

# Paths

The Magazine of UCD's

pagan soc

## Introduction to UCD Pagan Soc

I know what you're thinking: "WTF???"

This is the most frequently asked question of pagans, so I will attempt to answer this question first.

Paganism is not a religion, it is the term used to describe an infinite variety of spiritual practices surviving in myth, folklore and culture from before the time of Christ. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, *pagan* means 'a person holding religious beliefs other than those of the main world religions.' As such Paganism could encompass a huge range of world religions from Shinto (Japanese folk-religion) to modern witchcraft.

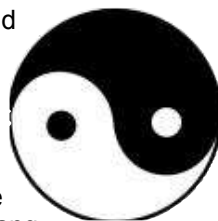
Paganism contains no hard and fast doctrines, and while some pagan religions, such as Wicca, may encourage adherence to its doctrine '*An it harm none, do as you will*', pagans are free to explore any and all available spiritual paths. This is in fact generally encouraged among pagans. Pagan practices are not mutually exclusive, and furthermore, pagans view all religions as equally valid. Although some fundamentalist pagans do exist, these tend to be in the minority, and as such we as a group hope to celebrate spiritual diversity and encourage people to approach whatever path they are drawn to with an open mind.

There are a number of common strands shared by most, but not all pagan belief systems. These include:

**Polytheism**, a belief in multiple gods. Generally there are two supreme male and female godheads analogous to the male and female aspects of God in the Old Testament. Other deities tend to be allegorical representations or personifications of various aspects of the universe. This shares an interesting parallel with the Roman Catholic veneration of God, Mary and the Saints. Shamanism and other purely nature based

spiritualities would not be as much concerned with gods as with animal spirits, and a generic force of Nature.

**Universal binary:** The difference between male and female is one of the most fundamental, and basic laws of the natural world. As such the significance of the mutual opposition of male and female forces is fundamental to many religions, from Taoism and Buddhism to neo-paganism. It is represented in Eastern philosophy by the yin and the yang. In the yin-yang symbol, the yin contains yang, and the yang contains yin representing the interdependency of the binary opposites.



**Belief in reincarnation:** Belief in reincarnation is common to almost all pagan religions, and was even held by some Christian sects until it was banned as heresy.

**The Elements:** The fundamental forces of Earth, Fire, Air and Water, associated with the cardinal points of North, South, East and West, respectively play a huge role in the ceremonial and spiritual beliefs of most pagan religions. Some minor variations exist between different traditions, for instance, Asatru replaces Earth with Ice, while Witches in the Southern Hemisphere reverse the north/south associations of Earth and Fire. While the Asian system of five elements may appear to be a contradictory, mutually exclusive system, the fifth, central element of Spirit brings the Western total up to five pointing at least to a superficial similarity. The Asian elements are Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth. While the cardinal associations of the Asian elements can vary from tradition to tradition, Earth is normally considered the central element, or quintessence, made up of the other four.

### **Respect for Nature**

Almost all pagan celebrations are linked to the natural world, being based upon Solar events, such as solstices and equinoxes, and lunar events. Paganism fosters a respect for the natural world and a responsible use of this planet's resources which we have not only inherited from our ancestors, but borrowed from our descendants.

### **Types of Paganism**

The main groups which fall under the category of Paganism can be summarised roughly as such:

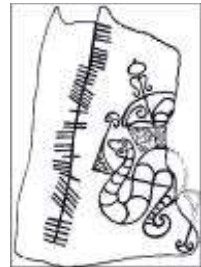
**Asatru (Odinism, Heathenism):** The pre-Christian beliefs of the Scandinavian, Germanic, Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon peoples. The main



the deities of the Asgard, or Asatru pantheon are Frey, Odin, Thor and Tir, Frigg, Freya and the Norns (Fates). The legends of the northern tradition form a rich mythology which are central to the understanding of European cultural heritage.

While Germanic legend and the associated spiritual heritage gained an unfortunate association with German Nationalism, culminating in the Arian philosophy of the National Socialist (Nazi) party in the 1930s, the teachings of the Asatru are in fact the antithesis to this kind of supremacist attitude. Despite popular opinion, Asatru is a pacifist religion whose magical arts concentrate predominantly on healing.

**Druidry:** The druids were the priests, scholars and mediators of the Celtic world – Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and Northern France. In Ireland, Celtic legend and poetry survives in a unique manner, having been written down by Christian monks, who were most likely druids themselves. Irish folk-culture, such as the belief in the power of fairy-forts, is steeped in the remnants of pagan Celtic religion. Interest in reviving the Druidic way began in Britain with annual gatherings at Stonehenge dating back to the Nineteenth Century, and possibly before. The central ceremonial location of Irish Druidry is Tara Hill. A number of groves are currently operating in Ireland.



