarity shifts from external (men and women), to internal (essences within the person), as the Goddess moves from birth-giver/lover of the God to containing both essences within her while remaining outwardly female. Then, in the tenth anniversary edition, we see noticeable changes in the approach to gender; Starhawk moves away from the idea of gender polarity and heterosexual attraction as the basic model of tension and energy in the universe, and re-positions it as one aspect of dynamic tension among many. She also shifts away from the internal-essentialist view of gender, to an idea of the complex self, where gender becomes only one among a multitude of aspect used to construct one's identity. In the twentieth anniversary edition, she further cements these shifts away from the original edition, and the gender model we are left with is that of the complex self, where the notion of male/female essences within the person no longer exists.

The basic concept of Hay's gender model is that of gay men as a third gender, socially and spiritually, and that this gender category is in itself sacred. For Hay, the basis of working magic in any form is not the union of opposites, but the union of those who are like one another, which for him meant the third-gender category of gay men. This view is tied to the basic model of gender relations, namely Hay's subject-OBJECT versus subject-SUBJECT consciousness. The heterosexual gender polarity model to Hay is based in the view of oneself as active subject, and of the other as passive object onto which one's wishes and desires is projected, thus failing to recognize the other as human and person. The subject-SUBJECT consciousness recognizes the other as active subject, person, and human. Therefore, Western society needs to replace the heterosexual matrix in the shape of the subject-OBJECT consciousness with the subject-SUBJECT consciousness of the gay community. What we see initially is a three-gender model (man, woman, gay man/faerie), and an idea of a gay identity as uniquely linked to a spiritual and magical ability. This idea is tied to a desire for social change, based on a specifically gay experience and worldview.

In the second generation, then, we see a process of gradual deconstruction of the binary essentialist, and heteronormative gender model (Starhawk), and a maintained three-gender model, with a focus on inter-personal relationships (Hay). In both cases, gender has moved from an externally applied gender category, based on the idea of male/female as universal categories linked to anatomy, to a self-applied, internal mode of identification linked primarily to the mind. These changes appear to be to some extent influenced by the gender discourses of the political movements that Starhawk and Hay were a part of, demonstrating that the discourses in different social fields often affect one another.

For the majority of the third generation, the shift in gender understanding follows that of the second generation, and has continued to evolve. Peter points to an on-going clash of gender narratives within Gardnerian Wicca in Europe on a broader scale, where some covens are, or are beginning to, disconnect the essentialist gender model of Gardner's time from their practice, to better reflect the identities and gender models of current practitioners. Here, gender is located in the mind, and tied to anatomy only so far as each person wishes it to be. The primary criteria for performing previously gender specific ritual work is personal suitability, not gender. While the majority group still follow Gardner's model, there is a competing narrative that is winning ground. Amoret views the changes in gender discourse within Reclaiming Witchcraft as part of a larger process of social progress brought by the political and social work in the Reclaiming community. She stresses the importance of inclusion and diversity, and that this is an on-going process of questioning and re-interpreting narratives, as well as one's own understandings of certain concepts. Walnut sees changes in the gender discourse among the Radical Faeries, but also points to prevalent issues with generational gaps and clashes of perspectives on a broader spectrum, as different topics come into focus. While the Radical Faerie community has adopted a stance as "radically inclusive", there are still issues to work through. Transgender people are now welcomed within the community, but this at the cost of earlier essentialist notions of gender more closely tied to homosexuality. Yssion's account of the situation within the Alexandrian community stands out from the rest, as he states that it has maintained the original, essentialist genitalia-equals-gender model from Alex Sanders' day. The topic of different gender understandings does not appear to feature within the community as far as he has experienced. Even sexuality is treated as a non-issue; the practice follows a heterosexual model, and members are expected to conform.

