



Irish Network for the Study of Esotericism and Paganism

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ABSTRACT BOOKLET

JOHN BOYLE

Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies at the University of Essex

Esoteric Traces in Contemporary Psychoanalysis

This paper considers the role of esoteric traces in contemporary psychoanalysis. It begins with an introduction to how Western Esotericism relates to psychoanalysis and introduces the figure of F. W. H. Myers (1843-1901) to illustrate the role of psychical research in the early history of psychoanalysis. Having established the existence of an historical and cultural milieu favourable to the transmission of esoteric currents within contemporary psychoanalysis, the paper embarks on a tripartite investigation into altered states of consciousness, telepathy and Kabbalah, the significance of which for contemporary psychoanalysis it seeks to establish through the writings of Wilfred Bion (1897-1979), James Grotstein (1925-2015) and Michael Eigen (1936-). The paper concludes with some remarks on the place of esotericism in contemporary psychoanalysis.

JENNY BUTLER

Department of Study of Religions, University College Cork

The Irish Contemporary Pagan Community: Cultural Resources and Identity

This paper provides an overview of the religious worldview and ritual practices of the contemporary Pagan community in Ireland and details the ways in which the practitioners engage with the cultural resources of Irish history, landscape, mythology and folklore. The data is drawn from an ethnographic study based in interviewing and participant observation carried out as doctoral research and includes those who identify as Wiccans or other Pagan Witches, Druids and as Pagans generically. In the discussion, the use of mythology is examined with regard to how mythic narrative is connected to identity formation. Irish cultural symbols are observed as resources utilised in the construction of the movement's overall character. The interconnectedness of the natural landscape, the numinous and mythology gives rise to creative expression through various forms of Pagan artworks and other forms of material culture, which

will briefly be discussed. Overall, the paper will present insights into the Pagan community in Ireland, and its associated cultural expressions, and into the relationship that present-day Pagans have with the Irish landscape, history, and indigenous and popular Irish religion.

ANNE CROSSEY

Artist and Independent Scholar

The Great Work: Magic in a Contemporary Practice

In Ireland there are well-established precedents for understanding art as a vehicle for personal transformation – the illustrated Book of Kells and the work of W.B. Yeats being two obvious examples. However, in the world of contemporary Irish art, talking about spiritualism or the place of magic in art seems to be largely taboo, or as art historian James Elkins put it in the preface to his book *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (2004), mentioning anything to do with the spiritual in art is ‘like living in a house infested with mice and not noticing that something is wrong’. However, the mystical lies at the very heart of my own practice as an artist, just as it did for W.B. Yeats, and this paper is my attempt to trace the legitimacy for that concept within abstract art by revisiting Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911). Considered the landmark manifesto for abstract painting, it is structured around the theosophical idea that the invisible has a great power and that art is, by its nature, transformative. I will also explain how other aspects of my academic interests have enriched my own artistic practice, particularly the sigil magic of Austin Osman Spare, the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, and the alchemical *Monas Hieroglyphica* of John Dee, believed by Dee to be a living symbol of the Philosopher’s Stone. Painting itself is a visible expression of invisible processes – of digging deeper into unknown territory. I have no doubt that this is a sacred frontier and I think we all need to be reminded that this is a place where real magic can happen. It seems important and timely that dialogue be opened up within the context of finding meaning and questioning the role of contemporary Irish art.

VIVIANNE CROWLEY

Nottingham Trent University, UK

Ancient Egypt in an Irish Castle: The Fellowship of Isis

The Fellowship of Isis is one of the largest Goddess-worshipping organizations to emerge in the 1970s. Founded by the Anglo-Irish Durdin-Robertson family, it claims tens of thousands of members and has multicultural appeal, particularly in the United States, where African American interest in Ancient Egypt is high. The Fellowship is based on esoteric interpretations of the Egyptian goddess Isis, but positions itself as a universal multifaith movement that honors the Divine feminine in all her forms. Unlike many of the new religious movements born in the 1970s, it cannot be defined as a cult in the usual sense. The movement has no membership fees, free resources, and great latitude in spiritual practice. This paper examines the evolution of this contemporary Goddess movement and how it has sought to bridge the esoteric, exoteric, and Pagan and Christian worlds.

NADINE ECKMANN

Study of Religions Department, University College Cork

The Construction of the Concept of ‘Celtic Spirituality’ in Modern-Day Ireland

Folklore, mythology and storytelling – these words nowadays seem to be intertwined with Ireland as a country. But one can ask: Why is ‘Celtic Spirituality’ (e.g. Celtic Christianity, Druidry, Celtic Shamanism, as well as modern engagements with fairy lore) so popular and what are the reasons for the historical and contemporary romanticizing of these types of religiosity in Ireland? The tourist industry and other agendas (for example, nationalism) play an important role here and use Ireland’s ancient religious roots to create a new ‘brand’. In order to explore how the notion of ‘Celtic Spirituality’ is constructed and manifested in Ireland today, I carried out fieldwork, visiting different sites in Ireland and conducting interviews. This paper presents some preliminary findings related to my MA dissertation.