**Ritual Magic:** Less a spiritual belief than an occult methodology, Western European occult practices based on Hermetic and Cabbalistic traditions have existed since the Middle Ages. This form of mysticism was often practiced by Christians, Jews and Moslems. The Order of the Golden Dawn was an organisation of such ritual magic, and boasted such auspicious members as Alistair Crowley and W. B. Yeats. Practice of ritual magic or 'occultism' does not preclude obedience to most of the main world religions, but has sometimes accrued the negative connotations associated with secret societies.

**Shamanism:** While the shamanic revival among neo-pagans began a decade or so later than the Wiccan revival, Shamanic practices are based on anthropological research into ancient spiritual practices as well as the surviving aboriginal shamanic practices of Amazonian tribes, Native Americans, Aboriginal Australians, Maori and others. Shamanism

is the root of all religion and relies on the manipulation of and communication with plant and animal spirits.

While most shamanic practices involve the use of herbal hallucinogens to induce a trance-state, we must caution against the use of any potentially unsafe or illegal substance without proper supervision.



### **Witchcraft**

Wicca  
of



**(Wicca):** Perhaps the most famous of pagan paths, claims its heritage from the underground continuation pre-Christian religion in Western Europe. This claim was supported by the historian Margaret Murray (see *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, 1924). In Britain, after the repeal of Witchcraft laws in the 1950s, Gerald Gardner published books detailing the practices of the New Forest coven of which he had been a member.

While some covens claim to trace their heritage from separate, hereditary roots, most are influenced, at least in part by the writings of Gardner and his students.

**Voodoo (Santeria, Orisha, etc.):** The religious and magical practices of the African American Slaves, developed in captivity from the aboriginal practices of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, specifically in the Caribbean Islands as well as some colonies on the American Continent. Many practitioners adopted superficial Christian trappings, such as the substitution of African deities' names with those of the Virgin Mary and Catholic Saints to avoid censor by the White slave-owners.

Santeria, as practiced in Puerto Rico, does involve animal sacrifice and divination by means of animal entrails. These practices are legal in Puerto-Rico. *Voudon* is the name for this religion in Haiti. These practices are often unfortunately associated with 'obeah' or spirit theft, a left-handed magical subset of voodoo. Voodoo also forms a rich part of Creole culture in places such as New Orleans.

Voodoo is often synonymous with 'Black Magic.' This is mostly an unfortunate racial stereotype created by years of bigotry.

**Other traditions:** The above list is by no means comprehensive, and each group described is not a cohesive tradition but rather a group of myriad traditions within that heading.

### **The Year Ahead**

In our first year operating in UCD, we will hold regular coffee mornings where you can meet, talk, and have free coffee and biscuits. We also intend to run workshops on some of the more common aspects of

pagan practice, such as dowsing, divination, healing, grounding, etc. These will not be 'Wicca 101', but will be of benefit to persons of any spiritual inclination.

**This Magazine:** We will have some form of publication at least once per term, to keep you posted of our activities and keep in contact. As such, we would welcome any contributions for future editions, be they relevant articles, anecdotes, illustrations, cartoons, or any other relevant material.

Contact: [turloughholmes@hotmail.com](mailto:turloughholmes@hotmail.com)

### **Other Events:**

**Gavin Bone and Janet Farrar** will be giving a talk on Paganism in Ireland on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> November. venue TBA.

Other workshops will be given on divination, meditation and crystal working throughout the first term.

## **Committee**

### **Neil Byrne: Auditor**

Neil is a Biochemistry student and a Wiccan, but I try not to hold either against him. He has been trying to get this society up and running for some time now, and now that he is finally in power... bwahahahaha...

### **Eoin Hughes: Secretary**

Eoin is a 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Computer Science Student. Her main area of interest is Shamanism.

### **Cathy McFadden: Treasurer**

Cathy is a 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Mathematical Science Student. Brainy! She is also ridiculously smiley for a Pagan.

### **Andrew Felle: Webmaster**

Andy is a 2<sup>nd</sup> Arts student studying History and Archaeology. He's a first level Sorcerer, attempting to multiclass as a Monk.

### **Kathy Enders: Public Relations Officer**

Kathy is a 1<sup>st</sup> Arts student studying English, Psychology and German. I think she's a Wiccan, but that might just be because of the way she dresses.

