

Ecology, Witchcraft and the Enchanted World

by Mike Carr *

Pagans, or more properly neo-pagans have been growing in numbers and influence over the past decade or so in the U.S. and Canada. This is evidenced in the feminist, peace, green (or ecology), and anarchist movements. Margot Adler, author of *Drawing Down the Moon*, an examination of contemporary neo-paganism, has estimated that there are about 100,000 people in the U.S. alone who describe themselves as pagan or neo-pagan.¹ Over the past 5 or 6 years, I have developed a strong sympathy, more, an empathy with the neo-pagan sensibility and earth centredness. Apart from reading *Dreaming the Dark* by Starhawk, I had not studied paganism or ritual practice. This summer however, both at the North American Anarchist Survival Gathering and the North American Bioregional Congress the presence of pagans was very obvious to me. At the Bioregional Congress I had the chance to experience paganism directly, through earth-bonding rituals which had a powerful effect on many participants.

The following essay, presents a particular reading of two literary works, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery and *Not Wanted on the Voyage* by Timothy Findley. In reading these two modern tales it seemed to me that each in its own way contains a pagan sensibility or, at least, can be interpreted from a pagan sensibility to reveal new insights the authors may not have been conscious of. The first section of the essay attempts to show how a discussion of the symbols used in *The Little Prince*, informed by a neo-pagan symbolic understanding, can evoke images of a very different way of knowing from the dominant Western scientific one. *The Little Prince* is the story of a little prince from a tiny planet who comes down to earth, after visiting several other planets, meets an enigmatic and magical serpent, a wise fox, and an adult (the narrator). Through his adventures, the Little Prince learns some lessons about love, relationships, and adult life. In this tale, a pagan understanding of the self has resonances with currently developing ecological insights of a self which goes beyond the boundaries of our skin. The second section of the essay, focuses on the character of Lucy in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. It is the story of

the great flood and the first time the world ended, the story of Noah's ark. Yet, it's a kind of modern magic realism with a mythology of its own. Lucy, is Lucifer the rebel male angel who comes to earth as a seven foot white-faced woman of considerable beauty and charm with long, jet-black hair. In both these stories, an examination from a pagan perspective can illuminate imagery and symbolism out of which we can draw many lessons.

As Anton Ehrenzweig states in *The Hidden Order of Art*:

*The complexity of any work of art, however simple, far outstrips the powers of conscious attention, which with its pin-point focus can attend to only one thing at a time. Only the extreme undifferentiation of unconscious vision can scan these complexities. It can hold them in a single, unfocused glance and treat figure and ground with equal impartiality.*²

The Little Prince is certainly exemplary of the "hidden order of art." However simple in appearance or form, the reality dealt with in *The Little Prince* is most difficult to express in language, especially for those of us who are from a literate, historical, linear, visually oriented culture. In *The Little Prince* what is most essential in life is not visible at all. The secret of life, the fox tells the Little Prince, the essential, is invisible to the eyes. What then is this story, apparently written for children, that treats of the hidden order of the universe?

When I first read *The Little Prince*, it was for a literature course given by a Priest at Saint Michael's College. For him, the story of the Little Prince was a modern tale of the Christ, his wanderings and his crucifixion and resurrection.

Art, like life, is open to interpretation and *The Little Prince* presents a number of riddles not readily interpreted. I myself don't have a clear-cut interpretation of this tale but I do see some resemblances to mythology. The

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earliest legends go back long before Christianity of course. In *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk points out that the legends of Wicca, or Witchcraft predate all the so-called great religions.³ The cycle of death and re-birth dealt with in Christianity and which we will see *The Little Prince* also deals with is certainly a subject of a broad range of mythologies. But perhaps the symbolism in *The Little Prince* can be interpreted more satisfactorily from the older pagan perspective. Yet *The Little Prince* is clearly a modern tale, set in the 20th century with asteroids, airplanes, geographers, businessmen, hunters with guns, and enormous telescopes. Clearly, this story is not a myth, at least not a traditional myth. This puzzle can be resolved if we consider how myths and tales are compared by Mircea Eliade in *Myth and Reality*:

