

The Pentagram
and
the Hammer

by

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<http://www.webcom.com/~lstead/wicatru.html>

The following article is based on the workshop "Wicca and Ásatrú", which was presented by the writers during the 1994 FreeSpirit Festival. Devyn Gillette is a English Traditional Wiccan, and former host of the Pagan radio show "Between the Worlds." Lewis Stead is an Asatruar who edits Asatru Today.

For a considerable amount of time, Ásatrúar have tirelessly debated where they, as a unique sect within Pagandom, relate (or fail to relate) with their earth-spiritual peers. During the last few years, this debate has featured considerable critique concerning Wicca, from whence a fair number of recent Ásatrú practitioners had first nurtured their heathen spiritual development. At the other end of this spectrum lie, of course, the Wiccans, many of whom remain oblivious to the sometimes raging debates concerning them that the Ásatrúar are fond of.

Many Wiccans, particularly eclectics, indulge in Germanic practices without reason to suspect (or without concern) that a cadre of Germanic purists are shouting at them from over the heaths. In between these two distinct camps lie those who remain carefree of the matter, and who disregard anyone who would comment on what "is working for them."

This article may, at first, seem tiresome to those who have been debating such matters, but we hope to express this concern on a level that (so far as we are aware) has not been engaged in before. Rather than provide a reactionary response from either Pagan perspective, we aim to carefully and definitively demonstrate exactly how and where the (few) relationships and (many) differences between Ásatrú and Wicca exist.

To do so, this booklet approaches the matter from the perspectives of anthropology and sociology, treating both Wicca and Ásatrú with the rigors of an ethnographic comparison. As a result, it must be understood by the reader that this review will explain matters as they pertain to *the general whole* of each Pagan denomination, and therefore numerous subtle differences may elude this comparison. An Alexandrian coven, for example, may not approach its theology or means to ritual the same way a Dianic coven will, nor will kindreds loyal to Odhinn view heathen matters the same way a hearth dedicated to Tyr may. An article reviewing basic predominant distinctions between Wicca and Ásatrú can only make use of basic predominant circumstances. Wiccans in particular may find some of the statements here particularly challenging, and it should be understood that this not based on any desire to heavily criticize Wicca, but an approach that uses the most testable facts available.

Even before similarities and differences can be addressed, the first issue that deserves mention is the simple fact that Ásatrú and Wicca possess distinctly separate origination histories. This is not, it seems, always understood. We have witnessed a common assumption (particularly among Wiccans) that Ásatrú is a branch-off from the general post-1960s Pagan upsurge, and from Wicca in particular. This is not so. Interestingly, the renaissance of both Wicca and Ásatrú do seem to develop at more or less the same time, although in different locations. An extremely brief history review is in order:

Elaborate (and largely unsubstantiated) claims to ancient familial lineages aside, Wicca essentially developed as an organic and popular movement that can trace its impetus to the efforts of English civil servant and folklorist Gerald Brousseau Gardner (1884-1964) and author Doreen Valiente. Gardner himself became involved in witchcraft circa 1934, but Gardnerianism, as a sect, did not likely develop until well after the repeal of the English anti-witchcraft laws in 1951. Much of

Gardner's efforts owed itself to the works of various theorists, including anthropologist Margaret Murray, occultist Aleister Crowley, folklorist James Frazer, and poet Robert Graves. Ritual structure was further influenced by societies such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the Ordo Templi Orientis, and Co-Masonry. Hallmarks of the practice evolved over time, but generally feature (1) an orthodox hierarchy typically governed by a Priestess, (2) gender-based dualism of deity, (3) magical practices (largely graftings from the above-mentioned societies coupled with British Isles folklore), (4) the notion of "perfect couples" (i.e., equal numbers of males and females, paired), and (5) ritual nudity (called "skyclad"). These hallmarks eventually would identify a coven as being "traditionalist". The entire phenomenon received a major boost in the late 1970s-early 1980s when this community began to merge convergently with feminism and the development of what is now known as Dianic Wicca, which tended to be more egalitarian, political-minded, and celebratory. The current phenomenon of Wiccan eclecticism (essentially an "anti-tradition") is largely the result of the social and theological convergence between these two camps. Currently, Wicca remains the largest Pagan denomination, although considerable diffusion with the New Age and other exterior phenomena has (in the opinions of many old-school traditionalists) taxed the character and depth of the movement. Debate continues between traditionalists and eclectics, from whom the majority of cross-cultural theology can be attributed.

Ásatrú, on the other hand, developed for the most part independently from Wicca, and more importantly for the purposes of this examination, Ásatrú's self-image has been one of an independent religion, rather than a denomination within a greater Pagan community. American Ásatrú begins in the early 1970s with Stephen McNallen's Viking Brotherhood which evolved into the Ásatrú Free Assembly. McNallen and many other early figures in Ásatrú were familiar with the Wiccan community. However, studies of Norse and Icelandic history and mythology combined with contact with other Norse Pagan groups in Iceland and England, led to a quick evolution away from the Wiccan community and from Wiccan models of theology or ritual practice. Virtually from the beginning, Ásatrú developed its own ritual structures, magazines, gatherings, and terminology; and by the mid-seventies was a completely separate community. Ásatrú continued to be a small and fairly insular group with little contact with other Pagans until the late 1980s when the AFA broke up. Out of the AFA's demise, two groups rose to the forefront: the Ásatrú Alliance representing a traditionalist approach and the Ring of Troth representing several new directions. The Alliance is for the most part a reconstituted AFA, dominated by prior AFA members and even acting as the distributor of AFA publications. It remains small and marginal because of an insular organizational mentality and a tolerance for a large and vocal racist contingent. The other major group to come out of the AFA's breakup, the Ring of Troth, has developed into a loose network of "Germanic" practitioners ranging from Norse Wiccan to Ásatrú. It is from this group, that much of the current contact (and subsequent conflict) between Wiccans and Ásatrúar has come to the forefront--often involving organizational difficulties the Ring has had in attempting to straddle various Norse groups. The majority of the Ásatrú community is best thought of as independent although it may have some unofficial or semi-official connections to a larger group. Much of this independence is because of equal suspicion of the Wiccan-influences or other innovations in the Ring of Troth and racist elements in the Ásatrú Alliance. The Ring makes up roughly 25% of kindreds. The Alliance is a small 5%, but has greater influence because so many "old time" Ásatrúar are members. Stephen McNallen has announced a new AFA, this time to be the Ásatrú Folk Assembly, but this group appears to be tiny and dominated by a largely secular racial agenda.