## 6. Conclusion

Having analysed and discussed the material using the methodological tools presented in the “Theory” and “Method” sections, and presented the results above, we now arrive at the conclusion that, from 1954 up until today, there has been an overall shift in the understanding of gender, both in the abstract sense and as linked to bodies. This shift illustrates the core point of Butler’s theory about sex/gender as socially and discursively constructed narratives rather than pre-discursive and universal categories. With the exception of the Alexandrian community, a binary and essentialist understanding in the first generation has gradually given way to an increasingly non-essentialist and multifaceted understanding in the second and third generation. Focus moved from anatomy, specifically genitalia and reproductive organs as a definition of an individual’s gender category and role – to identity and self-definition, without connection to anatomy. In other words, sex/gender has been relocated from a fixed, pre-discursive status, to a status as discursively constructed and applied. Changes in discourses in other social fields inhabited by the members of the second and third generation also affected the discourse within the pagan community. Most specifically, political views – primarily left-wing and/or liberal – have been an important factor in setting the course for the pagan gender discourse. Emphasis has, to varying degrees been placed on inclusion and accommodation of different modes of identification, and language has been a tool in creating this inclusion. In those groups where the gender discourse has been reshaped to encompass a broader understanding of gender, a primary method of inclusion of transgender and gender non-conforming persons has been to employ a more gender-neutral language, and to re-examine and re-shape older narratives to ensure that they fully represent the members of the community. The change in gender discourse within the pagan milieu thereby reflects the changes in gender discourse of Western society as a whole.

## 7. Final Remarks

As stated in the introduction, my intention was to explore what I considered a gap in knowledge within academic research in general, and research on new religious movements in particular. In this, I do think I have succeeded, as I come away from this study with both answers and more questions to be examined. Naturally, a study of this size cannot hope to provide the full picture on this issue, but it can offer a starting point for further research. As

we have seen throughout the study, changes have occurred, and are still occurring, in the gender discourse of pagan movements – changes that are re-shaping the spaces and practices of these groups. The growing implementation of left-wing political ideas into pagan practices appears to have played a part in furthering these changes. We have also seen that while change is occurring in many groups, there is also resistance from other groups as established narratives clash with emerging ones. Importantly, we see indications of a growing awareness of transgender lives and experiences within these movements, how inclusion of transgender and gender non-conforming people is very much an on-going discussion, and how the linking of gender to sexuality is gradually replaced by discussions of gender and sexuality separately. The plastic nature of beliefs, texts, and ritual structure from the second generation and onward might have helped this process along. Since these were already undergoing a continuous process of re-interpretation and re-shaping, it is possible that the discourse on gender could use the momentum to challenge the ruling narratives while facing less resistance than what might otherwise have been the case. It is also possible that the polytheistic nature of paganism has helped move the process forward, as more deities provide a wider range of possibilities in the construction of identity and ways of embodying different traits and abilities. These findings are important, as they point to the need of more research and understanding in academia of the transgender community and gender non-conforming individuals as members of religious groups – which is demonstrated, as we saw in the chapter on material, by the previous lack of studies focused specifically on these groups.

With that said, this study has not been without limitations and issues of its own. The sample group of four informants, who all identify as cisgender, for the interview study is less than ideal, given the span of the topic of my research. A much larger sample group from each movement, with both trans- and cisgender participants, will be needed to test the accuracy of the testimonies given here. Similarly, a larger sample of written texts, from a wider range of pagan groups would also have greatly benefitted the precision of the study, as would a closer look at the differences in changes of the gender discourse between paganism and other religions. Such a perspective would have provided valuable insights into the position of paganism on the broader religious arena regarding the topic of sex/gender.

It is my belief, also, that further study of gender discourses within these groups would benefit from additional theories and methods, such as those relating to the material aspects of pagan practice would be useful to examine the specific ways discourses affect the shape of pagan collective spaces. Queer theory, and theories on meaning-making and the creation and maintaining of group identities could also be valuable to our understanding of this topic.



Given the width of the topic, there is no shortage of perspectives to explore for academic scholars in the years to come.

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## **Interviews**

Amoret, Gendered Practice in Reclaiming Witchcraft, Skype interview, June 12, 2017.