*Though in the West the tale has long since become a literature of diversion (for children and peasants) or of escape (for city dwellers), it still presents the structure of an infinitely serious and responsible adventure, for in the last analysis it is reducible to an initiatory scenario: again and again we find initiatory ordeals.*⁴

In the case of *The Little Prince*, the ordeals which Eliade speaks of take the form of riddles to be solved. The enigmatic behaviours of adults, the puzzling behaviour of the Prince's rose, and the riddle of "taming" the fox are among the many "ordeals" the Prince faces. In reflecting on the nature of the tale, Eliade continues:

*Its content proper refers to a terrifyingly serious reality: initiation, that is, passing by way of a symbolic death and resurrection, from ignorance and immaturity to the spiritual age of the adult.*⁵

For Eliade, it is not always true that the tale shows a desacralization of the mythical world: "It would be more correct to speak of a camouflage of mythical motifs and characters."⁶

Of course, in the world of *The Little Prince*, becoming an adult after meeting up with all the narrow pathetic representatives of the adult world -- the narrator excepted -- growing up is a very dubious fate.

I don't know what Saint-Exupery had in mind when he wrote *The Little Prince*. There

are many enigmas in this tale: the elephant in the boa, the fox who wants to be domesticated, the lamplighter, the danger of the baobab trees, the mystery of the rose, of the golden cobra, and of the Little Prince himself, both so naive and so wise. At least some of these enigmas can be illuminated through a pagan understanding of self. By drawing upon some symbols from mythology certain correspondences are suggested which evoke a different epistemology, an epistemology which has a fundamental ecological meaning. There are many elements of early mythology in *The Little Prince*. The Prince himself has magic powers not the least of which is his ability to "dream" into existence the village well in the desert, or his ability to read the narrator's mind. In this tale animals talk, as well as flowers, just as in mythology.

The story opens with the drawing of a coiled serpent. In *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* by Barbara Walker, the serpent which sheds its skin periodically is symbolic of the cycle of death and rebirth.⁷ In this metaphor, snakes don't die of old age but in shedding their skins they are continually being reborn into a new life. The serpent is identified with the goddess, the life force constantly re-newing life through the cycles of birth and death. For Eliade, myth, "an extremely complex cultural reality . . . can be approached and interpreted from various and complementary viewpoints."⁸ In his appendix Eliade comments:

*The tale takes up and continues "initiation" on the level of the imaginary. If it represents an amusement or an escape, it does so only for the banalized consciousness, and particularly for that of modern man. . . . Today we are beginning to realize that what is called "initiation" co-exists with the human condition, that every existence is made up of an unbroken series of "ordeals," "deaths," and "resurrection," whatever be the terms that modern language uses to express these originally religious experiences.*⁹

Eliade's discussion of initiation resonates with Paul Shepard's reflections on initiation in pre-historic societies. For Shepard, initiation in these societies symbolizes passage from one stage of life to another, and actually helps to achieve the transition. Shepard suggests in his book, *Nature and Madness*, that Western society is "sick" because it has rigidified at the juvenile

stage in development, failing to provide the nurturing which will help adolescents into the more mature stage of bonding with nature, and of being at home in the world.¹⁰

Drawing from the Fairy Tradition of Witchcraft, Starhawk explains in *The Spiral Dance* that the unconscious mind is called the "Younger Self"; the conscious mind is called "Talking Self." Because they function through different "modes of awareness," that is they have different epistemologies, communication between the two is very difficult.

The Younger Self directly experiences the world through images, emotions, sensations, dreams, visions, and physical symptoms. Starhawk says Younger Self corresponds roughly to Jung's personal and collective unconscious. Younger Self's verbal understanding is limited. Talking Self organizes the impressions of Younger Self, gives them names, and classifies them into systems. Talking Self speaks through words, abstract concepts, and numbers. Younger Self corresponds to the "child," Talking Self to the "adult" or "parent" in the tale of *The Little Prince*. The Little Prince himself is the child, a magical child whose way of knowing is so different from the adult world. The parent is the narrator, the adult who helps the Little Prince understand the weird world of adults. This is one level of understanding of *The Little Prince*, but there is another deeper one. In the Fairy Tradition, a third "self" is recognized, what Starhawk calls the "High Self" or "God Self," "the ultimate and original essence, the spirit that exists beyond time, space, and matter."¹¹ In the Fairy Tradition, this "self" is our deepest level of wisdom and compassion.