### **Conan Doyle: Librarian**

I'm a Masters student in Old and Middle English. My primary degree was a BA in Music and English... so much for my employment prospects. I don't belong to any specific religion, I just read a lot

### **Suzanne Cantrell: OCM**

3<sup>rd</sup> Arts student studying English and Greek and Roman Civilisation. Suzie doesn't belong to any specific tradition, she just sees dead people.

## Contact Us

Website <http://pagansoc.netsoc.ucd.ie/>

Society Email: [pagansoc@netsoc.ucd.ie](mailto:pagansoc@netsoc.ucd.ie)

## Useful Books

The amount of books currently published about the various different pagan traditions is immense. To help you with the process of sifting the good from the bad, we will give you a short list of suggested reading for individual topics. This is by no means a definitive bibliography, but may be a helpful starting point for the curious. The society hopes to procure a collection of books for the use of its members, but for now, we will provide information on relevant books as best we can. Books available in UCD Library are given a shelfmark number

### Historical/Anthropological studies of Witchcraft / Occultism

- Frazer, J. G., *The Golden Bough*, 1925, Shelfmark Gen 290
- Kieckhefer, Richard, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 2000, Shelfmark Gen 133.4/KIE
- Murray, M., *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, Shelfmark Gen 133.4
- Moura, Ann, *Origins of modern witchcraft: the evolution of a world religion*, 2000, Shelfmark, Gen 133.4/MOU

### Paganism in General

- Alder, Margot, *Drawing down the Moon*, Penguin, 1979
- Farrar, Janet and Gavin Bone, *The Pagan Path*,

### Asatru

- Blum, Ralph H., *The Book of Runes: A Handbook for the Use of an Ancient Oracle*, St Martin's Press, 1993
- Davidson, Hilda Ellis, *Gods and myths of Northern Europe*, 1990, Shelfmark Gen 293/DAV
- Dumézil, Georges, *Gods of the ancient Northmen*, Shelfmark 293/DUM
- Turville-Petre, Gabriel, *Myth and religion of the North : the religion of ancient Scandinavia*, 1964. Shelfmark Gen 293/TUR

### Witchcraft/Wicca (unfortunately none of these are in the UCD Library)

- Farrar, Stuart, *What Witches Do: A Modern Coven Revealed*, Phoenix, 1971
- Farrar, Janet and Gavin Bone, *Progressive Witchcraft*, New Page, 2004.

- Gardner, Gerald. *Witchcraft Today*. Magickal Child, 1954
- Shamanism
- Andrews, Ted, *Animal Speak, The Spiritual & Magical Powers of Creatures Great & Small*, Llewellyn Publications, 1993
  - Harner, Michael, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, 1973, Shelfmark Gen 200.19

#### Druidism

- Green, Miranda J., *The Gods of the Celts* 1986, Shelfmark Gen 293/GRE

#### Religious Books

- The Bible. Available in multiple translations and versions. Should be read with an open mind by followers of any religious path. Shelfmark Gen 220.52/BIB
- New Testament Apocrypha, Hennecke E. (ed), Shelfmark Gen229/HEN
- The Koran, trans E. H. Palmer, Shelfmark Gen 291/SAC

#### Eastern Religions

- I Ching, (the texts of Confucianism), Shelfmark Gen 291/SAC
- Hoff, Benjamin, *The Toa of Poo and the Te of Piglet* Methuen, 1998, Shelfmark Gen 813/HOF
- King, Richard: *Indian Philosophy: an introduction to Hindu and Buddhist thought*, Edinburgh University Press, 1999, Shelfmark: Received

#### **Editorial:**

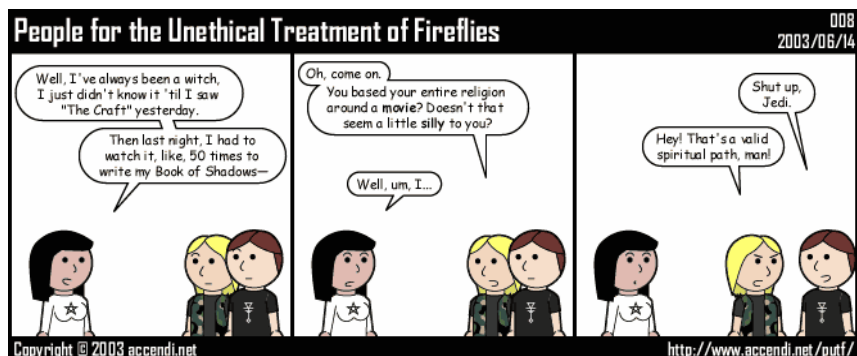
Since I'm rambling aimlessly, I decided to get something off my chest that's been bugging me all summer. Recruitment.