Peter, Gendered Practice in Gardnerian Wicca, personal interview, Uppsala, Sweden, October 17, 2017.

Walnut, Gendered Practice in the Radical Faeries, written interview, June 8, 2017.

Yssion, Gendered Practice in Alexandrian Wicca, Skype interview, October 10, 2017.

# Appendix

## Glossary

### Assigned Gender/Sex (Also: Sex/Gender Assigned at Birth)

Also referred to as ‘legal gender’, and sometimes incorrectly as ‘biological gender/sex’. This is the gender assigned to the infant immediately after birth, generally based on visual examination of its anatomy.

### Cis/Cisgender

A person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. ‘Cis’ (Latin) is an adjective, meaning ‘on the same side’. A cisgender person may have any sexuality, hormonal/chromosomal combination, gender presentation, etc. This term refers only to their identity in relation to their assigned gender.

### Cisnormativity

Cisgender identities and experiences as the ruling set of norms for gendered experiences. For example, the default assumption that only women experience pregnancy and related health issues, or that only men have beards or Adam’s apples.

### Drag

A performance art based on exaggerated and/or deliberately theatrical performance of gender in clothing, manners, language, etc. Often, but not always, performed on a stage or runway as part of a show or contest, for the purpose of entertainment. The person performing may have any sexuality and/or gender identity.

### Gender Non-Conforming

A person whose gender identity and/or gender presentation differs from the norm of their assigned gender, either most or all of the time. They may or may not also be transgender.

## Heteronormativity

Similar to 'cisnormativity'. A collective default assumption that all people are heterosexual, and that heterosexual gender norms is the default set of norms for all relationships.

## Non-Binary

An umbrella term signifying a range of gender identities that fall outside the binary, male/female model. Can be a gender identity in itself, and is then used as an adjective; "NN is a non-binary person".

## Queer

A term used by the LGBTQ community to mean either a perspective/worldview that is critical to the ruling discourses regarding, amongst others, gender and sexuality, *or* as an identity label for a person's gender/sexual identity. For example, instead of labelling their gender and sexuality respectively, they might instead sum those aspects of their identity up as simply 'queer'.

## Trans/Transgender

A person whose gender identity differs from the gender they were assigned at birth. Some transgender people choose to undergo social, medical, or surgical transition, while others choose not to. 'Trans' is an adjective, and is used in the same way as 'tall/short', or 'old/young'. A person assigned male at birth, but who knows themselves to be (identifies as), a woman, or a non-binary identity, is a transgender person. This term is not linked to the person's gender expression, anatomy, or sexuality. It refers only to their relation to their assigned gender.

## Source:

"LGBTQ+ Definitions – Trans Student Educational Resources", *Transstudent.Org*, 2017 <<http://www.transstudent.org/definitions>> [accessed 12 December 2017].

## **Interview Guide**

### **Background**

- Tell me a little about yourself.

*What drew you to paganism?*

*How did you come to join [your tradition]?*

### **The local pagan community**

- Could you tell me something about what [your community] is like?

*Close-knit vs loosely connected (regular gatherings, working groups, etc.?)*

*Open vs closed to outsiders*

### **Gender in practice – current situation**

- Could you describe to me how gender and sexuality is generally viewed in [your tradition]?

- What does it look like in practice?

*General group interactions*

*Rituals*

*Terminology (in general, and in ritual)*

### **Gender in practice – over time**

During your time in [your tradition], have you noticed any changes in the way gender has been viewed/handled – especially when it comes to language?

*New pronouns gaining popularity?*

*Gendered language becoming more gender-neutral – or the other way around?*

*Other changes?*

### **Interactions with other traditions**

The views on gender and sexuality can differ a lot between groups, just as with other topics – in your interactions with other groups (if you have any), is this something you have noticed?

*Were there differences?*

*What differed?*

*Did it even come up?*

*If so, how did the groups work with/around it?*

**Closing questions**

Is there anything you would like to add (to the previous questions)?

Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?