Here then are the similarities between Wicca and Ásatrú:

They are both Pagan earth religions.

They both apply magic in their practices.

They both feature an element of reification (i.e., basis on a romanticized notion of the past).

While there may exist groups that individually feature more similarities, as far as the entirety of each faith is concerned, there are no other similarities.

Pagan Earth Religion

Simply put, both Wicca and Ásatrú feature respect and reverence for the earth. To the Ásatrúar, She is Nerthus, and to the Wiccan, She can be identified as Gaea, Mother Earth, whatever; but both believe that spirit lies in the earth and that the earth is something (Someone?) to be respected. This ideology is rampant throughout Wiccan writings, and the works of Wilfred von Dauster (former editor of *Mountain Thunder*) and others are testament to its presence in Ásatrú.

Curiously, some have questioned whether this is really true for Ásatrú. Some highly eco-aware Wiccans, for example, may balk that Norse Pagans, being generally more conservative (more on this later), might be prone to support legislation that is anti-environmental, or that the Ásatrú ritual of "land taking" (i.e., ownership) defies most understandings of land stewardship. To "own" the land, such a person would argue, is inherently "un-Pagan." For their own sake, many Ásatrú reject the label of "earth religion" and while environmentalism is important, veneration of the Earth Goddess is not a dominant feature of Ásatrú; Nerthus being merely another deity among many.

While some of these assertions may have some limited merit, it is also true that Ásatrú tends to feature a reverence of local land spirits on a greater scale than many Wiccans seem to, with entire holidays devoted to the reverence of "minor" local spirits. If analysis from currently popular "how to" books are any indication, Wiccans by and large may be more interested in the respectful occult use of the land (herbalism), but Ásatrúar seem to pay more attention to the making of votive offerings to land spirits. In fact, it may even be argued that the only Pagan sect who seem to surpass Ásatrúar in deliberate, ritualized, habitual votive expression to the earth may be indigenous peoples such as the Native Americans.

Both communities also engage in environmental social activities which are linked to their religion. Wiccans may be involved in camping, hiking, or backpacking, while Ásatrúar take up "outdoorsman" sports such as hunting or fishing. There is an interest in herbalism, alternative healing, and natural foods among both communities. In both cases these are not directly religious activities, but are part of a general hearkening back towards nature which finds its original impulse in the environmental orientation of each faith.

Use of Magic

As will be explained later, the relationship between magic and votive ritual is key matter where Ásatrú and Wicca differ. Nevertheless, and like many other Pagan (and some non-Pagan) religions, they share the general belief in and use of magic in common.

Reification With The Past

Both Wicca and Ásatrú feature central tenets that rely on romanticized concepts about the past. For Ásatrú, this is absolutely vital and very plain to see: the cultures of the Germanic peoples (Norse, Teutons, Saxons), complete with their folklore and heritage are central to entire core of Ásatrú. Ásatrú is a reconstruction of the past and cannot exist without it. In addition, while Ásatrú prides itself on a reliance of academically legitimate historical sources, there is a large element of romanticism which ignores the inequalities, injustices, and difficulties of ancient Norse culture.

Reification tendencies are less acute in Wicca, but it is nevertheless significant. In Wicca, the predominant culture of choice is that of the Celts, which reflects the British Isles origins of Wicca itself, although various others may approach Wicca with a Greco-Roman framework. Rarer still, (but noteworthy) are Wiccans who idealize the Sumerians, Native Americans, Egyptians, or other cultures. Those who do not identify with a particular culture often identify their religion with an ancient matriarchal period or some other historical or pseudo-historical golden age. Romantic, idealized reification with the past is central to both Ásatrú and Wicca, perhaps to modern Paganism in general.

That's it. There are no other significant similarities between Wicca and Ásatrú that we have ascertained. These similarities may seem so extremely general as to be virtually pointless. This is exactly our point. Even with these similarities, clarifications of some differences were necessary, or perhaps obvious.

Here then are the key differences between Ásatrú and Wicca:

Meaning Of The Term

Most any anthropologist will tell you that a decent identifier for a people's beliefs and priorities will lie in its approach toward symbolism. Language, it can be suggested, is essentially a system of verbal symbols, from which we can also suggest which notions and ideas are prioritized among a given people. With this in mind, let's treat the very meanings of the words "Wicca" and "Ásatrú" as a verbal symbol for analysis.

The etymology of the word "Wicca" has been under close debate for some time, and frequently for reasons that have more to do with impressing an ideology than fair linguistic study. The generally acknowledged meaning is that it derives from an Anglo-Saxon root meaning to "bend, or to shape," although other arguments suggest it means "wise." If we accept the definition "wise," then the priority of its members is clear: to be wise, to have wisdom. If we accept the definition "to bend or to shape," then we have space for subjectivity. It could be inferred that the meaning is to bend or shape the cosmos, as in working magic, or to bend or shape as in being malleable (such as bending a reed for a basket). In being malleable, this suggests an ability to shift, to "bend" in the sense of social or subcultural adaptivity. Given some claims that Wicca possesses origins in the distant past, this suggestion makes sense. However, it can also simply suggest that "Wicca" is willing to "bend, or shape" other matters as well (such as folklore, which we may accuse it of doing at times).

"Ásatrú", on the other hand, bears no suggestion of such malleability. Simply, the term means "faith of (or loyalty to) the Aesir" (in practice to Aesir and Vanir alike) in plain, simple, direct, specific words.