The very word sends a shiver down my spine, making me think of seedy charismatic cult-leaders asking you to give them all your worldly possessions, etc. The truth is pagans don't like recruiting, for this very reason. And furthermore, pagans also feel that everyone should be allowed to decide his or her own path. This leads to the ultimate dilemma. How do you tell people about spirituality without appearing to preach, or at worst, convert?

So here is my solution. I'm not going to. I'm not going to tell you any more than is in this pamphlet unless you ask me, and I'm going to tell you not to become a Witch, or Odiniist, or Shaman or Druid or anything else for at least a year of finding out what it means. Don't make up your mind about anything. If you've been raised a Christian, learn about your parents' beliefs, you may not agree but you should understand and respect them. Don't decide you're going to become a witch and throw

out all your crosses. And please don't decide you're becoming a druid and start hugging all the trees on campus, that would just be weird! If you are already on a path, don't stop exploring everything else, all knowledge is useful.

I don't mean to discourage the curious, I just feel that there's nothing worse than a fundamentalist pagan recruit. You can spot them easily enough. They are hypocritically hateful to Christians, and constantly moan about how oppressed they are by Christianity. They wear their pentacles like wannabe gangsters wear gold medallions, and they generally have to have the latest fashion in ceremonial robes, which they wear every day. So please, join us in Freshers' Week, but try to remember that you don't look anything like Alyson Hannigan, so the 'fear me I'm a witch' routine really just gets tiresome.



## A Word from the Auditor

Pagan. A word which often evokes images of dark arts practised on arcane altars. Pagan is a word which has been surrounded by fear and misunderstanding over the ages. But what does the UCD Pagan Soc do and why was it established? Our society represents any students or staff in this university who practise, or have an interest in and would like to learn more about nature worshipping religious belief systems or practises which focus around an earth-based spirituality.

Because of the misconceptions and misunderstands often met by pagans and heathens when they discuss their beliefs openly, most pagans don't tend to advertise their beliefs and, with the exception of the occasional symbol worn as a piece of jewellery, you would not normally notice that there are pagans amongst you. Yes that right we're everywhere .... just kidding. But seriously, young pagans are often afraid to be open about their beliefs because they are afraid of how others may react, be they friends or family.

Part of the reason the society was formed was to have a group of people on campus who could ensure that pagans and heathens can meet in a safe, secure environment where they can discuss their beliefs without fear of negative reactions borne of misunderstanding or a lack of respect for their beliefs. Our aim is to try to create a sense of community in which pagans and heathens of any form, from druidry to shamanism to asatru, may feel welcomed and accepted for their beliefs. We wish to create venues where even if only for an hour each week you can go to meet other pagans and share your beliefs and experiences as much or as little as you wish.

The society will be here to ensure that no matter how open or secretive you may be with friends, family and classmates that you will have at least one place where you can be yourself; and if you are not a practising pagan or heathen but would like to learn more about these belief-systems then you will have access to regular events where you can ask all the questions you want and hear the opinions and beliefs of others who practise a pagan or heathen path.

Throughout the year we will be holding regular events. There will be the weekly coffee lunches where you can meet and socialise whilst getting free precious caffeine between lectures, as well as fortnightly discussion groups where members will be able to meet and discuss their beliefs. These will be informal sessions with no fixed topic from meeting to meeting, where members can meet and ask the questions they want to and will be an excellent opportunity for beginners to learn more from experienced pagans and heathens. As well as these regular events we will also be holding several workshops throughout the year with the first being a meditation and grounding workshop in October. These will cover topics which are found in all different forms of pagan and heathen systems and will not be specific to any one form of paganism. The society is also planning on having well known members of the pagan community in Ireland come and give talks on various topics.

So if you are a practising pagan or heathen, or would simply like to know a bit more about these belief systems, then come along and we will do our best to answer your questions and make you feel welcome. Looking forward to meeting you during the college year.

Blessed Be,  
Neil Byrne - Auditor

"I'm not normally a religious man, but if you're up there, save me Superman! - Homer J. Simpson"

## Food for thought: Magick and Science

One of the most common prejudices against paganism is that it involves an irrational belief in magic in the face of evidence to the contrary. This could not be further from the truth. Pagans are not irrational or superstitious people. Neither do we support our arguments with a closed system of logic. Pagans do not reject science, but mostly embrace it. Three of this society's committee are science students. So why then do we believe in magic? I hear you ask.