The High Self often appears as the "Spirit Guide." Sometimes the Spirit Guide appears in dual form. Starhawk relates John C. Lilly's account of his L.S.D. experience in an isolation tank where he reports meeting two helpful beings:

They say that they are my guardians, that they have been with me before at critical times and that in fact they are with me always, but I am not usually in a state to perceive them. I am in a state to perceive them when I am close to the death of the body. In this state there is no time. There is an immediate perception of the past, present, and future as if in the present moment.¹²

Starhawk then comments that the High Self is connected to the Younger Self, but that the

conscious mind with its abstract concepts, its numbers, the Talking Self never actually communicates with the Divine, the Higher Self. To do this we have to resort to symbols, art, poetry, music, myth, and the actions of ritual.

Ritual is actually only mentioned once in *The Little Prince*. Significantly though it is the fox -- the character who reveals the secret of life -- that says ritual is necessary and that it has been too much forgotten. The Little Prince himself does not know what ritual is and the fox's explanation is not very elaborate. From the story though, it's clear that ritual does involve time, dance, and a break from ordinary life. For Eliade, by living the myths through ritual, "one emerges from profane, chronological time, and enters a time that is of a different quality, a 'sacred' time at once primordial and infinitely recoverable."¹³

In *The Little Prince* the break from ordinary time that the fox describes can be interpreted as that "sacred time" in which we connect with our high self. Starhawk, in considering ritual for moderns warns:

Aspects of Witchcraft rituals may sometimes seem silly to very serious-minded people, who fail to realize that ritual is aimed at Younger Self. The sense of humour, of play, is often the key to opening the deepest states of consciousness. Part of the "price of freedom," then, is the willingness to play, to let go of our adult dignity, to look foolish, to laugh at nothing. A child make-believes that she is a queen, her chair becomes a throne. A witch make-believes that her wand has magic power, and it becomes a channel for energy.¹⁴

All the above descriptions, John Lilly's, Mircea Eliade's, Starhawk's, and Saint-Exupery's are attempts to explain to Talking Self or linear-logical modern man what in the last analysis can never really be explained in terms of Cartesian reductionism, namely, that what is most real, most vital for human life on earth, can never really be explained on the level of ordinary reality. It is in fact another way of knowing reality, an epistemology of the enchanted world, an epistemology of the heart. From such a reading of *The Little Prince*, we can understand that an epistemology of the heart leads us into the enchanted world of relationship where everything is interconnected. This is the world of the High Self.

The High Self or Divine self is very much analogous to "deep ecology" perspectives of the extended self, the self which includes an ever widening sphere of beings and natural processes, the self which bonds to the biosphere and ultimately beyond it to the cosmos. We identify with other species in our enchanted world because in this sense they and we are connected ecologically. Their home is our home, we are related, connected. As Starhawk says:

*Love for life in all its forms is the basic ethic of Witchcraft. Witches are bound to honour and respect all living things, and to serve the life force . . . oneness is attained not through losing the self, but through realizing it fully. Honour the Goddess in yourself, celebrate your self, and you will see that Self is everywhere.*¹⁵

In the Fairy tradition of Starhawk, the High Self is often symbolized as two linked spirals, or as the infinity sign. It is the sign of a fully realized being, one who has attained, experienced and realized the wisdom of the ancients.

In Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage* this kind of realized being is represented by the character of Lucy. Like the Goddess symbol in Wicca, Lucy includes both male and female aspects. For Starhawk, "the femaleness of the Goddess is primary, not to denigrate the male, but because it represents bringing life into the world, valuing the world."¹⁶ It is clear that Lucy values the world. Her purpose in joining the human race is both to "survive the holocaust in-heaven and to prevent the holocaust on earth."¹⁷

Not Wanted on the Voyage is not an openly "pagan" novel. Like *The Little Prince*, its paganism (if such it is) is hidden. Even though Lucy tells Mrs. Noyes (at the end of book three) that she, Mrs. Noyes, is beginning to understand the meaning of her sign "infinity," this is the closest we get to an explicit explanation of the sign. However, we do know that Lucy/Lucifer, the bearer of light, was intolerant of heaven because there was only light "merciless light," no shadows, no storms, no rain. Neither does Lucy support the opposite situation where there is only rain, no sun. She dreams of a world "where darkness and light are reconciled."¹⁸ Lucy values diversity, diversity in all things, light and dark being symbols of course of good and evil. Lucy knows that real evil is a place where opposites don't exist, a place like heaven

where "a person's clothes were always at the cleaners, being improved, or else, the person was always at the cleaners, being improved."¹⁹ Lucy's desire to reconcile light and dark is essentially a pagan sensibility. In *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk writes of the "wheel of the year" with its waxing and waning of light and dark:

*. . . the Dark and Light Twins are clearly understood to be aspects of the same divinity. But when we see the God as split, we run the risk of suffering a split within ourselves: of identifying totally with the Light and ascribing the Dark to an agent of evil. . . . In Witchcraft, the dark waning aspect of God is not evil -- it is a vital part of the natural cycle.*²⁰

Lucy's sexuality is representative of this pagan sensibility. Lucy's female aspect contains within it a male aspect. In Wicca, male and female forces represent difference, but not in essence. Starhawk says:

*They are the same force flowing in opposite, but not opposed directions. The Chinese concept of Yin and Yang is somewhat similar, but in Witchcraft the description of the forces is very different - Neither is "active" or "passive," dark or light, dry or moist - instead, each partakes of all these qualities. The female is seen as the life-giving force, the power of manifestation, of energy flowing into the world to become form. The male is seen as the death force, in a positive not a negative sense: the force of limitation that is the necessary balance to unbridled creation, the force of dissolution, of return to formlessness. Each principle contains the other: Life breeds death, feeds on death; death sustains life, makes possible evolution and new creation. They are part of a cycle, each dependent on the other.*²¹

Lucy herself goes through several "sheddings of skin" in the course of "the voyage," perhaps symbolic of the Wiccan perspective of the universe as fields of energy, vortexes of moving forces, currents in an ever changing sea, congealing temporarily into forms, only to dissolve and coalesce again into new forms. Lucy can be seen then as a representation of a

pagan concept of self, an extended mature self having undergone many transformations throughout her long struggle against the forces of evil in heaven which are "under the protection of Michael Archangelis."²²

In a discussion on the spiritual self, Harold Wood refers to the pantheistic concept of the "ecological self" in which one's personal self becomes identified with the ecological self or ultimate being.²³ This is also referred to as "extended identity," a basic principle of pantheism. Regardless of the differences between pantheism and paganism, this concept of self is very similar to the extended self concept in paganism (and in deep ecology).

The mature being, a being for whom being matters in all its diverse forms will naturally be opposed to absolutism. As we have seen, this is the crux of Lucy's fight against the evil of absolutist heaven and of its chief representative on earth the patriarch Dr. Noah Noyes. As Starhawk says in *The Spiral Dance*:

*The Judeo-Christian heritage has left us with the view of a universe composed of warring opposites, which are valued as either good or evil. . . . Dualism slides over into what I call the "Chosen People Syndrome." When there is One Right True and Only Way -- Ours! -- and everybody else is wrong, then those who are wrong are damned and the damned are evil.*²⁴

For Starhawk, Wicca is a practice for activists. Its insight is that polarities are in balance, not at war. Energy moves in cycles at times flowing outward, pushing us to change the world, at times inward, transforming ourselves. It must always turn and return, and so be renewed. In paganism, the Goddess does not rule over the world as in monotheism. On the contrary, in paganism, the Goddess is the world: "The Goddess is ourselves and the world -- to link with Her is to engage actively with the world and all its problems."²⁵