To be Wicca means to be wise (perhaps), able to bend and shape certainly. To be Ásatrú (as far as the term is concerned) means to be loyal to a distinct and specific clan of Gods and the culture identified with it. One is open to personal interpretation and suggests a casual resolve to its application, shifting and bending its senses to suit its purposes and the desires of its adherents. The other is clear, defined, leaving little room for waywardness, suggesting a more stringent clarification of membership than the other. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these terms clearly also reflect the character of each group and their reputations.

Symbols

Here the differences are obvious. The predominant symbol for Wicca (and for many, Paganism in general) is the pentagram. The predominant Ásatrú symbol is, of course, the hammer.

While various interpretations for the pentagram abound, a common understanding of the religious meaning of the symbol is that it represents five equidistant elements: Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Spirit, each bound within the circle of life, death, and rebirth. Here then is a display of a central ideology behind Wicca: to live one's life in harmony with these elements, representative of features of the self, and in union with the cycles of nature. There are other interpretations of the pentagram such as a human figure, limbs outstretched bound by the cosmos or the cycle of nature, but nearly all of these explanations of the pentagram examine it as a glyph with a symbolic importance other than as a simple symbol of the faith.

Little interpretation is needed to understand the hammer. The symbol is taken from myth, and represents Thor's Hammer, Mjollnir, with which the God kills various giants and thus protects the lands of the Gods. Rather than a glyph symbolizing a complicated metaphysical statement, the hammer is a simple object taken from a specific myth. However, one can derive some understanding of the religion from it. The image of a weapon of war as a symbol for the religion is significant, as much of Ásatrú theology and mythology is based not on harmony between various deities or between man and the universe as expressed by the pentagram, but a relationship of conflict. However, Ásatrúar themselves are not nearly as elegant in their explanations of the symbol. For most, it is simply the accepted symbol in modern times as well as being the ancient symbol for the religion worn during the dual faith period by Ásatrú's adherents to differentiate themselves from Christian newcomers.

Theology

Many persons cite non-monotheism as one of the similarities between the various Pagan religions and this is something which Ásatrú and Wicca share. However, a more complete examination reveals more theological differences than similarities. Wicca is predominantly pantheistic, Ásatrú polytheistic. These two approaches possess subtle differences that some may not fully appreciate, but which can have vast implications. This matter of theology is also one of the primary factors in

the rationale of those Wiccans who embrace Ásatrú or Ásatrú-like elements in their practice (i.e., "Norse Wicca"), and in general disregard the Ásatrú critique of this endeavor.

Extreme monism, or pantheism (from the Greek "pan," all, and "theos," God) is the theistic belief that the universe itself is divine, that the "all" (or "the is," as Richard Bach writes) is God. Throughout philosophic history, this divine totality has been expressed in a number of different contexts: "logos," "fate", "Zeus," etc. In his *Magickal Rites From The Crystal Well*, Ed Fitch (a respected author of Wiccan material despite the criticisms received for his *Rites of Odin*) argues that all of Wicca is essentially pantheist. While there are Wiccan systems and traditions that would challenge this assertion, Fitch is at least accurate enough in that the majority of the Wiccan community certainly seem to be pantheist.

The polytheist (from the Greek "polus," many, and "theos," God) on the other hand, may agree that the universe (or at least the earth) possesses a divine nature, but would argue that a multiplicity of *separate and distinct* divinities are involved through a complex web of relationships. Polytheism argues that as distinct entities, the Gods represent unique and individual characteristics that may or may not always seem (to us) to be in harmony with one another. But unlike many pantheists who often desire to express the interconnectedness of the sacred universe, polytheists do not necessarily seek (or believe in) the existence of such harmony. Thus, while the pantheist seeks spiritual development through harmony and *balance* as being self-evident, the polytheist, particularly the Germanic polytheist, may prefer to experience the spiritual nature of *conflict*. Assuming a polytheist would desire balance, therefore, it is more likely that he or she would theologically seek it through a concerted effort to make it so, rather than assume its existence in the first place.

The central cosmologies between (traditionalist) Wicca and Ásatrú support this point. As a rule of thumb, the general cosmology among Wiccans concerns the Goddess, She of Many Names, who is complemented by Her Consort, Son and Lover, the Horned God. This deity framework is often represented within contexts of balance (e.g., Goddess' half of the year, God's half of the year; Goddess=lunar, God=solar; etc). Even when times of conflict do ritually occur (e.g., Oak King v. Holly King at the solstices), the outcome is predetermined and expresses a universal balance of forces. Even the pentagram, being a geometrically perfect icon, suggests this.

Ásatrú, on the other hand, being based on the cosmology of the ancient Germanic peoples, defies such neat systematic packaging. Ultimately, the entire cosmological system revolves around the preparations of the coming of Ragnarok, a final battle at which the Gods will do battle with various evil entities and as a result of which the world will be destroyed and the majority of the Gods killed.

Mythologically speaking then: the overall theological message in Wicca is essentially one of keeping attuned with natural cycles, while the overall message in Ásatrú involves continued vigilance and struggle for the same spiritual development.

Considering this, it becomes clearly understandable why the "Norse Wiccan" phenomenon exists at all and why Ásatrúar find it so objectionable. This has much to do with the magical concept of "names of power" and its relationship with the application of Jungian psychological theory in Paganism. Pantheistically, the Germanic Gods represent another series of such "great names" which the Wiccan or pantheist is free to explore and ritually address. By evoking such names of power,

this Wiccan hopes to identify with the folkloric and mythological essences (archetype), within and without, represented by that name. With this perspective, combined with the understanding that the entirety of the universe is divine (and thus accessible to everybody), Norse Wiccans fail to comprehend (or ignore) the criticisms expressed by Ásatrúar. As polytheists, Ásatrúar do not recognize "names of power" for the Gods--to the polytheist, the Gods are individuals, distinct from those of other faiths. The notion that they are names for the pantheistic "greater Godhead" is foreign to the polytheist understanding of deity, and is often found offensive. Pantheists would call such names in an understanding that they are "just another option," where polytheists view such names as "the *only* option," and therefore sacrosanct to those of kith and kin to Them.

