

My Experiences with Eclectic vs. Traditional Wicca

<http://www.geocities.com/~lyнна/temple/>

Ian Corrigan writes:

The worst thing about Cunningham's writings on Wicca is that he actively pushes the "do what feels right, and that's what's right for you" doctrine, and tells students that initiation is optional etc. If he had called his stuff Paganism I'd have less attitude about it, but I think he contributed a great deal to the weakening of Wiccan tradition.

I agree. He's far from the only author to have done that, but he's certainly one of the more prominent.

It's funny—I seem to have come full circle in my thinking on the traditional/eclectic split within Wicca. I started out reading Sybil Leek and Doreen Valiente in the late 70s, so my initial conception of the Craft was pretty strongly rooted in the sort of old-school British vein. (Roots in a vein? Talk about mixed metaphors!)

Then I found The Spiral Dance, which meshed a lot more explicitly with my political views, and I moved more toward eclectic Craft. In the early 80s, I left the relatively traditional group I'd been working with to help found a "radical pagan" group with a bunch of my anarchist friends.

And I discovered something very interesting: eclectic do-your-own-thing Craft, in practice, didn't work for me. Not at all. I got along fabulously with the friends I was working with, we have great political discussions before and after ritual, but the rituals themselves didn't do a thing for me. I found them messy, fluffy, unfocussed, and ultimately boring. I didn't want to go back to the group I'd been working with before, because I had found them too hierarchal, heterosexist and apolitical, so I ended up going solitary, which was an even bigger flop.

Ultimately, I did go back to the group I'd started out with, but this time with my eyes open and not expecting everyone to think exactly like me. That was ten years ago, and I've never regretted that choice. The thing is, on the mini-spectrum contained within that group, I represented the eclectic end! So I remained to a certain extent eclectic-identified for some time.

But that too began to change, particularly once I became active first on PODS and later on the Internet and thereby had a lot more contact with pagans outside my own local community. And the more contact I have had, the more I've become disturbed by the increasing tendency for people to define Wicca as a catch-all for anything they want it to be. A lot of the people calling themselves Wiccans, especially in the US, don't even seem to be aware that Wicca has a history, an existing body of tradition and lore, or any concrete set of beliefs outside "harm none" (itself an out-of-context fragment) and "nature is good."

So while I still tend to be somewhat experimental in my own practice, I've become increasingly more strongly identified with traditional Craft, and

increasingly concerned about the influence of authors like Cunningham in pulling the teeth of the Craft. When I hear CRs or others going on about Wiccans being “fluffy bunnies”, I don’t so much want to kill them as I do half the authors that write for Llewellyn.

Though in Cunningham’s case, I suppose that would be redundant... :-)

Déithe duit,
Liath Cadhóit
(a.k.a Lynna Landstreet)