Lucy does just this. As we have seen she has joined the humans to try to prevent a holocaust on earth. She helps to organize the "Great Revolution of the Lower Orders" on the ark. She is helpful and loving to humans and animals alike. She brings light to the lower orders of the ark, where the humans out of favour with Noah (and therefore with God) and the animals are kept. Lucy bonds strongly with the other animals and, after her final "shedding of skin," she herself while still "human" has

become more animal-like: "The face -- this time -- was neither round nor angular, but wide and flat, with extraordinary eyes of an almost golden colour: animal eyes, fierce and tender."²⁶ Lucy is an activist in the best sense of the word, an earth activist.

In his article, "Paganism as Resistance," Christopher Manes writes:

*The rise of radical environmentalism and neo-paganism occurred almost simultaneously, no doubt in response to the same concerns over the desacralization of the earth that modern culture represents. . . . The large number of neo-pagans in the radical environmental movement confirms the fact that people involved in the struggle against accumulated power sense an affinity between Deep Ecology and "The Old Ways" as Gary Snyder calls the primal religions.*²⁷

There is now a growing convergence in the ecology movement between religion and science. In *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, this convergence is represented by the marriage of Lucy, the "pagan devil," and Ham, the "scientist." But what are we talking about when we say "science" and "scientist" in this context? The debate between pantheism and paganism illuminates this.²⁸ The "science-oriented" pantheists stress the mystical approach to science. Pantheist author Harold Wood refers to geneticist Barbara McClintock and her concept of a science which "embraces the world," and to Spinoza, Ernst Haeckel, John Muir and Rachel Carson as examples of pantheistic scientists. He could have added Gilbert White and Henry David Thoreau. These individuals are part of what historian of ecology, Donald Worster, calls the Arcadian tradition in ecology, clearly not the reductionist mechanists of classical renaissance science or "systems" ecology.²⁹ In *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, Lucy's husband Ham is such a scientist.

Now, if we look at the "pagan" side of the debate Starhawk speaks, for example, of the new physics as evidence of pagan support for a non-reductionist science.³⁰ In fact, Starhawk points out in *The Spiral Dance* that the split between religion and science is a false duality of absolutism:

When God is felt to be separate from the physical world, religion can be split off from science. . . .

*But the Goddess is manifest in the physical world, and the more we understand its workings the better we know her. Science and religion are both quests for truth -- they differ only in their methodology and the set of symbols they use to describe their findings. The field of inquiry is the same. . . . Observation is meditation as the builders of Stonehenge -- temple, astronomical observatory, calendar, and calculator -- knew well.*³¹

Lucy is very in touch with science. She is able to produce tungsten lamps when they have not even been invented. She knows about Einstein even though he has not even been born yet and both she and Ham share that deep sense of inquiry that always questions everything. This is why she eventually has to leave heaven. What she and Ham share most is that love of the earth, that deep bonding common to naturalist and pagan alike.

I find some excellent and inspiring considerations from both the pagan and pantheistic perspectives on science. Certainly, when both perspectives recognize the on-going development of a spiritually inspired, earth-centred science, then a sharper distinction can be made between this kind of science, a "hands-off" science of curiosity and joy, and the old reductionist science of manipulation and domination.

What I have called the "epistemology of the heart" is an epistemology for the enchanted world, our world if we open ourselves up to it. The beings represented by the Little Prince and by Lucy, whole beings in touch with their high selves, are really our own selves, our deepest selves. This ecological mode of perception, "extraordinary consciousness" as Starhawk puts it "is broad, holistic, and undifferentiated, sees patterns and relationships rather than fixed objects."³² It is what Starhawk calls starlight vision "dim and silvery, revealing the play of woven branches and the dance of shadows, sensing pathways as spaces in the whole."³³ It is the mode of perception of the unconscious mind, younger self and high self.