In analyzing conflict between Wiccan and Ásatrú communities, this particular concept cannot be underestimated, particularly in the case of Ásatrú and Norse Wicca. There is nothing more infuriating to each side than Norse Wiccans insisting they are the same thing as Ásatrú, while Ásatrúar insist they are completely unrelated. The Ásatrúar view the Wiccans as pushy and trying to take over their faith, while the Wiccans view the Ásatrúar as intolerant and fundamentalist in their beliefs.

Metaphysical Foundation

By "metaphysical foundation," we are referring to the very core foundation that underlies the metaphysical (rather than the theological, which is expressed above) essences of both Wicca and Ásatrú.

Even a cursory glance at the history and practices of Wicca will clearly mark it as a phenomenon that began as an occult movement that only later developed its present religious nature. This is an extremely important point for this analysis.

In this context, Wicca is a *mystery religion* which, it is suggested, is based on the ecstatic practices of ancient European peoples. As a rule of thumb, many covens involve themselves with "the mysteries," typically meaning esoteric understandings of various mythological or ritual events. Aidan Kelly's research on the foundations of Gardnerianism (while hardly free from criticism) strongly suggests that the priorities of Gardner's activity was ritual magic, rather than any particular form of worship. That the earliest writings of the "Book of Ye Art Magical," understood as predecessor to the Gardnerian Book of Shadows, contains multiple references to the God of Christendom makes this suggestion all the plainer.

Wicca has always prioritized its practices to magic before religious veneration. This is further suggested in the amount of time reserved for the creation of a "formal" ritual circle (much of which is based on Masonic and OTO practices) as compared to devotional activity, and the amount of time by Wiccan tutors to instruct students with magical workings rather than devotional efforts. While Wicca has developed an extensive religious and theological focus, this origin as a type of magical lodge remains a significant force in the faith.

Ásatrú, however, is mainly a *votive religion*. While mysteries and magic are found in Ásatrú, they are typically reserved for activities that are separate and distinct from the main religious work. In Ásatrú, magical work, including such things as workings with the runes or seidr, is likely to be

found in specialist groups such as the Rune Guild. It is generally done as an activity *in addition* to a worship ritual rather than as part of one. That the primary Ásatrú rituals are simple, and require minimal "sacred space construction," adds to this argument--complexities of magical work are found in the appropriate specialist group. Underlining all specialist groups, whether they gather for magical work or brewing or studying the Havamal, is a common thread: that they take part in blots--that they engage in votive expression as well as mystery work. One is not an Ásatrúar because one practices Rune magic or seidhr; one is an Ásatrúar because one venerates and makes offerings to the Aesir and Vanir.

It could be said that Wicca is a religion that evolved out of a magical group, while Ásatrú is a religion out of which have evolved magical groups. You will find Ásatrúar of many years experience who have never experimented with magic, it's almost impossible to think of a Wiccan in such a situation.

Historical Foundation

One of the most significant social characteristics in Wicca seems to be a common desire to appropriate a sense of "ancientness" to its practice. Whether we regard such claims as being genuine or not, the fact remains that an extraordinary number of Wiccan practitioners may make assertions to a direct connection with distant familial lineages (often connected with the European "witch craze") or other exotic individuals or groups from which the particulars of their tradition and training are handed down directly. Typically, such statements seem unconfirmable, either due to the death of the tutor, or geographic distance, or some other such reason. This practice was so prevalent at one time that the assertions behind the late Alexander Sanders' entry into Wicca served as the model for what became called "grandmother stories." The terms "hereditary," and "famtrad" (family tradition) have also been applied to these assertions.

What is interesting is that such claims are often made repeatedly and often during the initial stages of a social meeting. Pagan persons who have had the privilege of doing extensive national networking are a wealth of anecdotes of such dialogues. What is also interesting is that such assertions sometimes become the subject of social ridicule and argument between two or more persons who each persist in claiming some undefinable sovereignty over a particular matter, based on their asserted lineage with ancient practice and its superiority to the claims of others. Many persons, of course, do not behave in such fashions, but the habit seems commonplace enough among some Wiccans that terms for such behavior has developed: witch wars, bitchcraft, and warlocking. One may compare the claims of lineage with ancient European witchcraft to the assertions made by many occult lodges that they are the modern descendents of the Knights Templar, esoteric Freemasonry, or other ancient "mystery schools."

Certainly, Ásatrúar are not free from the same human characteristics that develop arguments. However, it is noteworthy that most Ásatrúar do not seem to possess as much a predilection for asserting (often cross-cultural) claims to a *direct* connection with ancient or esoteric practice as Wiccans do. In fact, those few who have made such claims are generally considered laughingstocks.

Likewise, Wicca has a tendency to become influenced by various scholarly trends, particularly with anthropology. Much of Gardner's assertions were based (according to Kelly) on the theories

postulated by Margaret Murray, and the current Dianic development owes a great deal to the theories expressed by Marija Gimbutas. While the work of both Murray and Gimbutas are anthropological *theory*, many Wiccans seem to embrace them as fact. It is very possible (and very Freudian to suggest, but here it is anyway) that these two social characteristics exist among Wiccans because the Wiccan 'religion' (while truthfully existing as such) is based on suppositions. We suggest that these tendencies reflect a need to consistently validate itself, to continue to reify its existence, i.e., the interest in lineage among covens has as much to do with offsetting Wicca's lack of history as it does with preserving magical integrity. In terms of Ásatrú/Wiccan conflict, this tendency is sometimes exploited by Ásatrúar who very casually (and loudly) dismiss Wicca as a "made up" religion.

Ásatrú, while not necessarily referred to by that name, *is* historical--not in the sense that it is a faith with an uninterrupted history stretching into the past, but in that it is a recreation of a religion that did exist in history, recreated through modern research. The beliefs and practices of ancient Ásatrú can be confirmed academically through a myriad of historical accounts, texts, and chronicles. We know *who* the Northmen and the Teutons and the Saxons were worshipping and we have an idea *how* they were doing it. As a result, claims to direct ancient lineages become irrelevant. Reification is made by using historical research to recreate the ancient faith as it was.