The historian Richard Keikhefer answers (with respect to medieval magicians):

*'We cannot begin with the assumption that magic is irrational; we must ask ourselves why it was that for people whose rationality was otherwise unimpeachable it seemed to fit into a rational view of the universe.'*

There is nothing irrational or even impossible in the magic we practice, it is merely a form of science and learning which has been largely forgotten by modern science and patriarchal culture. Alternative medicine, for example is just one facet of the kind of healing arts taught by those with an interest in forgotten knowledge which effectively treat the whole patient, rather than a single symptom. One should not, however be taken in by the fallacy that every natural cure is beneficial, for many natural substances are highly toxic.

Aside from healing arts, the magic of paganism is no different from the prayer of the predominant religions. The Victorian theological distinction of magic as coercive as opposed to prayer as petitionary has been rejected by anthropologists as irrelevant, as many religious practices cannot be placed into either category. Witches, for example do not coerce their gods, but ask their intervention in much the same way as Christians pray.

Pagans do seek to alter reality by the manipulation of occult properties within nature which in some ways can be seen as a scientific endeavour. The other facet, already mentioned is the belief in and involvement with powers beyond the bounds of normal material perception, be they gods, daemons, fey, or spirits, just as Christians do when they pray for a specific end. While empiricist scientific method ridicules this sort of rationale, our actions are not based on any articles of blind faith, but on the experiences of countless generations of mystics who have explored the subconscious mind and the spiritual realms.

Most importantly, the principle aim of most occult practices the same as the principle aim of most religious practices: to gain self knowledge and achieve spiritual and mental growth by contemplation of the divine.

While modern science cannot largely describe or perceive any of the spiritual forces with which a mystic deals, it cannot refuse to acknowledge the bioelectrical and physical changes that occur in a

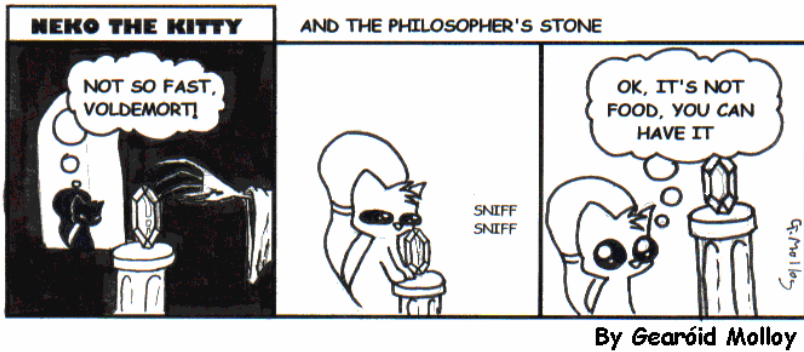
person who enters a meditative state. What pagans practice is not irrational, but merely relies on an older form of learning than modern science, which, I hasten to add often went hand in hand with alchemy, as evidenced by the occult journals of Sir Isaac Newton. What belief in magic thus rejects is not rationality, but rather the hubris of rational thought, the self indulgent egos of Enlightenment and Modern philosophy which believed themselves to have been intellectually superior to their ancestors.

In looking into the past for wisdom and knowledge, pagans are neither ignoring the present state of technological advancement nor resisting the future of scientific development. Very few pagans are dogmatically opposed, for instance, to theories such as evolution or tectonic plate movement. On the contrary, pagans largely seek knowledge of all forms, new and old. In accepting the knowledge of ancient cultures and recently taboo religions with an open mind, pagans avoid the short-sightedness of certain modern practices and seek spiritual development in a world of increasing secularity.

So why is it that pagan religions are becoming so popular once again? I would suggest a number of reasons. Firstly, in this era of rapid technological advance, many people are feeling disconnected from the natural world in which we evolved. This can even have physical symptoms in the rapid proliferation of allergic reactions to heavily processed, and over-used food stuffs such as wheat, cows-milk and sugar as well as the rapid growth of respiratory problems in polluted urban areas. While not every pagan would be a consumer of organic produce, nor every health-freak a pagan, most earth-based religions offer a spiritual as well as medical explanation for such problems. In an increasingly secular world divorced from the natural environment, many people feel the need for spiritual systems which bring them closer to nature, celebrating the seasons and the diversity of nature.

Another reason for the growth of neo-paganism is that the time of Patriarchy has finally come to an end (in Western Civilisation at least) and we are witnessing the results of real social change. Many people feel disappointed with conventional religion and require a form of spirituality that does not have the authoritative connotations and dogmatic prohibitions of organised religion. To pagans, who believe that all paths are equally valid, modern lifestyle choices such as polyamoury or homosexuality should not lead to any sense of spiritual inferiority or imposed guilt. On the other hand, pagans at times need to remember that all religions being equally valid, Christianity and other such established religions are no less valid than modern eclectic practices.

Conan Doyle



<http://nekothekitty.keenspace.com> (shameless plug for my friend's webcomic)