PATRICK EVERITT

Independent Scholar

The importance of Ireland to Robert Anton Wilson and Terence McKenna

There are a number of fascinating parallels between the American entheogenic esotericists Robert Anton Wilson (1932 - 2007) and Terence McKenna (1946 - 2000). They both spoke openly about their use of entheogens and their occult and esoteric interests. They both advocated an approach to entheogenic practice that was simultaneously scientific and spiritual. Further, both men independently claimed that in the early 1970s their psychedelic use led to an experience akin to contact with a non-human, higher form of intelligence. Also, both men were of Irish descent and both had a lifelong fascination with Ireland. This presentation will outline the lives and works of Robert Anton Wilson and Terence McKenna, illustrate the striking parallels between them, and explore the important influence Ireland played in their thought.

DMITRY GALTSIN

Independent Scholar

Claiming Europe: Celticity in Russian Pagan and Nativist Movement

I focus on 'Celticity' as an area of cultural material emically marked as 'Celtic', whether consisting of real borrowings from Celtic cultures or pre-Christian religions, or not. In Russian post-Soviet milieu of Pagan, Nativist and esoteric movements, as well as in mass culture, 'Celtic' may vary from a dim referential corpus serving as a backdrop to different cultural agendas to ethnic and folkloristic reconstructions in religious or secular contexts. The present paper looks at two contexts in which Celticity was and is articulated in modern Russia: 1) 'Celtic' identity in Slavic Paganism and Nativism of 1990s to the 2010s. Claiming an 'Indo-European' identity, many Russian Pagan Nativist authors mention Celts in the context of a 'big' Indo-European history of Slavs/Russians. The role of these 'Celts' may vary – from close allies or kin peoples to foes and spiritual opponents. 2) The role of Celticity in Russian non-Slavic Paganism. While Wicca in the 1990s and even in the 2000s was widely perceived in Russia as a 'Celtic' religion, withing the decade 2000-2010, there emerged a druidic movement, which will also be discussed in this paper.

CHRISTIAN GIUDICE

Department of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion, Gothenburg University, Sweden

From Black Magic to the Blue Shirts: Maud Gonne, the Golden Dawn and Irish Nationalism

For most scholars, especially in the field of Irish literature, Maud Gonne (1866-1953) represents the muse and long-time friend of W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), the woman who rejected the poet's proposals of marriage on three distinct occasions. Far from playing the role of simple source of inspiration, though, Gonne was a larger-than-life figure herself: a suffragette protesting for women's rights, a magician in the most famous magical order of all time, and a fervent Irish nationalist with ties to some of the most influential personalities involved with the Irish nationalist movement. My presentation will therefore aim to track Gonne's magical and political career in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and her role in Ireland, where she married Irish nationalist John MacBride (1868-1916), who was killed during the infamous Easter Rising of 1916. I will also draw attention to the importance the Celtic Revival had within the Golden Dawn, influencing illustrious personalities of the occult world such as Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854-1918), Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), and W.B. Yeats.

ÁINE WARREN

Religious Studies, University of Edinburgh

The Morrigan as a 'Dark Goddess': The operation of a metanarrative through self-narration of women on social media

This paper will examine the contemporary cult of worship of an Irish folkloric figure, the Morrigan, as expressed in new media e-communities, and in the context of the wider concept of the Dark Goddess. The development of a metanarrative of the 'Dark Goddess', and its operation on self-narratives in social media e-communities, represents one element of reinvention in the continually transforming, multivalent movement of modern Pagan witchcraft.

‘Metanarrative’ is defined here as a macro- or overarching narrative which exerts rhetorical power, augmenting and transforming the meaning of both personal and folkloric micro-narratives. The application of the Dark Goddess concept transforms the meaning of these micro-narratives. While narratives of a ‘dark’ Goddess appeared in American feminist witchcraft of the 1970s/80s, the discrete Dark Goddess archetype has developed alongside third-wave feminism. Since the 1990s, numerous publications have presented this archetype as enabling women’s healing and empowerment. As the Morrigan is portrayed in the Pagan e-community as a ‘dark goddess’ or an iteration of the ‘Dark Goddess’, this folkloric figure is transformed or re-storied by this metanarrative to create a unique reinterpretation. This reinterpretation arises through self-narration of Morrigan devotees, a process through which the therapeutic metanarrative operates to re-contextualise and provide new meaning to past and current autobiographical experiences. The Morrigan is reconfigured by devotees as a force which has brought about, assisted them through, and healed them from personal struggles. Thus, this metanarrative allows practitioners—predominantly women—to reconfigure personal narratives of struggle as transformational trials or rites of passage.