Ásatrú in some ways mirrors Wicca's conflicts in regards to history resource and legitimacy. Where Wiccans argue about direct lineage in order to give their particular approach credence in intracommunity disputes, Ásatrú has developed a tendency to cite historical examples, often obscure, to legitimize practices and beliefs out of the Ásatrú mainstream. The result is often academic/historical sources being cited in a way similar to Protestants citing Biblical references along with the adherent problems of selectivity and lack of context. The Ásatrú fascination with academic minutiae often reaches a point at which one suspects some Ásatrúar would be willing to revise their core religious beliefs if a new academic source could be found.

Wicca is a contemporary approach to a supposed religion. Ásatrú is a contemporary approach to a known religion. Wicca occasionally feels a stigma in being a "contemporary approach" because it secretly desires to be the survivor of an unbroken tradition. Ásatrú couldn't care less because it understands that its traditions have always changed in different times and circumstances, and so what it does now to reflect its belief is as nifty to them as what their spiritual predecessors did in the fifth century.

Misrepresentative Taboo

Misrepresentative taboo involves a matter where a community is misunderstood just enough to equate it with an unsavory element that it bears no relationship with.

Until very recently, newspaper journalists have habitually linked Wicca with Satanism during their coverage of occult-related news. That this is changing is testimony to the hard-won efforts of various Wiccan networks and individuals who have made it a priority to educate the media, law enforcement, and the public at large that Wicca and Satanism bear no relationship with one another (despite what Anton LaVey may entitle his books). However, this does not necessarily mean that the conscious taboo which misrepresents Wicca and devil-worship is in the past, and the

unfortunate experiences of some persons (and the ravings of ill-informed Christian fundamentalists) will testify to.

Satanism is the key misrepresentative taboo to Wicca, although the New Age phenomenon is quickly becoming a close second for this distinction.

For Ásatrú, the taboo is Neo-Naziism and white supremacist movements. In this case, it is not purely misrepresentation as there is some linkage between the two movements. Norse Pagan symbols were used by the German Nazi party to muster support from the German people and Ásatrú has been plagued by people identifying themselves as Ásatrúar who have linked racist views to the faith. These have ranged from sincere believers who were also racists to those who have cynically used the faith as a cover for a purely political ideology.

However, these people make up and have made up a very small number of people when compared to those who see the issue as irrelevant or abhorrent. Even in groups which are frequented or controlled by racially oriented practitioners, a large minority silently sees the question as irrelevant.

However, one would not assume this given Norse Paganism's reputation within the Wiccan-oriented community. This is one of the key differences between Wiccan and Ásatrúar misrepresentation: where it occurs. Wicca's problems have been almost exclusively with the non-Pagan community. The use of the term "witch" and symbols such as the pentagram have made this sort of misidentification simple to understand. Ásatrú's problems with misrepresentation, on the other hand, have been almost exclusively within the Pagan community. Mainstream society is ignorant of Ásatrú, and unless a group uses a swastika, it is more likely to generate thoughts of Hagar the Horrible or Thor comics in the mind of mainstream society.

This has had interesting effects on each community. Wicca's extra-community misrepresentation has led those groups so identified to group together to fight common problems. It is common to hear in the Pagan community that various groups need to come together in order to fight the common enemy, who is almost exclusively defined as external to the community. Ásatrú's misrepresentative taboo has tended to isolate it from other forms of Paganism and to some extent to isolate some Ásatrú groups from others. This may be one of the reasons Ásatrú has retained its own distinctive community and character.

Intra-Group Strata

There are some interesting similarities and differences between the various social relationships that exist within both the Wiccan and Ásatrú communities. Traditionalist Wiccans, by and large, meet in groups (usually identified as "covens," "groves," "circles," or rarely "orders") that are frequently hierarchical, which reflects Wicca's underlying characteristics as a mystery religion. Authority is typically invested in a Priestess, although a Priestess may or may not work alongside a Priest, and such authority very often is based on consensual respect of the Priestess in question, as opposed to the members responding to a demand of subservience. Even among non-traditionalist (eclectic) Wiccans, rituals very often retain this same model of organization, even if only in name.

Likewise, most well-established traditionalist Wiccans operate through some means of initiatory framework with its members, also reflective of Wicca's mystery religion nature. Such groups often feature various "degrees of elevation," implying that a reasonably structured means of spiritomagical development may be offered by the Priestess involved, who serves her coven as a mentor and tutor. This instructional relationship is very important to Wicca and the teacher/student relationship is often the primary one in a coven. The fact that such initiatory degrees exist is testimony to Wicca's strong genealogical relationship to other occult distinctions such as Freemasonry and ceremonial magic societies such as the Ordo Templi Orientis.

With very few exceptions, Ásatrú groups (usually identified as "kindreds," "hearths," or rarely "steadings") do not seem to feature the same tendency to initiatory hierarchy that Wiccan groups proliferate with. This is very likely because Ásatrú, unlike Wicca, is not directly a mystery religion even though it can and does feature mystery-related material such as runic magic. Early Ásatrú was heavily influenced by somewhat romantic notions of Icelandic democracy and many groups consist of equal individuals with a single or few leaders who's role is generally organizational rather than theological. Even where there is some type of heirarchical structure, that structure is mainly administrative rather than theological. The leaders function is largely answering mail and organizing events. While such leaders, frequently known as Gothi or Gythia (Priest or Priestess) lead rituals, their leadership of rituals is not reflective of a greater level of spiritual development or rank. In fact, the choice of who leads rituals may be based on such mundane criteria as where the ritual is being held or how well ones voice carries. In cases where groups have methods for training and validating clergy, such as the Ring of Troth's "Elder Training Program" the role recognizes greater academic knowledge, but rarely implies a greater level of spiritual development.