Dolores LaChapelle, in *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex: Rapture of the Deep*, speaks of nature's patterns as the "old ways," both deep inside us from our own deep past (including our pre-human animal past) and those patterns outside us in the natural environment. In trying to express the inexpressible, she speaks of the Chinese concept of the dynamic pattern of the universe, the web of relationships, a web "woven

by no weaver."³⁴ Although this is Taoist, I think it fairly expresses a pagan understanding of the web of life. This is a very ecological metaphor as well. As such, it is both very ancient and completely contemporary, the web of life of our enchanted planet earth. The pagan understanding of the goddess is another metaphor for it.

Notes

1. Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

The words pagan and neo-pagan do not admit to an easy definition. Very often the two are used interchangeably by people who ascribe to paganism. Although there is a semantic overlap, neo-paganism refers to the contemporary revival of paganism, whereas pagan can refer to the contemporary movement or to the past as far back as palaeolithic times when it was the "universal religion." Today, some use the word palaeopaganism to refer to those pre-civilized pagans. Religion, by the way, originally meant and still means for most pagans, "linking back" or "connecting back." Adler gives an account of the history of the contemporary revival of paganism, which I find most useful as an introduction to the movement and to the pagan "world-view." However, the term "pagan world-view" is itself misleading since there is a very great diversity of views within paganism. Hence, the difficulty with definitions. Adler cites several different definitions from people calling themselves pagan. She herself uses Pagan (Adler capitalizes the noun as do other religions) to mean "a member of a polytheistic nature religion, such as the ancient Greek, Roman, or Egyptian religions, or in anthropological terms, a member of one of the indigenous folk and tribal religions all over the world." Adler also attempts a generalized description by which neo-pagans "usually mean the pre-Christian nature religions of the West, and their own attempts to revive them or to re-create them in new forms" and she adds "the modern Pagan resurgence includes the new feminist goddess worshipping groups, certain new religions based on the visions of science fiction writers, attempts to revive ancient European religions -- Norse, Greek, Roman - - and the surviving tribal religions." Adler further points out that one of the "foremost characteristics of Neo-paganism is the return to the ancient idea that there is no distinction between spiritual and material, sacred and secular." For Adler, most neo-pagans sense an aliveness and "presence" in nature, are usually polytheists, animists, or pantheists, or two or three of these at once; that share the goal of living in harmony with nature and tend to view humanity's "advancement" and separation from nature as the prime source of alienation, seeing ritual as a tool to end that alienation.

2. Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art* (London: Paladin, 1967), p. 35.

3. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979). Wicca, or Witchcraft, also known as "the craft" has many traditions within it. Wicca is defined by most of its practitioners as the craft of the wise. Wicca is part of the pagan tradition.

4. Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 201.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Barbara Walker, *The Womens Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983).

8. Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

9. Ibid., p. 202.
10. Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1982), chapter 6, pp. 109-130.
11. Starhawk, op. cit., p. 22.
12. Ibid.
13. Eliade, op. cit., p. 18.
14. Starhawk, op. cit., p. 23.
15. Ibid., p. 11.
16. Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), p. 9.
17. Timothy Findley, *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 110.
18. Ibid., p. 284.
19. Ibid., p. 338.
20. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 29.
21. Ibid., p. 27.
22. Findley, op. cit., p. 321.
23. Harold Wood, "Modern Pantheism: Seeking a Personal Relationship With the Universe," *The Trumpeter*, 5:3 (1988), pp. 100-106.
24. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 189.
25. Ibid., p. 189.
26. Findley, op. cit., p. 344.
27. Christopher Manes, "Paganism as Resistance," *The Trumpeter*, 5:3 (1988), pp. 110-112.
28. For the debate between paganism and patheism see *The Trumpeter*, 4:3 (1987), 5:1 (1988), and 5:3 (1988).
29. Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univesity Press, 1977).
30. Monika Langer, "Valuing Diversity: No One Can Speak for All," *The Trumpeter*, 5:3 (1988), pp. 106-109.
31. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, p. 191.
32. Ibid., p. 18.
33. Ibid.
34. Dolores Lachapelle, *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex: Rapture of the Deep* (Silverton: Fine Hill Arts, 1988).

