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Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America
(review)

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Journal of American Folklore, Volume 122, Number 483, Winter 2009,
pp. 103-104 (Review)

Published by American Folklore Society
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaf.0.0054>



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nect to the actions of states and other institutions. Folklore needs to be examined as a part of the political economy of nations and of the world system. One feature that led to the creation of particular themes of AIDS legends is how governments—and we think here of the Reagan administration, although no doubt Canadian readers have their own examples—constructed the crisis of AIDS, and responded or did not respond. And not just governments, but drug companies, major employers, hospitals, schools, religions, activist groups, and social service agencies each had a part to play. As these powerful social actors set the terms of the pandemic, images flowered and were transformed in the public imagination. Without such a political analysis, a stance largely abjured in Goldstein's book, the way that legends fit into institutional life—what has been called the third force of folklore—cannot be appreciated.

None of these limitations should obscure precisely what *Once Upon a Virus* has provided. We now can understand how an array of legends tracks the creation and transformation of a major human challenge. Goldstein reminds us, properly, that how we see danger is intimately linked to vernacular perceptions of risk, perceptions that are embedded in tradition. As Susan Sontag emphasized, AIDS is a metaphor for our age, but folk narratives are metaphors for the ages.

Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America. By Sabina Magliocco. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. Pp. 268, notes, bibliography, index, acknowledgments.)

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For both believers and skeptics, religion is the most folkloric of institutions. If one is not part of a tradition with some measure of longevity, how can one justify embracing a belief for all eternity? Scholars of religion have long limned the folkloric ingredients of religious belief, whether it be Alan Dundes's explication of the career of the Christ or Bert Wilson's accounts

of the construction of Mormon teachings. To be sure, uncovering traditional motifs in narratives of faith does not address their validity; gods can surely wield lore and custom to persuade their rough parishioners.

In *Witching Culture* Sabina Magliocco uses her considerable acumen to analyze how Neo-Pagans use folklore in the construction of beliefs and rituals. Yet despite considerable borrowings of traditional themes, this is not your father's Paganism. With the possible exception of Unitarians, no community of belief is likely more politically progressive and postmodern than Neo-Pagans. This is a true-blue creed, as azure as the Mormons are scarlet.

Magliocco is an effective and affectionate guide in mapping the development of Neo-Paganism in America and the multiple—and occasionally conflicting—strains from which it draws. The author shows that, although the roots of Neo-Paganism can be found throughout the twentieth century, the movement had its beginnings as a movement of practice in the 1970s, when it emerged to “reflect and refract the cultural politics characteristic of the American experience” (p. 3). Like all religious movements, Neo-Paganism is cultural politics congealed in faith. It is a coalition of what outsiders might describe as tree huggers. The evident divisions within the movement emphasize that no Mother Church exists, but we find an array of denominations, sects, and cults, each searching under rocks and over clouds for an authenticity of the wild. And as Rodney Stark persuasively argued of early Christianity (and which was equally true of much of the American religious revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, excluding the Latter-day Saints), Neo-Paganism—and particularly Wicca—is essentially a feminist movement, a haven from the gendered threats of male hegemony (*The Rise of Christianity*, Princeton University Press, 1996).

Witching Culture presents a richly textured ethnography, as fine a participant-observation account of an American scene as folklore has been gifted with since Leslie Prosterman's *Ordinary Life, Festival Days* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994). For my taste, however, Magliocco does not stand sufficiently back from the movement to gain the analytic purchase

that comes from skepticism. Granted, all religions appear gawky in their adolescence, but sometimes disciplinary agnosticism permits us to discount desired but undeserved self-presentations. While no researcher should scorn the belief system of a group that she encounters, neither is it necessary to nuzzle. This attachment may cause Magliocco to downplay sexuality, drug use, and posturing in the community. These seekers often appear in her telling to be, frankly, rather puritanical. For some young people, their witchy beliefs may serve as an in-your-faith dogma, sparking familial drama at Thanksgiving. Resistance may appear as bullying to one's intimates. As scholars, let us recognize Neo-Paganism in all its forms as simultaneously silly and profound, subversive and moral, liberating and harassing.

A more distanced view would emphasize the struggles over political correctness that challenge the movement as it staggers toward a consensual theology. One illuminating instance is the problematic usage of American Indian lore in Neo-Paganism. Do these white, middle-class, well-educated Americans have the *right* to appropriate native traditions? Do these beliefs belong to their tribes or do they belong to the divine? As Magliocco explains, West Coast Pagans are more prudent in avoiding tribal complaints, whereas East Coast Pagans, less attuned to American Indian politics (or at least to the objections of tribal leaders) are more willing to embrace these cross-cultural borrowings. If European Americans cannot borrow Indian traditions, can Italian Americans borrow Celtic traditions, can Sicilians borrow traditions from Lombardy? Put another way, are traditions linked to an ethnic identity that springs from the soil? This is a matter that reverberates with the concerns of Johann Herder as well as with those troubling Nordic Pagans who demand a purity of Aryan magic.

While Neo-Paganism may be a religion aborning, no single authority has yet emerged. Numerous strains of Neo-Paganism—Wicca, the Golden Dawn, the Reclaiming tradition—compete for adherents in a creedal marketplace. Within each of these traditions, one's own worship group matters deeply. In a faith that lacks set dogma and ritual authority, actors set the

terms of their own faith. This may be legitimate spiritually, but it accords great power to local practice. Each group establishes its own divinity, creating an idioculture of belief.

As an account of the folkloric practices of a burgeoning social scene, *Witching Culture* deserves high praise. Yet, this is a volume whose goal is to apply folkloristics to explain Neo-Paganism. In sharp contrast to Tanya Luhrmann's treatise on cognitive anthropology, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (Harvard University Press, 1989), that uses a similar (British) scene to explain the ambiguity of belief under conditions of modernity, Magliocco's volume does not include a theory of traditional practice. While one sympathizes with Magliocco's desire to get Neo-Paganism right, she might have thought more deeply about concepts such as group, gender, cultural politics, and faith to better understand how the insistent striving for authenticity and ecstatic imagining of Neo-Pagans apply beyond their circles of magic. How, we might ask, does the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn enlighten the traditions of Pentecostals, pensioners, and pencil pushers alike?

The Land of Remorse: A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism. By Ernesto De Martino. Trans. and ann. by Dorothy Louise Zinn. (London: Free Association Books, 2005. Pp. xxiii + 332, foreword, translator's note, preface, introduction, photographs and illustrations, table, epilogue, appendices, bibliography, indices.)

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"*Traduttore, traditore*" (Translator, betrayer): in English, this Italian proverb illustrates its own meaning. In a bare two words, assonance, alliteration, accent pattern, and nearly perfect symmetry are partially lost, although much is retained. Dorothy Zinn, translator of Ernesto De Martino's *La terra del rimorso* (The land of remorse), faced a more severe problem with the mere four words of the title because "rimorso" means "re-bite" as well as "remorse." Indeed, to be "bitten again" is the root metaphor of