In close relationship to issues of leadership, one of the distinctive attributes of Wicca is the domination of a student teacher relationship between members of a coven and the coven leader. In fact, in traditional Wicca, once members of a coven have learned all they need to know and been elevated through the degrees, their next step is not to take a place within the coven, but to "hive off" and form their own coven, taking the place of the the teacher with a new set of students. Most learning is spiritual rather than academic and probably most closely resembles that of an eastern seeker and guru (although the term "guru" in Neo-Pagan circles is considered pejorative).

This type of "teaching" relationship is virtually unknown in the Ásatrú community. Learning the faith is generally in terms much closer to mainstream academic study. Where a newcomer to Wicca is usually placed into classes with a High Priestess involving spiritual exercises, a newcomer to Ásatrú is likely to be handed a booklist or referred to a local college. The focus of any education tends to be strictly academic involving history, archaeology, and mythology. Students are left to their own initiative and a "teacher" if there is one, generally suggests new sources that might be of interest.

Inter-Group Strata

On the wider scale, Wiccans who identify their approach toward mystery religion in similar ways may identify themselves as part of a "tradition," i.e., a sect with mutual roots and practices. Wiccans often regard their "tradition" as being explicitly unique to other traditions within Wicca in various spiritomagical ways, and they often (sometimes) jokingly taunt one another on various

merits that have to do with the "validity" of their tradition's practice. Thus, for Wiccans, social rallying flags are determined by the kind of practice to be engaged in, which in turn is identified as a "tradition."

Ásatrúar, on the other hand, tend to be even more decentralized. While Ásatrú groups often associate themselves with larger networks (e.g., Ásatrú Alliance, Ring of Troth, Raven Kindred Association, Vinland Ásatrú Association), the reasons for doing so seem far more based in social ties, administrative coordination, or convenient geographical location than a desire for "magical lineage," which is a central theme underlying the genealogy of the prototype of Wiccan traditions, Gardnerianism. This lineage of a Wiccan tradition has strong connotations concerning matters of "validity," i.e., in order to be socially accepted by colleagues in the same tradition, some means of conformity in ritual format or practice (even if minor in scope) can be expected.

In terms of "validity," Ásatrú is both more and less accepting of diversity. Ásatrú tends to be much less inclusive of differences in the overall community. Individuals draw the line at different places, but it is accepted that there are certain things which simply aren't Ásatrú. On the other hand, within those boundaries, there is much less intra-community rivalry or grouping on the basis of minor variations in practice. Those groups which have tried to set themselves aside as separate, more valid, or "elite" have become suspect and quickly disappeared.

Wicca has wide extra-community boundaries and narrow intra-community ones, where Ásatrú has narrower extra-community borders and virtually non-existent intra-community ones. In other words, Wiccans will accept almost anything as Wiccan, but individual groups within Wicca will draw sharp distinctions between each other. Ásatrúar will frequently reject people claiming they are "not Ásatrú" (or more often that they are "too Wiccan"), but once accepted as Ásatrú, there are little distinctions made between groups.

Ritual Complexity

Because of Wicca's historical background in ceremonial magic, Wiccan rituals are generally fairly complex. The mean format is easy to locate in any decent book on the subject: consecrate elements, cast circle, call Quarters, sanctify ritual space with the elements, invoke Goddess (etc.), do working(s) at hand, symbolic Great Rite, wine & cakes, and close the whole thing up with a reversal of the opening process. While this is not necessarily a universal, it is nonetheless true that the standard Wiccan ritual features a series of interconnected little rites that make up the overall ritual experience. Certainly, the ritual may (and frequently is) reduced to simpler practices, but the acknowledged general ritual remains a complex matter.

Ásatrú rituals, on the other hand, are generally simple and straightforward. For a basic devotional blot, all the pious Ásatrúar would simply need is a suitable location, a little time away from the telephone, and a beverage to libate. Even the most complex blot or sumbel remains a ritually simple affair, with the majority of the event being the circulation of a horn among the participants, whereas Wiccans devote a great deal of time and energy toward the creation of their sacred space even before anything is done with it. Ásatrúar may, of course, elaborate on their rituals, involving readings from the Havamal, or oracular work, or whatever, but the general ritual remains simple.

To significantly change their ritual structure (for whatever reason), Wiccans often find themselves simplifying something already complex. Ásatrúar attempting to change their standard structures often find themselves making a simple ritual more elaborate.

Current Literary Sources

While this distinction is heavily dependent on the current literary trends, this is nevertheless an interesting matter to point out.

Over the last decade, the majority of books that prospective or practicing Wiccans seem to be purchasing tend to be very general texts, usually published by "occult" or "New Age" publishers, that, in some cases, would receive substantial critique if they were subjected to solid academic inspection. Some Wiccans, for better or worse, seem to freely accept printed information that may be considered outright revisionist or hyperdiffusionist as well. This is not to say that Wiccans are necessarily gullible, but it does suggest that there are folks involved with Wicca who would rather believe information that supported what they desired it to report rather than what was solid factual data. Genuine cases in point would be books which assert that the Celts came from Atlantis, or that every benefit to society is strictly attributable to women, or that Whom ancient cultures embraced as the Gods were actually extraterrestrials paying regular visits to planet Earth.

To be sure, there are prime texts on folklore and other subjects that Wiccans frequently use, and most of these books have been in use longer than the "witchcrap." Many reputable Wiccans have strong research backgrounds (the writer is personally acquainted with one New England coven that consists almost entirely of Ph.D.'s in Greco-Roman culture). But at the same time, there has been a recent influx of less-than-detailed information being made available on the occult book market, and much to the chagrin of some older-school Wiccans and stauncher traditionalists, the newest wave of Wiccans seems to heavily influenced by this questionable information.

Certainly, Ásatrúar are exposed to the same problems. Just as Wiccans may exist who claim that the Celts came from Atlantis, it is equally likely that there are Ásatrúar who believe that the "Kensington Runestone" is a genuine artifact, or that Eric the Red actually built a community near Boston Harbor. There have also been occasional releases of dubious books by the New Age press on Norse Paganism, but such books have been almost universally rejected and in some cases such materials and those who cite them have been openly mocked.

This fringe aside, there is a general trend for Ásatrúar to rely more on detailed (and often esoteric) academic sources than their Wiccan cousins. This has been a source of frustration for some Ásatrúar who may not have explored such sources, but it is nevertheless true that many Ásatrúar exist whose research is on par with that of any good folklorist.

Interest in linguistics is a particular demonstration of this. There are Wiccans who have made the effort to learn tongues such as Welsh or Gaelic, but these folks seem to be few in number when compared to those Ásatrúar who made the effort to learn Old Norse, Icelandic, Saxon, German, or Old English for no other reason than religious pleasure and the ability to read original textual sources in these languages.

Many Wiccans have resigned themselves to learning about their practices through books that would probably never survive a graduate student review. Many Ásatrúar are learning dead or esoteric languages just so they can learn about their practices from the most primary sources possible. This is significant. In each community, this trend may be strongly linked towards their position as faiths of reification. Wiccan connection to the past often involves easily disproved claims of direct historical lineage. It's emphasis is largely on esoteric experience rather than exoteric education. Ásatrú's claim to the past is acknowledged to be indirect, and relies solely on reproducing the ancient religion through historical research. Lore retrieved from esoteric sources is to be verified by historical research rather than taken on its own terms. Thus, in terms of reification, Ásatrú validity is buoyed by historical knowledge, while Wicca may often be disappointed by it.

Behavior To Non-Adherents

Wiccans, as a rule of thumb, do not and will not proselytize. Wiccans tend to be extremely giving on matters of religion, and it can be argued that the one great contribution to Western society that Wicca will leave us with is a greater appreciation for social tolerance. While this has some obvious and lasting benefits, there are also some highly-ecumenical Wiccans who express so much tolerance for the beliefs of others that they may even incorporate non-Pagan belief elements into their practices. To this day, the matter of whether Wicca is or is not miscible with Christianity is a debate that remains in some areas. It may be surprising then that, at the same time, there are Wiccans who refer to non-Wiccans with a somewhat derisive term: "cowans."

Ásatrúar, on the other hand, do not seem to have a particular taboo against proselytizing, although its practice is rare. Ásatrúar may be found joking that their religion is destined for the world, and the fact that some groups produce leaflets and tracts for distribution suggests this. One might guess then that Ásatrúar would also have a term for those not affiliated with them, but while they have a term for members of their religion: "the Folk," no term exists for those not of the Folk. Some Ásatrúar will half-sarcastically, half-humorously deliberately misspell the word "Christian" ("cristian," "kristjan," etc.) to represent rebellion against those who usurped the sacred sites of the Elder Gods. Ásatrúar will also feel free to criticize those among their number who do not live up to the virtues of Ásatrú. Wiccans have a similar habit, with the term "warlocking" becoming popular one, referring to those within the community who are vindictive gossips or otherwise viciously betray the Craft. Such folks may be blacklisted as "warlocks."

Socio-Political Beliefs

The overall partisan political interests between Wiccans and Ásatrúar are generally polarized. In reality, it is most likely that a wide political spectrum exists for both Pagan denominations, but judging from socio-political commentary in the various Wiccan and Ásatrú journals and newsletters, it can be safely asserted that Wiccans tend toward liberal, egalitarian, and even socialist politics. Ásatrú, on the other hand, tend to express more conservative, libertarian, and sometimes far right-wing ideologies.

In purely social terms, both Ásatrú and Wicca possess some central moral principles, but the differences between them are noteworthy. Compared to Ásatrúar, Wiccans, it would seem, do not share a common thread of moral principles and values. The main expression of moral principle in

Wicca is the Wiccan Rede, "an it harm none, do what you will." This is a flexible and very subjective statement open to individual interpretation. Moral principles are generally ambiguous, almost of minor concern, to many Wiccans. The Wiccan Rede is certainly an indicator of principle, but its stringency seems to be based on advice (indeed, some versions of the Rede refer to it as "the Advice of the Wise Ones") rather than defining characteristics. Wicca's attitude on morality is also personal, and personal decisions are seen as above questioning by others.

Perhaps this interpretation is a little pessimistic, and if so, we would suggest that the current dilution of Wiccan ideology through its current over-popularization may be the cause. There was a time, in the memory of the Wiccan co-author of this article, when the Craft featured as much an interest in personal honor as Ásatrú does today. However, unlike Ásatrú, and with rare exception (such as Fitch's "Wiccan's Rede of Chivalry" or various tenets of faith applied by individual Craft traditions), Wicca does not tend to postulate strict principles for its adherents. It could be said that Wicca's main moral principle is that of situational ethics and that it views most issues as being shades of gray rather than black or white.

Ásatrú possess a common thread of principle in the Nine Virtues: Courage, Truth, Honor, Fidelity, Discipline, Hospitality, Industriousness, Self-Reliance, and Perseverance. These are specific, and many slightly differing versions of the list exist, most often accompanied by essays detailing the place that each virtue should have in an Ásatrúar's life. Like Wicca, Ásatrú tends towards an internally motivated moral attitude rather than external motivations, but if moral decisions are not internally directed to the community's liking, Ásatrúar are not shy about letting others know their opinion and can be quite judgmental.

Given its history, Wicca may be described as being a generally counter-cultural phenomenon. This is supported by various facts, ranging from Gerald Gardner's interest in naturism (nudism) during a sexually repressive period, as well as the fact that much of contemporary Wicca developed alongside the hippie movement of the 1960s. Even Aleister Crowley (who, while not an example of Wicca, still remains a figure of interest to many Wiccans) is a character who may clearly represent a challenge to social conformity and status-quo. Socially, Wicca seeks to challenge various societal factors ranging from gender stratification and patriarchy to the "empowering" of individuals.

Ásatrú, on the other hand, is cultural. This is clear, if for any reason, because it is firmly based on the characteristics of a specific group of related cultures (Scandinavian, German, Anglo-Saxon, etc.). Ásatrúar are more likely to join societies such as the Sons of Norway than a Wiccan may be. Most importantly, where Ásatrú finds fault with the dominant culture, it generally wants a return to traditional conservative cultural values rather than a radical change in them. Many Ásatrúar have expressed their general support for the notion that America must return to "basic family values" (although they may disagree with other conservatives about exactly what those values are). In fact, many of the traits of modern culture that Ásatrúar criticize are those which are supported by the Wiccan community. For example, many Ásatrú are horrified by the social nudity and casual sexual ethics of Wiccan-based Neo-Pagan gatherings and some go so far as to view such gatherings as morally unhealthy places.

Further, it's mythopoetic foundation in warrior motifs sets Ásatrú apart from Wiccan attitudes toward nonviolence. Here, a central tenet of Wicca may be compared to Ásatrú: among a series of other poetic ethical codes, the Wiccan Rede advises "An it harm none, do what you will." For

many Wiccans, one interpretive meaning here is plain: fulfill your deepest goals provided that you don't hurt anybody. Here then is a clear and present distinction that separates Wicca from Ásatrú. While Ásatrúar are not necessarily out to hurt people, they also do not possess any particular occult admonishment to avoid doing so and often regard conflict as an inevitable part of living on earth.

Another major difference between the two religions is the social class from which each draws its members. Class in America is an important source of values and social boundaries, and the differences outlined above in many ways correspond to a working/middle class split. Wiccan groups overwhelmingly tend to be from the middle class. People are generally college educated and work in professional or service sector jobs. It is part of that community's self-mythology that Wiccans are not well off financially, but those who aren't tend to be downwardly mobile persons of middle-class origin. Ásatrú is still very much a middle class phenomenon, but also draws heavily from the working class. Even among Ásatrúar who are middle class, many are upwardly mobile persons from working class backgrounds who more closely mirror working class social and political values. Perhaps most importantly in consideration of socio-economic status, Ásatrúar tend to place a high value on financial success while many Wiccans are disdainful of capitalist society.

The socio-political differences between the two communities cannot be underemphasized and are a major cause for friction between the two communities. The general political tendencies of each community tend to be inflated by the other into the most radical levels. Thus, Ásatrúar think of Wiccans as communist drug-addicted homosexual nudists on welfare, while Wiccans see Ásatrúar as militaristic drunken gun-crazy gay-bashing nazis. This is, of course, an exaggeration, but when significant differences do come to the forefront, these stereotypes are brought out to bash each other with and are a major cause for separation between the two communities.

Communication and Language Use

One of the most significant social differences between Wicca and Ásatrú is their use of language and the way they communicate. More conflict between the two communities can be traced to this than any other factor. Wiccans tend to speak in a very conditional manner, often using the passive voice. The general mode of communication is quiet, cooperative, and seeks consensus, which parallels the Wiccan worldview of an orderly and harmonic universe. Most statements are usually accompanied by a conversational hook, with which the other person can help his conversational partner to save face in the event of disagreement by affirming the validity of the opposite argument. Conversations tend to be in quiet and reasoned tones.

Ásatrúar tend to speak in a very direct method using declarative sentences, tending to cite things in a black and white and often simplistic manner. The general method of communication is to state ones position with the expectation that ones opposite will state theirs and either agreement or argument will ensue. Consensus and compromise is rarely the object. This verbal sparring mirrors the general focus on conflict in the religion. A standoff between strong but disagreeing positions (i.e., agreeing to disagree) is generally seen as preferable to compromise. Face saving is seen to be the individuals own responsibility, to be obtained by demonstrating not only the validity of ones beliefs, but how strongly one holds them. Conversations tend to be fast paced and often in emotional tones. Any conflict and anger brought forth in debate is generally dismissed as necessary to the process and quickly forgotten; although when it is not, it tends to create long term grudges.

These differing methods of communication naturally set up an easy to follow pattern of communication, or rather miscommunication, between Wiccans and Ásatrúar. The Wiccan begins with a statement of where he or she stands on an issue. The statement is conditioned with one or two phrases such as "in my opinion" meant to allow their opposite room for compromise in the event of disagreement. The Ásatrúar, upon hearing this, assumes that because the Wiccan has conditioned his statement, that it is loosely held and subject to revision or correction. He or she replies very directly that he feels the Wiccan's position is incorrect and supports evidence as to why. Up to this point, each party has acted exactly as their community standards lead them to react. The Ásatrúar expects the Wiccan to either accept the reasoning or to refute it. The Wiccan is simply stunned. He or she feels they have made a polite statement and had it answered in a rude and disrespectful manner. At this point, he has already decided the conversation is without purpose and attempts to end it by agreeing to the validity of the Ásatrúar's opinion, but restating his own, this time even more conditionally. This is a common way to end such a conversation in the Wiccan community, but the Ásatrúar sees it in an entirely different light. Smelling rhetorical blood, he or she strongly dismisses the Wiccan's opinion and even more strongly restates his own. The Wiccan now feels insulted beyond tolerance. He replies angrily, not concerning the original subject of the conversation, but chastising the Ásatrúar's behavior. The Ásatrúar is shocked by this reaction and asks what the problem is. Assuming the problem is obvious to everyone involved, the Wiccan turns and leaves. The two part, the Wiccan convinced the Ásatrúar is a rude and insensitive jerk trying to force his opinions on others, the Ásatrúar convinced he is the victim of yet another attempt at politically correct censorship by someone who can't defend his own beliefs.

Conclusions

The prospects for Wiccan/Ásatrú interaction are extremely troublesome. The differences as we have outlined them here span a huge range, from theology to personal philosophy. It would, perhaps, not be too great a stretch to say that Ásatrú and Wicca have nothing significant in common that they do not share with faiths that aren't considered to be Neo-Pagan. Nonetheless, there continues to be an interaction oriented around both faiths claim to the nebulous term "Pagan," and it should be noted that this article was based on a workshop taught by an Ásatrúar and a Wiccan at a Pagan festival of mixed attendance, organized largely by a Norse Pagan group identifying neither as Wiccan nor Ásatrú. There are things that we can learn from one another, but in order for successful interfaith interaction to take place we must first understand each other.